

OUR DIFFERENCES

INTRODUCTION

There is so much talk about left-wing unity. I have been asked repeatedly what stands in the way to unity of those who all profess to have the same goal. Why cannot all the Socialists and Communists work together? Why have I become the object of a campaign of vilification conducted by certain left-wing groups? I began Communist propaganda in this country when Communism and Socialism were strange terms. I was the first to introduce Marxian thought in this country. Yet, I have been denounced as "renegade to Communism," "traitor to the working class" and even an "agent of Imperialism." Naturally, well-meaning people are perplexed. They come to me for explanation instead of addressing themselves to the proper place. However, I shall once again set forth the reasons of the dissensions in the radical ranks. They are based on theoretical differences which, naturally, lead to political and tactical differences.

In 1928, the Sixth World Congress of the Communist International advised its Indian section to adopt a course of action which, in my opinion, was erroneous. It was the result of a wrong estimation of the social character and the perspective of the development of the Indian revolution. The majority of the Indian Communists, labouring under a false notion of discipline, accepted the resolution of the Communist International. The resolution characterised the Indian National Congress as the counter-revolutionary party of the bourgeoisie and advised the Indian Communists to denounce all the nationalist leaders, including left-wingers like Jawaharlal Nehru, as agents of Imperialism. The mechanical acceptance of the resolutions of the Communist International blinded the Indian Communists to the realities of the situation, and compelled them to commit tactical mistakes which isolated them from the anti-imperialist mass movement and even from the labour movement. Thanks to those mistakes, they could never be more than a small sect with no influence on the political life of the country. They gave out fantastic slogans and advocated absurd plans of action.

Convinced of the harmfulness of that sectarian policy, I believed it to be my revolutionary duty to oppose it. I was actuated by the following considerations. A revolution cannot be made to order. Revolutionaries should be guided by the realities of the situation. The young Indian proletariat being numerically weak, immature as a class, politically inexperienced, culturally backward, ideologically uneducated, cannot shoulder single-handed the task of overthrowing Imperialism and carrying through a great revolution. In order to play its rôle creditably, the proletariat should take up its proper place in the constellation of the revolutionary forces in the given situation.

The bourgeois democratic revolution is still to take place in India. The social changes brought about by it are necessary for the progress and the prosperity of the society as a whole. All the social groups, excepting the feudal aristocracy and the associated groups, are interested in that revolution. Being, for the period, culturally the most advanced class, and directly concerned with the social transformation, the urban middle class (bourgeoisie), normally become the

leader of the revolution. But they can carry it through only with the active support of the oppressed and exploited masses. In India, the delayed bourgeois democratic revolution cannot take place in its classical form. The bourgeoisie has forfeited the right to lead it. But the task of the revolution remains to be accomplished. The forces of the revolution are all there. Only the bourgeoisie has deserted them. There must, consequently, be a new type of leadership. But that would not essentially change the social character of the revolution.

The character of a revolution is determined by the social forces involved in it. The leadership devolves upon different classes in different periods of history. It may also be influenced by the peculiar structure of society in the throes of the revolution. As a matter of fact, in the successive stages of its development, even the classical type of the bourgeois revolution in Europe was led by classes other than the bourgeoisie proper. Practically nowhere did the prosperous urban middle class (merchants, manufacturers, bankers etc.) take an active leading part in the revolutionary struggle, although the

fruits of victory were everywhere monopolised by them. Indeed, wherever the bourgeois democratic revolution became completely successful, as in France for example, it had to overwhelm the resistance of the big bourgeoisie. The leadership of the French revolution had to pass from the Girondists to the Jacobins before it could overthrow monarchy and destroy feudalism. The Jacobins represented the urban lower middle class,—indigent intellectuals, poor students, artisans, small traders etc.

The inability and unwillingness of the big bourgeoisie to lead a revolutionary struggle for democratic freedom, and the far-reaching social transformation necessary for it, is not a peculiar feature of the Indian revolution. It is a mistake to hold that the simple and not unprecedented fact of the defection of the big bourgeoisie alters the character of the impending social revolution. It is a mistake to hold that by virtue of this fact India enters the epoch of proletarian revolution skipping over the long and necessary process of social transformation in course of which the conditions for the proletarian revolution are created, the forces for it grow.

The modern proletariat is a child of the bourgeois revolution. This standard-bearer of a deeper social transformation derives the necessary qualitative and quantitative strength from the achievements of the bourgeois revolution.

A wrong estimate of the character of the Indian revolution logically leads to absurd notions about the perspective of its development. The absurdity was evidenced by the tactics recommended by the Sixth Congress of the Communist International, and practised in India by its uncritical adherents.

In order to qualify for the place of honour abdicated by the big bourgeoisie, the proletariat must do what they have failed to do, that is to mobilise the revolutionary energy of the democratic masses and to organise a determined relentless struggle for the accomplishment of the task of the bourgeois revolution. Ordinarily, two factors are involved in the bourgeois revolution: the bourgeoisie and the democracy. The latter is the backbone of the revolution. With the self-elimination of the bourgeoisie, the revolution ceases to be bourgeois. But it remains

democratic. The perspective of such a situation is that the fruits of the revolution may not be monopolised by the bourgeoisie. But that again will depend upon the flexibility of the new leadership, the social foundation of which must be a coalition of the oppressed and exploited classes. If the bourgeoisie could be prevented from stepping in at the last moment to put on the crown of victory won by the masses, democratic freedom will not be a formality, a legal fiction, but a reality. The vanguard of the rising Indian proletariat will be able to direct the development of the impending revolution in that channel only if they succeed in winning over the confidence of the entire democratic mass. The tactics recommended by the Sixth World Congress were bound to defeat that end. Therefore, I opposed them.

Active participation in the revolutionary struggle on terms of equality is the road to mutual confidence. Proletarian dictatorship is not the slogan to secure the support of the entire democratic mass. By failing to secure the support and win the confidence of the democratic masses, the ideological vanguard of the proletariat cannot possibly guide the

course of the revolution. The masses are simply handed over to the orthodox nationalists who discourage their revolutionary awakening, disorganise militant action, and may eventually use them for a Fascist movement. These were exactly the results produced by the practice of the tactics recommended by the Sixth Congress of the Communist International.

Instead of promoting a revolutionary left wing inside the Congress, as the spearhead of the democratic masses, the policy followed by the Communist Party of India ever since 1928 actually contributed to arrest the crystallisation of the radical nationalist forces against the reactionary leadership of the Congress. Consequently, the forces of democratic revolution remained under the influence of a reactionary ideology and were dissipated in non-revolutionary activities.

I advocated the policy of helping the rise of a revolutionary democratic leadership. That is the need of the moment. Nothing else could grow out of the objective possibilities of the situation. Only a specific type of leadership can be thrown up by the given

relation of forces. In the given situation, the ideological vanguard of the proletariat can play a decisive rôle, guide the course of the revolution, only as an integral part of the revolutionary democratic leadership. The struggle must be conducted with a democratic program ; the demands must be democratic ; the slogans must express the aspirations of the entire democratic mass, composed of all the oppressed and exploited classes. The democratic program is not Socialism ; the demand of the democratic masses is not wholesale confiscation of private property. Their slogan can neither be the establishment of proletarian dictatorship, nor of Soviet Republic.

A dangerous mistake on the part of the Communist Party of India was the inability to differentiate between the leadership and the rank and file of the Congress. It failed to appreciate the objectively revolutionary significance of the Congress. The abusive language used in an unbalanced and unwarranted criticism, levelled not only against its reactionary leadership, but against the Congress as such, naturally prejudiced the nationalist rank and file against the Communists. I

was decidedly opposed to the view that the National Congress is a counter-revolutionary organisation, that it consciously serves as a tool of the capitalists. I did not approve of the plan of rallying the democratic masses in the struggle against Imperialism outside the Congress. I categorically rejected the absurd theory that the proletariat is the only revolutionary class and that the anti-imperialist struggle could not succeed except under their leadership. I deplored the failure to appreciate the revolutionary significance of the lower middle class and the importance particularly of the intelligentsia. I condemned demonstrations hostile to the Congress, also the effort to persuade the workers and peasants to break away from the united anti-imperialist front as represented by the Congress.

I am of the opinion that, as a movement, the National Congress is of a great revolutionary significance. It commands the confidence of the oppressed and exploited masses, that is to say, of the forces of the democratic national revolution. It is a great mistake to look upon it as a political party of the bourgeoisie. The Congress is a coalition of

classes. As such, it is bound to be dominated by one or the other of its constituent elements. Therefore, the danger of its coming completely under the influence of the bourgeoisie is always there. As a matter of fact, it has all along been more or less under their influence exercised directly or indirectly. The result has been that its objective revolutionary potentialities have not been developed. But the potentialities remain. The democratic masses constituting the backbone of the Congress must overthrow Imperialism and capture the political power necessary for a long overdue social transformation. The bourgeoisie cannot lead them in that revolutionary struggle. They must have a different leadership. The Congress can never be the party of the bourgeoisie. For, in that case, it must cease to be what it is. If the reactionary tendency represented by its present leadership prevails, the Congress is bound to disintegrate. The complete victory of the right wing has aggravated that danger, I pointed out many years ago. In the absence of an alternative leadership, the right wing has scored an easy victory. The mistaken tactics of the Communist Party has

contributed largely to this alarming state of affairs.

The National Congress as the organ of the anti-imperialist struggle is the creation of the democratic masses. It must be wielded by the masses for the purpose with which it is created. It is the specific form of organisation which has grown out of the peculiar conditions of the country. The struggle for the overthrow of Imperialism and for the establishment of democratic freedom must be conducted by a coalition of the oppressed and exploited classes. The coalition will naturally be dominated by the most revolutionary class which will acquire that position by virtue of greater activity, firmer resolution, clearer foresight and greater devotion for the common cause. But the purpose of the tactics followed by the Communist Party of India was to break up the Congress, and to create a more revolutionary anti-imperialist mass organisation under the leadership of the proletariat. I opposed that tactics with the argument that disintegration of the Congress will be surely followed by demoralisation, and that would not be the atmosphere in which a new revolutionary mass organisation could

be built. I suggested that the possible disaster must be headed off, that the ideological vanguard of the proletariat should help the crystallisation of the radical democratic forces so as to replace the present leadership of the Congress. I further argued that the National Congress, being the specific form of mass organisation grown out of the background of a given relation of classes, its possible disintegration would only impose upon the consciously revolutionary vanguard of the democratic masses the task of re-creating a similar organisation. Therefore, I condemned the tactics of the Communist Party of India as harmful and mischievous. I demanded that the ideological vanguard of the proletariat should place before the rank and file of the Congress the program of democratic national revolution, a program which should reflect the interests of all the oppressed and exploited classes. I insisted that no effort should be made to impose the maximum program of the proletariat—the program of Socialism—on the democratic masses involved in the anti-imperialist struggle. I recommended that we should make their program ours. The ideological vanguard of the proletariat

should press for the realisation of the program of democratic revolution because the way to the proletarian revolution—to the establishment of Socialism—will be opened only upon the accomplishment of the democratic revolution.

I appealed to the Communist Party of India to rectify its mistakes. I advised them to be realists, to act as Marxists. Marxists must be guided by the objective realities of the situation. I pointed out that several experiences had proved that it was travelling on a wrong road; that it had not acquired any influence in the mass movement developing under the Congress flag. I asked it to realise the implication of declaring the Congress to be a counter-revolutionary organisation. The declaration meant that, in its opinion, not only were the urban lower middle class counter-revolutionary, but the peasants also were counter-revolutionaries. There could not be any revolution in a country in which ninety-five per cent of the population were thus characterised. The proletariat constituting a minute fraction of the Indian people, and hardly formed as a class, could not alone save the country. The salvation of the toil-

ing masses of India as well as the rest of the world will ultimately be found in Socialism. But the people of India must be led towards their salvation stage by stage. There could not be a proletarian revolution without the proletariat; and in our country, the modern proletariat, conscious of its historical mission, is still in its infancy. How many even of the most advanced workers intelligently want Socialism, or understand it? We should not idealise the proletariat. Our vision should not be coloured by our imagination. The revolutionary zeal of the ideological vanguard should not be ascribed to the workers, who strike simply for higher wages and other minor ameliorations. The numerical weakness of the Communist Party is the surest measure of the revolutionary class consciousness of the proletariat. Judged by that measure, one cannot estimate it very high.

Accomplishment of the task of the bourgeois revolution, is indispensably necessary for the creation of political, economic and cultural conditions conducive to the social emancipation of the proletariat. Other exploited classes, primarily the peasantry, are also vitally interested in the accomplishment

of those initial revolutionary tasks. The proletariat must make alliance with them with the object of fighting for the common goal. As long as the revolutionary struggle must take place on the basis of a coalition of classes, most of which cannot be expected to accept the program of Socialism, such slogans as "dictatorship of the proletariat" or "Soviet Republic" are obviously unsuitable. They are sure to repel the forces of democratic revolution, thwart the formation of the necessary fighting alliance. Such slogans isolate the proletariat from the allies in the democratic revolution, and place before the proletariat a task which it can never achieve single-handed. Thus the vain desire to quicken the pace of revolution only obstructs its development. That is exactly what happened, in consequence of the tactics recommended by the Sixth Congress of the Communist International.

Ever since 1929, the Communist Party carried on the propaganda for political general strike as the decisive move in the struggle against Imperialism. That was a fantastic idea. Supposing that the entire industrial proletariat would participate in the strike,

what would be the result? A minute fraction of the people will be hurled in a frontal attack upon a formidable enemy. Given the backwardness of the proletariat, there is little ground for that supposition. General strike is the signal for insurrection in highly industrialised countries. In industrially backward countries like ours it has little political value. To lead the Indian proletariat in a political general strike, would be to lead them to a disastrous and demoralising defeat. Therefore, I opposed the idea of a political general strike.

The proletariat will develop as a class, conscious of its historic mission, equipped for the purpose, in consequence of the modernisation of the economic life of the country, which will be brought about through the accomplishment of the long overdue tasks of the bourgeois revolution. It will acquire the political education, ideological foresight, revolutionary experience, in course of the struggle for national freedom and the accomplishment of those tasks. In course of that struggle, they will win over the confidence and capture the leadership of the oppressed and exploited masses. From that strategic

position it will be able to defend the results of the democratic revolution against the usurpation by the bourgeoisie. It will be able to consolidate political power in a revolutionary democratic State based upon the oppressed and exploited masses. It will be able to use this revolutionary democratic State as the instrument of modernising the economic life of the country at a quick tempo. In short, the accomplishment of the tasks of the bourgeois revolution, in the teeth of the opposition of the bourgeoisie, by a coalition of the oppressed and exploited classes, under the hegemony of the ideological vanguard of the proletariat, will not entrench Capitalism. It will create conditions, political as well as industrial, for the eventual establishment of Socialism.

A false sense of loyalty to the Communist International persuaded the Communist Party of India to commit a whole series of disastrous blunders over a period of eight years. I criticised the mechanical view of discipline which compelled it to stick to a policy which could not possibly be approved of by intelligent judgment. The resolution of the Communist International which re-

commended that sterile course was based upon inadequate informations, on a wrong estimate of the situation in India. The leaders of the International cannot guide the national sections on the right road unless these provide them with correct informations, and have the courage to declare a resolution erroneous when it does not correspond with the realities of the situation. If the Indian Communist Party had the courage to declare that experience had proved the policy to be wrong, the International would surely give serious consideration to the matter and rectify the mistake. But the Communist Party of India could not muster that courage. Centralisation of leadership does not imply dictation from above. Discipline does not preclude democracy. The principle of democratic centralisation, underlying the statutes of the Communist International, makes ample room for independent judgment on the part of its national sections.

To fight for democratic freedom is not unworthy of the ideological vanguard of the proletariat. Marx himself did that. To stand in the forefront of the struggle under the banner of the democratic national revolu-

tion, is no betrayal of the proletarian usage. The vast majority of the forces involved in the revolution cannot be rallied under the banner of Communism. They are marching under the flag of Nationalism. The Communists must join them there, if they want to influence them, quicken their revolutionary consciousness, detach them from the present anti-revolutionary leadership, transform them into a formidable force sure to overwhelm Imperialism, and march triumphantly forward to revolutionise society more and more profoundly.

For holding these views and for criticising the mistakes of the leaders of the Communist International, I was condemned as a renegade to Communism, as an agent of the bourgeoisie, and even as a lackey of Imperialism.

After eight years' bitter experience, the disastrous policy was abandoned by the Seventh Congress of the Communist International in 1935. Immediately, I expressed my agreement with the resolution of the Seventh Congress. I wrote to the International as well as the Communist Party of

India to that effect. Yet, the campaign against me continued. Practically all my views, condemned previously, have now been accepted. Why I am still treated as an "outcast" and castigated as a culprit, is more than I can say. However, as far as the Communist Party is concerned, the change appears to be only skin-deep. It has accepted the new line simply because it has been recommended by the Communist International. But having grown in the tradition of ultra-left sectarianism, it is very difficult for it to appreciate the far-reaching implications of the new policy. Besides, the new approach to the Congress, for example, is regarded merely as a *policy*. The idealisation of the proletariat still continues. The social character of the impending revolution is still not properly estimated. On the other hand, there is a new orientation regarding the bourgeoisie, which is considered to be a revolutionary factor. Consequently, there is a confusion of ultra-leftist tradition and neo-opportunism. This confusion does not permit the Communist Party to carry on any consistent policy. Now it talks of the Congress as the United anti-imperialist Front ;

then again it demands the creation of United Front committees of action composed of the representatives of Congress Committees, Kisan Sabhas, Trade Unions and "other mass organisations". It still dreams of the dictatorship of the proletariat. It proposes to build Socialism on the basis of peasant proprietorship. Disregarding the demand of the peasantry, it plans collectivisation of land. Painfully conscious of the qualitative and quantitative deficiency of the proletariat, it includes in that category the land workers and the poor peasantry. It preaches Socialism to the peasantry, and maintains that only Socialist propaganda can rally the toiling masses in the struggle against Imperialism. It has changed its attitude towards the Congress only to the extent of not using abusive language. But it still desires to disintegrate the Congress instead of transforming it into a revolutionary people's political party. Its real attitude towards the Congress is indicated by the insistence upon collective affiliation which, if introduced, would make of the Congress a loose Federation of diverse organisations with conflicting interests, which will surely break

down in course of time, so that the party of the idealised proletariat may appear on the scene as the sole leader of the anti-imperialist struggle, which will immediately develop into the struggle for the establishment of Socialism, of course, through dictatorship of the proletariat, during the period of transition.

I am sure that the Communist Party of India would vehemently dispute these allegations. But at the same time, they would continue their crusade against me. This curious attitude should provide the clue to our differences to the unbiassed and discerning. If the Communist Party of India is sincere in its new policy, if it is capable of outgrowing infantile ultra-leftism, and can appreciate the implications of the resolution of the Seventh World Congress, there will be practically no difference. Its insistence on imaginary differences only betrays some ulterior motive which it is not my business to divulge or describe. I shall conclude by mentioning one reason and perhaps the most fundamental reason, which stands in the way to the generally desired unity. That reason is lack of independence.

OUR DIFFERENCES

Let the Communist Party of India gather the courage to think for itself, let it not be bound by a false idea of discipline, let it be more concerned with facts than with fictions, and all our differences will disappear.