CHAPTER I

COMMINTERN AND THE INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS
Soviet Ideological Legacy - Marxism-Leninism on National Liberation Struggle:

It has become rather common to project the Marxist-Leninist theory of Communism as the opposite of nationalism. Marxism-Leninism has, however, been wrongly criticised for its negative approach to the national factor. It is forgotten that Marx had ridiculed the "supernational" outlook of the French Proudhonists and some French sociologists like Lafargue who called nationality an "antiquated" prejudice. In the International Council of the First International in 1866 Marx took the French ultra-socialists to task for rejecting nationality as an outdated prejudice.

The credit for advocating the idea of national self-determination rightly goes to Marx and Engels who always supported the right of the oppressed peoples to independent statehood. Thus Marx defended the cause of Irish and Italian independence. Engels supported the independence of the colonial peoples as well. "No nation can be free if it oppresses others" -- said Marx. In one of his early articles published for the first time in the U.S.S.R. in 1955 Engels declared that the proletariat of the oppressing country must join forces with the national liberation movement.

3. Ibid., p.356.
movement. This idea was further developed by Marx in his letter to Kuglemann (29 November, 1869) and to Meyer and Vogat (9 April, 1870).

But Marx and Engels supported the cause of national freedom in the overall interest of the struggle for democracy. It was for this reason that while supporting the national aspirations of Italy, Poland, Germany and Hungary they opposed the movements of the Czechs and the Southern Slavs as the latter were exploited by Tsarism to further its reactionary objectives in Europe. They favoured the cause of Polish independence as the separation of Poland from Russia would have undermined the strength of Tsarist Russia -- the gendarme of European reaction.

The First Socialist International founded by Marx included the right of national self-determination in its programme adopted in September 1865. It declared the urgent necessity of eliminating the growing influence of Russia in Europe by assuring Poland the right of self-determination "which belongs to every other nation". The London Congress of the Second International also confirmed the right of national self-determination in 1896. But the Congress in Paris in 1900 did not reiterate it and the Amsterdam Congress in 1904 replaced it by demand for independence of the colonial people "to the extent compatible

with their state of development". At the Stuttgart Conference it was just confined to a pious wish "to prepare the natives for independence". While Kautsky paid lip service to it, Bauer and Rennder distorted it into "cultural-national autonomy".

Lenin who was opposed to a general stand of unmitigated hostility towards nationalism pleaded for subjecting it to a scientific study, i.e., a concrete analysis of its concrete forms and not just an abstract discussion about it. In his work, The Right of Nations To Self-Determination, he wrote: "The bourgeois nationalism of any oppressed nation has a general democratic content that is directed against oppression, and it is this content that we unconditionally support. At the same time we strictly distinguish it from the tendency towards national exclusiveness...." 7

At the same time, Lenin in several of his other works expressed categorical hostility to any and all forms of nationalism. Thus for example, he wrote that in Marxism, "all chauvinism and nationalism will find an implacable enemy ...." 8 He also declared that Marxists "resolutely oppose nationalism in all the forms ...." 9 At the first glance, there appears to be a contradiction in the division

8. Ibid., Vol.18, p.421.
of nationalism by Lenin into "progressive" and "reactionary" and his opposition to nationalism in all its forms. But Lenin distinguished between the reactionary essence of nationalism and the possibility of its relative progressiveness in its concrete historical content. To him in the final analysis nationalism was in conflict with the truly revolutionary tendency. Yet the concrete historical content of nationalism though related to and determined by its reactionary essence was something considerably broader. It may in part encompass relatively progressive democratic elements to which Lenin referred to as meriting support. Lenin's assessment of democratic factors in the concrete historical content of nationalism should not be mixed up with the entire social phenomenon of nationalism which is generally reactionary.

Marxism-Leninism makes a distinction between the "national" and the "nationalist". The latter is a "false one-sided and egoistical reflection of the national". While consistently opposing the nationalists for trying to absolutise the transient in the narrow class interest of the dominant exploiting class, Lenin also criticised those socialists who sought to oppose the fight for "puresocialism" to the national struggle. He wrote: "To imagine that a social revolution is conceivable without revolts by small nations in the colonies and in Europe, without the revolutionary outbursts of a section of the petty bourgeoisie with all its prejudices, without the movement of
non-class conscious proletarian and semi-proletarian against the oppression of the landlords, the church, the monarchy, foreign nations etc. -- to imagine this means repudiating social revolution. Only those who imagine that in one place an army will line up and say, "we are for socialism", and in another place another army will say, "we are for imperialism", and that this will be the social revolution, only those who hold such a ridiculously pedantic opinion, could vilify the Irish Rebellion by calling it a 'putsch'. Whoever expects a 'pure' social revolution will never live to see it. Such a person pays lip service to revolution without understanding what revolution is.\(^{10}\)

Lenin put forth the idea of supporting the really revolutionary bourgeois-democratic forces in the colonies subject to the condition of safeguarding the organisational and ideological independence of the Communists. It was Lenin who formulated the basis for the creation of an anti-imperialist united front. In the Colonial Commission of the Second Congress of the Comintern Lenin disagreed with M.N. Roy, Serrati and Sultanzade who argued that the support to the national movement headed by the national bourgeoisie would "only lead to the weakening of the proletarian class

on the contrary wished to see the Communists in the oppressed countries become the vanguard in the struggle for national independence. In his opinion the awakening national consciousness of the oppressed people had a progressive role.

Lenin's advice to the Communists in the colonies ran like this: "You will have to base yourself on the bourgeois nationalism which is awakening, and must awaken, among those peoples, and which has its historical justification." He also warned them against the consequences of a hasty attempt to give "a communist colouring to bourgeois-democratic liberation trends in the backward countries".

Lenin always pleaded for a creative search for more effective forms and means of struggle for socialism in consonance with national conditions and urged the Communists to apply the general principles of scientific socialism in a way that would "correctly modify these principles in certain particulars, correctly adopt and apply them to national and national-state distinctions". Lenin also

13. Ibid., Vol.31, p.149.
wrote, "all nations will arrive at socialism -- this is inevitable -- but all will do so in not exactly the same way, each will contribute something of its own to some form of democracy, to some variety of dictatorship of the proletariat, to the varying rate of social transformations in the different aspects of social life".\(^{15}\)

Marxism-Leninism subscribes to the principle of proletarian internationalism which, however, does not come in the way of Communist Parties of the different countries taking a prominent part in the struggle for national freedom and democracy. The international character of communism is nothing but the carrying forward by the working class of the banner of the international brotherhood first raised by the bourgeoisie while fighting against the feudal monarchs and tyrants. An emphasis on the basic unity of the working class in different countries does not mean disregard for the national specifics.

The dialectical unity of the national and the international, the national and the social is becoming more and more closer in the present-day conditions of the struggle of the two world systems of capitalism and socialism. The fusion in our epoch of the two interconnected tasks -- anti-colonial (national) struggle and the struggle for social progress has resulted in the emergence of a new type

\(^{15}\) Ibid., Vol.23, pp.69-70.
of revolution designated in the Marxist literature as the national democratic revolution. In many Third World Countries the realisation of national goals through the deepening of social changes has become characteristic of the contemporary political process. Anti-imperialism is increasingly showing signs of growing into anti-capitalism.

Comintern's Efforts to forge Cooperation with the Indian National Congress and Reasons for their Failure:

The October Revolution greatly changed the international environment and created conditions favourable for the formation of the Third International. The assault on imperialism, wage slavery and colonial oppression, needed organisation and consolidation of revolutionary forces on a world scale.

In January 1918 the first meeting for organising the Comintern was held in Petrograd followed by another meeting in Moscow in January 1919. On the evening of 2 March 1919 the first Congress of the Comintern opened in the Kremlin. Fifty two delegates from 35 organisations of 21 countries of Europe, America and Asia took part in it. Representatives of the oppressed peoples of Persia, China, Korea and Turkey participated in it. No representative from India, however, participated in the Congress.

The First Comintern Congress did not adopt any document on the colonial question, but the guidelines of the
Communist International stated in clear terms that "the Comintern considers it its obligatory task to establish a permanent and close bond between the struggle of the proletariat in the imperialist countries and the national liberation movement of the oppressed peoples in the colonies and semi-colonies and to support the struggle of the oppressed peoples to facilitate the final breakdown of the imperialist world system".  

Indian representatives were invited to the Second Congress of the Comintern which met in Moscow in July 1920. M.N. Roy and his American wife Evelyn Roy participated as official delegates from the Communist Party of Mexico. Abani Mukherji and M.P.B.T. Acharya were delegates from British India with no right to vote. Roy, a former militant nationalist, believing in the cult of violence and armed insurrection to win India's independence, turned to Communism in a distant land. However, has fascination for the path of armed struggle still continued. Before the session of the Second Congress Roy met Lenin and discussed with him at length the subject of Communist line regarding India and the countries of the East. Their approaches differed widely. While Roy stressed the dichotomy of national and class movements, Lenin took an integrated approach. The role and place of Gandhism in anti-imperialist struggle was the crucial point of difference.

between the two. Roy records in his memoirs: "Lenin believed that, as the inspirer and leader of a mass movement he (Gandhi) was a revolutionary. I maintained that as a religious and cultural revivalist he was bound to be a reactionary socially, however, revolutionary he might appear politically." 17

Roy being the first Indian Communist to come into contact with him, Lenin naturally treated him with affection and sympathy. He asked him to draft the supplementary theses for the Second Congress of Comintern. Soviet scholar Reznikov discovered in the Party archives Roy's original draft with numerous changes made in Lenin's hand. In the light of this discovery Roy's claim that his original draft was accepted by Lenin with only "verbal alterations" and adopted by the Congress together with Lenin's theses is hardly tenable. It is clear from a comparison of the original draft of Roy's theses with its amended version as finally adopted, as well as the record of the proceedings of the plenary session of the Congress and of the Colonial Commission of the Congress that the alterations made were of a substantial character and related to such dogmatic formulations as contradicted the general line of Lenin's theses. To say that Lenin himself compromised with the sectarian approach in Roy's theses is quite incorrect. The only change which Lenin agreed to make in his thesis was

substitution of the words "national revolutionary" for the "bourgeois democratic" movement which was not a substantial change at all.

The main thrust of Roy's sectarian position at the Second Congress was that the Comintern and the Communist Parties should not support the "bourgeois democratic nationalist movements" which were limited to small middle classes but should exclusively concentrate on the building of the Communist Parties and developing the workers' and peasants' movements. Roy also argued that "without breaking up of the colonial empire in the East, the overthrow of capitalism is not possible". Lenin rejected this view and insisted that support to the national liberation movement must be combined with the fight against the bourgeois democratic compromising tendencies and the struggle for building independent class movement and the Communist Parties. Lenin's theses also stressed the necessity of combined action of the workers of Europe fighting against capitalism and of the peoples of the colonies fighting for their national freedom.

Despite his disagreement with Roy over the appraisal of the rising national movement in India under Gandhi's leadership, Lenin agreed to give a free hand to Roy to pursue his favourite plan of leading a military expedition through Afghanistan to liberate India from the British.

colonial rule. Roy expected to raise a nucleus of the Indian liberation army at Tashkent by giving military training to the Muslim Muḥajirā who left India because of the British stand against the Caliphate in Turkey.

During his brief stay in Tashkent in the autumn and early winter of 1920-21 Roy was for the first time faced with the practical problems of organising the Communist movement in the East as also the problems of establishing proletarian hegemony over the national struggle for liberation so energetically espoused by him at the Second Congress of the Comintern. Having quarrelled with Acharya and Abdur Rab, Roy was called back to Moscow along with his other compatriots.

In May 1921 when M.N. Roy reached Moscow a delegation of Indian revolutionaries consisting of representatives of the Berlin Committee was already there for talks with the Comintern. Abrur Rab and Acharya also joined this group. The Indian national revolutionaries stayed in Moscow for four months. They had several rounds of discussion with members of the Comintern Commission.

According to Roy the disapproval by the nationalist revolutionaries of the formation of C.P.I. in Tashkent and their demand for its dissolution as the condition for any cooperation gave a deadly blow to the talks in Moscow.

Roy's account, however, is not wholly satisfactory and is not corroborated by the account of Moscow talks given by Bhupendra Nath Dutta.

Roy thus continued to direct Comintern's policy towards India. He sought to influence the non-cooperation movement led by Gandhi from distant Moscow. If his experience at Tashkent prompted him to take a more cautious approach to social revolution in the colonies, the motive of consolidating his personal influence in the Comintern led him to continue his dogmatic line towards the bourgeois-led national movement in India.

Thus Roy alternated between a sectarian and a realistic attitude towards the non-cooperation movement. He set forth at length his ideas about the contemporary Indian society and the various forces operating in it in his book, India In Transition, which he finished in October 1921 (it came out of the press in April 1922 after the withdrawal of non-cooperation movement by Gandhi). In the preface to the German edition of the book, Roy declared that the liberal bourgeoisie in India would not play the revolutionary role which the European bourgeoisie played in 18th and 19th centuries. Roy accused the weak-kneed Indian bourgeoisie of concluding an alliance with imperialism in return for a promise of changes offering it better possibilities to develop as a class. 20

It must, however, be said to Roy's credit that he never advocated an extremist adventurist line following the withdrawal of the non-cooperation movement. He wanted the movement with no-tax campaign to be continued up to a general strike all over the country.

The Comintern failed to forge a working relationship with the Indian nationalists during the phase of the first mass struggle for national independence in the post-World War I period. This happened in spite of the existence of an objective basis for cooperation between the two and tremendous interest evoked in India by the ideals of the October Revolution. Roy's assessment of Gandhi and non-cooperation movement is generally criticised by both communist and non-communist writers. While the anti-communist writers describe Roy's critical attitude towards the national movement in India as indicative or inherent antipathy of communism towards nationalism, communist scholars have been critical of him for his failure to forge a cooperative relationship with the nationalist movement by distorting the correct Leninist line through his dogmatic and sectarian approach. Of course, Roy undoubtedly played the major role in giving a sectarian twist to the Comintern's policy towards the nationalist movement. Yet it would be wrong to make Roy solely responsible for this.

With the zeal of a new convert to the creed of communism, Roy was influenced by Lenin's remark about the Indian
proletariat's growing maturity. He must have also been influenced by the master's idea of hegemony of the proletariat in the bourgeois democratic revolution elaborated as far back as 1905 in his work "Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution". Later on, while elaborating his ideas on imperialism Lenin had pointed out the absence of barrier between the democratic (national) and socialist stages of the revolution in the new epoch which had brought to the fore not the bourgeoisie but the proletariat. Roy was, however, mistaken in mechanically applying these ideas to India.

Lenin's correct theoretical formulation on the dialectical link between the national and the social aspects of the revolutionary process notwithstanding, the Manifesto of the First Congress of the Comintern in which Roy had not participated had spoken of the national liberation struggle "assuming an explicitly social character". The Theses on the World Situation and the Tasks of the Comintern adopted at the Third Congress of the Comintern had also somewhat exaggerated the level of capitalist development in India in the same manner as Roy's book India in Transition. It had stated: "The vigorous development of capitalism in the East, particularly India and China has created new social bases there for the revolutionary struggle.

21. For a similar approach see Shashi Bairathi, Communism and Nationalism in India: A Study in Inter-Relationship 1919-1947, Delhi 1987, pp.40-41.
The bourgeoisie of these countries tightened their bonds with foreign capital, and so became an important instrument of its rule. Their struggle against imperialism is essentially half-hearted and feeble. The growth of the indigenous proletariat paralyses the national revolutionary tendencies of the capitalist bourgeoisie, but at the same time the vast peasant masses are finding revolutionary leaders in the person of the conscious communist vanguard.  

Thus the Comintern failed to work out a working relationship with the Indian nationalists during the first phase of beginning of the mass struggle for national independence following the World War I. Roy continued to urge a complete break with the Indian nationalists on the ground that bourgeois nationalism was bound to become conciliatory. At the Fourth Congress of the Comintern he reiterated his standpoint. Without directly rejected Lenin's ideas about tactics of the United Front Roy argued that the bourgeoisie could be the vanguard of the movement in countries where it fought against feudalism while in India it fought not against feudalism but against foreign capitalism. Roy's line on the colonial question was turned down by the Fourth Congress of the Comintern, which called upon Communists to organise trade unions in the colonial countries and cooperate.

with bourgeois agencies struggling for national liberation. In its theses on the Eastern question, the Fourth Congress stated "... the Communist International supports every national revolutionary movement against imperialism .... In the conditions prevailing in the West ... the slogan put forward is that of the proletarian United Front, but in the colonial east the slogan that must be emphasised at the present time is that of the anti-imperialist United Front ... a danger of an agreement between bourgeois nationalism and one or several rival imperialist powers is far greater in the semi-colonial countries like China or Persia, or in the countries which are fighting for their independence by exploiting inter-imperialist rivalries like Turkey, than it is in the colonies".

The Fifth Congress of the Comintern held in June-July 1924 issued a manifesto supporting the revolutionary movements of the peoples of the East. The Congress recommended in a resolution that the executive council of the Communist International must expand direct contact with the "national movements for emancipation". Roy, it may be pointed out, opposed this resolution and suggested "direct connections with the masses".

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23. Ibid., pp.82-93.
24. Ibid., pp.393-94.
At the Fifth Congress, Roy was reprimanded by Manuilsky, the Chairman of the Colonial Commission, for trying to challenge the Leninist course. He said: "Some deviations were recorded by the Commission. Roy, as at the Second Congress exaggerated the social movement in the colonies to the detriment of the national movement ... in regard to the colonial question Roy reflects the mihilism of Rosa Luxemburg. The truth is that a just proportion should be looked for between the social movement and the national movement".27

Upto the Fifth Congress Roy's attempts at changing the correct Leninist line of the Comintern on the colonial question failed. Though he himself did not attend the subsequent Sixth Congress, his views were amply voiced by other diehard dogmatists from India. This Sixth Congress was characterised by a struggle between two trends, namely, the Leninist line of the Second Congress and the sectarian challenge posed by Roy's views. Speaking at the 20th Congress of the C.P.S.U., Kuusinen, the main speaker on the Colonial question at the Sixth Congress, observed thirty years later that the Sixth Congress line "had a certain touch of sectarianism" in regard to the national bourgeoisie of the colonies and semi-colonies.

The rupture of the alliance between the Chinese Communist Party and the Kuomintang on account of the action

27. Ibid., Vol.4, No.57, 12 August 1924, p.608.
of Chiang Kai-Shek resulted in a backlash of a sectarian approach. It served as a base for the apprehension that the national bourgeoisie would inevitably betray the cause of national liberation. The Congress also stressed the hegemony of the proletariat in the revolutionary movement of the colonies which meant that it must be achieved already at the anti-imperialist stage of the struggle when the national bourgeoisie had not yet earned the odium of coming to a compromise with imperialism.

It should however be said to the credit of Kuusinen that he disagreed with those who asserted that the nationalist bourgeoisie in India had already gone over to the side of counter-revolution and united with the imperialists. Kuusinen referred to the no-tax campaign in Bardoli conducted on Gandhi's instruction, the participation of the Indian National Congress in the Anti-Imperialist League and the election of "Nehru J" as General secretary of the Indian National Congress as examples of certain revolutionary potentialities still possessed by the Indian national bourgeoisie. The idea that the national bourgeoisie was bound to betray the cause of national liberation which was a running thread through all documents of the Sixth Congress, represented a serious concession to left sectarianism. Indian delegates to the Sixth Congress, Shaukat Usmani and Somendra Nath Tagore,

took an extremely critical attitude towards Gandhi and the Indian National Congress. It was Shaukat Usmani (Sikander Sur) who called Gandhi an "agent of imperialism".

This deviation was, however, corrected at the Seventh Congress of the Comintern which reiterated the necessity of all anti-imperialist forces to unite. The Congress gave a call for the formation of a united anti-imperialist front which was to be the main task for the Communist Parties in the colonial and semi-colonial countries. G.M. Dimitrov in his report to the Congress declared: "In India the Communist must support, extend and participate in all anti-imperialist mass activities, not excluding those which are under national reformist leadership, while maintaining their political and organisational independence, they must carry on active work inside the organisations which take part in the Indian National Congress facilitating the process of crystallisation of a national revolutionary wing among them, for the purpose of further developing the national liberation movement of the Indian peoples against British imperialism". The leftist errors in the activity of the Communist Party of India were pointed out by Wang Ming who referred to them as "an example of how not to carry on the tactics of the United National Front".

29. Ibid., p.1248.

The Comintern's failure to forge cooperation with the Indian National Congress can be attributed to several factors. First of all, a great deal of confusion had been created on account of Roy's negative assessment of the role of the Indian National Congress. Even after his reluctant acceptance of Lenin's view on the progressive character of the bourgeois-led national movement in India, Roy was greatly handicapped in implementing the Comintern line of close cooperation with the Indian nationalists as he feared loss of his personal position in the Comintern which was challenged by a group of Indian nationalist revolutionaries from Berlin who had come to Moscow to seek Soviet assistance. Moreover, Roy had little first hand information about the conditions prevailing in India. On coming to know about C.R. Das's differences with Gandhi, Roy thought of appealing to the Indian National Congress at its Ahmedabad session. He advocated the formation of a broad-based legal party called the People's Party functioning within the Indian National Congress under the direction of an illegal Communist nucleus. The Communists were to enter the Congress neither as defenders of its current programme nor as advocates of a full-fledged Communist platform. They were to propagate a minimum programme of action and try to strengthen their own independent power base in order to capture the party.
A radical programme drafted by Roy was to be presented at the Gaya Congress by the Indian Communists Singaravelu and Dange. The programme aimed at combating both trends in the Congress namely inactivity resulting from the spiritualisation of politics under Gandhi's leadership and compromise under the pretext of pragmatic policies advocated by the Swarajists. As against Lenin's strategy of united front from above Roy pursued a policy of united front from below. He hoped to draw left-wing nationalists to his new party after the rejection of his radical programme by the Congress.

Roy's strategy of trying to split the Congress without first consolidating the workers' and peasants' movements and establishing an effective Communist party to lead it was impractical. His choice of Dange and Singaravelu as instruments for carrying out his policy was also wrong for they endorsed his programme half-heartedly and were reluctant to attend the Comintern Congress. Roy was also disappointed by the Swarajists. The hopes he had built on their differences with Gandhi proved illusory. The Swarajists and the No-changers reconciled their position at the Faridpur Conference where C.R. Das denounced violence.

The Comintern also failed to forge a close relationship with the Indian National Congress on account of re-emergence of the sectarian approach at the Sixth Congress of the Comintern held in 1928. This approach impeded cooperation between the Comintern and the Indian National
Congress even after the removal of M.N. Roy from the scene. Only the adoption of the course of formation of a united anti-imperialist front at the seventh Congress in 1935 paved the way for cooperation with the Indian National Congress. Little progress, however, could be made in the task of forging a united anti-imperialist national front in India because of sharp differences between the Communists' attitude to War after the Nazi invasion of the USSR.

The Indian Communists felt obliged to take a stand in favour of British military efforts in India to attain victory in a conflict which in their view involved not only the fate of the U.S.S.R. but of the entire humanity threatened by the barbaric forces of Fascism. The sophistication of their argument, however, did not carry conviction with the Indian masses which enthusiastically responded to the call of the Congress leadership to boycott Britain's military efforts in India. This doomed the united front strategy of the Communists. Even their move in 1944 to mend fences with the Indian National Congress with Gandhi's help did not succeed. The Communists were forced to quit the Congress and their relations with the latter remained estranged during the crucial phase of negotiations for transfer of power leading to the partition of the country. This estrangement was bound to influence Soviet perceptions of the Indian National Congress. The changing international environment also conditioned these perceptions.