

A LETTER TO THE COMMUNIST INTERNATIONAL*

We deeply deplore the disunity among the proletarian revolutionaries in this country. We are numerically weak, but are called upon to perform a tremendous task under very difficult and delicate conditions. A strong (qualitatively), well organised, clear-sighted, cleverly led Communist Party is the crying need of the situation of this country. Elements to go into the rise of such a party are there, though still largely in the form of raw material. Nevertheless, even to-day there is no such party. The Communist Party of India is a small sect, isolated from the political life of the country. As such, it is utterly unable to influence the situation. This woeful position is the result of the mistaken tactical line followed ever since 1929.

Keenly conscious of the magnitude of the task confronting the Indian proletariat,

*Written in 1935, before the VII World Congress, the resolution of which must have been influenced by the facts reported in the document—M. N. R.

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also of the numerical weakness of the revolutionary vanguard of our class, we are very eager to close our thin ranks into a United Communist Party, so that, under your guidance, we shall be able to play creditably our difficult rôle in the Indian revolution. But the manifest futility and harmfulness of the policy pursued by the comrades acting on your authority, made it impossible for us to join the C. P. of India. Unity is highly desirable; it is urgently needed; we are eager to realise it. But there is no use uniting on a wrong line; and the C. P. of India stubbornly sticks to the line which has been proved by experience to be not only wrong but harmful. By joining the C. P. as it is to-day, we would also be isolated from the masses; we would also be deprived of the possibilities of acquiring a position of decisive importance; we would also be unable to swell the ranks of the proletarian revolutionaries with recruits from the politically active workers, peasants and declassed intellectuals, who even to-day follow the National Congress.

All our efforts to persuade the C. P. to change its policy, in the light of lessons learnt

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from bitter experience, so that all proletarian revolutionaries could get together in a united party, have failed. If some of our comrades would not learn from their own experience, would stubbornly blind themselves from the realities of the situation, would prefer splendid isolation to fruitful mass activity, we should not stultify ourselves by going their mistaken way. That is not the way for the rise of a C. P. in this country—a party that, in the near future, could be an effective factor in the political life of the country; could bid for the leadership of the oppressed and exploited masses, not in mere words but in convincing deeds; could raise the anti-imperialist struggle to a higher level; could decisively influence the development and perspective of the Indian revolution. The dreary and distressing record of the C. P. ever since 1929 definitely proves that it has run into a blind alley. Revolutionary conscience, regard for reality, devotion for the cause for communism, compel us to strike out a new path.

The C. P. of India lives only on your authority. Take away this support and the group will disintegrate. It has no root in the

soil. Your support is secured by magnified reports of activities and influence. The reports make a wrong impression upon you, and prevent you from realising the incorrectness of the policy inaugurated by the Sixth World Congress. We are sure that, provided with a correct picture of the situation, and informed of the negative consequence of the policy pursued ever since 1929, you will modify your opinion about the character and perspective of the Indian revolution, and direct your Indian Section to follow henceforth a different course. Therefore, we are giving you in this letter a general idea of the situation as it really is, hoping that it will be given dispassionate consideration with the object of formulating a realistic policy to be pursued by all the proletarian revolutionaries in this country.

We draw your attention to the following outstanding facts of the situation in this country :—

I. The immaturity of the proletariat. It is not only weak numerically ; it is formed but partially as a class. The strikes are rather the results of elementary revolt against intolerable conditions of daily life than symp-

toms of revolutionary class consciousness. Even among workers, more or less under Communist leadership, as for example, in Bombay cotton mills, there are very few who grasp the rudimentary ideas of class struggle, and are consciously inclined towards Communism. The working class as a whole is socially immature, politically backward, organisationally weak.

2. Only a very small fraction of the industrial workers (hardly 10%) is organised. A very small section of organised workers is under the Communist influence. Practically all the big trade unions (of the Railway workers, for example) are under reformist leadership. The dominating political tendency is nationalist, most of the prominent Trade Union leaders being Congressmen. "The Red T. U. C." is a paper organisation. Its membership is limited to the C. P., its sympathisers and supporters ; that is to say, to a couple of hundred people. Not one single important trade union is affiliated to it. The original T. U. Congress also is a weak body embracing a minority of the organised workers. The majority are in the Trade Union Federation.

3. The peasant masses are unaffected by any other political propaganda than that of the National Congress. The countryside is the scene of seething discontent, aggravated by the current agrarian crisis. But there is no symptom of any widespread revolutionary awakening. The political consciousness of the peasantry is represented by the adoration for Gandhi, and confidence in the National Congress as their champion. Communist propaganda finds no response in the village. Communist agitators have been driven out of the villages for abusing Gandhi and the National Congress. The political notion of the rural population, indeed also of the urban masses, is monarchistic. They can hardly think of the Government of a country without a king.

4. The petty bourgeois intelligentsia is the most active political element. Practically all the recruits for the Communist movement so far have come from that class. But nationalist pre-occupations are generally very powerful. Political activity of the petty bourgeois intellectual takes place either in the National Congress or in the terrorist movement. This latter has of late shown

signs of development in the direction of the Socialist Revolutionary Party of Russia. It is isolated from the masses; has no understanding or regard for the social problems; is fanatically nationalistic in cultural questions. In short, Fascist tendency is to be discerned in the terrorist movement. At the same time there is a process of radicalisation, socially. This process may advance towards Communism. The petty-bourgeois intellectuals in the National Congress are more or less in touch with the masses. They are getting more and more concerned with social problems, in a rather reformist, sentimental, humanitarian sense than with a consciously revolutionary purpose. This tendency has lately crystallized in the so-called Congress Socialist Party. There is a process of radicalisation in the democratic *bourgeois revolutionary* sense. But the process is retarded by the prevalence of the reactionary utopian Gandhist ideology. The radically inclined petty bourgeois intellectuals are without a leadership. Yet they are not ready to accept it from the proletariat *directly*. Nor is the proletariat as a class in a position to offer such leadership as yet.

5. The National Congress offers the rallying ground to the oppressed and exploited classes in their struggle against imperialism. It commands the confidence of the masses. It is not a homogeneous political party. It is a movement which expresses the highest degree of political consciousness of the masses. The leadership of the Congress is not the Congress. There is objective contradiction between the present leadership, which is under the influence of the middle bourgeoisie, and the Congress as a movement. There is social basis for an alternative radical democratic leadership to replace the present outfit. The rise of such a leadership is necessary for the next stage of the revolution.

6. It is an illusion to think that the workers and peasants are dissatisfied with the Congress. No mass movement can be organised in opposition to the Congress. Those making such attempts are sure to be isolated from the masses as has been the experience of the C. P. of India. The Congress is not disintegrating, although it is involved in a crisis. The absence of an organised left-wing has enabled the right-winger to capture the leadership. If the position of the right

is not challenged by an alternative radical democratic leadership, the entire nationalist mass movement will come under the reactionary influence of the bourgeoisie. Then the Congress would become a bourgeois nationalist party. The result of such an eventuality will be disastrous. The mass movement will be decomposed. The Congress will disintegrate, but there will be no new mass organisation to take its place.

7. Owing to its broad class basis, the National Congress can be transformed into an instrument of revolutionary (democratic) struggle. The petty bourgeois intelligentsia, in collaboration with the revolutionary vanguard of the proletariat, can provide the necessary alternative leadership. The next stages of the Indian revolution must develop under that type of leadership—under the hegemony (not leadership) of the proletariat. No other type of revolutionary leadership can possibly rise out of the background of the social composition of the forces of revolution, of the given relation of classes. To talk of an independent proletarian leadership is to indulge in a vain fantasy. The proletariat is not yet able to play that rôle. To begin with,

it must develop as a class, and that is conditional upon the accomplishment of the basic task of the belated bourgeois revolution, and the rapid industrialisation of the country under *democratic dictatorship*. The revolutionary leadership needed to-day must raise the banner not of Communism, but of Jacobinism. We must remember Lenin's remarks on introducing the New Economic Policy: there can be no proletarian dictatorship without the proletariat; let us first create the proletariat. Under the present world conditions, and thanks to the impossibility of solving India's economic problems (particularly the agrarian problem) on the basis of capitalist production, Jacobinism cannot degenerate into bourgeois democracy. Democratic dictatorship is the road to Socialism in India.

8. The National Congress, with its broad social basis and tremendous influence upon the masses, is the typical instrument created by peculiar conditions under which the anti-imperialist struggle had to take place,—an instrument admirably suited for the purpose of opening up the road to democratic dictatorship.

9. The National Congress with its widespread net-work of a skeleton organisation, given a revolutionary democratic dictatorship, (and the objective conditions for the rise of such a leadership are ripening) can serve as the instrument in the struggle for the capture of power by the oppressed and exploited masses, and eventually be converted into the organ of democratic power of the revolutionary state.

10. Local Congress Committees in a revolutionary crisis can function as instruments of mass uprisings and become the basic units of the revolutionary state. They render the establishment of the Soviet State a matter of practical possibility.

The activities of the C. P. of India disregarded all these realities and possibilities of the situation. The blunders are not merely tactical. A radically wrong, un-Marxian theory of revolution distorts the vision of the comrades who operate in this country on your authority, and are unfortunately backed up by you. They represent the spirit of Blanquism. They wish to make a revolution to order. They do not know that the character and perspective of a revolution are

determined by the conditions under which it takes place, and that the tactical policy of the revolutionary party should be guided by the character and perspective of the revolution.

We shall point only the most flagrant mistakes committed by the C. P. of India, and the harmful effects of these mistakes not only upon the development of the revolutionary movement, but also upon the growth of the C. P. itself:

1. Faulty analysis of the forces of revolution. The consequent failure to appreciate correctly the social composition of those forces. Wrong notion about the character and perspective of the Indian revolution in the earlier stages. Disregard for the fact that the task of the bourgeois democratic revolution is still to be accomplished in this country, and that owing to its immaturity, the proletariat is not in a position to do that single-handed, without the collaboration of the peasantry and the semi-proletarianised urban petty-bourgeoisie. The inability to realise that this collaboration cannot take place on the terms dictated by the proletariat, but only on the platform of

revolutionary democratic freedom. In short, the C. P. of India forgot, or never learnt, one of the fundamental lessons of Marxism derived from the history of class struggle: namely, that a revolutionary class creates the conditions for its own emancipation by liberating the entire society from the established form of class domination. The liberation of the Indian society from foreign imperialism and the native reaction will create conditions for the emancipation of the Indian proletariat. The immediate task of the proletariat is to work for that emancipation. The proletariat will accomplish this task by rallying the oppressed and the exploited masses in this struggle for the realisation of the programme of democratic national revolution. The C. P. of India has failed to lead the proletariat towards the accomplishment of this task.

2. Disregard of the nationalist character of the revolution. Owing to this failure, the C. P. of India underestimated the influence of Gandhi and the usefulness of the National Congress as an instrument in the struggle against imperialism. This mistake isolated the C. P. from the Nationalist masses

including not only the peasantry and the urban petty bourgeoisie, but the proletariat itself. The isolation from the forces of revolution seriously obstructed the growth of the C. P. which consequently remained a small sect.

3. To look upon the National Congress as the political party of the bourgeoisie, instead of appreciating it—as it really is—as a movement embracing a variety of classes and sub-classes. From this wrong estimation of the Congress resulted the failure to distinguish between the objectively revolutionary rank and file and the subjectively anti-revolutionary leadership of the Congress. Another result was the highly reprehensible policy of attacking the left wing as well as the right wing. The way to the liberation of the Congress from the bourgeois influence and its consequent conversion into a militant mass organisation, is the overthrow of the Gandhist leadership and its replacement by a radical democratic leadership. Under the dangerous illusion that the nationalist masses can be brought under proletarian leadership, and the anti-imperialist struggle developed as a part of the proletarian revolution, the C. P. refuses to

foment the rise of the radical petty bourgeois left wing inside the National Congress, and to help it in the struggle against the bourgeois-Gandhist right wing. The C. P. started on this grievously mistaken path in 1928 when the right-wing leadership of the National Congress was seriously menaced by the left wing. Instead of rallying the peasants and workers in support of the leftwing, disregarding for the moment the antiquity of its social programme, the C. P. declared it to be the greater danger, and foolishly denounced it as the veiled agent of the counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie and reactionary Gandhism. That foolish policy started from the estimation of the National Congress as the party of the bourgeoisie. It has been stubbornly pursued ever since, and has contributed considerably to the present debacle of the anti-imperialist struggle. In the absence of mass pressure, exerted under the influence of the C. P., the petty bourgeois left wing was easily placated by the right-wing leaders who thus retained the control of the Congress machinery. Objectively revolutionary forces remained under non-revolutionary leadership. Their will to fight was not developed. Their field of acti-

vity was restricted by the Gandhist tactics of passive resistance which was bound to end in capitulation.

4. The policy of the C. P., pursued ever since 1928, of standing outside the National Congress, of denouncing it as a counter-revolutionary body, meant voluntary withdrawal of the proletarian vanguard from the field of its operation. Had it stood by its post in the midst of the forces of revolution, it could have extended its influence over them, won their confidence by virtue of participating in the same struggle with them, and gradually guided them out of the paralysing control of the non-revolutionary leaders. But that was a difficult road to travel. The C. P. of India suffering from the infantile malady of ultra-leftism chose the easy line of least resistance. It was simple to abuse all but the small band of youthful Communists as counter-revolutionaries, and talk of rallying the masses in an anti-imperialist struggle under independent proletarian leadership, outside the National Congress. The masses, however, refused to rally under the new flag, and steadfastly followed Gandhi under the banner of the National Congress. Thanks to the fool-

ishness of abusing popular left-wing leaders, the C. P. alienated the sympathy of even the most radical elements in the National Congress from which source, under the given conditions of India, the leading cadre of the working class party must be recruited. The responsibility of the defeat of the anti-imperialist movement of India must be shared by the C. P., because it would not pursue the policy advocated by its pioneers and practised previously with satisfactory results, a policy that might have precluded the defeat by strengthening the movement from inside—through a process of class differentiation resulting from the experience gained in actual struggle; through a democratisation of the leadership; through a radicalisation of the program under the pressure of the masses; through the adoption of more effective forms of militant mass struggle.

5. The grievous mistake of the C. P. of India has been the idealisation of the proletariat. Disregarding all the realities, the C. P. entertained the fantastic idea that the revolutionary class consciousness of the Indian proletariat has attained a high degree of development, and consequently it is fit to assume

the leadership of the revolution even in the present bourgeois democratic stage. The deluded comrades are simply carried away by their overenthusiasm, and presumably have been misleading you with grossly overdrawn pictures of the revolutionary activity of the proletariat. As a matter of fact, notwithstanding its potential importance, at present, the proletariat plays a minor rôle in the scheme of Indian politics; and whatever rôle it plays, is still heavily coloured with the nationalist sentiment.

6. The overestimation of the actual significance of the proletariat leads to the corresponding undervaluation of the importance of other elements involved in the revolution, no less fundamentally than the proletariat. This disproportionate view of the relation of classes involved in the revolution does not permit the C. P. to realise the urgent necessity of the alliance of the revolutionary classes in the struggle for democratic national freedom. Yet the proletariat will eventually assume the leadership of the revolution on the strength of the hegemony that it will exercise in this struggle, and the initiative in the formation of the historically necessary revolu-

tionary alliance will place it in the position to exercise the hegemony in the struggle. No use advocating this alliance in word as the C. P. has been lately doing, while the C. P. stands outside the alliance already formed in the National Congress, and actually declared its determination to break it up. The C. P. believes that all it has got to do is to hold high the standard of revolution dyed in pure red, and the oppressed and exploited classes will automatically flock under it. Experience has proved the futility of this method. Yet the C. P. would not learn. It is for you, comrades, to remind these ultra-left enthusiasts of Lenin's famous injunction: that the revolutionary party must be where the masses are. And it is time that all concerned with the revolutionary movement in this country realise the palpable fact that the National Congress is the rallying ground of the masses.

7. The exaggerated notion about the revolutionary class consciousness of the revolutionary proletariat has induced the C. P. of India to pursue a suicidal policy as regards the organisation of the working class. Trade unions under its control are not mass organi-

sations, because the program of the party is imposed on them. As a matter of fact the C. P. does not seem to know the difference between the political party of the proletariat and the trade union. Thanks to this deplorable ignorance it split the T. U. Congress. Owing to its disregard for the fact that the trade union has a specific function, it failed to retain the big unions in the T. U. Congress when it came under its control. After the split (at Nagpur in 1929), during the brief period when the T. U. C. was completely under the control of the communists, there was a conspicuous absence of any mass activity. Instead of developing the T. U. C. into a powerful mass organisation, the Communists, thanks to this ultra-leftism, drove all the big unions out. At the same time, under Communist leadership, the T. U. C. passed resolutions calling for a political general strike. The result was the decomposition of the T. U. C., and the rise of the reformist Trade Union Federation controlling a majority of the organised workers. When Communists, who disagreed with this suicidal policy, tried to reconstruct the T. U. C., the C. P. again split that depleted body because

it would not follow the ruinous policy any longer. The C. P., under the name of the Red T. U. C., fiercely opposed our efforts, supported by a number of left-wing T. U. leaders, to establish unity in the labour movement on the platform of the struggle for enforcing a series of partial demands for the workers. Splitting tactics have isolated the C. P. from the ranks of the organised workers. Even the Girni Kamgar Union of Bombay, as far back as 1929, repudiated Communist leadership after this had all but destroyed the once-powerful organisation. Its membership was down to a mere few hundreds. On their failing to get re-elected to the offices of the union, the Communists left the union, and started a rival organisation which has never become a trade union with any mass support. We have reconstructed the Girni Kamgar Union and re-established the Communist influence over it. But the C. P. fights constantly this popular organisation of Bombay textile workers and makes repeated efforts to split it again.

We earnestly believe that you will easily realise the harmfulness of these mistakes committed in this country on your authority, and

rectify them without delay. These mistakes have prevented the anti-imperialist struggle from being re-inforced by the influence of the C. I., as was the case in other colonial countries, and also in this, previously. These mistakes are positively injurious to the cause of Communism and proletarian world revolution, because they decisively obstructed the growth of the C. P., and the revolutionary activity of the working class. Further development of the anti-imperialist struggle, under the banner of the democratic freedom, is conditional upon the appearance of a revolutionary democratic leadership in the National Congress ; and this, in its turn, can rise only on the foundation of a fighting alliance of the oppressed and exploited classes, formed on the initiative of the C. P., under the hegemony of the proletariat. Obviously the C. P. shall not be able to rise up to its task before it can function as an active factor in the political life of this country, closely connected with the masses, winning their confidence progressively by virtue of participating in their struggles. And to be an effective political factor, the C. P. must abandon the course it has been following since 1928—

a course that has led to isolation, and the consequent political stultification.

The document¹ attached herewith sets forth what, in our opinion, is the correct communist policy under the given conditions of this country. It is formulated on the basis of a Marxist analysis of the situation, and realist appreciation of the available forces of revolution.

A revolutionary party must operate with the forces available. The magnification of the potentiality of the available forces will only lead us to grief. Experience has borne out the correctness of the policy and programme of action advocated by us. Working under great difficulties, the most regrettable of them being the vicious attack by the C. P., we have made satisfactory progress in a short time. It is exclusively through our efforts that the right-wing leaders of the Congress have been forced to endorse the demand for the Constituent Assembly—a demand that challenges the authority of the British Parliament, and thus raises the anti-imperialist struggle to a higher stage which must

1. A comprehensive programme for a C. P. in India. It was subsequently published as "Our Task."

eventually culminate into armed insurrection. The opposition of the C. P. was one of the factors that delayed our success in this respect. When, in 1931, we sought to rally the Congress rank and file against the "Peace Pact" of Gandhi and his participation in the Round Table Conference, with the slogan of the Constituent Assembly, the C. P. joined forces with the politically backward Gandhists in the opposition. We are painfully aware of the fact that you also disapproved of the slogan ; but today, in view of your changed attitude as regards the defence of the parliamentary democratic freedom of Europe, you should reconsider your position on the question of the propriety of the Communists supporting the demand for a Constituent Assembly in this country.* The crux of the question is the character and perspective of the Indian revolution. Reports, deeply coloured with subjectivism, written by people unable to make a Marxian analysis of the given relation of the classes, and reluctant to recognise realities,—such misleading reports persuaded you to take a wrong view of the character and perspective of the Indian Revolution. Acquaintance with the facts as they

are, will convince you that the character of the Indian revolution in the next stages will necessarily be bourgeois democratic ; that the conditions in which the task of the bourgeois revolution may be accomplished under proletarian dictatorship, are not ripe in this country. It is foolish romanticism to aim at proletarian dictatorship in the near future in this country ; and it may not be an indispensable necessity later on. For the time being, a democratic revolution must develop with slogans appropriate for a struggle of that nature. The perspective is the perspective of democratic dictatorship.

We beseech you to give serious and dispassionate consideration to the facts indicated, and arrive at your own conclusions. We are sure that it will be a correct conclusion. Marxist principles, Leninist realism and revolutionary experience will enable you to realise the correctness of our position, and the necessity of changing accordingly the policy pursued by the C. P. of India. Such a decision on your part will render great assistance to the forces of revolution in this country. It will instantly unite the vanguard of these forces into a single organisation, free

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of the deficiencies that have hitherto hindered its development into an effectively functioning political party. We confidently hope that you will not fail to take such measures as will enable all the Communists in this country to stand together under the banner of the C. I., and perform their delicate and difficult task under your guidance.