

# The Tactical Problems of the Indian Revolution

Immediate Perspectives of the Nationalist Movement - The Struggle for Hegemony of the Proletariat

## The Basis of the Constituent Assembly

After a short period of stormy development, the movement in India is approaching a crisis. The crisis will be accelerated thru publication of the report of the Simon Commission and thru the political declaration of the British government which will follow upon it. The first part of this report has already appeared; the other part containing positive recommendations for India, will appear in two weeks. The tone of the first part of the report, which discusses the existing conditions, allows no doubt as to the nature of the positive proposals. The demands of the Indian nationalist bourgeoisie will not be entirely met. At the same time the old promise of self-government within the British Empire will take on more definite forms. This promise goes hand in hand with certain political concessions to the native bourgeoisie. This will be enough to loosen sections of the nationalist bourgeoisie from the revolutionary movement of the oppressed masses. The oppressed masses of India represent 90% of the entire population and include not only the workers and the peasants but also a huge number of other elements who belong with the bourgeoisie in social position. A few figures provide us with a picture of this situation. The princes, the feudal landowners and their adherents, amount all in all to about 8,000,000. The big bourgeoisie, those involved in modern industry and commerce, run up to 1 1/2 million at the very highest. On the other hand the industrial proletariat is numerically hardly stronger than a little over 4 million. If we include those employed in the big capitalist plantations, in trade, in distribution, in little shops and in urban handicrafts, the strength of the proletariat rises to 10 million. Thus we account for 20 million out of a total population of 320,000,000. The overwhelming majority of the rest consist of peasants who make up about 250 million. Therefore there are not less than 50 million people who belong to the bourgeoisie according to their social position but who are at the same time to be counted among the oppressed masses.

### Role of Petty Bourgeoisie

The most active elements of the nationalist movement are recruited from these oppressed sections of the bourgeoisie. The National Congress, which essentially represents the interests of the native bourgeoisie, is composed to a very large degree out of these middle elements of the population. The political radicalization of these strata has greatly contributed to the stormy events of recent weeks. Economic concessions to native capitalism, which create the basis for the counter-revolutionary common front between the nationalist bourgeoisie and imperialism, cannot improve the conditions of these middle elements. On the contrary the protective tariff system, that corresponds to the demands of the native bourgeoisie, means destruction for petty trade. Moreover, by setting the prices for all factory products, whether imported or domestic, and by setting them high, the protective system accentuates the oppression of the vast mass of the population. In spite of this oppression thru foreign and native capitalism, the social outlook of the middle class remains bourgeois. The present political unrest will certainly not end with the acceptance of the bourgeois-nationalist leaders of any concessions offered them by imperialism paraded as the "substance of independence."

The immediate perspectives of the movement appear, therefore, that the National Congress will reject the constitutional reforms offered on the basis of the Simon Report and that the conference proposed by the British government will be boycotted. Disregarding what the leaders of the National Congress may wish, the movement will, in all probability, take this development. The leaders, including Gandhi, did not place themselves willingly at the head of the present mass uprising; they were compelled to do this. Their present role is not to be judged by what they desire but rather by what they do—by their political actions. It is clear that they would be only too happy to find a way out of their unpleasant situation. At the same time, however, they do not under any circumstances want to lose their hold of the movement thru any premature action against the expressed will of their followers. Gandhi has already declared himself ready to negotiate with the imperialist rulers about a *modus vivendi* as long as it will be

compatible with the "substance of independence". The "substance of independence"



Poster of the Revolutionary Youth League of Peshawar, the leading revolutionary nationalist petty bourgeois youth organization of India. It is addressed to the "Young Men of the Frontier" and calls for the support of the victims of British imperialist terror in India. It concludes: "Long live the Revolution! Workers and peasants of the world, unite!"

may mean anything; essentially it is based upon the interests of native capitalism. But

the correct social questions, which the petty bourgeoisie, in spite of all its political radicalism, is not in a position to solve.

It is from this point of view that the Communists must approach the tactical problems of the Indian revolution. How is the political leadership of the proletariat in the struggle against imperialism to be achieved? This is the central question of the day. The coming crisis in the nationalist movement offers the Communists the opportunity to realize the hegemony of the proletariat. Whatever may be the position the leaders of the National Congress will adopt, the petty bourgeois masses of the Congress cannot be satisfied with any sort of promise about the "substance of independence." But they are unable to give positive form to the struggle into which they have entered. As long as their activity is not concentrated on a concrete basis, their energy will be frittered away in ineffective negative activity. Ineffective activity with negative slogans, such as boycott, will only keep them away from the road to revolutionary struggle. Such slogans may still be quite satisfactory today for the representatives of native capitalism, such as Gandhi and the other leaders of the National Congress. And the tasks of the Communists can hardly be limited to calling these leaders counter-revolutionaries. The task of the Communists consists in taking up the struggle for actual leadership and this can only be accomplished by setting up positive demands corresponding to the interests of

As the revolutionary movement progresses the native bourgeoisie in each colonial land tends to divide into two sections, a petty bourgeois section which is revolutionary and a big bourgeois section which aims at compromise. —Stalin, 1925.

Confronting the imperialist coalition is to be found another coalition, the coalition of the workers and peasants and revolutionary petty bourgeoisie. This is an anti-imperialist coalition aiming at the complete liberation of the country from the yoke of imperialism. —Stalin, 1926.

The establishment of workers and peasants Soviets is proper for the transition period between the bourgeois-democratic and the proletarian revolution. —Stalin, 1927.

it is precisely here that Gandhi and the other leaders of the National Congress will come into conflict with the growing dissatisfaction of his supporters. The former (Gandhi and his friends) are not against capitalism; nor are they consciously for a social revolution (even in the bourgeois sense); their political demands are limited essentially to the transference of all power to the native bourgeoisie. The existing conditions weigh heavily upon them and the greatest reforms which the Simon Commission will be able to propose will hardly be such as to make any essential change in this. The National Congress, as the representative of the oppressed majority of the national bourgeoisie would perhaps like to peacefully lay down its weapons (boycott, passive resistance and civil disobedience—all of which lead to stormy outbreaks of an acute revolutionary nature) if dominion status, that is complete self-administration, were guaranteed. But dominion status is altogether out of the question today and even dominion status could not be achieved without real struggle. Consequently their outlook for the immediate future is not for peace.

### How Is Proletarian Hegemony to be Attained?

The struggle will continue. Merely a redistribution of forces is facing us. The ranks of the Nationalists will diminish. There can be no doubt as to the conduct of the big bourgeoisie which composes only a tiny minority of the entire population. Today they are still trying to utilize the mass movement as a weapon for themselves. What steps their representatives in the National Congress will take still remains doubtful, but it is hardly of importance as far as the general perspectives of the situation are concerned—a situation that manifests itself in the development of the bourgeois-nationalist revolution against the counter-revolutionary will of the big bourgeoisie. With or without the approval of its leaders the National Congress will continue its anti-imperialist struggle. And the unfolding of the anti-imperialist struggle will necessarily bring up

those classes that form the social basis of the movement. The nationalist masses united under the banner of the National Congress will break the influence of the representatives of the counter-revolutionary sections of the big bourgeoisie if the leaders of the masses put forward such demands as are supported by the people. Not only the demands of the workers and peasants but also those of the oppressed sections of the bourgeoisie cannot be fulfilled except thru revolutionary struggle. This will become the test for leaders like Gandhi. Thru the propaganda of such demands the Communists will lead the proletariat in the struggle for real political leadership in the anti-imperialist and revolutionary-democratic movement.

### The Basis for the Constituent Assembly

The Communists cannot draw in the bourgeois-democratic nationalist masses in a revolutionary struggle with slogans representing the maximum demands of the workers and the peasants. Above all a common platform must be worked out. The struggle against imperialist absolutism, in which the overwhelming majority of the entire population is interested, presupposes such a platform. In other words: the Communists must in the very beginning issue a central slogan to give positive form to the struggle for national liberation. What should this slogan be under the given circumstances? It must be the concrete expression of the striving for the recognition of the right of self-administration. The oppressed masses of India must create a democratic organ of power as a weapon in the growing struggle against imperialism. The proper slogan in the present situation is therefore the election of a Constituent Assembly. As a practical rejection of the self-endowed right of the British Parliament to decide on the political future of the Indian people, the slogan of a Constituent Assembly will find an echo in the spirit of rebellion dominating the whole land. On the other hand the agitation for a Constituent Assembly will lift the movement from the atmosphere of ineffective

negation to that stage of higher development which will be a challenge to the ruling powers. In such a situation the Nationalists will be forced to look around for allies. They will be forced to support the demands of the peasant masses, that is, to come out for a solution of the basic problems of the bourgeois-democratic revolution. Thus the development of the bourgeois-democratic revolution will develop under the political leadership of the proletariat.

The development of the bourgeois-democratic revolution under the hegemony of the proletariat and against the will of the bourgeoisie cannot end with the creation of a democratic state. In India the Constituent Assembly will sometimes be different from a bourgeois parliament. It must be called into life as the organ of the democratic dictatorship, i. e., as an organ of struggle, thru which the oppressed masses will seize political power. As a guarantee that the Constituent Assembly should in fact arise as a basis for such a revolutionary state, it must be elected not thru universal suffrage but thru local committees of the National Congress enlarged thru the drawing in of representatives of workers, peasants, students, small traders, employees, and later soldier organizations. The organizations of these various oppressed and exploited classes have their various demands; they will send their delegates first to the Congress committee and finally to the Constituent Assembly in order to carry thru their demands. The workers and farmers together will constitute the overwhelming majority in these organs of struggle and power. Organized independently on the basis of their class interests they will dominate the situation.

The Constituent Assembly will not be elected in order to adopt a formal constitution but as an instrument for the realization of a program of national democratic revolution worked out on the basis of the demands of the oppressed classes which form its social basis. Agitation on the basis of the slogan will prepare the basis for a general armed uprising for the overthrow of the dominant political and social system. The Constituent Assembly as an organ of the revolutionary democratic power can only arise out of a victorious uprising.

The proposed Constituent Assembly is something quite different from the bourgeois parliament but it is nevertheless no Soviet. It is the organ of the democratic dictatorship—a very special type that arises out of the developing bourgeois-democratic revolution under the political leadership of the proletariat. The slogan of Constituent Assembly with its democratic color corresponds to the social character of the revolution and at the same time its realization will drive the revolution beyond the limits of bourgeois democracy.

The above article, written over a month ago, is taken from No. 4 of the International Information of the Communist Opposition (Inkopp).

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