CHAPTER – III

COMMUNIST CRITIQUE OF GANDHI

Leftism in India emerged out of the matrix of the Indian National Movement. The starting point that must be stressed was the fact that it was both a nationalist and a revolutionary movement. The left wing leadership within the Congress concentrated its entire attention on national liberation and propagated radical socio-economic changes only as a means of strengthening the nation. They believed that National independence could be restored and the nation made to flourish only through a radical socio-economic change. They were disillusioned with the conservative socio-economic ideas of the early nationalist movement as well as with the ‘anti-modern’ philosophy of Gandhi who was not only opposed to any drastic change in the traditional social hierarchy but also set his face against modern science, technology and Industrialism. The growing intellectuals within the Congress, were intent upon radical socio-economic transformation of the country, but they did not want to cast off the intrinsic values of Indian life and society. Their response to the Marxian doctrine of class struggle was, therefore, not great. They were attracted to the socialist ideology because it offered not only a programme of rapid socio-economic advancement but also provided an alternative to conservatism and capitalism.

The Communist variant of the left wing on the other hand gave its attention more on propagating class struggle and proletarian internationalism than National liberation. World War I, it was believed,
created the objective conditions for the overthrow of imperialism as a step towards the ultimate goal of world proletarian revolution - a goal more revolutionary and uncompromising than that of the radical nationalists. In the early years of the Communist movement, their overriding concern was to form a revolutionary party and bring about a revolution, but under the existing circumstances, this could hardly be done without identifying with the nationalists’ cause and forming a common platform with the national bourgeoisie.

The left wing within the Congress was an amorphous body. But all its leaders were more attracted to socialist ideas, than to the orthodox liberalism of the Congress. It can be said that the Congress left wing tended to express in two ways, one which might be termed its orthodox strain and the other its radical strain; the former tending to uphold and preserve the existing ideals of the party and the latter tending to fit it with a revolutionary ideal which was to develop out of the prevailing order. But, as Jawaharlal Nehru confessed, the left elements did not quite know how and when this new order would emerge out of the chaos.1 “We appear to be in a dissolving period of history”, he said "when the world is in labour and out of her travail will give birth to a new nation.”2

The programme of socio-economic transformation contemplated by left-wing Congressmen was to be based not on Gandhian socialism which synthesized the philosophy of Ruskin and Tolstoy with the Vaishnava ethics of non-possession and human equality, but on

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2 Ibid.
socialism in the Marxian sense of the term. According to Jawaharlal Nehru, the theory of trusteeship was "barren" because it meant that the power for good or evil remained with the self-appointed trustee. The sole trusteeship, he pointed out, that could be fair was the trusteeship of the nation and not of one individual group. The left wing elements in the Congress mostly were those who belonged to the urban intelligentsia, were sceptical about Gandhian socialism which discarded the methods of industrialization and advocated the establishment of self-governing village panchayats as the basis of an ideal society. They were attracted by Marxian socialism because it provided them a philosophy, a dogma, a scientific method of studying the socio-economic problems and, above all, a concrete programme of action in contrast to the traditional religious metaphysical way of looking at things. In conformity with the Marxian analysis of history, the Congress-Socialists diagnosed the political subjection and economic degradation of India as a direct result of Capitalist system of production and distribution. They came to realize that political freedom without economic emancipation of the masses was meaningless and that the national movement should be directed towards liquidation of all vested interests.

The one and only way of emancipating India from Capitalist-imperialist exploitation and of creating a healthy political, economic and social order was to build a new India on the foundation of Democracy and Socialism. It was only through democracy-socialism that the three maladies of the Indian body politic-political subjection, economic exploitation and social maladjustment - could be cured. Thus we see that the Congress socialists were clearly influenced by Marx, but their adherence to Marxism was only to a degree. For if their inspiration
for a socialist society came from Marx, intrinsically their ideology was rooted in the humanistic and liberal tradition of India's past. Congress socialism in fact represented a complex assortment of ideologies including Marxism, Leninism, Fabian socialism, aspects of Gandhism and Humanism. What distinguishes the Congress Socialists from the orthodox Nationalists was that they sought to yoke socialism to the chariot wheel of Indian nationalism. This socialist creation of Indian nationalism, inevitably demanded a concrete programme which was to be socialist in action and objective. And as the Congress socialists felt that the Congress could accept a socialism programme only in mutilated form, the responsibility for carrying on the struggle was bound to devolve on the masses.

In striking contrast to Congress socialism, Communism in India had not grown organically in the country's own spiritual and political climate. It came to India when a section of radical nationalists, being utterly dissatisfied with the leadership of Gandhi, started grouping for a more militant ideology and found in the Marxist-Leninist revolutionary doctrine an answer to Gandhism. When the non-cooperation Movement was called off by Gandhi consequently on the outbreak of violence at Chauri Chaura, these extremist elements felt themselves betrayed and blamed Gandhi for "pandering to the Government." And since that day, many of them lost faith in Gandhi and his technique of non-violent struggle. “If India will not have Freedom conquered by violent means"

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observes M.N. Roy "She will have to go without it." Castigating the Gandhian principle of non-violence, Elleyn also wrote “That three hundred million Indians will cheerfully endure all kicks and insults, all hunger and nakedness, all poverty and wretchedness at the hands of their exploiters, until these touched and overcome by such a demonstration of man’s innate divinity, will respond to it by throwing away their machine-guns and flesh-pots, their treasure hoards and princely power and will welcome their three hundred million brethren to a new fraternity of Man, where Liberty and Equality will rule the human race under the aegis of perfect love....Non-violence, resignation, perfect love and release from the pain of living - this is the substance of Indian philosophy handed down over the ages by a powerful caste of Kings’ priests and Philosophers who found it good to keep the people in subjection. Gandhi is nothing but an heir to this long time of ghostly ancestors – he is the perfect product of heredity and environment. His philosophy of Satyagraha is the inevitable fruit of its spiritual forebears. What is unfortunate is that Mr. Gandhi’s revived philosophy of the other worldliness coincides with the most unprecedented growth of a spirit of revolt against material privation, on the part of the Indian masses.”

Imbued by the teachings of Marx, these extremist elements had not only broken with Gandhi’s cult of non-violence but also found that their newly acquired ideas were absolutely incompatible with the whole range of Gandhian theories and attitudes. M. N. Roy was perhaps the first Communist writer to present an appraisal of Gandhism and

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identified him with the feudal class interests” and avered “that this strong instinct of preserving property rights above all betrays the class affiliation of Gandhi against the sordid inspite of his pious outbursts against the sordid materialism of modern civilization. His hostility to capitalist society is manifestly not revolutionary but reactionary. He believes in the sanctity of private property but seeks to prevent its inevitable evolution to Capitalism.”  

Another Communist intellectual, R. Palme Dutt, also identified the Congress leadership of Gandhi with the Petty bourgeoisie elements which “wished on one hand to stand forward as leaders of the masses, but also feared to break up with the property interest of the bourgeoisie.” The leaders of the International Communist Movement also hold identical views - of Gandhi and Gandhism. In an article entitled “The Constitution for the Enslavement of the Indian People and the Policy of the Indian Bourgeoisie” in the Communist International, it is observed that Gandhian teachings represented "the cowardly anti-revolutionary bourgeoisie, linked up in the landlord system, and in deadly fear of a national revolution." P. C. Joshi, another Communist intellectual, summed up Gandhism as the "outlook of negations, the policy of passivity, and the practice of subservience."

In order to appreciate their attack, it is important first to string the events that finally led to the Non-cooperation Movement.

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6 Roy, M. N., India in Transition (Bombay: Nachiketa), 1971, p. 236
7 Dutt, R. P., Modern India (London: Longman), 1927, p. 81.
8 Communist International, June 15, 1933, p. 320.
World War I (1914-1918) had serious repercussions on India in several ways. The British war effort received from India a large and generous contribution in men, money and ammunition. At the same time, the war hastened the growth of National consciousness among the people. In a speech delivered at Karachi on February 29, 1916, Mahatma Gandhi said:

“A new hope has filled the country, a hope that something is going to happen which will raise the motherland to a higher status.”

In the meantime, an event of profound significance had occurred in the Champaran district of Bihar. In response to an appeal of the riots of Champaran, who had been groaning under the oppressions of the indigo Plantations, Mahatma Gandhi went there in 1917. With the help of some leaders of Bihar, Gandhi succeeded in persuading the Government to pass the Champaran Agrarian Act of 1917 which removed age long abuses and acute miseries of a body of men. This mission of Mahatma Gandhi was also marked by some experiments in social and educational fields. At the same time, it fostered the spirit of nationalism by infusing into the minds of the common people of Champaran a spirit of awakening which is an Indispensable prerequisite for a successful national struggle. “The Champaran struggle was a proof of the fact” wrote Mahatma Gandhi, “that disinterested service of the people in any sphere, ultimately helps the country politically.”

There were agrarian troubles in other parts of India also particularly in Kheda

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11 Ibid., pp. 385-90.
taluka in Gujarat, where ryots organised satyagraha under the advice of Mahatma Gandhi.  

In return for her sacrifices in the war, India had naturally high expectations from the British Government particularly after the Montague-declaration of August 1917. In order to consult the Viceroy and to give a hearing to all the interests concerned in India's advance towards self-government, the Montague mission reached India on November 10, 1917. It formulated a joint scheme of reforms, which was published on July 8, 1918 and embodied in the Government of India Act 1919. The publication of the Montague Chemsford Report raised an angry outcry from the extremist organs. Lokmanya Tilak and Mrs. Annie Besant denounced it strongly. A special session of the Congress held in Bombay in 1918, under the Presidentship of Hasan Imam, condemned the proposals as "disappointing and unsatisfactory"13, and suggested some modifications as absolutely necessary to constitute a substantive step towards responsible government. It also decided to send delegation to England "to express the Congress views on democracy".14 These reforms proved acceptable to the moderates who formed an organization distinct from the Congress known as the Indian National Liberation Federation.

Gandhi was at first in favour of making these reforms work and the Congress decided accordingly in 1919, but certain factors soon caused considerable excitement in India. Economic troubles due to

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14 Ibid.
additional taxation and rise in prices of articles of prime necessity produced extreme hardships for the people and accentuated discontent against the rulers. Muslim discontent was deeply stirred by the Khilafat Movement on the question of dismemberment of Turkey after her defeat in World War I, Shaukat Ali and Mohammad Ali, the two brothers and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad organized the Khilafat Movement. India's hopes for a true responsible government were soon belied in the face of unmitigated governmental repression. The Rowlatt Bills were calculated to perpetuate the extraordinary powers given to the Government during the war for suppressing political activities in the country and punishing persons by depriving them of the ordinary rights and privileges of trial and defence provided by law. As a protest against these, Mahatma Gandhi organized a country wide passive resistance movement.

To put down this movement, the Government began a reign of terror particularly in the Punjab under its Lieutenant Governor Sir Michael O'Dwyer. The blackest act was committed by the Government in connection with the Meeting of the citizens of Amritsar held at Jalianwala Bagh in the afternoon of April 13, 1919. Under the orders of General R. E. H. Dyer, British troops mercilessly fired over 1650 rounds at the unarmed and defenseless people, killing 379 people. The Jalianwala Bagh massacre was indeed a dark tragedy. Even after this, the Government had no hesitation in using third degree methods on political prisoners. There were shootings, hangings and bombings from the air, while at Amritsar innocent men and women were made to crawl like worms on bellies. All these outrages naturally shocked the people of

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India and raised a strong wave of discontent throughout the country. As a protest against the atrocities in the Punjab, Rabindranath Tagore renounced Knighthood.

Under the inspiration of Mahatma Gandhi, the Indian National Movement now took a new turn. Gandhi wholeheartedly supported the Khilafat cause and there was a happy fraternization between the Hindus and Muslims, who became determined to fight together to achieve the country's freedom from alien control. At a special session of the Congress held in Calcutta in September 1920 under the Presidentship of Lala Lajpat Rai, the momentous resolution of non-cooperation was passed.\footnote{Zaidi, A. M. & S. G. Zaidi (eds.), The Encyclopaedia of the Indian National Congress, Vol. VII, 1916-1920, op. cit., p. 580.} This resolution was confirmed almost unanimously at Nagpur in December 1920.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 659-660.}

There had already been a quick and enthusiastic response to the programme of non-cooperation Movement throughout the country. It included surrender of titles and honorary offices and resignation of nominated members of the local bodies, boycott of government education institutions, law courts and the legislatures, boycott of foreign goods, adoption of Swadeshi cloth on a vast scale and revival of hand Spinning, and defined its objective as "the attainment of Swaraj by the people of India by all legitimate and peaceful means."\footnote{Ibid., pp. 659-670.}

Under the guidance of Gandhi, the non-cooperation movement made remarkable progress as a mass struggle. Students left colleges and schools in large numbers. More national education institutions were
established at different places, many lawyers gave up practice, the most prominent being Moti Lal Nehru and Deshbandu C. R. Das and about two-thirds of the voters did not participate in the elections held in 1920.

To conciliate the Indians, the British sent the Prince of Wales to India. He landed in Mumbai on November 17, 1921, but India refused to welcome a representative of the system of which she was "sick unto death". As a mark of discontent against the Government, people observed hartal all over the country, and when the Prince visited the provincial capitals, all the streets were deserted.\(^{19}\)

There followed a mounting wave of passive resistance and civil disobedience in different parts of the country. Mahatma Gandhi still advised to "hasten slowly" and asked the people to create an atmosphere of proper non-violent Movement. At the All India Congress Committee Meeting at New Delhi on November 4 and 5, 1921, a decision was taken that every province would undertake the civil disobedience Movement on its own including non-Payment of taxes. Mahatma Gandhi, as a supreme leader of the Movement, would undertake the experiment at Bardoli.\(^{20}\) However, before this could take place, an infuriated mob burnt a police station at Chauri Chura, and Gandhi called off the Movement under the pretext that it was turning violent. Gandhi at once came into criticism from all quarters. All communists had criticized Gandhi for calling off the non-cooperation Movement, and since all of them argued


more or less on the same lines, it would be sufficient to analyse the views of the two leading Indian Marxists of yester-years namely M. N. Roy and Rajni Palme Dutt.

In his book "India in Transition". M. N. Roy says, "For the first time in its history, the Indian National Movement entered into a period of active struggle and in doing so, it had to call upon the masses of the people. A national strike cannot be carried on with any effect, by the lower middle class which too is very small in India. The time for mass action was ripe. Economic forces together with other objective causes, had created an atmosphere in which a spontaneous response could be expected to a call for a national strike. Had this step been taken several years earlier, there would have been hardly any response. Gandhi did not think of backing up the Congress-League demands of 1916 by a hartal, not even by a big demonstration. Great ideas originate and are conditioned by prevailing material conditions. In 1919, the state of affairs was such that the idea of a national strike could be conceived. A considerable portion of the population was in an inflammable state."\(^{21}\) In other words, Roy argued that Gandhi’s role was very minimal in organizing the masses - the powder magazine was there, and Gandhi set it on fire.

According to Roy, the mighty mass revolt, scared the moderates, who were not slow in issuing a manifesto condemning the hartal, which, apparently a demonstration against the Government, was essentially a great social upheaval which would run against the moderates’ class interests. Roy felt they were mainly from the bourgeoisie, Roy also says

that Gandhi himself appeared to have surmised instinctively the
dangerous character to be eventually assumed by the mighty forces
which he was instrumental in invoking. Therefore, from the very
beginning, he firmly took his stand on the ground that truth should be
followed by refraining from "violence to property." Roy writes, "This
strong instinct of preserving property rights, above all, betrays the class
affiliation of Gandhi in spite of his pious outbursts against the sordid
materialism of modern civilization." Roy felt that Gandhi’s hostility to
Capitalist society was not revolutionary but reactionary and that he
believed in the sanctity of Private property but sought to present its
evolution to capitalism. He felt that a radical cure of that civilization so
heartily hated by Gandhi could be effected not by returning to a
backward stage of society based upon private property but by
eliminating property rights, roots and branch. And before altogether
eliminating private property, it would have to go through successive
stages of evolution, the highest being capitalism. Roy says, "Gandhi
embodies both Revolution and Reaction, he must perish in the fierce
clash." Thus Roy felt that Gandhi represented the Indian bourgeoisie
which was standing between two fires - on one side, the great social
upheaval fomented by the rising tide of mass energy which Gandhi
endeavours to manipulate according to the requirement of its own
benefit and convenience; on the other side stands the Imperial Power
intent upon maintaining its political and economic hegemony; but at the
same time showing its inclination to compromise. The unbridled
advance of the first alone, he felt, could deliver the death blow to
Imperial domination as it spelt a serious menace to the design of the

22 Ibid.
23 Ibid.
nationalist bourgeoisie, while to enter into a compromise with the Imperial Capitalist was not a bad idea. But the Indian bourgeoisie by itself was too weak to make the Imperialist Government pay heed to its demand. Therefore, it has to depend on mass action by imposing its will. And that was the main purpose of Non-Cooperation Movement to involve the masses to an extent so as to extort benefits from the bourgeoisie for the call off the movement. At that moment, it threatened to upset property relations.

Similarly, Rajni Palme Dutt in his book "India Today and Tomorrow" writes that the entire non-Cooperation movement, which had been organised on the basis of complete discouragement of any spontaneous mass activity and mechanical subordination to the will of one man, was called off for reasons other than Chauri-Chaura and the official announcement that the movement was being called off because "it was going to pieces inspite of its apparent power." Dutt asks that in what sense was the movement going to pieces? He contends that if it meant that the reformist-pacifist control was weakening, then it was definitely true. But, Dutt remarks, that if on the other hand, it might be taken to mean that the effective strength of the mass struggle had in reality passed its highest point and was weakening, such a claim would certainly not be correct. To substantiate his argument, Dutt quotes a Telegram of the Viceroy to London dated February 9, 1922:

"The lower classes in the towns have been seriously affected by the non-cooperation movement, in certain areas the Peasantry has been affected particularly in the Parts of Assam Valley, U. P., Bihar, Orissa

24 Dutt, Rajni Palme, India Today and Tomorrow (Delhi: People’s publishing House), 1955, p. 147.
and Bengal. As regards the Punjab, the Sikh agitation has penetrated to the rural Sikhs. A large proportion of the Mohammedan population throughout the country is embittered and sullen...grave possibilities. The Government of India are prepared for a disorder of a more formidable nature than has in the past occurred and do not seek to minimize in any way the fact that great anxiety is caused by the situation.”

Dutt says that the masses were ready for a decisive struggle as is shown by the example of Guntur where inspite of Gandhi’s orders, through a misunderstanding, the Non-tax campaign was inaugurated. Not five percent of the taxes, according to Dutt, were collected- until Gandhi’s countermanding order came. On a word of command from the Congress, this process could have undoubtedly been unleashed throughout the country and would have turned into a universal refusal of land revenue and rent. But Dutt argues, this process would have meant the sweeping not only of imperialism but of landlordism.

Dutt feels that the above considerations are implicit in the Bardoli decision resolution. He proves that no less than three clauses deal specifically, urgently and emphatically with the necessity of payment of rent by the peasants to the landlords or government, "There is here no question of violence or non-violence", he says, "there is simply a question of class interests, of exploiters and exploited.” Why should a resolution condemning violence concentrate so emphatically on the question of non-payment of rent and the legal rights of landlords? Dutt says that there is only one answer - The phraseology of "non-violence" is revealed as only in reality a cover, conscious or unconscious, for class

26 Ibid., pp. 149-50.
interests and the maintenance of class exploitation. He says "The dominant leadership of the Congress associated with Gandhi called off the movement because they were afraid of the mass activity, because it was beginning to threaten those propertied class interests with which they themselves were in fact closely linked. Not the question of "violence" or "non-violence" but the question of class interest in opposition to the mass movement was the breaking point of the national struggle in 1922. This was the rock on which the movement broke. This was the real meaning of non-violence."  

Roy and Abani Mukerjee, an Indian in exile, published during the twenties, books, brochures, and articles, treating questions connected with the Indian National Liberation Movement, the economic and political situation within the country, which were then Illegally brought to India. They were signatories to the first Manifesto to Indian Revolutionaries that appeared in the British Press in 1920. The Manifesto laid out the tasks facing the national revolutionaries in their transition to a position of international proletarianism and preparation for a social revolution in India.

Roy’s activity in propagating Marxist ideas in India and his contribution in the organization of Indian Communists was great. Roy and Mukherjee regarded the Indian Revolutionary underground organizations and their emigre centres and also the Left-Wing within the Indian National Congress as reserves for the Communist movement in India. As a result, they considered it their task to free the Indian petty bourgeois youth from the influence of bourgeois Ideology as soon as

27 Ibid.
possible. It was to this end that Roy, Mukherjee and the group of Communist emigres under their leadership, attempted to establish contacts with various political movements and organizations in India, ranging from the leaders of the Swarajists to the leaders of the underground revolutionary organizations that launched a new wave of political action after 1922.

Among the works published in India at that time that expounded the principles of scientific Communism, the most notable was a small book by S. A. Dange entitled- "Gandhi and Lenin" (1921). In this book, Dange who had been an active participant in the non-cooperation Movement, compared the methods of political struggle advocated by Lenin and Gandhi criticizing Gandhi’s programme and tactics. In May 1922, Dange started a weekly English Language newspaper entitled "Socialist" which was India’s first weekly periodical. It gave detailed information about the works of Marx and Lenin and discussed aspects of the National Liberation Movement in India. Dange’s work and activities provided a rallying point in Mumbai. In September 1922, the “Socialist” put out an announcement on the formation of the Indian Labour Socialist Party of the Indian National Congress. The name of this Marxist group which counted among its members S. A. Dange, C. V. Ghate, K. N. Joglekar and R. S. Nimkar shows that the emergence of a Marxist Wing of the National Movement at that period was viewed by Dange and his associates as a creation of a left faction within the Congress. In 1923, the Mumbai group began putting out monthly Journal entitled "Socialist."

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28 Dange, S. A., Gandhi and Lenin (Bombay: Asia Publications), 1921, pp. 110-112.
Marxist groups also appeared in other large industrial centres. In 1922, Shaukat Usmani, after returning from Moscow, set up a Communist group in Varanasi. A Communist cell at Lahore also started work at this time under the leadership of Ghulam Hussein. The organ of the Lahore group was the Urdu Language newspaper ‘Inquilab’ (Revolution). The Kolkata group led by Muzzafar Ahmad also adopted a scientific communistic stand at this period. In 1923, Ahmad started putting out a paper entitled ‘Ganavani’ (The voice of the People). A Marxist group was set up in Chennai under the leadership of Singaravelu Chettiari who started publishing the Labour Kisan Gazette in 1923.

The first Marxist periodicals provided a source of collective propaganda and organization. Also important in this respect was the underground distribution within India of the Journals "Vanguard of the Indian Independence" (1922-1924) and "the Masses of India" (1925-1927).

Between 1923-1925 not only did existing Marxist groups grow in size, but now Marxist circles were set up, such as those in the industrial centres of Cawnpore and Karachi. Links were established between the various Marxist circles and letters were exchanged with the groups of Indian Communists in exile. The main task facing the Marxist groups in India was the coordination of their activities and the formation of an All-India organisation.

One of the Principal points on which Roy laid repeated stress during the early years of the Indian Communist Movement was that the primary goal of the Communists in India should be to form a party of the people as a rallying ground for all the revolutionary elements.
According to him, the paramount importance of a peoples’ party lay in the fact that it was only under the leadership representing the workers and peasants that the National Movement, which had been betrayed by Gandhi at Bardoli, could be restored as a new basis. In the Fourth Congress of the Communist International in 1922, Roy warned that the counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie which was "not pitted against the old order of social production," would surely betray the revolutionary Movement and unless "we are prepared to train politically the other social elements which are objectively more revolutionary, to step into their places and assume the leadership, the ultimate struggle of the Nationalist Movement, becomes problematic for the time being."29 Therefore, the crying need of India was not bourgeois political parties but mass organizations which would express and reflect the demands, interests and aspirations of the mass of the people as against the kind of nationalism which merely stood for the economic development and political aggrandisement of the native bourgeoisie. “We have to develop” Roy concluded, "our parties in these countries in order to take the lead in the organization of the united anti-imperialistic front."30

Although Roy had some doubts about the efficacy of a party which would become merely as a legal cover for the Communist Party, he laid great stress on the need for a Workers and Peasants Party, through which the communists would function legally; through which agitation and propaganda would be carried on legally and the workers and peasants could be organized to defend the interests of their class.

29 The Advance Guard – January 15, 1923, p. 3.
30 Ibid.
Moreover such a party could be an excellent agency through which the Communist could find a way to the masses.

From the beginning, International Communism was somewhat chary in its attitude towards the emergence of workers and Peasants Parties in India. Although they did not openly oppose their growth, they refused to consider them a substitute for the Communist Party. They also apprehended that too much attention to these parties would inevitably delay and retard the development of Communist Movement in India. It was further thought that the very nature of these parties revealed a dual class character of the toiling masses which was not in conformity with the Marxist Leninist conception of a vanguard of the people. It was for this reason, that these parties, no matter how revolutionary they might appear to be, could all too easily be transformed into petty-bourgeois organizations. What was more harmful, as pointed out by Page Arnoc,

\[^{31}\] was that some of the Indian Communists actually regarded these organizations as Communist Parties in an Indian shape and there was no need for the creation of a separate Communist Party. In his report to the Sixth World Congress, Olto Vilhem Kusinea also said that the formation of “Labour and peasant parties” as substitute for Communist Party was not advisable particularly in the colonial and semi-colonial countries because such parties would tend to transform themselves into petty bourgeois parties, to get away from the Communists, thereby failing to come into contact with the masses.\[^{32}\]

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\[^{32}\] Kusinen, O. V., The Revolutionary Movement in Colonies – VIII, October 17, 1928.
Disagreeing with Kusinen, C. Dutt told the Congress, that it would be a mistake to dismiss the role of the peasants and workers parties with a phrase. In the existing stage of the development in India, he pointed out the characteristic feature of the workers and peasant parties, that they were opening up an important route through which they (communists) could find a way to the masses. Despite such bitter controversy about its raison-d’etre the workers and Peasants parties continued to operate as a projection of the Communist Party until it was virtually dis-integrated as a result of the Meerut Conspiracy case in 1929.

The Meerut Conspiracy case, far from stamping out Communism from India, made martyrs out of the Communists and gave them a unique niche in India’s political life. By playing upon anti-British emotions of the people, they evoked a nation-wide sympathy and could enlist for their legal advice and services of such prominent Nationalist leaders as Jawaharlal Nehru, Farid-ul-huq Ansari and Kailashnath Katju and with this trial, the first chapter in Indian Communism came to an end and Communist ideology came to be established in India.33

Curiously enough, the historic trial in Meerut came to synchronise with the expulsion of M. N. Roy from the Communist International. He was charged on five counts:

1) He had misled the Communists at home by directing them to set up workers and Peasants parties.

2) He had instructed the Indian National Communists to work within the Indian National Congress thereby making them a tool

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33 Ibid.
in the hands of the bourgeoisie thus compromising and betraying
the communistic cause.

3) He had breached the theory of "Decolonization" contrary to the
theory of the Comintern.

4) He had betrayed the revolutionary Movement in India.

5) He had associated himself with the anti-Comintern, German
Communist leaders Brandler and Thalhelmer in opposing the
Comintern's policy in the Reich.34

Thus the Communists' critique against Gandhi (1920-1930)
remained ideological and ineffective because they were the founding
years and there were a lot of controversies within the party itself. The
founding itself was quite a momentous job; finally the dispersed groups
were brought together. Moreover, the years immediately following the
non-cooperation Movement, were a period of lull in the Indian National
Movement. Gandhi retired from politics for a time and his presence was
not felt. But the year 1928 saw a change when the movement took
upward turn once again with the arrival of the Simon Commission.

When the country was in the throes of the civil Disobedience
Movement, the Communists were in the wilderness. Far from
identifying themselves with the national upsurge, they turned their backs
on the mass anti-imperialist movement and kept themselves aloof from
the “Well spring of Indian political life”35

34 Ibid.
1954, p. 42.
The policy to remain aloof from the mainstream of the Indian National Movement was in consonance with the tactical ideological guidelines laid down by the Communist International. In 1928, according to the thesis adopted by the Sixth World Congress, Liberation Movements in the colonial and semi-colonial countries under bourgeois nationalist leadership were nothing but attempts "by means of empty nationalist phrases and gestures" to keep the petty bourgeois masses under its influence and to induce imperialism to grant certain concessions. It was, therefore, necessary for the Communists in such countries to isolate and emancipate themselves from the influence of the bourgeois nationalist movements. In accordance with this policy, it was decided that "the Communists must unmask the national reformism of the Indian National Congress and oppose all the phrases of the Swarajists, Gandhists etc about passive resistance."36

This ultra-left posture of the Communist International was outlined in unmistakable terms in an open letter from the Young Communist International to the Indian workers, peasants and youth. The letter asked the Indian working class and other revolutionary elements to realize that by championing reformist movements, the Congress was actually retarding the revolutionary movement and, as such, it could not lead the struggle of the Indian people against British Imperialism. Therefore, it was the duty of the Indian Communists to sever all contacts with the Congress and similar organizations like the League of Independence to disclose the falseness and treachery of the assistants of

36 Ibid., p. 42.
British Imperialism and to drive the traitors and phrase mongers out of their ranks.”

In December 1930, the International Press Correspondent published the "Draft Platform of Action of the C.P. of India," an important document containing a detailed analysis of the Indian political situation and the programme of the Communist Party of India. After highlighting the fact that the Indian people were groaning under the yoke of British Imperialism which, relying upon its political and economic supremacy and requiring billions and billions of rupees, year after year out of the "miserable Income of India", had brought the toiling masses of the people to the state of famine, perpetual poverty and slavery, the Platform declared that it was only by merciless and violent overthrow of British imperialism that the working of India would succeed in achieving their real Independence and creating the conditions necessary for the development and reconstruction of society on the basis of socialism.

The Platform then went on to identify the collaboration of British imperialism in the enslavement of the Indian People - the Native princes, the land-lords, the money lenders, the merchants and, above all, the national bourgeoisie. As for the role of the Congress and Gandhi, it declared that by consistently following the policy of compromise with British imperialism, they had betrayed the revolutionary struggle of the masses. The greatest threat to the victory of the Indian revolution was the fact that the masses still harboured illusions about the Congress and had not realized that it represented the class interests of the exploiters against the fundamental interests of the toiling masses.

37 Inprecor, 09-01-1930, p. 25.
38 Ibid., 18-12-1930.
Criticizing Gandhi, the Platform pointed out that under the cloak of vague statements about love, meekness, modesty, national unity, the historic mission of Hinduism etc., he preached the inevitability and wisdom of the division of society into rich and poor, the eternal social inequality and exploitation. He preached the interest of the Capitalist development of India on the bones and the sweat of the working masses of the Indian people in collaboration with world capitalism.\footnote{Ibid.}

Analysing the class character of the Congress, the Platform pointed out that the Congress not only supported the manufacturers against the workers during the textile strikes, but also assisted in the passing of anti-labour legislations. It was the Congress which not only refused to support the fight of the Railway men against British Imperialism, but also opposed the peasantry in their struggle against the money-lenders, the big landlords and manufacturers”, “the Congress had produced the anti popular Nehru Constitution in order to preserve the landlords, the princes and the money-lenders as "Junior partners of British Imperialism."\footnote{Ibid.}

Describing the Delhi Manifesto as "programme of the Chambers of Commerce and similar associations", the Platform declared that the Congress and particularly its Left-Wing, had done and were doing all in its power to retain the struggle of the masses within the framework of British Imperialistic constitutions.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 3-4.}

\footnote{Ibid.}
\footnote{Ibid.}
\footnote{Ibid., pp. 3-4.}
In Part II of the Platform entitled "The Fight for Partial Demands of the Revolutionary Movement", attention of the Indian Communists was drawn to the fact "that the propaganda of non-violence" by Gandhi, Nehru and other Congressmen was intended to prevent a general national armed insurrection of the toiling masses against British Imperialism. By his own admission, it was pointed out, that Gandhi took part in the armed suppression of the Zulu peasants uprising in Africa and assisted the British robbers in their fight against the German capitalists for the right to exploit the colonial peoples. Gandhi also helped to recruit Indian peasants for the British army and sent to their deaths hundreds of thousands of Indian workers and peasants in the interest of the British robbers, "And today Gandhi tells the workers and peasants of India that they have no right and must not revolt against their exploiters. He tells them this at the very time when the British robbers are making open war on the Indian people in the North-West Frontier Province and throughout the country."42 Similarly, the left-wing of the Congress was also bitterly castigated as an appendage of imperialism and the enemy of the toiling masses. The most harmful and dangerous obstacle to the victory of the revolution, it added, was the agitation carried on by the left elements of the Congress led by Jawaharlal Nehru, Bose and others. Under the cloak of revolutionary phraseology, they carried on the bourgeois policy of confusing and disorganizing the revolutionary struggle of the masses and helped the Congress to come to an understanding with British Imperialism.

On the basis of this analysis, the Communists came to the conclusion that there could be no compromise between the counter

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42 Ibid., p. 7.
revolutionary nationalist leadership and the revolutionary masses. Some of the extremist elements went a step further and diagnosed the mass upsurge during the Civil Disobedience Movement as a manifestation of growing confrontation between the bourgeois nationalism and a revolutionary mass Movement of the workers and peasants. According to the Labour monthly, as the Congress led by Gandhi represented the dissatisfied Indian bourgeoisie, “it was not a Part and Parcel of the vast mass agitation taking place in the country, however much it might appear that the Congress leaders were the instigators of the present revolt.”

“The prime interest of the Congress in this mass Movement was not to accelerate it, but to prevent it from developing into a revolutionary movement. Therefore, the real struggle that is going on is not between the Congress and the British imperialism but between the Congress and the Indian Revolutionary Movement.”

What were to be the main tasks of the Indian communists? The Platform of Action declares:

“The exposure of the left Congress leaders who may again undertake to set up a new party or organization like the former League of Independence in order, once again, to mobilize a mass of workers is the primary task of our party. Ruthless war on the Left National Reformists is an essential condition if we are to isolate the latter from the workers and the mass of the peasantry, and mobilize the latter under the banner of the Communist Party and the anti-imperialist agrarian revolution in India. On every occasion, they must expose the treacherous part played by the Indian National Congress. Against the bourgeois compromise front, established by the national reformists, they must

43 Ibid.
create a united front of toilers from below on the basis of a definite Proletarian revolutionary demands and activities.44

Apart from the confusion over tactical guidelines, the factor that contributed most to the slump in the Communist activity during the post-Meerut days was the crippled condition of the party organisation. Although it was proudly claimed that the Meerut trial had placed communism on a sure footing, there is no denying the fact that the imprisonment of front ranking leaders had a traumatic effect on the organizational apparatus of the party. The task of building a centralized and well coordinated party machinery which could harness the revolutionary forces in India still remained a far cry and to make things worse, factional quarrels between different Communist groups threw the entire party organization into disarray. To complicate and make matters worse, Roy had returned to India and made a bid for leadership. Immediately after his expulsion from the Communist International, Roy broached the thesis contrary to his earlier stand that success of Communism in India lay through the national revolution and that the Indian Communists must work through the national mass organization and volunteer corps. He did some excellent work in a very short period of time. At Jawaharlal Nehru's special invitation, he attended the Karachi session of the Congress in March 1931 and it was widely believed at that time that the Resolution of Fundamental Rights and Economic Policy adopted by the Congress was the handiwork of Roy. In short, until his arrest in July 1931, Roy was in a large measure successful in his attempt to make a good number of Indian Communists

to eschew their ultra-left posture towards the anti-imperialist struggle under the Congress leadership.

The Communist International now disturbed at Roy's activities in India could no longer allow the Indian Communist party to drift aimlessly in search of an anchorage. That the growing disorganization of the Party became a singular source of concern and embarrassment for The Communist International, was clearly indicated by the publication of various articles on India in various journals and also by the arrival of Comintern emissaries in India. By the end of 1933, almost all Meerut Prisoners were released from jail and a concerted effort was made to pull the party from rut. As a result of this effort, a Conference was held in Calcutta in December, 1933 and a new statute of the Communist Party of India was adopted. Ben Bradley immediately left India to report the formation of the All India Party Act to the Communist International and soon afterwards, the Communist Party of India became a section of the Third Communist International. But at this juncture, the Government formally declared the Party illegal. Meanwhile, events were taking place in Europe which had repercussions on the entire attitude of the Communists towards the Indian National Congress.

In the face of this scourge of Fascism, the Soviet Union sought alliance with other States, formed the League of Nations, championed the cause of disarmament and collective security, and shelving all anti-democratic campaigns, embarked upon the policy of United Front of all Communists, Socialists and Liberals against Fascism.

The sudden shift in the Soviet foreign policy was soon followed by the abandonment of the Comintern’s ultra-left policy towards the
nationalist movements in the colonial and semi-colonial countries. When the Seventh Congress of the Communist International met in Moscow on August 1, 1935, the task of the Indian Communists was outlined by the Chinese delegate Wange Ming, in his thesis, entitled "The Revolutionary Movement in Colonial Countries." In this thesis, Ming pointed out that the isolation of the Indian communists from the mass anti-imperialist Struggle was due to two-factors. First, they had suffered for a long time from left sectarian errors and did not participate in the mass demonstrations organized by the Congress. Second, they did not possess sufficient forces independently to organize a powerful anti-imperialist Movement. For a long time, the small scattered groups of Communists could not even be united and by their sectarian policies, these small communist groups objectively helped to retain the Influence of Gandhism and national reformism over the masses.45

Ming further pointed out that although the Indian Communists had now begun to rid themselves of their sectarian errors and were making the first step towards the creation of an anti-imperialist united front, they had shown a great lack of understanding of the united front tactics. This was borne out by the fact that irk attempting to establish a united anti-imperialist front with the Congress, they put forward such demands as the establishment of "an Indian workers and peasants Soviet Republic", "Confiscation of all lands belonging to the Zamindar without compensation", "a general strike as the only effective programme of action" etc. Such demands on the part of the Indian Communists which

he averted could serve; how not to carry on the tactics of the anti-imperialist united front.\textsuperscript{46}

“The Indian Communists”, Ming observed, “should in no case disregard work within the National Congress and the national revolutionary and national reformist organizations affiliated to it, maintaining at the same time their complete political and organizational independence. Both within and without the Indian National Congress the Indian Communists must consolidate all the genuine anti-imperialistic forces of the country.\textsuperscript{47}

He asked the Indian Communists to take lessons from fellow travelers in China and Brazil, where Communists followed the strategy of the United front with all the anti-imperialist forces - the Working class, peasantry, petty bourgeoisie and the national bourgeoisie. “The Indian Communists”, he said, “could do well to broaden and strengthen their party organizations by enlisting support of the various Political blocks, representing the four classes and keeping “complete independence”, must strive to forge broad anti-imperialistic coalition in collaboration with the national revolutionary and national reformist organizations. In effect, Ming urged the Indian Communists to pursue simultaneously the tactics of United front from above and United front from below that is to make a common cause with the nationalist leadership with the ulterior motive of ousting it from the national revolutionary movements.\textsuperscript{48}

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid.
In regard to the concrete programme of action, Ming advised the Indian communists to denounce the "Slave Constitution" embodied in the Government of India Act 1935, to agitate for the release of all prisoners (political) and the abolition of all repressive laws and decrees to fight against low wages, high land rents and confiscation of peasants’ land for non-payment of debts, and also to fight for the vindication of peoples’ legitimate democratic rights and liberties.

The tactical guidelines formulated by Ming were supported by Gobgie Domitrov who declared in the Seventh World Congress that the Indian communists must "carry on active work inside the organizations which take part in the Indian National Congress facilitating the process of crystallization of the Indian revolutionary wing among them for the purpose of further development of the national liberation movement."

After reviewing the critical phase of the nationalist movement, resulting from the failure of the Civil Disobedience Movement and the imposition of the new constitution, R. Palme Dutt and Bin Bradley pointed out that the Indian National Congress under the leadership of Gandhi "has given up, for a time, the attempt to direct the struggle" and it was now time for the radicalization of the entire national leadership on the basis of a broadest possible anti Imperialist united front.\textsuperscript{49} The United front, however, did not mean the abstract unity "of the entire Indian population" because there were classes and elements in the Indian society - the princes, the landlords, the money lenders and other reactionary religious political groups which could never be the partners of any imperialist struggle. The United Front would be forged with all

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{49} Communist, Vol. I, No. 12, September 1936, p. 2.}
the progressive elements who stood for a policy of "irreconcilable struggle with imperialism for the advancement of the programme to reflect the growing influence of socialist ideas. The thesis called upon every Indian patriots to recognize that the first need for the powerful advance of the Indian national movement was the unity of all anti-imperialist forces in a common front. This was the indispensable condition for the successful fight against the ever sharpening forces of reaction and oppression.\textsuperscript{50}

Summarizing the role of the Congress in the national movement and the Communist attitude thereto, Dutt and Bradley observed that the Congress was already the United Front of the Indian people in the national struggle because it had achieved a gigantic task by uniting wide forces of the Indian people against imperialism and remained the principal mass organization of the diverse elements seeking national liberation. For this reason, nothing should be allowed to weaken the degree of unity that had been achieved by the Congress. They then pointed out, that the Communists had many times criticised the policy, programs and ideology of the Congress, because they believed that it was dominated by the bourgeois leadership whose interests often conflicted with the interests of the masses, and with the interests of the revolutionary anti-imperialist struggle.\textsuperscript{51}

The primary task of the Indian Communists was, therefore, to oust the right reactionary leadership of the Congress and to join hands with its left wing leadership represented by a newly formed Congress Socialist Party so as to transform the Congress into a mass platform of

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid.
The Dutt-Bradley thesis said that the Congress Socialists, Trade-Unionists, Communists and Left Congressmen should all be able to unite on the essential of a minimum programme of anti-imperialist struggle for complete independence. They pointed out that in this struggle, the Congress Socialist Party could play an especially important part, and for this reason, every effort should be made to clarify questions of programme and tactics in the Congress Socialist Party.

Dutt and Bradley also expressed the opinion that the Indian Communists should no longer decry the nationalist demand for a Constituent Assembly and should also not insist on the establishment of Soviets, instead. Although they made it clear that the Constituent Assembly was no substitute for Soviets, they sought that under the prevailing conditions of the National Movement, the demand for a constituent Assembly would be an effective slogan for the mobilization of the masses against imperialism. The demand for a constituent assembly was the expression of the people’s urge for political liberation and, therefore, the Communists must identify themselves with the national aspiration for there could be no socialist revolution without political liberation.

To sum up, in consonance with the new Comintern line laid down by Wang-Ming, Dutta, and Bradley, called upon the Indian communists to isolate the right reactionary leadership of the Congress and to make the common cause with all the left elements of the country and thus to forge a Front Populaire against Imperialism.

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52 Ibid., p. 16.
The political situation in India during the years following the Civil Disobedience was decidedly conducive to the formation of a united front of the Communists and other left wing nationalists. The failure of the Civil Disobedience Movement and the consequent wave of Gandhi’s influence was followed by emergence of the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) which now began to rally not only the radical elements inside the Congress, but also the younger sections of the people in general. Its initial appeal to the people lay in the fact that it appeared in the Indian political scene at a time when both non-violent civil disobedience and revolutionary terrorism had lost their charm. The resurgence of the radical left wing under the banner of the (CSP) was accompanied by an unprecedented awakening of the workers, peasants and students. It was at this time that the All India Trade Union Congress (A.I.T.U.C.) which had experienced two successive splits at Nagpur and Calcutta was once again unified. Similarly, for the first time, a centralized peasants’ organization called the “All India Kisan Sabha” was formed under the leadership of Swami Bahajananda Saraswati. The students’ movements also got a fillip with the formation of the “All India Students Federation”.

This emergence of leftist tendencies brought about a definite alignment of political forces and polarization of nationalist leadership. At the Lucknow session, Nehru openly identified himself with the left and included in the Congress Working Committee Subhas Chandra Bose, Jayaprakash Narayan, Narendra Dev and Achut Patwardhan. He also exposed himself to the odium of right wing leadership by proposing

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affiliation of mass organizations of workers and peasants to the Congress. The viability of the Nationalist Movement, he emphasized, lay in the identification of the Congress with the economic struggle of the exploited masses. Other points which put the left at loggerheads with Gandhi were:

1) the participation in the forthcoming elections and acceptance of office under the new constitution; and

2) the programme to which the Congress would commit itself in the Election Manifesto. (The C.S.P. wanted the removal of economic grievances).

It was in this piquant condition of Indian politics, that the Communists set about the translation of their policy of United Front into positive and purposeful action.

Initially, the Indian Communists, split into many quarrelsome groups, were reluctant to follow the new Comintern line, because they still shuddered at the idea of collaborating with the national reformist leadership of the Congress. Therefore, when Dutt and Bradley urged them to put the United Front tactics into practice, many of them were inclined to ignore the advice. But when the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) ultimately took the decision to accept Communists in its ranks, they decided to eschew their left sectarian stand and thought it prudent to become partners of an anti-imperialist United front. The task of formulating the new tactical line was admirably executed by the General Secretary, P. C. Joshi, under whose energetic stewardship, the
The Idea of Socialist-Communist alliance was first mooted by the leaders of the Communist Party of Great Britain. Harry Pollitt, R. Palme Dutt and Ban Bradley discussed the question with one of the founder members of the Congress Socialist Party, M. R. Masani, who happened to be in Moscow during the Seventh World Congress. But the dialogue was cut short when Masani insisted that such an alliance could be brought about only if the Communist Party of India (CPI) dissolved and severed all connections with the Communist International.\[54]\n
The Congress-Socialist alliance, however, took a concrete shape through the enthusiasm and initiative of J. P. Narayan the General Secretary of the C.S.P. In the Meerut Conference of the Socialists in January 1936, Narayan emphasized the need for a common front of all "groups and individuals who stand by Marxism," \[55]\nand suggested that in view of the shift in Comintern policy, the Communists should be admitted to the membership of the CSP. And despite the fact that there had yet been no indication of the communist approval, the National Executive of the Congress Socialist Party unilaterally adopted a resolution to that effect in the belief that the Communists would reciprocate the socialist gesture.

True to their anticipation, the Communists, in line with the new Comintern policy, seized the opportunity offered by the CSP and at

Joshi’s directive, large number of them came forward to accept membership of CSP.

Within a very short time the communists completely infiltrated the ranks of the C.S.P and virtually captured many important positions in its central as well as local units. However, the Socialist Communist alliance began to run into difficulties when reports reached the National Executive that the Communists were sowing seeds of discord by asserting that the CSP had not developed along true Marxist lines. It was alleged that they were trying to convert the Socialist members to communism. Another serious allegation against the Communists was that they were secretly maneuvering to capture the CSP local units and labour organizations. The Socialists also found themselves at loggerheads with the Communists when the latter began to breach the idea that the left forces should support "the struggle of the Indian capitalists against the domination of British finance capital" and decided that all the “four classes' should unite under the banner of anti-imperialism. The rightist turn in their policy was confirmed by a resolution adopted by the Communist Party of India Politburo in February 1937 which declared that not only the left forces but even the Indian merchants and industrialists should be accommodated in the anti-imperialist United Front. In a bitter indignation, the Socialists denounced the resolution as a betrayal of Marxism. But the Communists defended their stand by accusing the Socialists of left sectarianism and pointing out that the four classes envisaged by the politburo did not include the ‘pro imperialist bourgeoisie and the landlords and princes.’ But despite such explanation, the Socialists had little doubt that by their disruptive activities, both on the organizational and ideological fronts,
the Communists were virtually wrecking the very spirit of the Lucknow agreement which, they held, stipulated the eventual merger of the two parties into a single political organization. The Communists, on the other hand, alleged that the Socialists were bounding out the Communists from the CSP ranks by branding them as disruptors. In these circumstances, they declared that united action was impossible.

That the crack in a Socialist-Communist alliance, was beyond repair became evident in the meeting of the National Executive of the CSP in Patna in 1937 where the two groups violently clashed over the alleged secret documents of the CPI which had somehow fallen into the hands of the Socialists. When the document was read in the meeting, the socialists were shocked to hear that the Communists did not consider the CSP as a true Socialist Party and that the Communists wanted to cooperate with it only to use it as a convenient platform of action. The two parties now found very little ground for joint action, and as a result, the Socialist-Communist alliance continued to sour at an uncertain pace till 1940 when the National Executive finally expelled the Communists from the CSP.

From the tactical point of view, the alliance of the Socialists was of great significance to the Communists for it afforded them an opportunity to penetrate the Congress of which the CSP was a constituent part. The communists avidly seized the opportunity and infiltrated into the nationalist organization from its lowest level to the All-India Congress Committee. This not only broadened the base of its mass contact, but also gave them a new clan in Indian politics of those who succeeded in occupying important positions in the Congress, the
most notable were Mian Iftikharuddin, Swami Sahajananda, and Indulal Yagnik.

From the very beginning of their United Front with the Congress, the Communists vigorously pursued the tactics of united-front-from-below against the right wing nationalist leadership with a view to ‘moving the active sections of the Congress rank and file out of the reactionary constructive programme’ of Gandhism. "The success of this policy was evident not only from growing influence of the Communists in the local units of the Congress but also from the fact that by 1939, they claimed as many as 20 seats in the A.I.C.C.\textsuperscript{56}

Emboldened by this success, the Communists attempted to clinch the issue of violence vs. nonviolence by moving an amendment at the Faizpur Congress which declared that Swaraj could be achieved only by ‘an uncompromising revolutionary mass struggle’, against imperialism. Although the amendment was defeated, the Communists’ influence inside the Congress was amply demonstrated by the fact that in the A.I.C.C., it was supported by 45 members out of 128 and in the full session by 262 members out of 713.\textsuperscript{57}

After the Election of Subhash Chander Bose as the Congress President, the leftists had fondly hoped that they had at least found an answer to Gandhi. But when Gandhi accepted the challenge and forced Bose to resign, they realised that Gandhi could not be brushed away so easily. The Communists, therefore, decided to trim the sail to the wind

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.
and chose to side with Gandhi. Throwing all their revolutionary pretensions to the winds, they now came out with a declaration that Gandhi commanded the greatest ‘mobilizing power’, and that the anti-imperialist struggle ‘demanded not the exclusive leadership of one wing, but a united leadership under the guidance of Gandhi.’

Explaining this shift in the Communist policy, S. G. Sardesai observed that, in the new circumstances, it was useless for the Leftists to continue their old attitude towards Gandhism and Gandhian leadership. They had exposed the shortcomings of Gandhism sufficiently in the past and now with the new strength at their command, the time and opportunity had come for them ‘to wield even Gandhism with new nationalism’. This necessitated a very close study of and emphasis on every positive aspect of Gandhism, particularly during its militant anti-imperialist phase between 1919 and 1920. ‘This is the Gandhism’. He declared, that we have resurrects, burnish and replenish.

This stage about the face of the Communist leaders not only created confusion and indignation among many of their followers but also the image of the Communist Party of India stood badly tarnished, denouncing the leaders who were responsible for this summersault.

The renunciation of the entire policy line, hitherto advocated by the Communists, was in fact necessitated by the turn of events in the international situation swiftly escalating towards a series of crises. With the mounting danger confronting the Socialist fatherland, it was now important for the CPI to concentrate its attack on the enemies of the

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58 National Front 19-03-1929, p. 96.
59 Ibid., 30-04-1939, p. 189.
Soviet Union. The Chamberlain Government was nothing but an ally of the fascist Germany and, as such, the Communists must do everything to strengthen the anti-British movement in India. And for that reason an alliance with the Congress under Gandhi’s leadership was imperative. While the Indian Communists termed Gandhi overnight from an imperialist stooge to a powerful anti-imperialist force, the leaders’ of the Socialist fatherland transformed Hitler from a fascist scourge to an apostle of peace. On August 23, 1939 came the stunning news that the Soviet Union had concluded a ten-year neutrality pact with Germany.

As for the Indian Communists, although the pact took them by complete surprise yet they were saved from embarrassment by the rising tide of anti-war feeling in India. In fact, as pointed out by Masani, it would have been more embarrassing for them to have to support the war in case Russia had joined the allies against Germany. They could now ride the waves of anti-war sentiment of the people and pledge their identity of interest in the common struggle against British imperialism. They could now reiterate what Sunderaya said a year before Soviet Union concluded Non-Aggression pact with Germany that the immediate issue before the Indian Communists was not the fight for Fascism but the fight for true democracy in India. India's part in the coming international struggle, he said, was the struggle for her independence.60

It was in fact for the Russia’s sake that the Indian Communists did not want an organizational break with the Congress. From the very beginning of the outbreak of hostilities, the Soviet Union apprehend that

Britain might attack her using India and Iran as the jumping ground of aggression. It was, therefore, of paramount importance for the Indian communists, not only to intensify anti-British campaigns, but also to unify and sustain all anti-imperialist forces in India including the vascillating Congress. It was for this reason that they, while castigating the right leadership of the Congress, carefully refrained from attacking the Congress itself. They also condemned the CSP and the Forward Block for disrupting the National Unity by following the ‘united from above’ tactics. When Subhas Chandra Bose organized the anti-compromise Committee, P. C. Joshi, the Secretary of the Communist Party of India observed that the struggle to be initiated by the Committee would neither be national nor international. Far from leading the Congress on to a path of mass struggle, he pointed out, it would only disunite and weaken the Congress, ‘the only organization capable of conducting a truly national campaign.’

The surprise of the Indian Communists detained at Deoli Detention Camp knew no bounds when on June 22, 1941, came the news that the German bombers had struck at Soviet airfields and Nazi armies were on their way to Moscow. Bewilderment was followed by confusion as the Nazi onslaught on the Socialist Fatherland forced the latter into the imperialistic camp.

In the face of such new alignment of forces a revision of the communist Policy in countries fighting against imperialism appeared to be a tricky question. But the communist logic was simple enough. Now that the Soviet Union was fighting side by side with the imperialist forces and the interest of British imperialism coincided with that of the
Soviet Union, the Communist policy must address itself to the supreme aim of Russian victory even if it meant jettisoning the nationalist objective of political emancipation. Explaining this new rationale, the Labour Monthly wrote that the primary concern of the proletariat in the imperialist as well as colonial countries must be the defence of the Soviet Union whose defeat would be a sad blow not only for the proletariat of all countries but for the humanity in general.

Every act of proletariat struggle, it said, had to be subordinated to this supreme aim of Russian victory which would mean a great stride forward of the peoples’ cause in every country. In regard to the question of India’s struggle for freedom, it was argued that the victory of the alliance of the peoples in association with the Soviet means not only the liberation of 'nation', enslaved by fascism, but also the most favourable world conditions for the final liberation of the Indian people and all nations under foreign domination. The path of India’s independence, therefore, lay through the victory of the Soviet Union and its allies over Fascism. The burden of the argument was explained by R. Palme Dutt who brusquely pointed out that freedom or no freedom, the Indian Communists must rally round the British Government in order to secure victory of the Soviet Union. The interest of the people of India and Ireland and of all the colonial countries, as of all peoples of world, he avered, was bound up with the victory of the Soviet Union against Germany. That victory, he pointed out, was absolute and unconditional and did not depend on any measure – ‘their rulers promise or concede.’

It was indeed an excruciating task for the Indian Communists, who had so long drawn sustenance from the strong anti-British feeling
of the masses, to turn around to the same audience and convince it that British Imperialism had overnight, becomes a prisoner in the Peoples Camp and that the main enemy of India was no longer British but Germany and Japan. But in a desperate bid to justify the sudden reversal of their anti-imperialist Policy in favour of the peoples’ war orientation, the Communists put forward the argument that, under the guidance of the Soviet Union, the war against fascism would not only assume a revolutionary character but would also usher in a new world order after the war was over. Under Soviet leadership and inspiration, it was pointed out that the people of the world would advance arm in arm with one common aim of destroying Hitler, Fascism and its allies, of smashing up the very structure of world imperialism which bred the plaque of fascism. It was to further the cause of independence if all nationalist forces rallied together on the side of the allies. In the very act of uniting for war the Indian people could gather strength to wrench away their freedom from imperialist Britain. Therefore, the CPI urged all the patriotic parties and groups to raise the slogan for National Defence and National Government.

A mass mobilization in favour of British war efforts was not possible so long as the entire group, irrespective of caste, creed and political differences, rallied around Gandhi. The Communists attempted to weaken the Quit India movement even by driving a wedge between the Hindus and the Muslims. On August 9, 1942, the Peoples’ War magazine wrote:

"Vivisection of India is a sin, says Gandhi. And this sums up the opinion of the national leadership and emphasizes the gulf that must be
bridged before it is too late, Nationalist opinion has been loud in its proclamation that under a free India, there must be no oppression of the minority by the majority. But a minority which distrusts the majority cannot be satisfied with such assertions. Its fears must be completely allayed. Its equal status must be guaranteed in a form easily understood. It must be given the right of secession, the right to form an independent State. To look upon secession as a special fad of Jinnah, as a conspiracy of a few communists to divide in the interests of British imperialism, is to ignore the new Muslim awakening as also of other nationalities e.g. Andhras Karnatikis, Maharashtrians etc., the awakening of a distinct nationality to a new life, individual consciousness.\textsuperscript{61}

The profoundly pro-British orientation of their war time policy had exposed the Communists to the odium of the entire Indian public. The image of their party was also badly tarnished when it was openly alleged that in collusion with the Government, the Communists had attempted to sabotage the national movement. But the Communists made yet another attempt to recover lost grounds with the Congress. When the Communists were being expelled from the provincial Committees of the Congress, Joshi bemoaned. "It is the Congress which planted the banner of Indian freedom, it is from the Congress leaders that we got our first lessons in patriotism and it is the Congressmen who want to deny us the privilege of fighting shoulder to shoulder with them for the cause, they taught us, to accept as an aim of life.” Joshi also made fervent appeal to the Congress leaders to believe that the policy of the CPI was ‘not dictated from outside’ but ‘it is decided by its own people as it understands the interests of its own people and of the people

\textsuperscript{61} The Peoples War, August 2, 1942.
of the world'. But Gandhi, while admiring the energy and discipline of the Communists, dismissed Joshi’s arguments as unreal.

As the stage was being set for the transfer of power, events in India began to move forward in an atmosphere of frenzied excitement. "The real struggle for freedom was over", observes R. C. Mazumdar, "and the battle for India's freedom was to be henceforth fought round the Council Table, the principal combatants being Hindus and Muslims and not the Indians and the British. The British were now sincerely anxious to grant freedom to India, but the Indians were slow to take it for they could not decide among themselves what form it should exactly assume. The role of the British was that of a mediator between two disputants, sometimes degenerating into that of a judge in a boxing bout between two prize fighters."\(^{62}\)

The Soviet policy now became moderate. The commentators on India urged the CPI to abandon its war time policy of cooperation with the British and to return to the pro-war strategy of anti-imperialist struggle in collaboration with the Indian bourgeoisie ‘with the exception of feudal princes and section of the big landlords.’ Their attitude towards the Congress was also strikingly favourable. Emphasizing the important role of the Congress in the national movement, Dykov observed that as the social and political activity of the Indian people was at a very low level and as their degree of organisation was inferior to that observed in other democratic countries, the Congress was in a

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position to formulate in ‘its programme a number of propositions’ which had the support of the broad sections of the population."^{63}

The CPI’s attitude towards the Mountbatten Plan was also remarkably soft. Although it was contended that the Mountbatten award was the culmination of a double faced policy which, while making concessions to the national demand to transfer power, sets in motion disruptive and reactionary forces to obstruct the realization of a real independence’. The resolution admitted that the Plan contained important concessions to India’s nationalist aspirations and opened up new opportunities for national advance. The resolution thus affirmed that these concessions had been extracted through the continuous pressure of the Congress leadership for transfer of power.

Endorsing the CPI resolution, R. P. Dutt described the Mountbatten Plan as an enforced retreat of imperialism and declared that the time had come for the Congress and the CPI to bury the hatchet and set about the task of laying the foundation of new India. "Now more than ever." Dutt said, "the situation reveals the urgent need increasingly recognised on both sides to endeavour to overcome the past phase of sharp division, between the Congress and the Communist party in order to march forward together upon a common programme of democratic advance, for the advancement of full independence, and eventual all-India democratic union, and for the fulfillment of the economic and social demands, land reforms, measures of nationalization and planned

^{63} Ibid., pp. 240-45.
industrial development, for which the workers and peasants and masses of the Indian people are looking." \(^{64}\)

Thus on August 15, when the Congress under Nehru’s leadership fell heir to power in India, the Indian communists came to realize that they could put little premium on a prospect of a violent revolution in India. All they could now strive for was some respectability in the politics of new India.

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\(^{64}\) Dutt, R. Palme, India Today & Tomorrow, op. cit., pp. 1-7.