

# TIME TO CHANGE COURSE!



**Communists and the Indian Revolution**



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## FOR A COMMUNIST POLICY!

*'What difference does it make? They'll take our votes and make money. What's in it for us? How does it really affect us who is voted to power? We will continue to live the way we have been living. Do you think we like to see our children growing up here like animals? Do these campaigning politicians give us even a thought when they are not electioneering? I tell myself I must not think about it but then it makes me angry.'*

This statement by a Bombay slum-dweller, quoted in the paper *Daily* at the time of the 1984 elections, sums up the feelings of most of us. We have been cheated too often by glib political crooks. They make pretty speeches about poverty. They exploit our misery to get votes. Once they are MPs or MLAs they sell their influence for bribes. And we can't expect to see them again until election time comes round and they need our votes again.

Now once again, parliamentary elections have given the suffering masses of India the chance to overthrow a corrupt and brutal government. Tragically, however, once again they are forced to choose between equally repulsive capitalist parties: between Tweedledee and Tweedledum.

Congress(I) is the party of the super-rich, its programme is to make them richer by driving the rest of us deeper into poverty. But is the Opposition any better? Take a hard look at where these opposition politicians have crawled from. Most of the so-called alternatives to Congress(I) are misfits or rejects vomited out of the party after losing this or that faction fight. Some of them rose to power on the basis of caste and regional demagoguery. The rest of them launched their careers in the favourite party of Big Business and sooner or later they'll be crawling back.

The Indian people fought long and hard to overthrow imperialist rule. We resisted the dictatorial Emergency regime and threw it out. For us, the vote is a precious right for which the Indian people sacrificed life, blood and liberty. In this light, we regard the bogus choice facing the people in this and many past elections as an insult to our democratic traditions, a blasphemy on our martyrs and a gross abuse of our hard-won rights.

It is the responsibility of the communists to give the masses a real choice. We believe that the workers' parties have nothing in common with the other so-called opposition parties, with their stinking record of corruption, repression and communalism. For the working class, 'unity' with creatures like Devi Lal, Kama Rao, Arun Nehru and Co. is suicide.

For all the endless intrigues for 'opposition unity', we say that the only real opposition to the Rajiv Government has come from the working class. 12,00,000 young workers converged on Delhi in the magnificent Left rally of 9th December 1987. A staggering 35 million workers struck in the bandh of 15th March 1988. That one event was perhaps the biggest single display of working-class power in world history! Then, on 30th August, crores of workers came out again on a Bharat bandh.

What more can the workers do to prove their readiness to fight? Their massive power lies untapped. They have waged titanic class battles over the years. Striking workers face starvation, jail, blacklisting and even death on the

picket lines. But their political spokesmen, the Left leaders, have failed abysmally to match the workers' heroism and self-sacrifice. Instead they have huddled miserably into dirty unprincipled alliances with their worst enemies, often hiding their own treachery under the cloak of contemptible slanders against the 'low political level' of the workers!

No! The workers are looking to the Left leaders, and especially to the CPI(M), for a way out of the impasse. Tragically, they have met with a deafening silence. The attention of the CPI(M) leaders is focussed instead on endless debates over what terms to negotiate in return for their support to the latest ramshackle opposition coalition, the so-called 'Janata Dal'.

It is time for a real communist solution. We are living in the epoch of mass struggles of workers and youth throughout the world. The uprising of the black workers and youth of South Africa has pushed forward for five years now, in the teeth of ferocious repression. The world has watched in awe the heroic intafada in Palestine. One South American military dictatorship after another has been overthrown — in Argentina, Brazil, and soon in Chile. The same is true of other hated regimes: Marcos of the Philippines has gone, Duvalier of Haiti, Chun of South Korea, Zia of Pakistan. The struggle of working-class youth has been no less courageous in the countries where landlordism and capitalism have already been overthrown but where society is stifled under the weight of bureaucratic privilege and corruption. We salute as our comrades the youth of China, the striking miners of Russia, the shipyard workers of Poland, etc.

Let us put the record straight! It was not Congress but the workers and peasants of India who won the battle for independence. It was due to the political blunders of the CPI that power fell into the hands of the greedy, parasitical Indian bourgeoisie. Again and again these mistakes have been repeated. The CPI supported Congress right through the hated Emergency. The CPI(M) helped Janata come to power and refused to challenge it. Now once again we have the nauseating choice between a new mandate for Rajiv or another version of the 1977 fiasco.

We offer this pamphlet to voice the anger of young workers who are looking for a revolutionary way forward; to establish the Marxist foundation for revolutionary policies; to appeal to young workers and communists to join us in the campaign for a change of course.

## THE WORKERS' STRUGGLE FOR INDEPENDENCE

First, let us recall the real history of our national liberation struggle, which has been viciously 're-written' by bourgeois historians.

The first great uprising was that of 1857. The mutinous sepoy got the support of the city poor and peasants in the nearby villages. They killed their British officers, marched to Delhi, released the deposed Mughal king Bahadur Shah from Red Fort, and made him declare himself ruler of all India. 69,000 sepoys massed within the walls of Delhi. Contingents came from various parts of Northern India. They established a jalsa of six sepoys and six civilians. The revolt engulfed the towns of Doab - Aligarh, Bareilly, Lucknow, Kanpur, Allahabad. Risings in Bengal and Punjab were repressed by the officers. In Oudh and Bundelkhand the kisans sided with the rebels. They made their own arms, attacked the landlords, stormed official buildings, stopped rent payments, and formed their own armed defence squads.

The revolt failed only because the sepoys had no programme to win the peasantry, but gathered instead under a feudal leadership. Delhi was recaptured after five days, and the uprising was crushed by the most bloodthirsty repression.

The next big upsurge was also prompted by a military mutiny in 1908. Three regiments in Bengal responded to the call of Congress and refused to accept uniforms made with British cloth. Tilak was sentenced to six years' jail. This led to mighty protests by the Bombay workers, in which several workers were shot dead by the army. There was a reign of terror in Bengal, where the rebel leaders were beaten, homes raided, shops looted, and schoolchildren flogged for singing Vande Mataram. Lenin observed that the days of British imperialism in India were numbered.

### STRIKES

Amid the worldwide revolutionary storms following the First World War, 1919 saw a gigantic wave of strikes. 1,25,000 Bombay textile workers came out on strike in protest at the Rowlatt Act, which provided for imprisonment without trial. A hartal was called by Gandhi. A mighty wave of demonstrations and strikes was answered by police firings. The people retaliated. These disturbances shook the country. The wide fraternisation between the Hindu and Muslim masses sent a wave of panic through the ruling class, bringing back frightening memories of 1857.

The British army committed the infamous massacre at Jallianwala Bagh, where 1,600 rounds were fired on an unarmed crowd. 379 people were killed and 1,200 wounded. Martial law was declared throughout Punjab. There were wholesale shootings, hangings, and bombings, and the notorious racist decree ordering Indians to crawl through the streets of Amritsar. There were protest demonstrations in Ahmedabad, Bombay, and Calcutta.

The wave of struggle was not stemmed by the massacre. The first six months of 1920 saw 200 strikes involving one and a half million workers, the Chittagong armoury raid in Bengal, and a widespread peasants' movement in UP.

A renewed upsurge began in 1928, when 5,00,000 workers came out on strike and 31 million man-days were lost. There were railway strikes in Kharagpur and Lilluah, on the GIP railway, and throughout the entire South Indian Railways. In Bombay there was a six-month textile strike in 1928, then another in 1929. Democratic strike committees were elected; these alarmed the mill-owners who correctly feared that they could develop into soviets (workers' revolutionary councils).

The Bombay Chronicle (a pro-Congress paper) wrote: 'Socialism is in the air. For months past socialist principles have been preached in India at various conferences, especially those of peasants and workers.'

Yet another renewed upsurge began in 1937. There was a general strike in Kanpur of 40,000 workers, which won a victory after 55 days' bitter struggle. In Bengal there was a strike of 2,25,000 jute workers.

In 1940 — after the outbreak of war — there came another strike of 1,75,000 Bombay textile workers. 3,50,000 other workers came out on a one-day solidarity strike. Soon afterwards there were strikes of 20,000 Kanpur textile workers, 20,000 Calcutta municipal workers, jute workers in Bengal and Bihar, oil workers in Assam, coal miners in Dhanbad and Jharia, and steel workers in Jamshedpur.

Between August and December 1942, following the launching of Congress' 'Quit India' campaign, more than 60,000 people were arrested, and no less than 940 were shot dead in the streets. The arrest of the Congress leaders provoked an unprecedented outburst of anger. Police were resisted with arms.



## THE INDIAN BOURGEOISIE

Before continuing the story, it is necessary to pause a moment and examine the role of Congress.

The mantle of revolutionary democrats lies especially uneasily on the shoulders of Congress. The Indian National Congress was actually created very skilfully by a British official, Hume, with the conscious aim of building an instrument of mediation between the government and the masses, to moderate their revolt against imperial rule. It was hoped that the ideas of constitutionalism and order, progressively instilled into the minds of the educated intelligentsia by western education, would enable them to hold back the masses from revolution.

As the British/Indian CP leader Palme Dutt put it: 'The government did not found a movement which had no previous existence or basis. The government stepped in to take charge of a movement which was in any case coming into existence and whose development it foresaw was inevitable.'

Congress represented the national aspirations of the Indian capitalist class. But it is completely wrong to regard it as the instrument of a revolutionary liberation struggle against imperialism. This is the fundamental mistake of our own leaders, who have not examined closely enough the real nature of the Indian capitalist class and of its political party, Congress.

If Congress had been ready to mobilise the workers and peasants behind the banner of national liberation, no force on Earth could have stood in its way — as was to be demonstrated by the events of 1946. What is the explanation for its refusal to do this?

Capitalism in India developed, not in opposition to imperialism but in collusion with it. It must be understood that the founders of all the existing big Indian monopolies started as brokers, banias, contractors to the raj, intermediaries for the joint stock banks, traders, and plain gamblers and speculators.

According to Suniti Kumar Ghosh (*Economic and Political Weekly*, November 1988), who has studied their origins: 'The founders of the Tata house, the Wadias, Lalji Naranjis, Thackerseys, Khimjees, Morarjees, Goenkas, Kanorias, Jantias, Jalans, Bajorias, and so on amassed fortunes by serving the imperialist bourgeoisie in such capacities....Among the princes of gamblers or speculators who afterwards became leading industrialists were the Birlas, Bangurs, Dalmias, Surajmall Nagarmulls, Kesoram Poddars, Hukumchands, Chamarias.'

These were not at all examples of the classic productive 'national bourgeoisie' constricted by imperialist domination. It was only later, and in collusion with the imperial power, that the most prominent Indian capitalists invested the vast sums of cash accumulated in such parasitic activities into productive enterprises — steel plants, cotton and sugar mills, etc.

Already by the early years of the twentieth century, British imperialism was beginning to slip back in competition with its newer rivals in America, Germany, Japan, etc. It considered that the best protection of its Indian market against such competition lay in a limited development of Indian capital, in a secondary role and in collaboration with the dominant British imperialist

capital. It hoped that if Indian resources were developed by British capital, with Indian capital playing a subordinate role, this would prevent imperialist poachers from intruding on Britain's preserves.

Already in 1900 the Secretary of State had insisted that Jamsetji Tata should be encouraged to build a steel plant, and the Indian government gave all help to the Tatas to see it through.

By the time of the first world war, as Ghosh explains, 'the hobbled British giant felt the need for some guided industrialisation in India to prevent imperialist rivals from trespassing upon the Indian market.'

In a despatch to the Secretary of State for India in November 1915, Lord Hardinge's government wrote:

'It is becoming increasingly clear that a definite and self-conscious policy of improving the industrial capabilities of India will have to be pursued after the war, unless she is to become more and more a dumping ground for the manufactures of foreign nations.'

The revolutionary ferment stirred up by the war and by the effects of the Russian revolution throughout Asia introduced crucial new political factors which underlined the need to extend this policy.

To quote Ghosh once again: 'To strengthen their social base within the colony when the first world war had created an explosive situation and when the proletarian revolution in Russia had set an example before all oppressed peoples, the British imperialists extended some concessions to that section of the Indian bourgeoisie which was quite willing 'to put the interests of the imperial power above those of India' and 'to play a part in the imperialist system'....The concessions were granted...to contain growing public discontent and to attract collaborators who would form a stable foundation for their rule.'

This demonstrates clearly that the Indian big bourgeoisie was not seeking confrontation with imperialist capital, but collaboration with it.

At a meeting with Lord Irwin in 1928, Sir Purshotamdas Thakurdas, the outstanding leader of the Indian big bourgeoisie (who was not a member of Congress but played a strategic role as intermediary between Congress and the government), pleaded for 'co-operation between Indian and British commercial interests', and stated that 'Englishmen in India understand that Indian leaders have no predatory intentions and that in a self-governing India, British interests will be as secure as at the present day.' (Thakurdas later warned the government: 'Mr Gandhi's agitation is bad, but it may prove to be better than some other more vicious agitation to follow should the government hold out unduly).'

A Congress committee itself, headed by Motilal Nehru, reported in 1928: 'As regards European commerce we cannot see why men who have put great sums of money into India should at all be nervous. It is inconceivable that there can be any discriminating legislation against any community doing business lawfully in India.'

## CONGRESS AND IMPERIALISM

As befitted a weak and dependent bourgeoisie, its whimpering plea to imperialism for economic concessions and a greater share of political responsibility was slavish and cowardly and it huddled with imperialism at every turn in fear of the masses.

Lala Lajpat Rai admitted at the 1920 session of Congress: 'It is no use blinking at the fact that we are passing through a revolutionary period. We are by instinct and tradition averse to revolutions. Traditionally we are a slow-going people; but when we decide to move, we do move quickly and by rapid strides.'

Congress was paralysed from the beginning by fear of the masses, and squirmed a tortuous middle path between the needs of imperialism, to which it swore loyalty, and the aspirations of the masses for freedom, in the interests of leveraging a more favourable bargaining position for itself. It devised the tactic of 'non-violence' as a means of syphoning off the fury of the masses while exploiting them as a bargaining counter. Gandhian non-violence reduced all mass actions to symbolic and impotent protests. At all costs the downtrodden hordes must be kept in a subordinate and passive role. They must be pacified, hence quite literally the 'pacifism' of Congress — which once in power proved to be among the most bloodthirsty of capitalist regimes.

But the Indian capitalists dared not risk letting loose the fury of the masses. They feared quite justifiably that they too would be swept aside by the revolutionary flood. Marx explained that even in the last century, the German capitalists were already more frightened of the new working class than of the repressive feudal princedoms which were intolerably restricting their growth. Lenin explained exactly the same problem in the case of the capitalists of Tsarist Russian.

So, too, it was inconceivable that the Indian bourgeoisie would be prepared to wage a revolutionary struggle against imperialism or landlordism. Unfortunately, none of our leaders, neither those of the CPI nor of the CPI(M) — nor for that matter the various strands of 'Naxalism' — have appreciated this.

For instance, Comrade Ranadive, a leading CPI(M) theoretician, in his book *The Independence Struggle and After*, accepts the idea that Congress was leading the struggle of the Indian 'national bourgeoisie' against imperialism. He finds himself, therefore, at a loss to explain the failure of Congress to rouse the peasants against the feudal landlords — an elementary precondition for a national-liberation struggle.

He is forced to put forward a most involved explanation: 'In India, the intelligentsia and the national bourgeoisie were characterised by their opposition to agrarian revolution....There were historical reasons for this outlook....Before the Indian bourgeois elements began to be consolidated into a class with its own aspirations, the feudal state power in India was already broken by the British. The Indian bourgeoisie had to fight for power against the imperialists. It did not have to struggle against the feudal state or its ideology to establish its superiority. Besides....the Indian bourgeoisie...had no urgent need to free the peasant from landlordism; in fact, they feared an

agrarian revolution. In their fight against imperialism, they relied on the support of the landlords...'

But if Congress was in a bloc with the feudal landlords, and was not prepared to fight for the elementary democratic demand to break serfdom, then what is the justification for communists to regard it as a progressive force, and even for a time to dissolve themselves into it?

The confusion arises because of the mistaken idea, completely alien to Marx and Lenin, but peddled by the clique around Stalin after Lenin's death, of 'stages of revolution' and the 'progressive' role of the so-called 'national bourgeoisie' in the underdeveloped countries. We will deal with this question more fully later.

Congress had very little interest in fighting for political power – precisely because they anticipated how precarious and unstable their own rule would be, in the face of a powerful and militant labour movement.

Congress did not even want complete independence. To quote Ghosh, 'the Indian business magnates and the Gandhis, their political representatives, were opposed to independence which would mean coming out of the imperialist orbit, for this meant to them an uncertain future in India.' When the independence issue was posed by the uprising of 1946, Gandhi argued that dominion status was preferable, for it meant 'independence plus the British connection.'

The one issue on which Congress was prepared, not exactly to fight, but let us say at least to exert a little pressure, was to give more room to the Indian industrialists to do business and make money. Secondary conflicts were developing with British imperialism and they used Congress to lobby for their special interests.

Hence the Swadeshi campaigns, the boycotts of British goods. Gandhi at first defended the antiquated techniques of handicraft against modern industry, which he considered 'sinful'. But it did not take long for the industrialists who backed Congress to call him to heel. Local textile mills were being victimised as a result of the dumping of British products. The capitalists wanted greater protection for Indian industry, against the unfair and discriminatory treatment meted out by British imperialism.

The new Congress programme demanded protection for the Indian textile industry (which was of course also in competition with the traditional handloom production); prohibition on the importation of foreign cloth; raising of the rupee/sterling exchange ratio; reservation of coastal traffic for Indian vessels. Incidentally, it said not a word at this stage on the question of political power.

Congress succeeded in forcing through certain protective measures, for instance in favour of the Tata Steel Industry. Later, Congress led campaigns against government manipulation of the rupee/sterling exchange rate, etc.

The dominant element in Congress were the big capitalists – the Tatas, etc. – and their main goal was to lobby for protection against imperialist competition. At the same time, they were not prepared to wage a serious fight for political power, out of fear of the revolutionary power of the workers and peasants.

Far from 'fighting for power against the imperialists', from the beginning Congress leaders crawled on all fours before the totems of British imperialism. The first Congress President displayed a characteristically sycophantic note when he called for three cheers for the English Queen!

During the First World War, Congress co-operated with the British, their representatives in the Imperial Council voting for contributions to the war effort, and even acquiescing in the hangings of several members of the Ghadar Party, which had tried to organise a mutiny. 'Sir' Satyendra Sinha, presiding over the 1915 session of the Indian National Congress, whined that 'at this critical hour in world history it is for India to prove to the great British nation her gratitude for peace and the blessings of civilisation secured for her under its aegis for the last 150 years and more.'

There were cheers for the British Governors who graciously attended the 1915 and 1916 sessions. Congress even wrote to the Secretary of State promising that 'the princes and people of India will readily and willingly co-operate...by placing the resources of their country at His Majesty's disposal, for a speedy victory of the Empire.' The Delhi session of the Congress in 1918 passed a resolution expressing loyalty to the King.

So much for Congress' so-called 'struggle against imperialism!'

In contrast to the confusion of our CPI(M) theoreticians, let us compare the refreshing clarity of Trotsky, who summed up very aptly the role of Congress:-

'Millions of people have begun to stir. They demonstrated such spontaneous power that the national bourgeoisie was forced into action in order to blunt its revolutionary edge. Gandhi's passive resistance movement is the tactical knot that ties the naivete and self-denying blindness of the dispersed petty-bourgeois masses to the treacherous manoeuvres of the liberal bourgeoisie....The more 'sincere' Gandhi is personally, the more useful he is to the masters as an instrument for the disciplining of the masses.' (1930).

'We denounce before the colonial masses the treacherous aspects of Gandhism, whose mission is to retard the fight of the revolutionary masses and to exploit it in the interest of the 'national' bourgeoisie.' (1934).

'The Indian bourgeoisie are incapable of leading a revolutionary struggle. They are closely bound up with and dependent on British capitalism. They tremble for their own property. They stand in fear of the masses. They seek compromises with British imperialism no matter what the price, and lull the masses with hopes of reforms from above. The leader and prophet of this bourgeoisie is Gandhi. A fake leader and a false prophet!' (1939).

## THE FALSE PROPHET

Churchill mocked the 'naked fakir' Gandhi, but the obese, rapacious and parasitical Indian bourgeoisie needed as its mascot the caricatured saint with his sackcloth, his fasting and his pacifism. A crafty lawyer with messianic delusions, Gandhi's writings express with breathtaking frankness the striving of the capitalists to subdue the storm of mass revolt (all the following quotations can be found in Gandhi's *Collected Works*).

Gandhi explicitly confirms Trotsky's description of the role of Congress as an instrument to 'blunt the masses' revolutionary edge'. He wrote: 'I think the growing generation will not be satisfied with petitions. We must give them something effective. Satyagraha is the only way...to stop terrorism....It is all well as long as you hold the peasants in check. But Nehru's presence must now ease the situation. He has no difficulty in dealing with the peasants and restraining them.'

Gandhi insisted above all on the property rights of the capitalists and landlords. 'I shall be no party to dispossessing the propertied classes of their private property without just cause....You may be sure that I shall throw the whole weight of my influence in preventing a class war....Supposing there is an attempt unjustly to deprive you of your property, you will find me fighting on your side.'

Congress openly opposed the Bombay textile strikes in the 1920s, because they were receiving lavish financial donations from the millowners. Gandhi expressed horror at finding in Gujarat 'utter lawlessness bordering on Bolshevism', and replied to the demand for a general strike: 'I hope I am not expected knowingly to undertake a fight that must end in anarchy and red ruin.'

Gandhi's slavish worship of imperialism is indicated by the fact that no less than two entire volumes of his *Collected Works* are devoted to his correspondence with the Viceroy! It would be hard to imagine more revolting expressions of bootlicking and toadying than the following selection of extracts:-

'It would be unwise on my part not to listen to the warning given by the government....A civil resister never seeks to embarrass the government. I feel that I shall better serve the country and the government by suspension of civil resistance for the time being.'

'I confess that it is a delicate situation. I need hardly assure you that the whole of my weight will be thrown absolutely on the side of preserving internal peace. The Viceroy has the right to rely upon my doing nothing less.'

'I do not know whether...friendly relations between us are closed, or whether you expect me still to see you and receive guidance from you as to the course I am to pursue in advising the Congress.'

We will spare our readers any further examples of this nauseating correspondence with the Viceroy.

Gandhi went a little further than his urbane colleagues in transcending the cramped barriers of local particularism, caste superstition and communal bigotry, an indispensable condition if concessions were to be won from

imperialism. But even Gandhi's famous 'crusade against untouchability' (which was an indispensable precondition for any kind of mass campaign) was really limited only to a call for social reform among Hindus. Gandhi remained a passionate supporter of the principles of the caste system, as the following quotation shows:-

'Varna fulfils nature's law of conservation of human energy and true economics....It is the best possible adjustment of social stability and progress....It trusts to the principle of heredity....It is difficult to imagine a more harmonious adjustment. Caste does not connote superiority or inferiority. It simply recognises different outlooks and corresponding modes of life....It is not a human invention but an immutable law of nature.' (Quoted by J. Ram in *Caste Challenge in India*).

### TREACHERY

With each new manifestation of militancy by the masses, Gandhi acted, systematically and consistently, to betray their hopes and capitulate to the British imperialists.

In December 1919 – just after the Jallianwala Bagh massacre in Amritsar and the imposition of martial law in Punjab – Gandhi suspended passive resistance and guaranteed 'the intention of the British people to do justice to India.'

When a no-tax campaign was launched in Guntur district, Gandhi insisted that all government dues be paid. While at one time Congress staged a formal and symbolic breach of the salt law and forest law, it stopped well short of calling for a refusal to pay land rent or tax. When the peasants overstepped this limit, Gandhi insisted on the adoption of a special resolution 'advising Congress workers and organisations to influence the ryots (peasants) that the withdrawing of rent payments to the zamindars (landlords) is contrary to the Congress resolutions and injurious to the best interests of the country.' It went on to 'assure the zamindars that the Congress movement is in no way intended to attack their legal rights.'

Even more outrageous was Gandhi's response to the magnificent movement of the peasants of Chauri Chaura (UP) in 1922, who stormed and burned the village police station, killing several policemen. The Congress Working Committee decided that 'in view of the inhuman conduct of the mob, not only mass civil disobedience but...the whole campaign of processions, public meetings, etc. must end, to be replaced by a constructive programme of spinning, temperance, reform and educational activities.'

Most breathtaking of all in its treachery was Gandhi's reaction to the heroic mutiny of the Hindu soldiers of the Garhwal Rifles, who were jailed for refusing to open fire upon a crowd of unarmed Muslims demonstrating against imperial rule in Peshawar. These martyrs might have expected praise from Gandhi for their solidarity in the struggle against imperialism, their decisive blow against communal divisions, or at the very least for their practice of 'non-violence.'

Instead, they were callously disowned by Gandhi, who said (incidentally exposing the hypocrisy of his alleged 'pacifism'): 'A soldier who disobeys an order to fire breaks the oath which he has taken. I cannot ask officials and soldiers to disobey, for when I am in power I shall in all likelihood make use of these same officials and soldiers. If I taught them to disobey, I shall be afraid that they might do the same when I am in power.'

The treacherous role of Congress provoked impatient and terrorist moods among the youth. Many lower middle-class youth took to arms, especially in Maharashtra, Punjab and Bengal, inspired by the example of similar groups in Ireland and in Tsarist Russia. However misguided, many of these devotees of the 'propaganda of the deed' were heroic figures, who suffered floggings, torture, jail and the gallows.

Nobody was more frightened of these groups than the leaders of Congress, who lost no opportunity to condemn their 'violence'. Some of these youth — notably Bhagat Singh — were moving away from terrorist illusions to the idea of the socialist revolution. This posed a danger to the Congress leadership. Fearing protests at the impending Congress session which was due to be held in Karachi, Gandhi even pleaded with the British authorities to postpone the executions of Bhagat Singh and his comrades for a few days until the session was over! (The British arrogantly refused, and the meeting was in uproar).

Congress had the power to paralyse industry and communications. Had it given a call to the industrial, railway and transport workers of India, and appealed for support to the Indian troops who maintained British rule, the entire country could have been brought to a standstill. The tremendous revolutionary power of the masses was demonstrated in 1946.



## HOW INDEPENDENCE WAS WON

It seemed inconceivable that a party with such cowardly and treacherous traditions could wrest the power from the hands of imperialism. How then did the party of the 'fake leader and false prophet' come to power? The answer is that power simply dropped into its lap due to the exhaustion and senility of imperialism, amid the revolutionary ferment that gripped the world following the end of the second world war.

The winning of Indian independence was due neither to the saintliness of Gandhi nor the benevolence of Mountbatten but to the revolutionary wave that rocked the planet following the Second World War, a wave that also launched the global movement towards colonial revolution, swept to power workers' parties or Popular Front governments in Western Europe, and brought an end to landlordism and capitalism in China and a number of countries in Eastern Europe. In India, the masses tore control of the national liberation struggle out of the quivering hands of Congress.

1946 was a year of revolution. It began with the mass movement which forced the British to release from jail the leaders of the Indian National Army, who had been convicted of treason. The enormous popularity of the INA proves that the masses had no sympathy either for the pacifism of Congress, or for the pro-British loyalism of the CPI. The INA was an armed rebellion which collaborated with the Japanese as the enemy of India's oppressor Britain.

Even Ranadive – who supports the CPI war record – has to admit that 'the formation of the Indian National Army under Subhash Chandra Bose inspired the people. Subhash Bose became the most popular leader.... The formation of the INA increased the militancy of the fighting Indian people. So big was the developing upsurge with the arrest of the INA leaders that Shahnavaz and others who were tried by a military court had to be released immediately after conviction. All over the country strikes and demonstrations were taking place in defence of the INA officers. The Viceroy had to immediately cancel the sentence. The government dared not face the angry people.'

The climax was reached with the rebellion of the Royal Indian Navy. On 19th February there began the great mutiny, in which thousands of RIN naval ratings – Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs – threw overboard their British officers, trained the guns of their battleships on the centre of Bombay (another very non-Gandhian gesture) and hoisted on their masts the red flag together with those of Congress and the Muslim League, thus proclaiming the unity of the rebellion. Admiral Godfrey threatened to sink the entire Indian navy but the ratings held on. Immediate sympathy strikes were launched by navy and air force men in Bombay, Madras and Karachi. General strikes broke out in several cities.

The CPI gave a call for a general strike in Bombay which was completely successful, and the workers raised barricades when British armoured cars were sent to quell the rebellion. In the course of three days' street fighting, more than 400 people were killed and hundreds wounded. On 1st March the sepoy in Jabalpur barracks mutinied. On 15th March the imprisoned RIN mutineers began a hunger strike. On 18th, Gurkha soldiers based in Dehra

Dun mutinied. The following day, the movement spread to the police force. In Allahabad police staged a mutiny and hunger strike. By 22nd March the police of Delhi had joined them. On 3rd April, 10,000 Bihar police joined the strike. Soon the workers joined in. On 2nd May North-West railway workers struck, and on 11th July there began the all-India strike of 1,00,000 postal workers. On 23rd July, 4,00,000 industrial workers came out in their support.

What was the attitude of the Congress 'leaders' of the struggle? Panic and consternation! Sardar Patel successfully urged the Bombay naval ratings to surrender, promising to use his influence to avoid victimisation. They were jailed. Gandhi and Nehru denounced the strikes and Congress President Maulana Azad said 'strikes, hartals and defiance of temporary authority are out of place.'

India was ablaze with strikes, mutinies, uprisings. The Empire was without an army. Lord Mountbatten was rushed out to organise a hurried withdrawal from India. Working in the classic 'divide and rule' traditions of British imperialism, Mountbatten partitioned the living body of the country, giving power to Congress and the Muslim League, while at the same time giving the rulers of the princely states the option of staying outside the Indian Union. In this way the imperialists hoped to dominate by playing one section off against the other.

Later Mountbatten explained: 'India in March 1947 was a ship on fire in mid-ocean with ammunition in the hold....It seemed that the only possible alternative to a quick transfer of power was...to bring in a large number of British Army divisions to hold down the country.'

But how many divisions would it take to hold down an angry population of over 50 crores? It would take an army of occupation and conquest bigger than the entire British Army! And where, in the conditions of that postwar dawn of hope, were the forces for such an army to be found? As Ranadive puts it: 'The British army was in no mood to fight the Indian people. The young British workers who had been drafted into the army by appeals to their sense of democracy and freedom were not prepared to use their rifles against the Indian people.' War-weary, radicalised and determined to go home and build a new world, the British soldiers were in no mood to play the role of an imperialist occupation army, fighting a dirty war and a lost cause.

If US imperialism – the strongest military power in history – had to stand by gritting its teeth while China abolished landlordism and capitalism, then how could the mangy toothless British lion prevent the political transfer of power to the Indian bourgeoisie? In fact the radical temper of the British soldiers had already compelled the British Government to hastily demobilise them and take the guns out of their hands. No wonder that General Auchinleck, faced with this forest fire of revolt, cabled back to Whitehall that unless independence were conceded, India could not be held for three days!

In the whole history of British rule, imperialism had never needed a full-scale occupation army in India. Britain conquered India with Indian troops, cunningly intriguing and playing off the rival Maharajahs and feuding principalities. Even the rebellion of 1857 was localised in character. It took the tidal wave of national consciousness that engulfed India in 1946-7 to sweep the

Raj away.

India gained its political freedom, thanks neither to Congress nor even less the CPI, but to the revolutionary mood of both the Indian masses and the British troops, and the pressure on the new Labour Government by the British working class. By 1947, the police, army, navy and air force had melted away, and there was no prospect of finding a new occupation army. The cynical right-wing Congress leader Rajagopalachari commented: 'If Mountbatten had not transferred the power when he did, there might have been no power to transfer.'

## THE COMMUNIST PARTY

If it was the workers, soldiers and peasants who carried the liberation struggle through to victory, then where on Earth was the CPI? The natural leadership of the struggle belonged with the party of the proletariat, the only class capable of leading the fight against imperialism.

The formation of the CPI under the impact of the Russian Revolution was a gigantic step, a tremendous historical achievement of the masses. It rapidly developed a serious base in the working class. Thousands of worker cadres had suffered jail, torture and death to build the CPI, throughout these years of struggle. How could a Communist Party find itself so isolated from a mass revolutionary movement such as had swept through India? It gives us no pleasure to say that, tragically, it took a long succession of grave political mistakes.

After Lenin's death, the crystallising bureaucracy under Stalin adopted the fatal programme of 'socialism in one country'. The struggle of the workers of the world for the socialist revolution was renounced in favour of defence of the 'socialist fatherland' — a policy that suited the most conservative bureaucratic strata in Russia. The Communist International became transformed overnight from the vanguard of the world revolution into the 'frontier-guard' of the USSR. In keeping with this policy, all its sections were forced to zig-zag from right to left and back again in keeping with the eclectic twists and turns of Kremlin diplomacy.

The CPI published a *Draft Platform of Action* in 1928, during the so-called 'third period' era of the world communist movement, when it clung to wildly sectarian policies everywhere. Even then, it called only for nationalisation of all British enterprises, and of properties of the landlords, ruling princes, churches and British government officials; for a halving of the peasants' land rents; and for the abolition of slavery and the caste system. It was a programme for the bourgeois revolution.

Yet Comrade Ranadive considers even this programme too hard on the bourgeoisie. It 'contained very mistaken and wrong notions about the role of the Indian bourgeoisie. Chiang Kai-Shek's treachery in China had profoundly affected international thinking. As a result...the bourgeoisie was virtually declared to have already betrayed the struggle. This led to sectarian attitudes in 1930 which did great damage.' (*The Independence Struggle and After*).

Certainly, an ultra-left abstention from the independence struggle did partially isolate the CPI; but we would not agree with Comrade Ranadive that this mistaken sectarian tactic 'flowed from a wrong understanding of the role of the national bourgeoisie', which as we have said was indeed treacherous.

Disastrously, the Communists allowed the trade union movement to be split along political lines, with the inevitable result that successive strikes were crushed, in particular those of the Bombay textile workers. In 1934, an all-India textile strike, demanding among other things the release of political prisoners, was also defeated.

Despite its mistakes, however, in 1928 the CPI was nevertheless able to mobilise 50,000 workers in Calcutta under the slogan of 'a socialist workers' republic.' It led huge strikes under the slogan of a workers' and peasants' government. The authorities were terrified of the effect of revolutionary propaganda among the workers. They were forced to stage frame-up trials of Communist trade unionists, notably the so-called Communist Conspiracy Trials in Peshawar (1922), Kanpur (1925), and Meerut (1929), and similar repressive measures in Bombay.

It must be said that, in spite of their ultra-left sectarian attitude towards the rest of the labour movement in those days, which limited their appeal, nevertheless the very fact that they were raising class issues gained the Communists enormous successes. Their later opportunist blunders were to destroy the militant base that they had established in many key areas. Look for instance at their position today in the very places where the authorities had been forced to victimise their leaders. What trace remains today of the Communist tradition, for instance in Meerut — the scene of the recent horrific Hindu/Muslim communal riots? Or in Peshawar (now in Pakistan) where even formally there is no Communist Party in existence? Or even in Bombay, where tragically the labour movement has been thrown so far back in political terms that it is dominated by the crypto-Congress gangster Datta Samant? In the whole of Maharashtra today the CPI(M) has only 4,800 members! In all of UP, only 7,300! (Figures quoted from *People's Democracy*, 25/12/88).

Apart from these witch-hunting frame-ups, the CPI suffered severe repression in these days. It was banned until 1937. Thousands of members were jailed in Maharashtra and UP, and even tortured in Bengal and Punjab. In Sholapur, four leaders were hanged, including a trade union leader. There was systematic terrorisation of the workers in Malabar, and the executions of communists in Madras State.

Not for the last time, a sharp turn in the policy of the world Communist parties, directed from Moscow, soon led to a complete reversal of CPI policy. It abandoned the earlier ultra-left policy and began seeking a 'broad alliance', not only with other tendencies within the working class, but with the entire bourgeois nationalist movement. This was not merely a question of tactical co-operation with the Congress leadership against the British authorities on this or that democratic issue, which would of course have been correct: it amounted to virtual liquidation of the Communist Party into Congress!

## ENTRY INTO CONGRESS

Now buried inside Congress, the CPI cadres tried to form a left bloc with social-democratic elements such as the Congress Socialists (led by J.P. Narayan), certain radical former terrorists, and even the 'Nehru wing' of the Congress leadership — which, as we have seen, was simply used by the capitalists to hold the workers and peasants in check. They even gave up their control of AITUC, the trade union federation, to the Congress Socialists.

Certainly, the CPI was correct to work closely with the independence movement, even under the leadership of the bourgeoisie. But its goal should have been to split it along class lines. It could have undermined illusions in the Gandhis and the Nehrus by exposing their real class interests. It should have appealed to the Congress Socialists and the militant opposition to join with the communists and build a workers' and peasants' revolutionary movement that would really fight to overthrow imperialism.

In 1939 the militant oppositionist Subhash Chandra Bose defeated Gandhi in elections for Congress President. This could have been a golden opportunity to rebuild the movement into a revolutionary fighting force. It was partly the responsibility of the CPI leaders that Bose, lacking any perspective, ended up in the blind alley of a futile quixotic guerrilla war, moreover collaborating with the Japanese imperialists.

Unfortunately, our CPI(M) leadership — which prides itself on having a policy to the 'left' of the old CPI — fully justifies the policy of liquidation into Congress. 'Rectifying its earlier mistakes,' as Ranadive chooses to put it, 'the CP developed a correct attitude....The Communists entered the Congress....In 1935 (they) proposed an affiliation of peasants' and workers' and youth organisations to the National Congress, making the Congress a broad platform of the diverse mass movements shaking the country.' This was in line with the worldwide Stalinist policy of the 'Popular Front' against Fascism, which wrecked the revolution in Spain and elsewhere.

Traces of the earlier wretched deference to Nehru and Co. persist even to this day within the upper layers of the CPI(M). For instance, Jyoti Basu (Chief Minister of West Bengal) spoke in these terms at a recent public meeting in London:-

'Mr Basu was especially appreciative of the role of...Nehru, whose thinking and outlook was affected by his reading and understanding of Marx....Nehru's foreign policy of non-alignment and friendship with the USSR reflected his affinity for the anti-imperialist struggle and underlined his socialist vision. His daughter Indira Gandhi kept faith with this policy....' (*India Weekly*, London, 7/7/89)

The CPI supported Congress in the 1937 elections. Upon assuming ministerial office, the Congress ministers rewarded the CPI leaders by launching attacks on them, and introduced vicious anti-trade union legislation.

The new upsurge of the class struggle forced the CPI leadership once again to the left. By 1938, there were 5,00,000 peasants enrolled in the CPI's Kisan Sabha. In 1939, this body passed a resolution criticising the Congress

never before.'

Nambudiripad also admits: 'The mass of people who enthusiastically participated in the Quit India movement could not understand how the communists, who were known for their uncompromising struggle against the British, could refuse to join a movement whose declared purpose was to force the British to quit India...It appeared to them inexplicable.'

It took years for the CPI to recover any credibility and to this day Congress leaders demagogically exploit this criminal record at election hustings.

Even the BJP — heirs of the Hindu bigots who really acted as agents of British imperialism against the independence movement — were given free arguments against the CPI. 'A classic example of communist treachery....At a time when the fate of the country hung in the balance and the nation...was engaged in a do-or-die struggle against British imperialism, the Communists without any qualms of conscience struck a treacherous deal with the British only to subserve Soviet interests.' (*Communists and their Extra-Terrestrial Loyalties*).

While the CPI did, many years later, make a perfunctory 'self-criticism' of its war policy, CPI(M) leaders today continue to justify it. What is the position of the CPI(M) leadership today on this crucial question? Listen once again to Comrade Ranadive: 'It came to the correct conclusion....The CP now declared the war to be a people's war which should be won....As subsequent events have shown, the communist understanding was entirely correct.'

Even Comrade Ranadive grudgingly admits, however, that as a result 'the Congress had again tremendously increased its prestige and influence over the masses.'

The CPI, on the other hand, had wantonly forfeited its own influence. It is as a direct result of its war policy that, as Ranadive complains, 'Communists are periodically maligned and slandered as opponents of the freedom struggle by hired hacks...

## WORKERS' UNITY

Communal, national, linguistic and caste conflicts have all along been the curse of the sub-continent. These were cynically fostered by the ruling class — Moghul, British and Hindu — to 'divide and rule'.

Marx brilliantly described the result. 'While all were struggling against all, the Briton rushed in and was enabled to subdue them all....A country not only divided between Mohammedan and Hindu, but between tribe and tribe, between caste and caste, a society whose framework was based on a sort of equilibrium resulting from a general repulsion and constitutional exclusiveness between all its members. Such a country and such a society, were they not the predestined prey of conquest? If we knew nothing of the past history of Hindustan, would there not be the one great and incontestable fact that even at this moment India is held in English thralldom by an Indian army maintained at the cost of India?'

Yet there were glorious traditions of mass unity throughout the history of the liberation struggle. With every upsurge, the workers and even the soldiers and peasants showed magnificent resistance to all attempts to divide them along communal lines.

Marx remarked in relation to the 1857 uprising: 'It is the first time that sepoy regiments have murdered their European officers; that the Mussulmans and Hindus, renouncing their mutual antipathies, have combined against their common masters; that disturbances beginning with the Hindus have actually ended in placing on the throne of Delhi a Mohammedan Emperor; that the mutiny has not been confined to a few localities; and lastly, that the revolt in the Anglo-Indian army has coincided with the general dissatisfaction exhibited against English supremacy on the part of the great Asiatic nations, the revolt of the Bengal Army being, beyond doubt, intimately connected with the Persian and Chinese wars....The Sikhs, like the Mohammedans, were making common cause with the Brahmins, and...a general union against the British rule, of all the different tribes, was rapidly progressing.'

The same unity was displayed at the time of the Bengal mutiny. 'Hindu-Muslim unity was a fact seen in the streets, in demonstrations, in hartals and in struggles against the British police.' (Ranadive).

The Muslim League was founded just then, in an attempt to break the unity of the soldiers' and workers' struggle. The feudal Muslim landlords of the North resented the rich Hindu merchants and industrialists of Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras, and played the communal card, in collusion with British imperialism, to weaken the independence struggle.

With every renewed upsurge, however, the masses showed a remarkable capacity to transcend communal barriers. An official British Government report in 1920 drew attention once again to this phenomenon. 'One noticeable feature of the general excitement was the unprecedented fraternisation between the Hindus and Muslims....In this time of public excitement, even the lower classes agreed for once to forget the differences. Extraordinary scenes of fraternisation occurred....'

Yet again, there were protracted and united strikes of Hindu and Muslim

workers against the Simon Commission, including the Bombay general strike which greeted the commission as it landed.

It may be that later, when communal riots were raging all over the country, Gandhi fasted and undertook penance. Nevertheless the responsibility for communalism and partition lies directly on Congress, which by its conservative social policies continually aggravated communal conflict.

Congress could easily have countered the communal threat with revolutionary social policies. But it refused to win over the Muslim peasants by fighting for the elementary bourgeois-democratic demand for the abolition of landlordism and the distribution of land to the tiller. As Ranadive says: 'this would have drawn into the common struggle millions of Hindus and Muslims. The Muslim mass would have been rescued from the pernicious influence of orthodoxy and the landlords. But the bourgeois leaders of Congress, historically incapable of liquidating feudal relations in their struggle for power, compromised with landlordism, the caste system and religious separatism.'

Nehru admitted that the criminal decision by Congress to end the mass civil disobedience campaign in 1922 ('in view of the inhuman conduct of the mob at Chauri Chaura') 'brought about a certain demoralisation...The drift to sporadic futile violence in the political struggle was stopped, but the suppressed violence had to find a way out, and in the following years this perhaps aggravated communal trouble.' (*Nehru, Autobiography*).

As Ranadive confirms, 'henceforth the Muslim mass was never to come under the Congress banner...and within a decade and a half it was to be completely alienated from the national struggle and turn hostile to it.'

That was to become clear in the 1937 elections, in which Congress won an overwhelming overall majority, but won only 26 out of 482 Muslim seats.

No less than fifteen of these were won in the North-West Frontier province, the only area where Muslims fought under the Congress banner. The inspiring events in Peshawar provided a rare testimony to the possibilities of mass unity. Two platoons of Hindu troops refused to open fire upon a crowd of Muslim demonstrators. They openly fraternised, and many soldiers handed over their arms. The military and police were hastily evacuated. Peshawar remained victorious in the hands of the people for ten days. The leaders of the Garhwal Rifles mutiny were jailed. By his shrill denunciation of these heroes, Gandhi enormously strengthened the hand of the reactionary Muslim League.

Once again, however, in the uprising in 1946 Hindus and Muslims fought shoulder to shoulder. Half the armed forces personnel were Muslims. Disregarding the communalists, Muslim soldiers, naval ratings and air force personnel fought shoulder to shoulder with their Hindu brothers. Muslim workers joined with Hindus in raising barricades in Bombay. In Calcutta and other cities Muslims and Hindus demonstrated together against the trial of the INA officers, who themselves also came from both communities. Everywhere they raised side by side the flags of Congress and the Muslim League, together with the red flag of the CPI.



## THE CPI AFTER INDEPENDENCE

Mountbatten's decree partitioning India along communal lines, and also giving the rulers of India's 500 princely states the freedom to stay outside the Indian Union, represented a vicious reactionary blow against the unity of the workers and peasants. As a result, lakhs were massacred in communal riots. This was a terrible defeat for the workers.

Unfortunately, yet again the CPI was unable to put a clear position. It did not base itself on the real tradition of joint struggle by the workers and peasants. Once having accepted that the revolution must remain within a bourgeois-democratic, capitalist framework, the CPI had no alternative but to give concessions to communalism. Initially it endorsed the Mountbatten Award (a decision it reversed in 1948). It had demanded a Congress/Muslim League government to lead the war effort, and under the banner of support for the right of self-determination it supported the creation of Pakistan, and hence India's partition and communal 'vivisection'.

Nehru wrote to R. Palme Dutt in 1945: 'It pains me to see the gulf that has arisen between the Congress and the Communists....That has nothing to do with communism and socialism....The gulf has arisen because of internal policy in India and the fact that the Communists...at a time when there was bitter conflict between nationalism and the imperialist structure...appeared before the people as acting on the side of the latter....Politically the fact that has gone most against them and aroused the greatest resentment is their attitude on the communal question. They have become full-blooded supporters of Jinnah's demand....I have no doubt that they have worsened the communal problem by their attitude.'

If the CPI had adopted a real Marxist standpoint, it would have stood firmly in favour of the right of self-determination for all nations within the sub-continent; at the same time mounted implacable opposition to all attempts by imperialists and their accomplices to divide the population along communal lines; and above all stood on the real traditions of the liberation movement, and fought to the bitter end for workers' unity.

As a result of this fundamental error, the communist movement not only did grave damage to its authority in the 'Indian' part of the sub-continent: it became annihilated in the 'Pakistani' part of it. The CPI actually advised its members to join the Muslim League, and inevitably as a result lost a whole layer of militants. Formally speaking, there is no Communist Party at all in Pakistan today. In Bangladesh, scene of the inspiring struggles of the militant jute workers, and joint heir to the revolutionary traditions of Bengal generally, there is just a small Maoist sect. This too is part of the bitter price we have paid for the mistakes of 1947.

On the crucial question of the correct Communist attitude towards partition, there appears even now to be some confusion within the CPI(M) leadership. Comrade Basavapunniah says of CPI policy: 'It misfired. The principle of self-determination was no remedy to the virus of the crude communal divide.' On the other hand, Comrade Ranadive comments: 'The communist stand led to widespread misunderstanding, leading to further isolation....The theoretical presentation of the problem by the CP suffered from weaknesses

which added to the confusion, although its practical proposal was correct.'

## ZIG-ZAGS

Unfortunately, erratic policy shifts continued for long after to be the hallmark of the CPI. With all its zig-zags, it took forty years and a major split before a Programme could be drawn up — or rather, two rival Party Programmes!

A Draft Platform had been drawn up in 1928, but before it could be endorsed, it was rendered obsolete by the turn from ultra-leftism to Popular Frontism. Then came the sudden policy switch relating to the world war. Then the Party immediately faced the dilemma presented by partition.

Having initially welcomed the Mountbatten Award, the 1948 CPI Congress — only the second in the Party's entire history! — repudiated this 'reformist and revisionist deviation.' Under the impact of the Chinese revolution, the Party changed course yet again, this time launching a policy of peasant guerrilla war. It resolved that 'freedom could be won only through mass struggles, and that in Indian conditions its axis was the agrarian revolution ending all feudal and pre-feudal land relations.'

There were important rural struggles taking place at this time in Travancore and Bengal. But it was in Telengana (then under the rule of the feudal Nizam of Hyderabad) that the struggle reached its peak. 12,000 peasants were mobilised in a revolutionary militia. Peasant committees representing a population of three million people redistributed one million acres of land. The CPI was compelled to give recognition to the tremendous struggle being waged by the peasants. But instead of linking their fight to the workers' struggle, and building a mass workers' and peasants' opposition to Congress, the CPI restricted its impact and left it isolated.

This brief flirtation with guerrilla war itself came to an abrupt end, when the struggle was abandoned by the CPI. Stalin was keen on developing friendly relations with Nehru, and dictated a new change of line for the CPI. The uprising was brutally crushed. 4,000 communist cadres were put in concentration camps; 50,000 peasants were jailed and tortured; millions suffered police rampages, raping, looting, etc.

*Economic and Political Weekly* (November 1988) talked of 'the snuffing out (with not a little help from sections of the CPI leadership itself) of the Telengana revolutionary struggle', and went on: 'In 1951, along with the struggle to smash the existing state, the CPI also abandoned the struggle to ensure 'land to the tiller' and other demands of the rural poor. The CPI was content to concentrate on relatively upper peasant demands like the cheapening of canal rates.'

But then the April 1951 Draft Programme was itself suspended, after the April 1956 Party Congress voted to keep it in abeyance. Even then the Party could not break the habit of zigzagging policies. In July 1964, the CPI yet again announced: 'As a result of our experience of the last ten years...our party came to a re-evaluation of the class character of the present government.'

It was not until the Party had finally split into two, that either wing was able to adopt a Programme — the CPI(M) in November 1964 and the CPI in December! As Comrade Basavapunniah remarks: 'It is rather extraordinary for a Communist Party to exist and function for nearly three decades without a Programme.'

The split finally came to a head with the Sino-Soviet dispute and in particular the India-China border war, when one section of the CPI leadership gave tacit approval to the jailing of another section as 'Chinese agents'. Comrade Harkishan Singh Surjeet (*On CPI(M)/CPI Differences*) explains: 'The leadership not only did not protest and launch a release campaign but joined with jingoist-chauvinist elements in the country in denouncing them.'

However, the underlying differences regarding the correct attitude towards Congress had been germinating over a long period. The rival factions had denounced each other as 'Right-reformists and revisionists' and 'Left-sectarians' respectively. Some sections of the CPI leadership had leaned very close to Congress. For instance, Bhowani Sen, a senior CPI leader, talked of 'the Nehru Government, representing the progressive section of Indian Big Business.'

### *THE ROLE OF THE NATIONAL BOURGEOISIE*

Underlying all the successive political errors stands the central question of our attitude towards the Indian capitalists. Either we can search among them for allies, on the basis that there must be some 'progressive' forces among them who will destroy the relics of feudalism and imperial domination, and usher in a modern industrial society, creating the foundations for a subsequent proletarian socialist revolution. Or we must show implacable hostility towards them, on the basis that capitalism today on a world scale is historically redundant, and that the Indian capitalists are parasites, incapable of developing society.

On the world historical stage, the days when capitalism was a progressive social system capable of taking society forward are long gone. In the present epoch of imperialist decay, no kind of capitalism, no matter how allegedly 'democratic', can develop and modernise society.

In the epoch of imperialism, when the imperialist powers have already ruthlessly divided world markets and resources between themselves through colonisation and world war, the 'national bourgeoisie' in the colonial or 'third world' countries is tied hand and foot to the imperialist monopolies and to the feudal state apparatus, and is therefore incapable of solving the elementary democratic tasks — the distribution of the landlords' estates, abolition of serfdom, creation of a proletariat, a constitution, national unification, the development of industry, mass education, etc., all of which are essential prerequisites for a modern capitalist society.

The only capitalist countries which can claim to have developed from backward societies into fully developed industrialised societies in the postwar period are Japan and the so-called 'Newly Industrialised Countries' of South-East Asia (South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong). In all these countries, it was fear at the example of the Chinese revolution which lay

behind their development. The revolution was spreading to Korea, Vietnam and Malaya, and even in Japan revolution was a serious danger in the 1940s.

The capitalist class in these countries was incapable of breaking the power of the feudal landlords and carrying through the land reform without which industrialisation was impossible. In Japan, which despite its social backwardness was already a strong military imperialist power, it took American imperialism, in the form of General Macarthur at the head of its occupation armies, to over-rule the defeated Japanese warlords and impose a very drastic land distribution programme, at the same time financing industrialisation with huge dollar subsidies.

American imperialism imposed the same stringent land programme on occupied South Korea, as a defence against the spread of revolution from the Northern half of the peninsula. Again it was General Macarthur — in one sense the most progressive bourgeois this century! — who carried through this programme.

In Taiwan, Chiang Kai-Shek's armies, fleeing from the revolution on the Chinese mainland, performed the same role, to stabilise their occupation of the island. Singapore and Hong Kong are really 'city-states', likewise based on offshore islands, so the land question was not so formidable.

It is noteworthy that not one of the famous 'NICs' is a real country. They are all fragments splintered off from countries already over-run by revolution: counter-revolutions in exile! In no way can they be regarded as arguments in favour of the viability of capitalism.

Already in the early years of the twentieth century, Lenin understood that the Russian bourgeoisie was incapable of leading the struggle against Tsarism — the political guardian of feudal landlordism and imperialist domination. He explained that the working class must lead the struggle for a new society, drawing behind it the mass of poor peasants, and linking arms with the proletariat fighting for socialism in the more advanced countries of western Europe. The democratic revolution would be led by the proletariat in alliance with the poor peasantry. Lenin explained that the workers have only two allies: the poor peasantry and the world working class.

Trotsky predicted that the workers, once in power, would not stop at democratic tasks. They would inevitably go on to fight for their own interests against capitalism. The revolution would thus flow from democratic to socialist tasks. That is the theory of permanent revolution, which was vindicated by the events in Russia. Today, in every country, a genuine Marxist analysis must base itself upon the rottenness of the capitalist system on a global scale in the modern epoch, the leading role of the proletariat in the revolution even in the colonial countries, and the worldwide task of the working class to overthrow capitalism and landlordism alike and establish a World Socialist Federation.

## *THE RECORD OF INDIAN CAPITALISM*

The Indian capitalists are incomparably more rotten and bankrupt even than those of Tzarist Russia. They have proved utterly incapable of fulfilling their tasks. If they had been in any way a progressive class, the winning of independence in 1947 was the ideal test of their potential to develop society. They could not have dreamed of more favourable conditions.

At the outset of the biggest world economic upswing in the history of capitalism, they took hold of the destiny of the most populous capitalist country on Earth! They commanded a gigantic potential home market — India's population is now as great as those of the USA, the EEC countries and the USSR put together. India is rich in untapped mineral and agricultural reserves, and above all in the most precious and productive resource of all: human labour power. If they could have arrived on the scene and come to power two or three centuries earlier, India could have become another United States of America. Its pitiful condition today graphically illustrates the historical rottenness of capitalism today as a social system.

It is ironic that apologists for capitalism blame India's poverty on one of the very factors that fuelled the economic 'miracles' in Japan and some of the other more developed capitalist countries, at the very time that Indian capitalism was hardly hobbling along: 'over-population'. The availability of surplus manpower allowed an essential influx of fresh reserves of labour into industry in those countries. America's wealth was founded upon successive waves of immigration which provided a rare combination of cheap labour and a booming market. Conversely, the declining populations of Ireland in the nineteenth century or Nepal today have hardly been beneficial to their economies! Socialism could proudly harness the energies and creative talents of humanity.

The law of permanent revolution has been brilliantly vindicated in reverse by the negative record of Indian capitalism. Not a single task of the bourgeois-democratic revolution has been fulfilled.

Once in power, Congress introduced a purely nominal land reform which in most areas has left the feudal landlords' estates intact. Their stranglehold has been broken only in a few areas — notably Punjab, which is hardly a paragon of stability today! Landlessness has swollen to half the rural population. Congress did put up nominal barriers against imports of foreign goods and capital, but these were brazenly violated by the Indian capitalists themselves. India continued to languish under exploitation by the multi-national corporations.

Capitalism has failed to develop a home market in India amounting to even one-tenth of its potential. On the contrary, the impoverished masses have been further pauperised since independence. Indian capitalism's unseemly scramble to cash in on foreign booms instead has ended in disaster, with the Indian share of world trade steadily and relentlessly declining throughout the years of the postwar boom from the high point it achieved in 1938 — before independence! It has lost its earlier toe-hold on world markets and is now, under pressure from imperialism, demolishing its already shaky protective barriers and opening up its limited market to a flood of foreign capital and

cheap imports. After a feeble flutter, Indian capitalism is now at the mercy of Western and Japanese monopolies which treat India as a dumping-ground.

A tiny class of vulgar parvenus has India by the throat, a parasitic bourgeoisie that straddles a shadowy border line with gangsterism and feeds its gross appetites by sordid speculation, black marketeering, usury, bribery, smuggling, and downright cheating. A huge volume of 'black money' is swilling and lurching throughout the economy, making a mockery of all bureaucratic regulation and 'controls'. If there has been a marginal growth in the industrial proletariat since 1947, there is no question that the social class which has swollen into monstrous proportions is the lumpen-proletariat of the teeming shanty-towns.

And yet Indian industry had been growing rapidly even before independence and was already a substantial force. Between 1920 and 1938 India's industrial production more than doubled. As Harkishan Singh Surjeet himself points out: 'In India...the bourgeoisie is much more developed as compared to any other developing country in the world....The capitalist path of development the Indian bourgeoisie has chosen is in the period when the world capitalist system is fast disintegrating....The present Indian society...is a peculiar combination of monopoly capitalism with caste, communal and tribal institutions.'

This shows, precisely, the narrow limits in the capacity of capitalism to develop society. After Brazil and South Korea, India has the greatest number of monopoly capitalist companies in the 'third world'. And yet the vast majority of the population still live within pre-capitalist social formations. We still have tribalism (the adivasi communities); slavery ('bonded labour'); feudal serfdom; all stages of cottage industry, handicraft, and manufacture; together with huge industrial concentrations. To cap it all, the Indian capitalist class can only totter along at all on the crutches of lavish state subsidies; hence there is also a big state-owned 'public sector'. India thus resembles a kind of vast living museum of historical materialism!

Under Congress rule, and especially with the growing economic crisis, there has been a resurgence of all the most vile and barbarous legacies of medievalism: illiteracy, plague, untouchability, caste atrocities, bigotry, ghetto life, communal massacres, pogroms, superstition, astrology, witchcraft, ritual child slaughters, the dowry system, bride-burning, suti (widows' self-immolation). Congress has failed to shake off the horrible legacy of the Dark Ages. This is the reality of Rajiv's promises to 'lead India into the 21st century!' For a start, huge areas of India would be grateful to be brought into the nineteenth century!

## *NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS*

Above all, by betraying the hopes of the independence movement, Congress has allowed the flame of national consciousness which set India alight in 1946-7 to flicker and dim almost to extinction. This represents its most shameful and humiliating failure.

The new 'national-bourgeois' Indian government which came to power in 1947 was unable to prevent the communal dismemberment of the sub-continent by imperialism. It succeeded in absorbing the princely states only after mass uprisings of their populations. It annexed Goa, by the most reactionary military methods (as it later annexed Sikkim). But even after victory in the 1971 war against Pakistan, and the establishment of an independent Bangladesh under Indian military occupation, it dared not even think of reunifying Bengal. India is regarded as a rival in Pakistan, a bully in Nepal and Bangladesh and an unwanted foreign invader both in the Tamil and Sinhala areas of Sri Lanka. That is the measure of its failure.

A developing Indian nation would have had an irresistible appeal to its neighbours. A Greater Indian Republic or a United States of India would have developed and a new nation born, as was the case in the USA, Germany and Italy which united separate states into great modern nation-states in the last century.

It cannot even hold India together. The Indian bourgeoisie needs a united India, both to provide it with a home market — (even if it amounts to only 10% of the population, in absolute terms this still provides a market of 80 million) — and especially with the lavish public funds of which it milks the state exchequer. The Balkanisation of India would mark its final demise as a class. The nightmare in Sri Lanka today gives a microcosm of the horrific future of India, unless capitalism is overthrown by the proletariat under a real Marxist leadership.

But the Indian capitalist class has discredited itself. It can no more hold India together than it can solve any other of its tasks. It has lost all faith in its own future. Just as Indian businessmen will cheat their way around their own laws to make a fast buck out of smuggling and black-money transactions, making a mockery of their own tariff and tax systems, so too their political agents will freely spit upon the sacred cows of Gandhism and nationalism, and indulge in unscrupulous conspiracies with the dark forces of communal gangsterism to promote their own careers.

Congress has turned full circle into the party of Northern Hindu communal chauvinism and bigotry. All the more reason for it to cling desperately to the Nehru/Gandhi family dynasty, a monarchy in all but name, to resuscitate the flagging myth of Congress' role in 1947. At every moment of political crisis it has had no alternative but to entrust its fate to succeeding generations of this family, including the virtual coup by which Rajiv was crowned Prime Minister within minutes of the death of his mother. It is ironic that a mass movement which overthrew a foreign Emperor has swept to power a class which can only resort to the establishment of a new royal dynasty in a vain attempt to prevent the country crumbling to pieces.

## 'TWO STAGES'

There is a huge gulf between the genuine revolutionary Marxist position on the tasks of the revolution in the 'underdeveloped' countries, and that of the Stalinists. We say: the capitalists cannot fulfil their historic mission. The task of taking society forward can only be undertaken under the rule of the working class. But according to their mechanical schema, because capitalism is not fully developed, the socialist revolution must also be postponed!

For instance, Comrade Ranadive writes: 'Four decades of independence in India have not led to qualitative changes in the class situation. It was not historically inevitable that the unfinished democratic revolution should require more than four decades for its completion. But the process got prolonged because of the weakness of the communist movement during the national liberation struggle and its consequent inability to organise the masses for...a direct assault on class power. Consequently, the bourgeois-landlord regime in India enjoyed a prolonged spell of stability.'

This is an amazing admission! We entirely agree that capitalism survives in India today because the Communist Party was not ready to overthrow it. But Comrade Ranadive draws a strange conclusion:-

'The task of completing the democratic revolution remained unfulfilled and the social struggle could not move forward to the next stage – the struggle for socialism.' In other words, because the capitalists are incapable of completing their own historic tasks, we must not overthrow them! Because of their incompetence, they must remain in power!

A CPI(M) resolution (August 1987) talks of 'the historical incapacity of the Indian ruling classes to solve the problems of modernisation of national life.' The conclusion can only be that historical progress depends on overthrowing these classes, the landlords and capitalists. That means a socialist revolution. But the CPI(M) Programme still insists: 'The nature of our revolution in the present stage, of its development is essentially anti-feudal, anti-imperialist, anti-monopoly and democratic.' Basavapunniah adds: 'Ours is an anti-imperialist, anti-landlord and anti-monopolist People's Democratic Revolution.' In other words, our revolution will leave capitalism intact.

For all the minor variations between them, there is no fundamental difference between the positions both of the CPI and the CPI(M) – and also of the various Naxalite factions. According to Stalinist ideas, the revolution is divided into 'stages'. The workers have to help to power a 'progressive' national bourgeoisie, or a 'progressive' section of the bourgeoisie. Thus the CPI talks of something it calls National Democracy, and the CPI(M) calls for a so-called People's Democratic Revolution.

'If we are not to mock at common sense or history,' wrote Lenin, 'it is obvious that we cannot speak of 'pure democracy' so long as different classes exist; we can only speak of class democracy.'

Lenin went on to remind us that 'pure democracy' is 'the mendacious phrase of a liberal who wants to fool the workers....Bourgeois democracy under capitalism cannot but remain restricted, truncated, false and hypocritical, a paradise for the rich and a snare and deception for the exploited, the poor.'



Let us call things by their right name. The programme of both the CPI and the CPI(M) is for a bourgeois 'democracy'. All factions of Stalinism in India start with the idea that the socialist revolution is off the agenda. It is postponed indefinitely. As if that were not bad enough, they try to ascribe this policy to Lenin! Actually it is absolutely the opposite of the position of Marx and Lenin. Fundamentally this policy corresponds, not to the ideas of the Bolsheviks but to those of their opponents the Mensheviks.

After all, in Russia, an 'under-developed' and socially backward country dominated by feudalism and imperialism, the Bolsheviks did in fact carry through a socialist revolution. The Mensheviks used Marxism not as a guide to revolutionary action but as a scholastic alibi for class conciliation.

Lenin summed up the whole experience of the Russian revolution in a withering repudiation of the idea of 'two stages'. He explained that the revolution began by linking the proletariat and its party, the Bolsheviks, 'first, with the whole of the peasantry against the monarchy, against the landlords, against the medieval regime — and to that extent, the revolution remains bourgeois, bourgeois-democratic. Then with the poor peasants, with the semi-proletarians, with all the exploited, against capitalism, including the rural rich, the kulaks, the profiteers — and to that extent the revolution becomes a socialist one.

'To attempt to raise an artificial Chinese Wall between the first and second, to separate them by anything else than the degree of preparedness of the proletariat and the degree of its unity with the poor peasantry, means monstrously to distort Marxism, to vulgarise it, to substitute liberalism in its place; it means smuggling in a reactionary defence of the bourgeoisie as compared with the socialist proletariat by means of quasi-scientific references to the progressive character of the bourgeoisie as compared with medievalism.'

The workers already had the power in their hands when they overthrew Tsarism in February 1917. How then did the capitalists succeed in forming their Provisional Government? Only because the workers were not conscious of their own power. Lenin scornfully dismissed any idea that the creation of a bourgeois government following the overthrow of the Tsar was somehow 'historically necessary', and stated emphatically:-

'The fact is that the proletariat is not organised and class conscious enough. This must be admitted: material strength is in the hands of the proletariat but the bourgeoisie turned out to be prepared and class conscious. This is a monstrous fact, and it should be frankly and openly admitted, and the people should be told that they didn't take power because they were unorganised and not conscious enough.' (*Collected Works, Volume 36, p. 437.*)

As soon as they began to feel their independent class power, as a result of their concentrated experience through the days of revolution and counter-revolution, and the brilliant propaganda and agitation conducted by the Bolsheviks, their rising consciousness was reflected in the election of majorities of Bolshevik delegates in the Petrograd and Moscow Soviets. That alone was enough to give the signal for the October revolution. There was no question of dividing the tasks of the revolution into 'stages' of historical development. The workers' own political consciousness rapidly passed through successive 'stages' of growing enlightenment.

## “PEOPLE’S DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTION”

The CPI(M) has, not a ‘two-stage’ but a ‘three-stage’ conception of the revolution. As another leading CPI(M) theoretician, Comrade Basavapunniah (*On the Programme of the CPI(M)*) explains: ‘We have already left behind one stage, namely the stage of an all-in united front against British imperialism, an alliance of workers, peasants, middle classes and the bourgeoisie, including the Indian big bourgeoisie. With the securing of national political independence in August 1947, the Indian revolution has entered a new stage, the second stage, the stage of People’s Democratic Revolution.

‘In this second stage the class alliance comprises workers, peasants, middle classes and the non-big national bourgeoisie confronting the class state and government of the bourgeoisie and landlords, led by the big bourgeoisie which is collaborating with foreign finance capital....The third stage would be the stage of Socialist revolution, i.e. the establishment of the political power of the working class with the aim of building Socialism and Communism....’

We disagree with Comrade Basavapunniah. We are utterly opposed to making any principled distinction between the various factions of the capitalist class, which is entirely reactionary. The working class has the only programme that can take society forward: socialism. It can and must win to its side the poor peasants and the poorer sections of the urban middle class. But any concessions to the capitalists – big or ‘non-big’ (an inelegant expression for a clumsy idea) – can only paralyse the workers’ struggle.

Look more closely at this ‘non-big’ national bourgeoisie! It is largely composed of smugglers, black-marketeers, pawnbrokers, food-hoarders, drug-pushers, pimps, communalists, and gangsters. No wonder that the bourgeois opposition parties – for instance, the assorted factions of the 1977 Janata coalition, which represented respectively the moneylenders, the Jat kulaks, the bigoted Hindu traders, etc. – were no less riddled with corruption than Congress.

We would ask our readers: in all these arguments postponing the socialist revolution, can’t we hear an echo of precisely what Lenin called ‘quasi-scientific references to the progressive character of the bourgeoisie as compared with medievalism?’

## COMPROMISES WITH CAPITALISM

Unless we start with the fact that capitalism today is a historically rotten and redundant system, whether in America, India or Timbuctoo, then all manner of confusions, betrayals and crimes must inevitably result.

It was their failure to grasp this simple fact which trapped the leaders of the workers' parties in a vicious circle of grotesque bargains, repulsive alliances, betrayal on betrayal.

False perspectives about Stalinist Russia led the CPI leaders, in the interests of Stalin's wartime alliance with British imperialism, to act as informers and strikebreakers in 1942-5. False notions about the nature of capitalism led the Socialist Party to liquidate itself and scuttle into the darkest crevices of various bourgeois parties. Misconceptions about the 'progressive' nature of Congress lured the CPI leaders into collaboration with Nehru and Gandhi right through until the overthrow of the Emergency regime, when the masses brought the CPI along with Congress crashing to defeat. Gullibility about the 'democratic' pretensions of the hypocritical Janata politicians paralysed the CPI(M) leaders, like a cobra hypnotises a rabbit, and caused them to squander their hard-won authority by underwriting their democratic credentials.

If history were left to leaders like these, then the struggle for a new society would be hopeless. The lessons of 1947 and again of 1977 are clear: the revolutionary will of the workers and peasants is the most real, progressive and dynamic force in history.

In 1967, the CPI leaders joined coalitions with communal opposition parties at state level. Then in 1969, at the time of the split in Congress, they opted instead for an alliance with Indira Gandhi, which lasted for ten years. The CPI hailed Indira as the representative of an 'anti-imperialist, anti-feudal and non-monopoly section' of the bourgeoisie. On that basis they helped Congress topple 'left and democratic' governments in West Bengal and Kerala, and even supported the dictatorial Emergency regime in 1975-7.

But the policies of our CPI(M) leaders are not fundamentally different. They too supported the 'Indicate' in 1969. They too praise Congress' so-called 'progressive foreign policy'. In their Programme they claim that 'unlike the monopoly bourgeoisie of the imperialist countries, the Indian bourgeoisie for its very development needs world peace and hence is opposed to world war.'

Actually all bourgeoisies want to avoid a world war, which would obviously destroy them and their system. (And yet, while capitalism exists, so in the long term does the danger of a new world war.) But on a regional level, India is no less warlike and no more 'pacifist' or 'non-violent' than any other bourgeoisie. India spends more per capita on arms expenditure than practically any other third-world country.

CPI(M) leaders also give fulsome praise to Congress for its record of 'democracy'. Comrade Ranadive, for instance, writes: 'It is really remarkable that the half-developed bourgeoisie of a liberated country should have had the courage to proclaim a constitution which declared fundamental rights, adult franchise, an elected parliament, the supremacy of parliament, right to free speech and organisation, freedom of conscience, etc.'

We would say that what is remarkable is not its 'courage' but its insolence and hypocrisy. Congress was swept to power on the basis of a tidal wave of revolution and army/police mutinies; it simply did not have the coercive forces with which to suppress all democratic rights. With the collapse of the Emergency within less than two years, it learned the same lesson in 1977.

Yet again in 1979, the great police strike, where ten lakh policemen revolted and in many cases fought pitched battles with army strikebreakers for control of police armouries, gave the ruling class a terrible shock. It cannot fully rely upon its own forces of repression. Instead, it has had to use trickery to undermine its promises.

Democratic rights are very feeble and conditional in India. The right to strike, the right of assembly, free speech, and so on, are continually challenged by the state. By itself, as Marx put it, the vote is merely the right to choose every five years which faction of the ruling class will rule over us.

We value whatever democratic rights we have. But it was generations of Indian workers who fought and sacrificed their blood and liberty over decades of struggle to win those rights. They were not magnanimously presented to the masses by an enlightened and charitable capitalist class. The price of those rights is eternal vigilance by the workers' organisations.

Ranadive himself later admits that 'the constitution was tainted with the blood of the Telengana peasants' and that 'the land reforms of the Congress have reduced the guarantees of the constitution to a farce.'

That does not deter him from going on to congratulate the Indian capitalists on 'an extraordinary performance and achievement for any bourgeois ruling class of a newly liberated country. It stands in sharp contrast with developments in India's neighbouring countries....This is due to the economic strength of the Indian bourgeoisie and the firm anti-imperialist national traditions.'

## *INDIA AND IMPERIALISM*

What is the truth about these 'anti-imperialist' traditions?

For all this talk of 'non-alignment', let us not forget that Nehru allowed the British army to establish camps for the recruitment of Gurkhas to suppress the Malayan guerrillas; granted air-base facilities for French planes on their way to bomb Vietnam; and sent medical aid for the American troops in Korea. India's mild and secondary disagreements with the policies of American imperialism only demonstrate that the Indian capitalists have a certain, strictly limited, bargaining-power and freedom of manoeuvre within their own regional 'sphere of influence'.

Comrade Basavapunniah writes of the Indian capitalists that 'they are certainly big and also monopolistic in a limited sense of the concept. But in no sense should these terms be equated with monopolists, imperialists, multi-nationals or trans-national cartels and combines....It is erroneous to argue that either Indian big or monopoly capitalists have upgraded themselves to the ranks of imperialist monopolies....Nobody can come to the conclusion that the Indian capitalist class, big or non-big, has either reached the 'highest stage of capitalism' or imperialism....Otherwise erroneous and dangerous

conclusions will follow.'

We presume that the 'erroneous and dangerous conclusions' that Comrade Basavapunniah is afraid of would be the struggle to overthrow capitalism.

On the contrary, very dangerous conclusions would follow unless we recognise that India has itself become an imperialist power, albeit on a regional level, comparable to such powers as South Africa, Israel, Argentina, Brazil, Australia; Indonesia, Pakistan, etc., within their own respective local spheres of influence.

This may appear paradoxical: didn't we argue that India is itself under imperialist domination? But Tsarist Russia too was both a colony of Western imperialism – the big monopolies of France, England, Germany etc., owned the biggest enterprises in Russia – and also itself a huge dark imperialist power, which enslaved a hundred captive nations. So too, India is a colony of Japanese, British, German and American imperialism – and also at the same time a regional imperialist power itself.

There is linguistic and cultural discrimination against the non-Hindi speaking and especially the Dravidian peoples. There are constant examples of dismissal of elected state governments and the imposition of 'President's rule' – which amounts to direct rule by a foreign-speaking power based up to a thousand miles away. There is bloody persecution of the Muslim and Sikh communities, etc. Many oppressed nationalities have languished under Indian rule since 1947: Kashmiris, Nagas, Mizos, etc. Sikkim was annexed. Bangladesh suffered Indian domination in the early 1970s. India is now accepted as the dominant regional military power, the 'policeman of the sub-continent'. Ask the Nepalis, the Tamils and Sinhalese alike of Sri Lanka, the people of Maldives, what they think of India's 'anti-imperialist' role!

### *THE CPI(M) AND JANATA*

A false theoretical position leads inevitably to disaster and often to betrayal. The crucial test for the CPI was its support for Indira Gandhi and particularly the hated Emergency dictatorship. The CPI found itself apologising for a regime which was terrorising workers. Even its support for British imperialism during the war was not so fatal as this. It has never recovered.

What an opportunity this created for the new Marxist Communist Party! It was its record of struggle and sacrifice during the Emergency which really for the first time built the CPI(M) as a mass workers' party on an all-India scale. But what a terrible betrayal of the hopes and the real interests of the working class, when the CPI(M) proceeded to use all its newly-won authority...to help the Janata Party to power!

What was Janata? It was a political rag-bag, hastily scrambled together in 1977 by the capitalists when support for their traditional party Congress collapsed. It consisted largely of assorted disgruntled renegades from Congress, the relics of Congress(O), a pressure group lobbying for the kulaks, the Hindu communal Jana Sangh, plus a sprinkling of former 'socialists'. It

was a reactionary caucus of historical rejects, mobilised to fill the political vacuum – the political droppings of the bourgeoisie. It was only from such elements that an alternative capitalist party could be created, to siphon off the tide of popular outrage into safe channels.

The CPI(M) Tenth Congress (1978) resolution admitted: 'The main constituents are the same parties that represented the Grand Alliance in 1971 and those whom our Party characterised as extreme reaction, Right reaction. Our party especially attacked the reactionary ideology of the Jana Sangh and the RSS. We described the Congress(O) as the avowed and outspoken representative of the monopolist-landlord combine. These people at one time stood by the sacred right of property, opposed abolition of princes' privy purses, nationalisation of banks, etc. Above all, they openly took a violent anti-Communist posture...'

How then, asks Comrade Namboodiripad (*Party Line on Current Tactics*) did these parties become our allies? Because 'their election manifesto put the question squarely as one between dictatorship and democracy and committed the leaders...to restoration of fundamental rights.'

Their manifesto!! Promises!!! Were there not already plenty of these in Congress manifestoes? It is not their promises but their class interests which determine the attitude of a communist!

Can we forget that Congress promised to 'remove poverty'? But the number of those living below the poverty line has swollen to well over 50%. Meanwhile the assets of the big capitalist companies have soared astronomically.

Now Congress is promising to 'save India.' Ask the Sikhs of Delhi, the Muslim workers of Bhiwandi and Meerut, the youth of Punjab, the dalits of Ahmedabad, how Congress is helping to restore national unity! Thousands of innocent working people have been murdered by communal goondas with friends in high places.

But the CPI(M) leaders rushed in to guarantee Janata's promises. They announced that the CPI(M) 'looks upon the Janata Party as the major political force in the battle for the defence of democratic rights and civil liberties of the people, and in defeating the dangerous forces of authoritarianism and dictatorship represented by the Congress party....The Janata Party is committed to the entire people to undo all these anti-democratic measures....It has also given solemn assurance to the electorate that it will introduce far-reaching electoral reforms to ensue free, fair and democratic elections.' (Basavapunniah, *People's Democracy*, 7/8/77).

'Solemn assurances', indeed! Once again, it was Lenin who gave the classic answer to this policy: 'If I enter into a political alliance with a party whose principles are hostile to mine...I can no longer criticise ruthlessly, I cannot fight for my principles, because this would give offence to my allies. I have to keep quiet, cover up a lot of things, make excuses for the inexcusable, gloss over matters that cannot be glossed over....Opportunism is opportunism for the very reason that it sacrifices the fundamental interests of the movement to momentary advantages...based on the most short-sighted superficial calculations.'

But the CPI(M) insisted on defending Janata against its critics. 'The CPI(M) is unable to agree with the Right CP's assessment of the Janata Party

government and its role, particularly at the present stage, and cannot subscribe to the tactical line of making the Janata Party the main object of attack, decrying it as anti-people, pro-imperialist and Right-reactionary....The CPI(M) cannot ignore the historical role it is playing in defence of democracy and against authoritarianism.' (*People's Democracy*, 7/8/77).

Comrade Nambudiripad argued pragmatically: 'We have no illusions about the class nature of the Janata government, but at least they are not trying to cut our throats like Mrs Gandhi tried to do.' No indeed, not yet at least: why should they when the CPI(M) was giving them such testimonials?

### AUTHORITARIANISM

But then what happened? As Comrade Basavapunniah said quite correctly: 'Our critics, if they are honest, should judge our policies in the light of experience.' All right: let us see.

During the thirty months of the Janata Government, there were police massacres of industrial workers, miners and agricultural workers in Ghaziabad, Pantnagar and Kanpur in UP, Faridabad in Haryana, Dallirajhara and Bailadila in Madhya Pradesh, Bokaro Steel City in Bihar. In one single month alone — March/April 1978 — about 300 people were killed in police firings. Police opened fire on 38 occasions in UP alone within a period of ten months. These figures leave out of account the countless victims of caste atrocities by landlords in the villages.

Janata introduced 'authoritarian' laws as repressive as those of Congress, for instance the Preventive Detention and Industrial Relations Bills. Some democrats! Some civil rights!

Nowadays, of course, every CPI(M) leader will agree with us! With the wisdom of hindsight, Comrade Basavapunniah tells us (*On the Political Line of the CPI(M)*): 'Under pressure of the ever-deepening economic crisis and growing mass discontent, and also due to the very class nature of the Janata Party and its leadership, most of the Janata-run state governments as well as the central government had begun to rapidly acquire the traits of authoritarianism.'

A CPI(M) pamphlet published in November 1979 confirms our point: 'Despite its Gandhian rhetoric, the Janata Government was bent on pursuing the same economic policies as the previous regime....The Government gave a clear indication of its unwillingness to do anything about land reform....It became clear from successive Janata budgets that encouragement, concessions and subsidies to the monopolists were on the agenda....Perhaps the most remarkable feature of Janata's economic record was its growing capitulation to the multi-nationals and to the dictates from imperialist countries....On every front, therefore, the Janata's economic policy was a betrayal of the trust placed by the people upon it.

'The counterpart of this pro-monopoly, pro-landlord, pro-multinational 'free marketism' was growing hostility towards the working class....Janata pursued the same shop-worn economic policies as Indira Gandhi, its championing of the same class interests as Indira Gandhi....It thus became increasingly clear that Janata had not only exhausted its anti-authoritarian

potential, but had actually reached a point where it was itself turning authoritarian.'

A second CPI(M) pamphlet, published in December 1979, continues: 'The attitude of the Janata Government towards big business houses or the multi-nationals was not in any way different from its predecessor....Contrary to their election assurance of right to peaceful and non-violent protest, the Janata Government mounted severe repression on the working class of the country.'

Could not a real Marxist party have predicted in advance that any capitalist government would carry out policies in the interests of the capitalists? And that while capitalist interests required repression of the working class, all talk about 'anti-authoritarianism' was sheer prattle and hot air?

Long after the event, Comrade Ranadive explained: 'As a party representing the same class interests as the Congress(I), the Janata could not have a programme radically different from that of its predecessors.'

Exactly! Why then did the CPI(M) leaders keep silent about this elementary fact in 1977? Were they themselves deluded by Janata's 'promises'?

## *RETREAT*

Once it was becoming clear to everyone how hollow these promises really were, the CPI(M) leaders began a quiet retreat from their earlier unqualified endorsement of Janata, in tribute to the pressure of Party activists who could not stomach defending Janata when every day brought news of new massacres and shocks.

In April 1978 the Party CC passed a resolution containing a gentle warning: 'There should be no complacency that the programme for dismantling of the authoritarian framework and expansion of democratic rights will have an easy passage without popular pressure and vigilance....All will not be faithful to these commitments; vacillations, hesitations and even treachery may be attempted. The urge for democracy...will be repeatedly obstructed by the class interests which dominate the party.'

But these were cautious, carefully measured, ambiguous words, rather mild against a regime stained with the blood of hundreds of murdered workers and landless peasants. This was merely an attempt by the CPI(M) leaders to cover themselves against all eventualities, to edge back shamefacedly from earlier statements, in which they explicitly provided testimonials to the democratic intentions of the businessmen, landlords, ex-Congress renegades and Jana Sangh bigots that made up Janata.

In essence, the CPI(M) leaders had committed in mirror-image the same opportunist policy as the CPI leaders previously. The standing joke of the time was to call the CPI and CP(M) respectively the CP (Indira) and the CP (Morarji)!

Comrade Basavapunniah himself wrote: 'It is crude eclecticism to go on asserting that we support what is 'good' and oppose what is 'bad'.' He was arguing against the CPI's attitude towards Congress. But how was the CPI(M)'s attitude towards Janata fundamentally different?



'What in reality the CPI leaders were begging for from the Congress party and government,' he added, 'was a small share in the government, a berth or two in the central government.' But the CP(M) was offering its services towards Janata for free!

Not only in words but in deeds they helped Janata to power at the Centre and in the states. Even in West Bengal they offered Janata a majority of seats in the state assembly. If it had not been for the Janata leaders' inordinate greed for still more seats, there would have been no rival CPI(M) list, and Janata (which turned out to have virtually nil support in the state) would have formed the state government! It was the workers and peasants who picked up the Bengali CPI(M) leaders by the scruffs of their necks and threw them into power. They have reasserted their mandate in three successive state elections.

What happened in West Bengal is the crucial test of the CPI(M) programme. Armed with a decisive revolutionary mandate, the CPI(M) leaders had no idea what to do with it. The new Chief Minister, Jyoti Basu apologised: 'We have accepted the present reality of a capitalist system.' CPI(M) General Secretary E.M.S. Namboodiripad explained: 'While the government will be a bourgeois government, the party will remain a revolutionary Marxist party.'

The Left Front government remains in power today due to the loyalty of the peasants for the bourgeois-democratic reforms it did partially carry through; and to the support at this stage, of the capitalists of Calcutta, who praise the 'labour discipline' and 'stability' that has been assured by what, in a sense, really is the best 'bourgeois government' they have! This is at the cost of falling real wages and massive lay-offs of workers.

## *INTO THE FIRE!*

A truly Marxist party would have been able to warn us in advance of the inevitable betrayals of the Janata Government. But did the CPI(M) leaders at least learn anything from their mistakes? Unfortunately not. They jumped out of the frying-pan, straight into the fire!

Predictably, the Janata government soon fell to pieces. The Congress foxes lured Charan Singh into a split, promising him their support as Prime Minister – and then neatly pulled out the rug from under his feet!

The CPI(M) leaders simply switched their allegiance from Morarji Desai to Charan Singh and Devaraj Urs, in the vain hope that this could be the basis for 'a common and powerful anti-authoritarian and anti-communal platform of all democratic forces' – apparently overlooking the fact that Urs had been Karnataka's Chief Minister throughout the Emergency and Mrs Gandhi's lieutenant up to 1978, and that Charan Singh was plainly both 'authoritarian' (the Home Minister responsible for police massacres) and communal (basing himself on the Jat caste).

The CC announced on 16th August, 1979: 'The CPI(M) is prepared to support the Charan Singh ministry in the coming vote of confidence though it has not freed itself from the support of the Congress(I) and is yet to give specific assurances to the masses...in order to prevent the Jana Sangh-dominated Janata Party from coming back and the Congress(I) exploiting the situation.'

Even when the Charan Singh government too had collapsed, the CPI(M) still hankered nostalgically after its fond illusions. A CC resolution passed in January 1980 made a pathetic appeal: 'It is not too late even now for the Janata, Lok Dal and other opposition parties to make a new beginning if only they draw lessons from and correct the mistakes of the past....'

Inevitably, given the failure of the workers' parties to put a clear left alternative, Indira Gandhi was re-elected in 1980. Within the CPI(M) leadership, the shallow euphoria of the Janata period turned to gloom and panic. 'One thing is certain,' predicted Ashok Mitra, Finance Minister in West Bengal's CPI(M) state government: 'In three months' time we will all be in jail.' Nearly ten years later, not only is Mr Mitra still at large, but the West Bengal left government is still intact!

In the 1980 elections, with similar policies, the left saw its former representation in the Lok Sabha almost halved, from 56 to 33. Its popular vote has never since reached the 10% it achieved in 1977. Is it not clear by now, if not in terms of political principles, then even from the point of view of sheer tactical gains, that this wretched policy of trailing along behind disgruntled defectors from Congress has failed?

## NO SUPPORT FOR V.P. SINGH!

We would not be so cruel as to draw attention to these embarrassing blunders – if it were not that our leaders are preparing to make them all over again!

Comrade Jyoti Basu is reported as saying that 'this was a historic moment, reminiscent of 1977, when conditions were ripe for a change....He spoke of the need to strengthen unity among the left and the opposition....Basu said the CPI(M) would seek an electoral alliance with the National Front in the forthcoming general elections, even though it meant seat adjustments with parties like the BJP. Although such a move is dangerous and disastrous for the Marxists, playing as it does the Hindu card, today's desperate state of affairs leaves us with no other alternative.' (*Indian Post*, 2/7/89).

And Comrade Ranadive writes about the 'unprecedented unity of oppositional and democratic forces...The process of greater understanding cannot be stopped....V.P. Singh's revolt against the Congress has led to further expectations and there is a keen desire among the people that all secular and Left forces should unite...'

Again, Comrade Basavapunniah 'told newsmen...that the CPI(M) would maintain friendly relations with the Front even if it fielded BJP candidates in constituencies which were not CPI(M) strongholds.' (*Indian Post*, 6/11/88).

It is enough to make you cry! This is an inexcusable and suicidal repetition of all the worst blunders of the past. In 1977 the Janata Government diverted the masses' anger into safe channels until it had spent itself, exhausted and disillusioned, and the main party of Big Business could return to power. Without the credibility given to Janata by the CPI(M) leaders, it could never have succeeded in playing that role.

Now again we have come full circle. For a few years, after the defeat of the Bombay textile strike in 1983, the workers' movement suffered repeated blows. As always, communalism rises and falls in inverse proportion to the class struggle. Industrial and political defeats created the basis for terrible communal riots. The Bhiwandi riots, Operation Bluestar, the assassination of Mrs Gandhi and the subsequent bloody pogroms against the Sikhs in Delhi and the North, the landslide election of Rajiv Gandhi, terrorist and state atrocities in Punjab, communal wars in Ahmedabad and Meerut....the Labour Movement was stunned and disoriented by these blows.

But the corruption, the disgrace and disarray of the Rajiv regime emboldened the workers once again. The 9th December 1987 rally, attended by 12,00,000 young workers, demonstrated the readiness of the working class to come out under its own banners. Above all, the bandh of 15th March 1988, which mobilised an unprecedented 35 million workers, was an inspiration to the whole proletariat.

Once again a huge head of steam is building up. Crores of workers defied the blackmail, slanders and threats of the government in support of the opposition bandh of August 30th. Mass protests have rocked the government. Once again the capitalists have scrambled together an alternative capitalist party, a poor

substitute for Congress, to hold the line until the mass anger subsides once again in disillusion.

Are we going to help them head off the movement once again? Is all the enormous latent power demonstrated on 9th December, 15th March and 30th August to be squandered to bring another bunch of corrupt and communal gangsters to power? We appeal to all workers, youth, and communists: join us in our campaign to make the CPI(M) leaders change course!

### **FIGHT AGAINST THE CAPITALIST PARTIES!**

We did not build the workers' organisations to bring to power people like V.P. Singh, the capitalist, landlord, and prince! V.P. Singh, whose police murdered countless innocent villagers in the name of 'encounters' with dacoits during his time as Chief Minister of UP! V.P. Singh, Sanjay's nominee for that position and a willing accomplice in the crimes of the Emergency and the 1984 riots! V.P. Singh, who introduced the most reactionary budgets as Rajiv's Finance Minister!

The CPI correctly described his budget for 1985-6 as 'a brazenly pro-rich, anti-poor testament of economic faith....The budget proposals seek to widen the income and wealth disparities by giving concession after concession to big business and the super-rich while heaping more burdens on the economically weaker sections and the working people....It has gladdened only the hearts of Tatas and Birlas and their class brothers....V.P. Singh has done totally opposite to what the working class demanded....The export-import policy announced by V.P. Singh also serves the same purpose of facilitating the capitalist class to fatten....The people face the prospects of only more pauperisation and misery as a result of this budget of Rajiv Gandhi and Vishwanath Pratap Singh.'

And what other creatures are we workers being asked to embrace in this horrible new alliance?

Rajiv's cousin Arun Nehru, formerly his security overlord, a corrupt businessman involved up to his ears in the Bofors and other scandals!

V.C. Shukla, the hated Goebbels of Indira's Emergency regime, described quite accurately in a CPI(M) pamphlet in November 1979 as 'a playboy-cum-bully'!

N.T. Rama Rao, correctly described by Ajit Roy in *Economic and Political Weekly* (1/4/89) as 'a saffron-clad, tantra-practising matinee idol who derives much of his popular appeal from his identification with Hindu deities from his celluloid portrayals, quite akin to the BJP's political culture.'

Do we need to go on? What have workers in common with Devi-Lal, Ramakrishna Hegde, Karunanidhi, Chandrashekhra?

What is the difference between the policies of Rajiv and those of the new hotch-potch, the so-called Janata Dal? None whatsoever!

It is not necessary to take our word for this. We have the admission of Arun Nehru himself! Speaking to *The Week* (23/4/89), he stated quite clearly in reply to a question on the political differences between Congress and Janata Dal: 'Except for some minor changes here or there, there is no great change in

priorities. It is on the implementation. If the Congress implements everything, we will not have a problem here....Of course the CPI and CPI(M) have a different ideology. The BJP has a different ideology. But the other centrist parties, if you take the Janata Dal, the Congress Party, I don't think they ideologically differ.'

Why then should we compromise ourselves yet again by supporting this party? Can it be that our leaders have fallen for the argument that V.P. Singh is 'cleaner' and 'less corrupt' than Rajiv? But we have already seen what gross and filthy corruption was practised by the last man who won an election in the guise of 'Mr Clean'!

We must fight against all capitalist parties and politicians, 'clean' or 'dirty'. Singh, Nehru, Hegde, Shukla, and the rest of them are all capitalist millionaires. In fact, apart from the regional demagogues (Rama Rao, Karunanidhi, etc.), every single one of them came from Congress at one time or another. V.P. Singh had not the slightest intention of forming an opposition party when he first quarrelled with Rajiv. He formed a loose grouping of Congressmen, in the hope of capturing the leadership of Congress(I)! Only under compulsion did he regretfully join with older exiled opposition factions.

And most of these gentlemen will soon be back in Congress(I)! It will not need much cajolery, bribery, blackmail or flattery for Congress(I) to lure into their web any one of the dozen or so rival 'Prime Ministers-in-waiting' that make up the JD leadership, just as happened last time round.

The DMK is part of the Front today; but it was allied with Congress(I) in the 1980 Tamil Nadu state elections. Up to recently, our leaders counted the National Conference in Kashmir as an ally; now it is back again in a coalition with Congress(I). Our leaders praised Sharad Pawar in Maharashtra as a champion against 'authoritarianism'; now he is the Congress(I) Chief Minister!

In Andhra Pradesh, the CPI(M) is supporting Telugu Desam and the CPI, Congress(I)! In the recent Tamil Nadu state elections, the CPI(M) was allied to the DMK, the CPI to the AIADMK (Jayalalita) and the so-called Indian CP to Congress(I).

Have our leaders forgotten all their past embarrassing howlers? Have they forgotten how hard they campaigned for Veerendra Patil, Janata candidate against Indira Gandhi in the 1978 Chikmagalur by-election? By 1980 he was Minister for Petroleum and Chemicals in Mrs Gandhi's Cabinet! But by that time, the CPI(M) leaders were campaigning for her main supporter in that same by-election, Devaraj Urs!

Have they forgotten their pirouettes with the late H.N. Bahuguna, UP Chief Minister during the Congress(I) Emergency, Janata leader in 1977, chief spokesman for Indira Gandhi in 1979-80, and once again prominent oppositionist more recently? Earlier this year, the CPI(M) leaders were telling workers to vote for his faction of Lok Dal. Weeks later, his whole party rejoined Congress(I)!

In the 1984 elections our leaders were promoting as candidate for Prime Minister of a 'national unity' government Jagjivan Ram, the Congress(I)

defector who had actually introduced the 1975 Emergency in the Lok Sabha. His party ended up winning a single seat. His party, Congress(J), was actually reduced to one man, Mr J himself!

*Economic and Political Weekly* (1/4/89) comments correctly: 'The communist call for an alliance of left, secular and democratic forces as a national alternative seems to be more wishful thinking than a practical possibility. Can any of the parties occupying the central space — the Lok Dal, TDP, Janata Dal — be described as secular and democratic?'

Taken to their logical conclusions, the arguments of our leaders would justify taking portfolios as Ministers in some kind of future Janata government. No doubt at a certain stage some elements will be advocating this — and justifying it with fine 'Marxist' arguments! In Kerala today, the CPI(M) is presiding over a government which includes capitalist and even communal parties. We must break all links with bourgeois parties and fight for workers' unity on a socialist programme.

### THE COMING ELECTIONS

These elections give the workers' parties a tribune from which to expose the rottenness of Indian capitalism and to win the toiling masses to the banner of socialism.

It seems, however, that once again the opportunity is being wasted. The CPI(M) has defined its electoral objectives in the Political Resolution of the 13th Party Congress, January 1989: 'The immediate task is to secure the ousting of the Rajiv government in the coming elections while protecting the unity and integrity of the country against the divisive designs of imperialism and the secessionist and communal forces. It is necessary...to mobilise all the bourgeois opposition secular forces and the Left forces for a common fight against this Government....The front of Left and democratic forces is to be an instrument of achieving the People's Democratic Front.'

How can our CPI(M) leaders justify this statement? We have already explained that we have no time for their idea of a so-called People's Democratic Revolution, which they define as "an alliance between the workers, peasants, middle-classes and the 'non-big' bourgeoisie". But even assuming that they were correct, what has support for the Janata Dal/National Front to do with this?

What is "non-big" about VP Singh in terms of his position in the Indian capitalist class? (or about Arun Nehru, in any sense at all?).

A recent article in the *Illustrated Weekly* (17/9/89) sums up clearly the attitude towards the prospect of a VP Singh government of the capitalists, who are presently indulging in a huge orgy of share speculation.

"It is not VP Singh they are worried about, for they know the Raja himself believes that the future of Indian industry lies in further opening up of the economy... he believes in economic liberalism himself and was the architect of Rajiv's new deal.

"But today they know he has no option but to mouth socialist rhetoric and describe the left as his natural ally... They know that the Raja is a prisoner of circumstances."

Rajiv Gandhi and VP Singh are rival contenders for leadership of the same class. But, instead of exposing the real class interests of the opposition, our CPI(M) leaders cover them up.

What will this mean to workers fighting for a living wage? To poor peasants and landless labourers trying to feed their children? To the unemployed, the slum-dwellers, the dalits, the bonded labourers, the tormented women and enslaved children, the countless victims of communal lynch-mobs?

Even this quotation is only an attempt to dress up in pseudo-Marxist language an apology for another unholy alliance with reactionary capitalist parties. But the allocation of Lok Sabha seats between rival cliques of hypocritical phrasemongers is of no interest to them.

Elections in the past used to be competitions to see who could make the prettiest speeches about poverty. Promises were made, such as 'garibi hatao' ('remove poverty') — to be cynically and cruelly betrayed. But at least the real issues were mentioned. Now what do we get? Bewildering and boring tugs-of-war between meaningless abstractions: 'authoritarianism', 'secularism', 'secessionism', 'dynasticism', etc.!

Yes, we must fight against authoritarianism, repression and corruption. But we must not peddle illusions that V.P. Singh and Co. will be fundamentally any different from Rajiv. Above all, the workers' parties must have a programme to solve the real and urgent problems afflicting the masses. Otherwise they will bear the responsibility for terrible suffering and bloody defeats. They must harness the inexhaustible energies of the workers and peasants to overthrow landlordism and capitalism.

All the objective conditions for socialist revolution are maturing: demoralisation, splits and dithering on the part of the ruling class; a readiness to fight on the part of the working class; a profound disenchantment with the existing order on the part of the peasants and other middle strata. All that is missing is a mass revolutionary party with the clarity of perspective, the confidence and audacity to give central leadership to all the scattered and localised mass struggles.

## CAN WE 'SKIP' THE 'STAGES'?

But here comes Comrade Basavapunniah (*On the Programme of the CPI(M)*), ready with the most learned pseudo-Marxist arguments against fighting for socialism:

'The question may be asked as to why different stages of a revolution have to be clearly demarcated from one another...and why the final aim of socialism and communism should not be made the principal slogan of action during the entire course of the revolution, irrespective of stages. In other words it is asked, why not dispense with the bothersome labour of defining and demarcating the stages of the revolution, reducing them all to the single stage of socialist revolution....The CPI(M) does not subscribe to such a line of thinking on the subject, rejecting it as un-Marxist and unscientific. The proletarian revolutionary party is duty bound to work out its slogans of agitation, propaganda and action, on the basis of the concrete study of concrete conditions obtaining in each given situation. It should not indulge in delightfully vague generalities and abstractions.'

For our part, we cannot think of anything more 'vague' and 'abstract', not to say utterly meaningless, than the call for a 'People's Democratic Revolution'. But let the comrade continue:-

'The direct and immediate raising of the slogan of socialist revolution, as a slogan of action, discarding the stages, instead of helping the working class to lead the non-proletarian toiling mass of the people towards socialism, through their struggle and experience, might scare them and repel them from it. The fact that the masses have to learn through experience and cannot be expected to be roused by theory should always be remembered.'

Let us intervene again for a moment to assure our readers that, naturally, we are not so stupid as to imagine that the masses can be won to the idea of the socialist revolution simply by shouting the slogan: Socialist Revolution! It hardly needs a major theoretician to remind us of that. Revolutionary propaganda is an art. But a communist party which consistently fails to learn that art, fails to link the anger of the workers and the peasants to the need for a social transformation, fails to raise their consciousness to a revolutionary perspective, is of no use to anyone.

'The attempt to skip the level of anti-imperialist and democratic consciousness of the common mass of the people, and to try to rouse in them socialist consciousness directly and immediately may prove counter-productive,' continues Comrade Basavapunniah. 'What is imperative for the proletariat, the imparting of socialist consciousness should not be made the object for all other classes....The direct raising of the slogan of socialist revolution, skipping all the stages, does immense harm to the cause.'

It is significant that our leaders are so defensive on this question. It is a tribute to the pressure of the working class for revolutionary policies. But Comrade Basavapunniah is guilty of a little verbal sleight-of-hand here. He is deliberately confusing the issue, by juxtaposing social 'stages' of historical development with 'stages' in the rising consciousness of the masses.

Of course we understand that we cannot conquer the masses all at once. We cannot win nearly 80 crores of toilers to our cause overnight. The first task is



to win the active militant vanguard of the proletariat, the striking workers in the textile mills, the ports, the coal mines, the railways, the factories, even the banks and the offices. As the comrade himself says, the 'impacting of a socialist consciousness to the proletariat is imperative'.

But the CPI(M) will not begin to solve even this first elementary task if it approaches these militant workers merely to canvass votes for Morarji Desai, Charan Singh, V.P. Singh and Co. — not even if this opportunism is disguised in dialectical language about 'people's democratic fronts', and similar nonsense.

Through the vanguard we can find a road to the broader mass of workers. And having built an impregnable stronghold within the working class, we can then appeal to the crores of poor peasants to come over to the side of the proletariat.

### *WINNING THE PEASANTRY*

Before Comrade Basavapunniah protests, let us remind ourselves of the real standpoint of Lenin on the relationship of the peasants with the proletariat. Russia was also a backward country dominated by world imperialism, with an overwhelmingly peasant population, and a barbaric legacy of feudalism, where the land question was central to the whole fate of the revolution. But Lenin was not afraid of speaking the truth. He had enough revolutionary confidence in the workers and peasants to know that honest arguments would not 'scare and repel' them. He did not hesitate to campaign among them for socialism. Writing during the course of the 1905 revolution, Lenin approached the problems of the peasants by demonstrating to them that their salvation lay in common struggle with the proletariat, behind the banner of socialism.

'The peasantry wants land and freedom....All class-conscious workers support the revolutionary peasantry with all their might....Hence the peasantry can be certain that the proletariat will support their demands. The peasants must know that the red banner which has been raised in the towns is the banner of struggle for the immediate and vital demands, not only of the industrial and agricultural workers, but also of the millions and tens of millions of small tillers of the soil. Survivals of serfdom in every possible shape and form are to this day a cruel burden on the whole mass of the peasantry, and the proletarians under their red banner have declared war on this burden.

'But the red banner means more than proletarian support of the peasants' demands. It also means the independent demands of the proletariat. It means struggle, not only for land and freedom, but also against all exploitation of man by man, struggle against the poverty of the masses of the people, against the rule of capital.'

This appeal was made, remember, 84 years ago, in a country ruled by an absolutist monarchy, in which 90% of the population were peasants, working on barbarically backward levels of productivity, using the medieval wooden plough. Even then Lenin had no hesitation in explaining to these primitive

illiterate peasants that it was not enough to confine the struggle to bourgeois-democratic demands, i.e. to the demands for distribution of the land to the peasants, and a democratic republic.

'This is a great mistake. Full freedom, election of all officials all the way to the head of state, will not do away with the rule of capital, will not abolish the wealth of the few and the poverty of the masses. Even on land belonging to the whole nation, only those with capital of their own...will be able to farm independently. As for those who have nothing but their hands to work with, they will inevitably remain slaves of capital even in a democratic republic....The idea that 'socialisation' of land can be effected without socialisation of capital...is a delusion....

'Thus the red banner of the class-conscious workers means, first, that we support with all our might the peasants' struggle for full freedom and all the land; secondly, it means that we do not stop at this, but go on further. We are waging, besides the struggle for freedom and land, a fight for socialism. The fight for socialism is a fight against the rule of capital.' (*Collected Works, Moscow 1972, Volume 10, pp. 40-43.*)

Unfortunately it must be said that nothing could be more calculated to 'scare and repel the non-proletarian toiling masses' than the present CPI(M) programme.

We agree with Comrade Basavapunniah that it is necessary to win the peasants to the side of the workers, and that this is possible only if we begin by supporting their democratic demands. But can the CPI(M) leaders claim that they are even doing this?

There is an unprecedented ferment today among the peasants. This was shown most spectacularly with the week-long sit-in of ten lakh peasants at the Delhi Boat Club in November 1988, which forced Rajiv to move the site of his Congress rally. This was an unprecedented display of defiance on the part of the peasants. It was a gathering of lakhs of poor peasants, mobilised by the rich capitalist farmer Mahendra Singh Tikait, just as his counterpart Sharad Joshi mobilises the poor peasants of Maharashtra under his leadership.

In both cases, rich kulak farmers, greedy for higher prices and higher profits, are politically exploiting the grievances of the hungry desperate small peasants who are crushed between the millstones of the monopolies which sell them their fertilisers, etc.; the banks which squeeze interest out of them; and the bureaucrats who pay them miserable prices for their products. They are unable to make a living out of their pitiful plots of land, and on occasion have agitated to be treated as workers and paid a wage. They are crying out for a lead from the workers' parties! We must take up their cause. In this way it will be easy to win them away from the rich kulaks with whom they have no common interests.

But what is the response of the CPI(M) leaders?

If Comrade Ranadive actually wanted to 'scare and repel' the peasants, he could not have done better than this: 'The rise of Sharad Joshi in Maharashtra, of similar agitations in Gujarat and elsewhere, and the kisan morchas that they have organised, are signs that the most conservative section of Indian society is entering the field to shape and distort the country's policy. And this force can be easily beguiled into compromise with anti-national foreign forces.' (*The*

*Independence Struggle and After).*

Is this really the best that we can do to 'lead the non-proletarian toiling mass of the people towards socialism through their struggle and experience'? How will such policies help to win the peasants away from 'anti-national foreign forces'?

### **NATIONAL OPPRESSION**

Another crucial issue in India is the national question in all its manifestations. India, like Tsarist Russia, is a 'prison-house of nations'. Crores of people suffer persecution, pogroms, discrimination, humiliation of their national pride and culture. The most elementary duty of the workers' parties must be to show the oppressed nationalities that the workers support their national rights. The Bolsheviki campaigned for the right of self-determination for the oppressed nations of the Russian Empire. We must do the same.

As Lenin proclaimed: 'We want a voluntary union of nations — a union that would not permit any persecution of one nation by another, a union that would be founded upon the fullest trust, upon a clear consciousness of fraternal unity, upon a fully voluntary agreement.'

But once again, Comrade Ranadive shows complete insensitivity on the national question: 'From the north-east — Assam and Darjeeling — to the Punjab, national unity is being challenged and attacked by divisive secessionist forces....It will be a great shame for the Indian people if they show their inability to protect the unity and integrity of the country against these forces.'

We do not deny that reactionary politicians have jumped upon the bandwagons both of the peasants' and the national struggles in an attempt to exploit them politically. But is that an adequate excuse for our leaders to condemn them and put themselves on the side of the ruling class? If reactionaries are exploiting these movements, then that is all the more reason for the communists to expose them by showing themselves to be better champions of their cause!

Can we imagine Lenin dismissing the Russian peasants as a 'conservative section entering the field to shape and distort the country's policy'? Can we imagine Lenin condemning the oppressed nationalities for threatening the 'unity and integrity' of Tsarist Russia?

Since the CPI(M) leaders are in effect fighting against the revolt of the peasants and of the oppressed nationalities, we cannot take very seriously their advice on how to win the non-proletarian masses to the cause of socialism.

## AN ESCAPE ROUTE

Having mercilessly ridiculed the idea that we can 'skip' the 'stage' of the 'People's Democratic Revolution', Comrade Basavapunniah then leaves himself an escape route, preparing perhaps for the possibility of yet another change in the Party line sometime in the future! He adds prudently:

'If some favourable national and international conditions facilitate the advance of the Indian revolution, we may have to raise the slogan of a socialist revolution, even before the People's Democratic state is established. In other words, if the degree of preparedness of the proletariat and the degree of its alliance with all the poor and exploited demand of us to raise the slogan of socialist revolution, we, as Marxist-Leninists, are duty-bound to advance it.'

With this afterthought, Comrade Basavapunniah completely undermines the whole carefully composed pseudo-scientific structure he had so painstakingly built up in the first place. Apparently this necessary historic 'stage' can be 'skipped' after all, if the workers force us! If they insist on being so 'unscientific' as to 'indulge in delightfully vague generalities and abstractions', then we'll be duty-bound to follow them!

But that means the People's Democratic Revolution was never really a 'stage' at all; it was only an alibi, just as we said! We can have a socialist revolution after all, provided the proletariat is first 'prepared'!

Very good! The only issue now is to see how the proletariat is to be 'prepared' for the socialist revolution, and how its 'alliance' is to be made with the rest of the poor and exploited. But that is precisely the job of a Marxist party: to 'prepare' the workers with revolutionary ideas, arguments, and slogans; and to build an 'alliance' with the peasants, national minorities and other exploited toilers, by taking up their demands and linking them to the workers' cause.

Yes! we must work out clear, bold, imaginative slogans and arguments which will win the masses to socialism. Every party in India pretends to stand for socialism. Congress always hypocritically talks about 'democracy', 'secularism' and 'socialism'! In fact, in accordance with a new constitutional amendment, every political party is now required by law to include in its constitution a clause 'swearing support for these slogans. Even Shiv Sena is now "secular" and "socialist"! Even the communal BJP nowadays calls itself a 'Gandhian socialist' party!

Are the two Communist Parties going to be the only parties in India which disclaim socialism and insist that they are fighting only for 'democracy'? How can we win the working people for socialism if we do not even mention it?

We accept that we will not be able to convince everybody overnight. All the more reason to begin the task now! All the more criminal to waste our time and squander our authority canvassing for V.P. Singh and Co.! Those rotten and discredited temporary allies will certainly not help us to 'prepare' the workers for the revolution!

## *A FIGHTING PROGRAMME FOR THE WORKING CLASS*

We do not have a perfect ready-made programme, but we offer the following suggestions for the consideration of our readers:-

★ **No trust in the capitalist parties!**

Once again, in most constituencies voters have a democratic choice between rival candidates representing gangsters, smugglers and communal rioters. The masses are tormented by unemployment, landlessness, exploitation, homelessness. It is time to tell the truth! These problems can never be solved within the framework of landlordism and capitalism. All the dangers facing India – communal bloodshed, national disintegration and war – are rooted in this diseased social system.

★ **Form workers' fronts in every area!**

Break from entanglements with capitalist, reactionary and communal parties. All left and workers' organisations should convene local conferences to decide democratically on a single independent workers' candidate to fight every constituency. The heritage of 9th December, 15th March and 30th August must not be squandered. They should meet regularly to plan joint campaigns, in every area, to build a real workers' unity against capitalism.

★ **For trade union unity!**

We cannot allow our militancy to be exploited by bureaucrats and gangsters. We call on factory militants to convene joint workplace meetings of all trade unions, to create united organisations of struggle. Workers must have the right to elect and dismiss their representatives and exercise strict control to root out corruption and misappropriation.

★ **For a living wage!**

A monthly minimum wage of Rs 1500 and a maximum working week of 40 hours.

★ **A job and a home for all!**

Put the unemployed to work building houses, roads, railways, schools, and hospitals. Decent education for all youth, skilled training for the unemployed. Close down the criminal labour agencies, set up a free government network of employment bureaus. A job for every worker! A house for every family! Work or full pay for every citizen over 16!

★ **End capitalist exploitation!**

India's productive resources – including labour, its most precious productive asset – are rotting in the hands of the capitalist parasites, who live by cheating, hoarding and smuggling. We can harness the people's creative energies and mobilise these resources only with a socialist plan. All enterprises employing more than fifty workers should be nationalised, with

compensation to be paid only on the basis of proven need. Nationalised industries must be democratically run by joint committees of representatives of their employees, of the trade union movement, and the workers' and peasants' government.

★ For worker/peasant unity!

The poor and landless peasants who make up the majority in India languish under inhuman poverty. We support all their struggles for decent conditions. Agricultural prices must be fixed through agreement with councils of small peasants. Break up the landlords' estates. Elected peasant committees should divide up the land. A workers' and peasants' government will write off all peasants' debts and guarantee peasants cheap credits, loans, fertilisers, etc. Guaranteed employment throughout the year for labourers, with the option of jobs in industry or construction. Model voluntary collective farms should be set up in every area.

★ Equal rights for women!

Equal pay and opportunities for women. Fight against the horrors of rape, the dowry system, sati and similar atrocities. Public creche facilities for working women.

★ Down with bigotry and oppression!

Communalism is a deadly poison. Equal rights for all. No discrimination on the basis of caste, religion, language or sex. We support the struggles of dalits against caste atrocities. End the sham of job reservations, which sets worker against worker. Guaranteed work for all. A trade union defence force must be set up to defend picket lines and protect workers and their families against communal attack.

★ For a workers' and peasants' government!

End the rule of the moneybags! Fight for a government composed of the parties of the Left Front! Appeal to workers in all trade unions not affiliated to the capitalist parties to organise politically and join them in an anti-capitalist socialist united front! We stand for a government of representatives of the toilers, accountable to democratically elected councils of workers, peasants, housewives, unemployed, small shopkeepers, soldiers, etc.

★ For a Socialist Federation!

The working class has no interest in keeping any nation in chains. We unconditionally support the right to self-determination. We stand for a free voluntary fraternal union of all the nations of the sub-continent, with maximum autonomy for every community. For a Socialist Federation of the Indian Sub-Continent!

★ Working people unite! You have nothing to lose but your chains!

## TIME IS SHORT!

This is a suggested outline for the only honest programme which can be presented to the people of India. It is the only way to let the workers speak with their own voice; to show the crooked politicians that we are not the fools they think we are; to show that we are ready to fight for a new society.

The Indian working class has never been more ready to fight for a new society. Why else did 12 lakh young workers demonstrate behind the banners of the Left parties? Why else did 35 million workers support the Bharat bandh last year?

How are we going to harness this tremendous power?

Comrade Namboodiripad (BJP/RSS: *In the Service of Right Reaction*) has virtually admitted that all this power was mobilised, simply to make a bargaining point in negotiations with Mr V.P. Singh: 'In the latter half of 1987, after a bitter struggle on the issue of whom to choose, i.e. the Left or the BJP, most of the secular opposition parties chose the former. The December 9 rally organised by two Left-led mass organisations at the Boat Club in Delhi, where a call was given for a Bharat Bandh, clinched the issue.'

The Duke of Wellington is reported to have commented once, on watching a parade of his troops: 'I don't know if it frightens the enemy, but by God it certainly frightens me!' It seems that our CPI(M) leaders must have thought something similar: whether or not it impresses V.P. Singh, it certainly frightens us! Why otherwise tinker around with negotiations with corrupt bourgeois politicians, when we have proved to the world the massive forces that we can mobilise on our own?

The CPI(M) is the major workers' party in India. But we are not building a sufficient working-class cadre. Look for instance at the composition of the recent CPI(M) Conferences:-

There were 623 delegates at the West Bengal State Conference. Of these, according to Party statistics, 434 were petty-bourgeois, 28 jotedars (landowners), 59 middle peasants, 22 poor peasants, 15 petty traders, 7 agricultural labourers, and only 32 industrial workers.

At the All-India Congress of the CPI(M), the class composition of the delegates broke down as follows: middle class 262, middle peasants 146, rich peasants 24, landlords 29, bourgeois 1, petty-bourgeois 11, workers 87, agricultural labourers 18, poor peasants 65!

As a revolutionary party, we must base ourselves upon the youth above all. We respect the veterans of the movement. But can it be a healthy sign for the party, that the average age of our Central Committee is 64 years, or that the average age of the Political Bureau — the real leadership — is 76 years?

We must throw open the doors of the Party to the workers and the youth!

What is the basis for the continued split of the two Communist Parties? Their programmes and policies are almost identical today. Trifling differences are periodically conjured up in order to justify the survival of two apparatuses. This is no doubt convenient for conservative functionaries at every level. But

**the workers crave for unity. We should campaign for a single Communist Party, based upon a fighting socialist programme such as the one outlined above.**

**These are crucial issues. They are matters of life and death to the working people of India. We appeal to all militant workers, to all politically conscious youth, to all communist activists. Think carefully about our arguments! Campaign for a change of course! Help us to build a real communist fighting force in India! Time is short! With your help, the workers will hammer out a programme and create a leadership that will at last be worthy of them.**



**CAMPAIGN FOR A WORKERS' FRONT**  
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