Chapter II

Confrontation and Conflict, 1945-51

Independence marks a sharp break with the past. The colonial power is replaced by peoples' elected representatives. Subject people become citizens having dreams, demands and aspirations. During the struggle for independence, the nationalists are guided by the desire to forge the strongest anti-imperialist front. The groups within the movement, underplay their differences in the interest of unity. However, once independence is achieved the urgency for unity disappears. Consensus is replaced by competition and groups begin to leave the nationalist movement carving distinct and independent entities for themselves. This process is further facilitated by extension of franchise and electoral competition. Independence thus marks the change over from nationalist politics to competitive power politics.

In India, however, the immediate post independence period was preoccupied by constitution making. Competitive politics made its appearance after the Constitution came into force in 1950. The first part of this chapter is devoted to the analysis of Nehru's relations with the Indian communists in the context of Constitution making.

By deciding to support the British and not the Quit India movement launched by the Congress, the communists embarked upon a chartered course that was bound to bring them into conflict or collusion with the Congress. As would be evident from the
previous chapter, even before 1942 the communist support to the Congress and Nehru had fluctuated from 'Joint-front' to open criticism. However, Nehru and the Congress had, until 1942, tolerated the communists and allowed them the membership of the Congress. This was not to be the case after 1942. The communists were expelled from the Congress in 1945.

The communist expulsion from the Congress in 1945 was a contributing factor but not a direct cause of Nehru-communist confrontation in Telengana in 1946. The communist adventure in Telengana had world wide ramification and marked the extension of the communist movement from the proletariat to the peasantry. The idea of peasant revolution received prominence and ideological and tactical legitimacy from the success of Mao's peasant revolution in China. The people's Republic of China was established in 1949. In launching their movement the Telengana communists were inspired by Mao's thought and his success.

The confrontation and collusion between Nehru and the Indian communists was guided by their ideological preferences apart from immediate tactical considerations. Nehru, with all his leanings towards socialism, was above all a nationalist. Saddled with the added responsibility of Prime Minister it was natural for him to give primacy to the unity and integrity of India. The communists on the other hand were guided by their ideology. They saw the Constituent Assembly and its deliberations in the light of Marxism and the Soviet
constitution. The Telengana communists picked up a few leaves from Mao's book and launched a peasant agitation, first against Nizam's feudal autocracy and later against Nehru government. Police action made no difference in the situation, in their understanding. Nationalism vs communism is thus the proper framework in which we can analyse Nehru's relations with the Indian communists in the immediate post-independence period. We would use the constitution making and Telengana as the two issues for analysis.

Let us begin with the study of their attitude towards the Constituent Assembly and the constitution. A detailed historical survey of the development of the Assembly is not within the scope of our study. We will briefly concern ourselves with the composition, character and work of the Assembly as observed by Nehru and the communists.

It is important to bear in mind that the communists had no significant role to play within the Constituent Assembly and in the constitution making because of their absence in the Assembly. Somnath Lahiri represented the communist view so long he remained its member till July, 1947. There was no

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1 Somnath Lahiri (Bengal) P. Sundarayya (Andhra) were proposed as candidates but Lahiri was the only elected member till July 1947. For our study therefore we rely on his participation and the communist view outside the Assembly helps us in imparting valuable information regarding the communist attitude.
recognised communist in the Assembly after Lahiri. However, the communists were considerably active and verbal in expressing their views outside the Assembly. The Communist Party was the only important political group outside the Assembly which decried the Constitution. The communists disagreed with Nehru from the very beginning of the Assembly and the initial differences made it difficult for them to cooperate with him in the making of the constitution. Their distinctive approach and attitude further widened the existing differences that had surfaced during the war period.

Nehru had expressed his views on the structure of the constituent assembly as early as 1936 and envisaged a constituent assembly elected on the adult suffrage to draw up a constitution for India. This in his view was the only way to give effect to the wishes of the people in a democratic way and could also help in the solution of the communal problem. He wanted it to be a real representative body, a representative of the masses with power to decide and give effect to its decisions. He advocated full representation of masses because that would have brought the economic issues to the forefront and pushed communal issues into the background making them unimportant. This he thought would also help solve the Indian problems in terms of economic reality.  

When the Assembly was actually constituted, Nehru realised that it was not a revolutionary body. But he did not reject it simply because it was not in accordance with certain principles, rules or notions he had advocated in the past. He was ready to test it on the touchstone of the existing facts and desired objectives. He anticipated both its positive and negative aspects as it could be a useless body or a powerful instrument for achieving freedom. Everything depended on the way they handled the Assembly and made its working a success.

Nehru strongly emphasised on the role of the Assembly as a free body because he did not feel threatened by the British Government's possible interference. Although the Assembly was a British creation yet he was confident that the British would have nothing to do with it once the Assembly began its work. He repeatedly ruled out any solution that was drawn up by the British and was unwillingly imposed. He was confident that the acceptance of a certain procedure in advance could neither prevent nor limit their absolute freedom to determine their own course in the Assembly. He firmly believed that Indian constitution could be determined by her own people without outside interference.  

In his view the Assembly was a sovereign body in the sense that it had no foreign member in it and no outside interference.

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3 Nehru to the Editor, AmritaBazar Patrika (1945), J. N. Papers, Vol. XIX (1289), NMHL (no date).
authority could interfere with its decisions. It reflected the proportionate strength of the people without the weightage that the British imperialists gave to certain communities for their benefit. He was against separate representation for each group and community and stressed on the need to curb such tendencies instead of encouraging them. This was contrary to the communist stand which envisaged India as the home of distinct nationalities. The communists proposed representation of all national units on linguistic and cultural bases.

The fact that Nehru and the Congress had accepted the plan for the Assembly and decided to participate in its deliberations did not tantamount to accepting the plan as a whole. It was only the decision to enter the Assembly to give it a fair trial. Nehru was firm to leave it if it could not serve their purpose. He emphasised on the need to examine and reach decisions with the perspective of achieving their ultimate objective of complete independence. His priorities were evident when he pleaded to examine everything in the context of Indian independence.

According to Nehru the purpose of the Assembly was to

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4 Nehru indicated his views on separate electorates when Anbian, President All India Kshatriya Nadir Association, asked for the representation of the Nadir community. Nehru to Prof. A. J. Anbian, Aug. 25, 1946, J. M. Papers, Vol. iii (183) NMML.

5 For further reference see f. n. nos. 6, 18.
frame the constitution of a republican State according to their standards and in the light of their own interpretation. The Constitution was to be framed for a free and independent India based on democracy and complete sovereignty of the people.

The communists on the other hand understood and viewed the situation differently because they formulated their opinion on different grounds. Before we detail the communist view on the character and working of the Assembly it is pertinent to point out that they opposed the proposal of the Cabinet Mission to utilise the newly elected (1946) Provincial Legislative Assemblies as the electoral College for the future Constituent Assembly because of their broad understanding of India as the home of distinct nationalities. They demanded a constitution making body on the principle of universal adult suffrage and sovereign constituent assemblies for each 'national area' and demanded that the delegates to the constitution making body be elected by these sovereign constituent assemblies. They strongly objected to the

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6 The Communist Party in a resolution in Sept. 1942 declared India to be the home of many nationalities and each distinct nationality was given the right to a sovereign or autonomous state within the Indian federation or union with the right to secede if it so desired. Andhras, Karnatakis, Marathis and Bengalis were some of the examples of distinct nationalities. See G. Adhikari, Pakistan and National Unity (Bombay: People's Publishing House, 1944), p. 8.

participation of the princes and hence, opposed the Constituent Assembly's decision (Dec. 1946) to appoint a committee to confer with the Negotiating Committee that was set up by the Chamber of Princes. They opposed the official resolution because they did not want the 'princes or their stooges' to participate in the Assembly.  

In the Congress' acceptance of the plan for the Constituent Assembly the communists saw the triumph of compromises because in their view the Assembly was a British creation which would lead India into a new partnership with the British imperialism. Hence, they expected no freedom of action within the Assembly because it drew its powers from the British. It was characterised as unfettered but not free. Nor did they accept it as a sovereign body because the plan did not recognise the Indian Independence. From the Assembly, with so many limitations, they anticipated a slave constitution based on Hindu-Muslim disunity and princely autocracy.  

The communists also characterised the Assembly as  

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undemocratic because the members were elected on the basis of indirect elections, by provincial assemblies, which in turn were elected by 13% of the people. They refuted the Congress' claim that the Assembly represented all interests and maintained that it represented the Congress, zamindars, industrialists, traditional liberals and communal Hindus.

In spite of the strong criticism levelled against the origin, composition and aims of the Constituent Assembly the communist decision to contest the elections to the Assembly was a surprise. Not only this, they even regretted that the Congress High Command was not able to spare even one seat for them while it had included old liberals, chauvinists, Mahasabhaaities, big land lords and arch profiteers in their list.

They severely condemned the role of the Congress leaders who constituted the bulk of the Assembly representatives and dubbed them as the allies of the British imperialism, the representatives of the capitalists and the vested interests. In the Congress dominance they saw the dominance of the bourgeois upper class narrow clique. The Congressmen were labelled as 'past masters in the art of demagogy, in the

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art of cheating people.'

They complained that the Congress representatives had made lavish promises to the Indian people before they came to power. After coming into power they put up a loud pretence of adherence to democratic principles but had repudiated every one of them in practice. They admitted that though Nehru led liberal elements of various shades in the Assembly it was inevitable that the ultimate result would be a compromise between right and left groups of the Congress.

With this broad perception of the Assembly it is not difficult to see why the communists defined it as 'the ill begotten child conceived out of sight and behind the back of toiling masses born as a result of the betrayal by the bourgeois Congress leadership, enacted in 1946 when they crossed over and entered into alliance with imperialism.'

The communists defended their decision to contest elections as a strategy to carry on the battle inside and outside the Assembly to expose the British designs. In their view the boycott of the constitution making body would have meant playing the British game. Because the Assembly was a manoeuvre to smash the growing upsurge, split the freedom movement and perpetuate imperialist rule in a new form.

they decided to use the Assembly as a forum to expose the imperialist designs. 15

The communists intended to expose the weaknesses of the Assembly by highlighting the differences among the members. Here we may point out that Nehru, too, was not unmindful of the differences among the members but stressed on the need to carry on the proceedings from the standpoint of national stability. But since Nehru and the communists found it difficult to reconcile on the broad view of framing a constitution, disagreements and differences were apt to follow.

Dissatisfied with the composition and character of the Assembly, the communists attacked the Draft Constitution as prepared by the Drafting Committee. They described the speeches of the members as dull and longwinded. In their opinion mock debates and discussions underlined the anti-people and anti-democratic character of the regime and demonstrated the intentions of the Congress leaders to impose a steel framer's constitution that could prove an effective instrument for safeguarding the Fascist rule. Long drawn debates on the provisions of the constitution were seen as a Congress conspiracy to protect the country's landlord-

15 The communists intention in contesting the elections was to capture power and to break the constitution from within. See statements by E. M. S. Namboodripad and A. K. Gopalan, Indian Express, July 9, 1969. Also see Editorial, "Communist Party and Constituent Assembly," People's Age, July 21, 1946, vol. v (3), p. 5.
capitalist interests.

They reacted strongly against Nehru's Objective Resolution. Nehru praised it for its declaration of India as a sovereign democratic republic, moving towards Socialism. Supported by the majority inside the Assembly, he emphasised that the constitution would ensure a broad based progressive type of development for India aiding its peaceful and historical advance towards a socialist future. The communists tabled an amendment that was ruled out of order. The Resolution in their view dealt with the establishment of an independent sovereign republic but did nothing more than show how it could be achieved.

The communists also opposed the federal scheme because the provinces were not given residuary powers and there was no right of secession to linguistic and cultural national units. Nehru's federal framework envisaged a strong centre possessing residuary powers and capable of ensuring peace, coordinating vital matters of common concern and able to speak effectively for the whole country in the international sphere. The communists criticised the federal provisions and wanted linguistic and cultural national units which would

16 Nehru did not like the term 'Objective Resolution.' He found it a prosaic description because the Resolution embodied more than mere objectives.

have the unfettered right of self-determination to decide freely whether they wanted to join the Indian Union or form a separate sovereign state. Obviously Nehru's framework was guided by his nationalist urges whereas the communists seemed to have been enamoured by the Soviet Constitution which in theory gave cultural and linguistic minorities the right to secession. As a nationalist Nehru viewed the position in terms of India's unity whereas the communists viewed it in terms of their theory.

The communists further criticised Nehru on the provisions regarding the powers of the Governors. They strongly condemned their nomination by the President which in their view was intended to weigh the scales in favour of the ruling clique. Particularly criticising Nehru's argument it was stated, 'The most valuable exponent of democracy, Nehru, let the cat out of the bag when he argued that his was the most democratic procedure because elections (of Governors) might produce conflicts . . .' While criticising the powers of the Indian Governors the communists related these to the powers of the British Governors. They apprehended the use of special powers to delay democracy and as a weapon in the hands of the big vested interests.


They felt that the problem of minorities, too was not dealt with properly by the Congress leadership. They supported the decision of the Assembly to liquidate all imperial privileges and weightages but at the same time also wanted statutory reservation for minorities according to their population. They underlined the absolute necessity of reservation in services for the period of transition. Mere presence of an adequate share consistent with efficiency was not considered sufficient; much more was expected from the Congress leadership.

The communists also took keen interest in the debates on the interim report on the Fundamental Rights, offering criticism on many of its features. The Fundamental Rights and the Directive Principles of State Policy were designed by the Assembly to bring about the great reforms of the social revolution. K. M. Panikkar believed that both the Rights and the Principles were the source and inspiration for reform legislation, for under their aegis 'the Indian Parliament has been active in the matter of social legislation, whether it be called by the Hindu code or by another name.' But the communists found a dismal picture.


21 Ibid., pp. 5, 10.

The rights in their view reflected the policeman's point of view and not a free India. They opposed provisions that empowered the Government to ban meetings, processions and demonstrations. They wanted to curtail the wide powers of bureaucracy and the police because these rendered Fundamental Rights illusory. They argued that the constitution ruthlessly limited and destroyed the liberties of the people in relation to freedom of speech, organisation and the press, etc. They particularly wanted the press to be free from the control of a handful of monopolists.

The democratic principles embodied in the constitution were a mere pretence because the restrictions and the safeguards practically denied and limited them. The constitution in their view had buried the Fundamental Rights because the state owned little responsibility in ensuring these rights. The Fundamental Rights were further weakened because the right to work, leisure, equal pay and education were relegated to the Directive Principles which were not enforceable by any court. The State had no obligation to implement these principles nor could the people demand their fulfilment.  

What the Fundamental Rights guaranteed, in communist view, was the unrestricted freedom for exploitation. In

relation to the freedom of speech, organisation and press there were so many limitations and people's liberties were so much circumscribed that these would turn out to be the weapons for oppressing the people. They also regretted that while these rights were negated by their limitations, the other important rights were not mentioned. These included the right to picket, the right to strike and the right to bear arms. The absence of these rights was aimed at suppressing the rising power of the people. Provisions in regard to the arrest and imprisonment of citizens were considered as outrageous and hypocritical part of the constitution.

The communists widely differed from Nehru on the compensation clause in Article 31 providing that compensation must be paid for all property acquired for public purposes. Legislature could prescribe different principles for the payment of property acquired for different purposes. While Nehru strongly supported and recommended the provisions, the communists thoroughly condemned it, because in their view the Article guaranteed the property and the privileges of the vested interests against the mass of toilers. They feared that a constitutional guarantee on compensation would hinder all plans of nationalisation of industries in the interests of the people and would remove all prospects of free economic life, the absence of which had led to India's national
enslavement. Austin, however, believes that "Fundamental Rights of other constitutions might have served as well as—or even better than—those of the Indian constitution in protecting the existing rights and liberties of the people—Indian Constitution has provided so much impetus towards changing and rebuilding society for the common good."  

In retrospect it may, however, be argued that the communists were on solid ground in criticising the compensation clause in Article 31. While Nehru was trying to convince himself that Parliament being supreme, the constitution would not stand in the way of social reforms particularly land reforms. The leftists had criticised the provisions of Article 31 on the ground that they would stand in the way of land reforms. In substance, this was also the criticism of the communists. Both were right. The courts struck down many land reform and nationalisation Acts on the grounds that they violated Articles 19 and 31. 

In the light of the above discussion it is not difficult

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26 Many states had already passed Land Reforms Acts even before the Constitution came into force and it was feared that many of them would be struck down by courts.
to see why the communists dubbed the constitution framed in 1950 as a bourgeois constitution. They viewed it as a product of conspiracy of Indian capitalists through their Congress representatives who 'sold away the freedom of the country by striking a deal with British imperialism through the Cabinet Mission and Mountbatten Plan to jointly rule over the people in the interest of the Indo-British capitalist classes.' The whole process was seen as a plot against the working class and the Indian people because it denied the fundamental rights of the working class and the toilers. The constitution in their understanding was meant for the upper class to rule the oppressed millions.

Because of the Congress dominance in the Constituent Assembly and the class character of the Congress, the communists seriously doubted the basic objective of the Constitution to eradicate social evils. They believed that the social oppressions would not be removed because the Congress leaders were 'tyrannical caste ridden Hindus and enemies of the untouchables.' They rather suspected that the educational and economic backwardness of the untouchables would increase under the constitution.27

The Preamble according to communists was a masterpiece of hypocrisy, unrepresentative of the people because it did not represent the aspirations of the workers and the peasants.

The real deal of surrender to imperialism was hidden from the masses. They challenged the sovereign character of the Republic because it was at the same time a member of the Commonwealth and recognised the king of England as the titular head which meant the acceptance of imperialist policies and subordinate position. Nehru was severely condemned in this regard and they saw a complete subservience of his Government to the British thereby becoming the main agency through which war and national enslavement were being foisted on the people of India. Hence, 'instead of embodying the sovereignty of the Indian nation the Constitution enslaved it to the British imperialists.'

Apart from the British dominance the communists also observed the American dominance in the Indian system. The Americans were called the new masters. Nehru Government had become subservient to the imperialists and taken India into the Anglo-American camp. Good profits were ensured to foreign capitalists at the cost of the working class and peoples' movement. It was charged that under their dictates Nehru Government had fallen into their trap to convert India into a war base. Instead of confiscating the industries and assets owned by Indian and foreign profiteers the foreign vested interests were promised complete freedom to subjugate India.

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28 Ibid., p. 3.
Imposition of enormous taxes on the people had also benefited their interests. This evidently embodied in the constitution, 'the rule of the Indian capitalists, landlords and the princes working in cooperation with the imperialists.'

The communists analysis of the Indian constitution clearly brings out the influence of the 1936 Soviet constitution on them. Because of the communist understanding that economic foundation of the U.S.S.R. was the Socialist system of economy characterised by the public ownership of the means of production, they condemned the Indian constitution for its failure to ensure economic equality. Their criticism was based on the contention that equality not based in the relations to the means of production (social ownership of the means of production) was a deceptive equality.

The communists determined their attitude towards the constitution in the light of the analysis put forward by Stalin. They criticised the limitations and restrictions on

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29 When the Assembly was discussing the constitutional Draft Pravda declared that the object of the constitutions was to strengthen the interests of the bourgeois and the capitalists. It was alleged that the Indian constitution had embodied the characteristics of all bourgeois constitutions; the private ownership of land, forests factories, mills and other means of production, the exploitation of man by man, the existence of the exploiters and the exploited, insecurity for the toiling majority and luxury for the idle but security for minority. J. A. Naik, Soviet Policy Towards India (Delhi: Vikas Publications, 1970), p. 39 and "Real Character of Constitution: Surrender to Imperialism" Crossroads, December 16, 1949, vol. 1 (15), p. 2.

the enjoyment of the Rights. To support their criticism of the Fundamental Rights and the accompanying safeguards they quoted Stalin.

From the standpoint of democratism bourgeois constitutions may be divided into two groups. One group of constitutions openly denies or actually nullifies the equality of rights of citizens and democratic liberties. The other group is of constitutions which readily accept and even advertise democratic principles but at the same time make reservations and provide for restrictions which utterly mutilate these democratic rights and liberties. 31

Hence the communists believed that the democratic principles were merely a pretence because the restrictions and safeguards practically denied, the rights as the ruling classes feared their benefits to the masses.

In regard to the state responsibility to ensure the rights they found the Indian constitution to be weaker in comparison to the Soviet constitution because the right to work was ensured by the socialist organisation of the national economy. To the communists the difference between a democratic people's constitution and the constitution of a bourgeois state that upheld a social order for the benefit of a few and the exploitation of many millions, was too obvious.

The democratic constitution guaranteed the right of the people to work and enjoy the fruits of their labour. The Soviet constitution attached primary importance to the establishment and maintenance of a new economic order with the consequent emphasis on social and economic rights rather than civil and political rights. The Indian constitution provided for political democracy and sought the ideal of economic democracy through the Directive Principles of State Policy. Hence they demanded the speedy implementation of the Directive Principles to make them a part of the Fundamental Rights.

Communist assessment of the Assembly and the constitution reveals not only the influence of the Soviet constitution but also similarities of views expressed in the Soviet Union. Apart from the ideological considerations that guided the communist assessment of the Indian constitution in the light of the Soviet constitution, they were also impressed by the phenomenal progress towards socialism that the Soviet Union had made during the pre-war period under the Stalin constitution. They saw in these triumphs the complete superiority of the socialist system over the capitalist system, the superiority of Stalin's policies over all other policies. Against this they also observed that the policies

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33 See footnote no. 29.
of the Anglo-Americans (whose philosophy had inspired the Indian Constitution) in their drive for world domination spelt national enslavement of the people and oppression at the hands of the capitalist monopolies.

In their campaign against the constitution they tried to expose it as an instrument of class domination in contrast to the provisions of the Soviet constitution. They denounced the constitution as 'a product of war mongers, a conspiracy hatched against the Soviet Union and China,' because it was framed by the Nehru Government that was considered to be in the war mongers' camp through its membership of the British commonwealth. On these basic grounds they opposed the constitution and called upon the people to organise strikes, processions and demonstrations against it. Nehru saw these demonstrations as a political provocation for disrupting the administration something which was not acceptable to him. The differences between them widened further.

In the debates of the Assembly the communists saw a struggle between two opposing forces—democracy and authoritarianism—waged by mass of the people on the one hand and a handful of vested interests on the other. They did observe that Nehru led the liberal elements and they

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34 Crossroads, Jan. 13, 1950, op. cit., p. 3.
35 Crossroads, Dec. 16, 1949, op. cit., p. 3.
distinguished Nehru from Patel who led the rightists in the Assembly. Nehru was considered to be the leader of the former trend supporting the mass of the people while Patel guided the interests of the handful of vested group. But they did not cooperate with Nehru because the compromise between the two factions was unacceptable to them.

It is interesting to note that both Nehru and the communists were aware of the differences among members of the Assembly. Nehru did not press his views too far lest they should go against national interests and unity. He stressed on the need to achieve the objectives in unanimity and cooperation because he wanted to maintain the unity of the nation, an idea that had dominated the Congress throughout the struggle for freedom. The same principles guided Nehru's approach to constitution making. Moreover, Nehru was also the Prime Minister, and had the responsibility of steering the country through the most difficult and trying period. Serious differences on constitutional provisions could threaten party unity and weaken the government. Compromise was thus inherent in the logic of the situation.

Such compromises on vital issue of the provisions of the constitution were, however, not acceptable to the communists. They were thus unable and unwilling to cooperate with Nehru. In this context they not only differed with Nehru but there

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were differences even among the communists themselves. Some of them even challenged the right of the Assembly to frame a constitution, whereas Nehru was ready to compromise, because the Assembly and not British Parliament was to frame the constitution. Both the communists and Nehru were convinced that the Assembly was a non-revolutionary body created by the British but Nehru never accepted this as a threat and was confident to carry its proceedings free from the interference of the British. The communists on the other hand could never reconcile on this issue and always apprehended the British dominance.

The constitution was not the only area of differences and conflict between Nehru and the communists during the early post-independence period. A more serious source of conflict was provided by Telangana in the state of Hyderabad. Telangana in fact represents the first major confrontation between them. Here the differences in the order of their priorities became more clear and sharp. For Nehru the Hyderabad problem was essentially a political problem caused by the hesitant attitude of the Nizam to accede to the Indian Union. The increased activities of the communists within the State in the form of the Telengana movement posed an additional problem. Nehru, as we shall see,

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38 Jyoti Basu in West Bengal Legislative Assembly, Sept. 1, 1948, quoted in Umakant Tivary, The Making of the Indian Constitution (Allahabad: Central Book Depot, 1961), p. 33; S. V. Ghate later revealed that they wanted the Constituent Assembly to frame a constitution for India; See S. V. Ghate, Transcript of Interview, Recorded on July 9, 1970, p. 218, NMML.
concentrated on the former but did not and could not afford to ignore the unrest caused by the movement. For the communists it was the other way round. They initiated their activities in the form of a movement against the oppressions of the feudal system and the Nizams' regime and then politicised it by adding to it the issue of accession. The analysis below makes it evident that with different orders of priorities the confrontation between Nehru and the communists was inevitable.

The accession issue of the Hyderabad state located in the heart of India, was quite different from the similar issue in the case of Junagadh and Kashmir which lay on the border of India. The refusal of the Nizam to accede to the Indian union posed a serious challenge to India's territorial unity. In the case of most other states it was not so partly because of the firm and adapt handling by Sardar Patel and partly because most princes saw reason and acceded to the Indian Union.

Nehru was deeply concerned about the indecision of the Nizam to accede to the Indian Union because besides being a threat to India's territorial unity it was a challenge to his clear stand of not recognising the independence of any princely state within India. He was determined not to tolerate Hyderabad as a sovereign unit because he considered independent states dangerous from the defence point of view.
The communist movement in Telengana began in 1946 as an agrarian unrest against feudal princely order, before the issue of accession came to the fore. The movement disturbed Nehru because of the violence involved which challenged his conviction about the primacy and legitimacy of constitutional means for social change. He also could not afford to give the impression either in the country or abroad that political ends could be achieved by violence and terror. However, Nehru also realised that Telengana could not be treated as a purely political issue. He also saw the communist violence as a symptom of the evils of the agrarian structure and poverty. Hence he stressed on the need to raise the standard of living and to introduce land reforms to give social stability. He fully understood that along with public safety measures it was important to pursue sound economic policies.

Guided by these broad perspectives Nehru faced the challenge posed by the Hyderabad state. To achieve the accession of the state as the prior objective Nehru evolved a strategy based on the general lines laid down in regard


to the accession of states.\textsuperscript{41} For achieving peaceful accession, various rounds of negotiations were held which resulted in a Standstill Agreement, essentially a temporary arrangement which maintained the status quo. Permanent solution, that is, accession, however, remained elusive despite Nehru's constant endeavour. Drastic solution, police action was taken only when protracted negotiations produced no result and there was a considerable deterioration in the law and order situation in the state.

The communists supported Nehru's refusal to recognise the independence of any state and they believed that Nehru would use the influence and resources of his Government to force the princes to join the Union and aid people's struggle against the princes who wished to declare independence. They opposed Nizam's refusal to accede to Indian Union and believed that thereby he was affirming his loyalty to the British empire.

For a proper analysis of the Telengana movement and the communist attitude towards Nehru's Hyderabad policy it is necessary to divide the movement in two phases. The first phase is related to the situation before the Indian Government intervened in September, 1948 and the second phase relates to the post-accession period marked by the confrontation of mighty forces of the state and the communists in Telengana.

\textsuperscript{41} Nehru's statement in Parliament, \textit{The Tribune}, March 15, 1948, p. 3.
Even before the issue of accession arose the communists had centred their activities in Telengana where they started and intensified a peasant agitation against the autocratic regime of the Nizam and the oppression of his bureaucratic officials. The movement was described as an agrarian uprising with land reform as its slogan, organised around the demands of the peasants against evictions and oppressive feudal extortions. To the movement for land reforms against feudal exploitation they later added the campaign against Nizam's autocratic regime when with the demand for the merger of the state becoming a major issue the communists decided to intensify the struggle initiated in Telengana. They considered it an opportunity full of new possibilities of developing the Telengana people's struggle into a full fledged politico-economic struggle. The Congress also launched a political struggle in Hyderabad to bring pressure on the Nizam to accede to the Indian Union. 42

The communists offered a mixed bag of reactions to Governments' policy on the issue of accession. No doubt they supported Nehru on accession they were critical of the continuing efforts at peaceful negotiations and appealed for the termination of talks. Dissatisfied as they were with Nehru's strategy of negotiations they considered the 'Standstill Agreement' as a surrender of the Indian leaders

42 P. Sundarayya, Telengana People's Struggle and Its Lessons (Calcutta: Desraj Chadha, on behalf of the CPI, 1972), p. 56.
to the blackmail tactics of the Nizam.\(^{43}\) As the negotiations dragged on they became critical of Nehru and dubbed the negotiations as a conspiracy of the Nizam and collaborators of imperialism against the people. They felt that protracted negotiations in the name of accession sacrificed the real democratic right of the people—the right to liquidate Nizam's autocracy and establish a democratic rule.\(^{44}\) In fact, they believed that the struggle against the Nizam had almost reached a decisive phase because the repression and people's resistance to it had grown considerably in the State.

Giving primary importance to the struggle against Nizam's atrocities, they demanded firm and immediate action by the Government. Interesting enough however, when Nehru did take the police action, they condemned him for delayed action and suspected it to be a weapon against their own activities. Nehru also knew that the action had been delayed, but that had happened because the problem of Hyderabad deserved dispassionate and balanced assessment of all unforeseen problems that were likely to crop up in the event of a possible Indo-Hyderabad armed conflict.\(^{45}\)

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\(^{43}\) *People's Age*, November 30, 1947, vol. vi (22), p. 4.


\(^{45}\) Nehru appealed to curb the tendency to exaggerate events in Hyderabad. He pointed out that the reason that impelled them to take action was not fundamentally the political reason but because inside Hyderabad and on the border, conditions were worsening that were effecting the South India and to some extent most of India. Nehru, Press Conference, New Delhi, Sept. 10, 1948. *The Tribune*, September 11, 1948, pp. 1, 8.
The communists viewed the 'police action' in Hyderabad as a double edged sword that could be used against the Nizam as well as against them. It was a 'bourgeois' intervention on the plea of curbing Razakar violence and achieve accession but they felt that it was intended to curb their movement as well. Nehru in their view intended to isolate the people from the communists and thus crush their movement. The true aim of the Nehru Government, according to the communists, was to wipe out their movement and retain the old rotten feudal structure of Nizam. They pointed out that Nehru Government had been able to create confusion among the people by concealing the true aims of the Police Action. The hypocritical professions and base slanders of the Nehru Government against communists made it difficult for them to cope up with the situation.46 In the communist interpretation the army intervened to stop the onward march of history, to save the Nizam, the oppressive feudal order and the bourgeois feudal rule from the rising tide of the forces of the democratic revolution.47 They even felt that the atrocities of the 'Nehru - Patel Regime' overshadowed even the Nizam-Razakar regime.48 Thus the communist understanding that Police Action in Hyderabad was directed as much against the Nizam as against them was not totally unfounded in view of

46 Some old Questions about Telengana by Old Man and Co. PHQ Open Forum: No. 17, Nov. 27, 1950, 1950/167, pp. 2, 3, ACHI, JNU.


48 "On Telengana" The Report prepared by one of the PCM's of Andhra P. C. Information Document No. 2, October 7, 1950. ACHI, JNU.
Nehru's own statement.

Communist criticism of Nehru's action despite the fact that they had earlier demanded it can be explained in terms of the theoretical formulations contained in the Political Thesis of 1948. From the general proposition that India had attained no real independence Ranadive advanced the thesis that the Communist Party of India must promote the armed insurrection blazing in Telengana into a full scale revolutionary war. They considered the 'Telengana way' a big landmark in the history of the struggles under the leadership of the party. As Ranadive himself stated, "Here we took the struggle to new qualitative heights with exemplary organization. Circles close to the Nizam tremble before the name of Telengana, for, Telengana today means communists and communists mean Telengana." 49

The communist view of the situation at the time of the entry of Indian forces followed the 1948 thesis. The masses were under the reformist influence of the Congress which strengthened the prevailing illusions about the leadership of the Indian Union. The communists directed their activities to smash the illusions of the masses by exposing the 'compromising character' of Nehru's policies. 50 They posed as the


uncompromising fighters against the Nizam and upheld the Telengana peasants as the revolutionary uncompromising fighters.

The communists stood on these basic formulations to liquidate Nizam's autocracy and opposed its retention in any form. In the process their priorities were evident in the slogan, 'Land to the Tiller, Power to the People, Forward Along Telengana Way.'

They wanted to solve all the problems together but emphasised on the liquidation of autocracy because this was the initial issue involved in the struggle while the issue of accession cropped up later on.

Ranadive believed that Nehru aimed at resolving the issue of accession only and not the liquidation of autocracy. He apprehended that the Government would leave autocracy intact provided Nizam agreed to accede. He further complained, 'Some years back Nehru used to characterise the feudal states as the fifth columns of the imperialists and as enemies of Indian freedom but today Nehru Government is eulogising the same feudal lords. He is betraying the people by entering into compromise with the State (Hyderabad) while their autocracy and exploitation are being kept intact.'

They launched a virulent propaganda


against Nehru and his Government which was characterised as capitalist.

Nehru noticed the changes proposed in the 1948 thesis and their activities in the State and understood the communist views. The reaction of Nehru and the Indian Government was inevitable. The real purpose of the communist activities was political—to create anarchical conditions by dislocating the economic life of the people. This policy was carried on under the pretext of solving agrarian problem.  

Nehru also charged the communists of siding with reactionary elements and of participating, in collusion with the Razakaras, in committing crimes against peaceful and law abiding people. Nehru remarked, "The communists consider themselves ... very revolutionary ... but I consider them counter-revolutionary ... Far from being revolutionary (they) are actually conservative." Nehru justified the arrest and detention of many communists. In his opinion, 'communists had functioned in such a way that exceedingly irritated all types of opinion in India.' They were the indirect allies of the


54 Dorothy Norman, Nehru: The First Sixty Years (Bombay: Asia, 1965), vol. ii, p. 203.

traitors. Nehru condemned the communist tactics of open inducement to violence, exploitation of agrarian unrest, increasing labour trouble and resort to murder, arson and sabotage, all utterly disruptive coercive and full of suffering. The Communist Party, in his view, was determined to create chaotic conditions in the country through sabotage of the railway system and other communication facilities. He accused the party of deliberately seeking to create famine conditions through paralysis of the railways.

Nehru felt that the communists agitation had harmed communism since it was against every natural nationalist urge of the Indian people. He said, "It has set the whole of the nationalist movement against it. It has adopted methods which are completely violent and in the nature of rebellion or petty rebellion because it has not the strength for a big one." Mass movement of the communists appeared...
to him to have developed into an anti-national campaign, worse than an open rebellion and aimed at total disruption which would result in widespread chaos, regardless of consequences. He also believed that the Communist Party had adopted a wrong course from its own viewpoint and had proved to be the 'greatest enemy of Communism in India.'

To deal with the communist activities government took effective steps by declaring the communist organisation unlawful in Hyderabad. The strongholds of the agrarian agitation in Telengana and other places in the State were attacked. The Government tried to divert the movement away from militant path into constitutional channels by showing the way they could deal with their government in power. The government decided to take steps to suppress the agrarian movement in Telengana and stop it from spreading to other areas.

The communists strongly denounced the Government onslaught. They felt that the principal aim of the government was to destroy the popular democratic peasant movement. Nehru government was condemned for instituting 'naked fascist autocracy in Hyderabad.' The Government measures were seen


as repressive, anti-communist slander and fascist offensive against the working class at the dictates of Anglo-American capital. They strongly protested against the arrests of their leaders and demanded their release. Not only this they also argued that India was a colonial and semi-feudal country with a government that represented the anti-national big bourgeoisie and feudal classes.

To the communists the surrender of the Nizam was no spectacular achievement since it offered no change as the Nizam and the feudal order remained intact even after the surrender. The nawabs and jagirdars had been installed in the political set up in collaboration with extremely reactionary capitalist elements. The aim of the Nizam and the Congress compromisers was to keep the autocracy intact.

However, strong criticism notwithstanding, the failure of the Telengana struggle became obvious as the movement began to fizzle out as a result of government action and led the communists to re-examine their strategy. In view of the strong measures of the Government the communists were confused whether to continue the armed guerrilla resistance against the Government in defence of peasants, land and other democratic gains or to surrender. It was clear to them that the 'Telengana way' had failed. The allegations that in the name of accession the


communists had been strengthening their own power base were not unfounded. As pointed out earlier they considered it their opportunity, and a new possibility of developing the Telengana struggle into people's struggle. Later party sources reveal that the communists had viewed the Telengana struggle as a liberation struggle even against Nehru and the Indian State and saw in it the beginning of the people's democratic revolution as in China. But they soon realised that they could not overthrow the national government by armed assault since the government was powerful enough to suppress their uprising.

They supported their new realisation with the theoretical argument that correlation of forces had changed with the merger of the state in the Indian Union. Hence, the liberation struggle against the Nizam could not transform itself into a liberation struggle against Nehru. They argued that they should have confined their struggle to achieving land reforms with full support to the gains of the peasantry. The party failed to lead the movement on correct lines and they felt that 'Telengana way in reality is not the Chinese way.' It is interesting to note that Stalin and other leaders of CPSU were also of the opinion that after the overthrow of the Nizam's regime and merger of the state with the Union it was sectarian and incorrect to continue the liberation struggle against the

64 Infra, f. n. 42.

Indian Union for establishing people's democracy. Evidently their own experience and the Soviet interpretation of the situation led the Indian communists to re-evaluate their stand. They also had the opportunity to discuss the issue with the leaders of CPSU and Stalin.

The shift in the communist attitude became obvious when they offered negotiations with a charter of demands as a pre-condition to the withdrawal of the struggle. However, this could not be done without providing arguments supporting their changed stand. They pointed out that the shift in their attitude was in the interest of the masses and preservation of peace in the area. However, the government, suspicious of their intentions, rejected the offer because of the continued armed rebellion. The communists regarded Government's silence as its 'refusal to return to democratic ways and to continue to serve the landlords through the military regime it has installed.'

Ultimately in October 1951 the communists withdrew their struggle unconditionally which any way had begun to peter out because of continued offensive operations and the vigilance of the security forces. Gopalan explained the decision to

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call off the struggle as a measure against the false anti-
communist propaganda intended to deprive the people of their
legitimate rights to participate in the general elections. To
remove the adverse image created by their violent activities
in Telengana, they issued statements and passed resolutions
to disapprove individual or 'squad terrorism' in Telengana. 69
This, however, did not convince Nehru and the circles close
to him. Even after the shift in their tactics, Nehru found
no change in the fundamental communist strategy of seizing
power through violence. Nehru's conviction was not unfounded
and may be supported by Dange's words, "Violent means are not
unconstitutional and any suggestion of constitutional means is
an innovation in the Constitution of India." 70

In fact, communist pronouncements bring out clearly that
they withdrew the struggle for two reasons. They were prompted
by the important consideration of participating in the elections
which were to be held in 1952. They could not have participated
in the elections without returning to constitutionalism. The
elections also offered them an opportunity to stage an
honourable withdrawal from a revolutionary adventure that had

69 A. K. Gopalan, Press Conference, Oct. 23, 1951, Crossroads,
Oct. 26, 1951, vol. iii (25), pp. 1, 3. For his view on CPI's
opposition to terrorists activities see, The Bombay Chronicle,
July 28, 1951, p. 4, Ajoy Ghosh also explained the communist
efforts to restore peaceful condition in Telengana see Crossroads,
Nov. 23, 1951, vol. iii (29), p. 3.

proved to be a 'fiasco.' And they could also prove their loyalty to India about which doubts had been raised by many including Nehru himself. Elections also offered an opportunity to take the communist message and programme to the masses and thus expand their popular support. Moreover, the communists realised that the government measures had weakened their struggle (though these measures were severely condemned), and they saw it prudent to withdraw. They felt that 'people were being decimated. There were no arms and no place (to hide) and so we said that the best thing is to withdraw the struggle...'

The above analysis of the Telengana struggle reveals frequent shifts in the communist tactics and strategy. Ranadive and his followers considered the insurrectionary struggle of Telengana type imperative in Indian conditions. As a mass uprising led by its leaders it was a symptom of the phase of insurrectionary struggle. This was a shift from the previous stand of the


72 A typical comment on the measures reads, "It was a new campaign of repression in Telengana... the publicity campaign is intended to provide a thick smoke screen to cover up the intensified repression and terror that is being let loose to crush the peasant Movement for land, food and democracy" *Crossroads*, March 31, 1950, vol. i (30), p. 14.


communists under Joshi to seek co-operation wherever it could be found with the progressive wing of the Congress. Ranadive and his followers asserted their authority when they anticipated the collapse of the Nizam Government. They continued their insurrectionary activities and the Andhra communists claimed that 'their struggle was 'the dogged resistance and prolonged civil war in the form of an agrarian revolution culminating in the capture of the political power by democratic front.' But when they found themselves incompetent to match the Government resources they moved towards the withdrawal and offered negotiations. Evidently the Telengana struggle could not be converted into a liberation struggle against Nehru. They then maintained that the peasant struggle in Telengana was for the removal of the feudal oppression and not for the removal of the Nehru Government, thereby marking another shift.

Telengana, instead of strengthening their hold undermined the communist position in many ways. The withdrawal revealed differences within their own ranks and it was much against the wishes of even some of the 'hawks.' Prior to the entry of the Indian forces several leading members of the Politbureau were of the opinion that the guerilla struggle should be discontinued but provincial leadership considered them reformist and foisted

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76 S. V. Ghate, Transcript of Interview, op. cit., pp. 222-23.
their own adventurist policy. But their activities did not have the desired impact and the tactics were not pursued in other areas. The movement was confined to the landless and the poor peasantry and did not protect the interest of other classes. Obviously the support was not coming from all the classes because except for land and armed struggle it had no perspective before it. It could not seize power through the movement in urban areas and rather encouraged the Government to take stern measures against them. Instead of strengthening and broadening the mass movement, the new tactics led to widespread loss of support. Joshi reported that the party became detached from its own class. 'This rapidly increasing isolation only drove the CPI to further adventures that brought further repression and further isolation.'

B. N. Mullik believed that the communists' fatal fault was their firm conviction that Nehru was a reactionary, that India's independence was only a sham independence and that India was still a lackey of Anglo-American imperialism and that democracy was false which gave no liberties to the people. The Communists too realised that the proper lines for their


effort to regroup the scattered movement in Telengana were, first, to have joined the Congress leaders in the struggle for merging the state in the Indian union and giving it a mass character, then developing it into an anti-feudal and anti-Nizam agrarian revolt and later into the liberation struggle against Nizam's rule. P. Sundarayya was of the opinion that the Andhra Unit of the Party reoriented the scattered movement on these lines from the inception of the movement till the party was banned in January, 1948.80

The Communist undertaking in Telengana further widened the gap in their relationship with Nehru. He rebuked their party and associated Communism with violence more strongly than ever before. He confessed that he had not the least feeling against the communists but was disgusted at the way they carried on their activity in Telengana; the most violent activity that lacked integrity and decency.' He refused to submit to the threats of violence and incitement to active revolt from any quarter. Keeping larger interest in view Nehru could not have tolerated for long the persistent undermining of lawfully constituted authority. He could not afford to give subversive elements any latitude at the initial stage after independence. No doubt the communists later decided to withdraw their struggle as they realised that it could not succeed but it surely concerned Nehru deeply. He

80 P. Sundarayya, Telengana People's Struggle and Its Lessons, op. cit., p. 55.
knew that the settlement with Nizam was not an easy affair and remarked that the question of Hyderabad is one which has given us the greatest difficulty. Later events proved beyond doubt that the settlement with the communists too was not an easy affair. By constantly observing their activities he was disgusted and saw no purpose in bringing communism to India.

Telengana represents the first major confrontation between Nehru and the Indian communists. Both adopted stands which made confrontation inevitable. The communists were following their theory that violence was a necessary part of peoples revolution and more particular they were influenced by Mao's dictum that power lies in the barrel of the gun. The fact that they failed does not necessarily negative their theory because they followed wrong tactics. At best the insurrection was premature considering the level of peasant mobilisation. Even if it could succeed in Telengana, there was no chance of 'Telengana way' spreading elsewhere in the country. The movement was doomed to failure.

The Telengana struggle underlines the communist understanding of class struggle as the principal mode of achieving political power and their rigid understanding of Nehru and the Congress as bourgeois. Nehru's handling of the movement tellingly showed

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81 The Tribune, March 15, 1948, p. 3.

how and under what circumstances a repentent bourgeois can turn repressive.

For Nehru, the unity and integrity of India enjoyed primacy over socio-economic change although he was not ignorant of the importance of the latter for the former. Also his nationalism suggested constitutional means for change and a total rejection of violent methods. He also condemned violence as a solution probably because he realised that violence would not pay specially in a country with traditional regard for the sanctity of all forms of life. The fact that he was also the Prime Minister of India, reinforced his convictions and priorities. He could not afford to weaken India's unity nor allow 'Telengana Way' to gain legitimacy. Suppression of the insurrection was not only logical but also inevitable.

Even if Telengana widened the gap in their relationship, it was not to prove a serious irritant for future relationship. The first general elections of 1952 provided a way out. The CPI's decision to contest elections and convert the party into a mass party signified the acceptance of constitutional means for socio-economic change and acquisition of power through ballot instead of bullet. Elections provided the way to move from confrontation to competition for political power and popularity, as we shall see in our next chapter.