Chapter - V

COMMUNISTS CRITIQUE OF GANDHI

During the freedom movement, the Indian National Congress under Gandhi's leadership came at variance with the left movement in India. From the philosophical height to the ground level realities, there appeared a great difference of thought and opinion between the two ideologies. The Communists did not have an organised and popular party or mass following in comparison to Gandhi's Indian National Congress. But they made severe criticism of Gandhi and Gandhism during the anti-imperialist struggle. M.N. Roy and Rajni Palme Dutt, the leading Indian Marxist theoreticians were the chief spokesmen, who attacked Gandhi’s tactics and strategies. They reacted heavily and critically to his politics of Non-co-operation, Civil Disobedience and Quit India Movement. For his practical politics and close relationship with a few capitalists, he was characterised as a 'friend of capitalists', 'an ascetic defender of private property', 'soft on Capitalism' and sometimes, 'conscious and willing tool of the bourgeoisie', by the communists.

The Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 played a significant role in the origins of communist movements all over the world. A few enthusiastic youths in India were deeply impressed by this. They considered it a great victory over despotic bourgeoisie which virtually gave impetus to Indian political aspirations.
The Bolshevic leaders also paid special attention to India and decided to organise the people in India against British Imperialism on the principles of Marxian ideology. M.N. Roy took the task in hand to form an organisation separate from the Indian National Congress based on communist lines.

Under the inspiration of Gandhi, the resolution on non-violent non-co-operation was passed at the special session of the Calcutta Congress in September, 1920 and then confirmed almost unanimously at the Nagpur session in December 1920. It received a very enthusiastic and prompt response throughout the country.

As a mass struggle, the non-co-operation made remarkable progress. Many distinguished lawyers left their legal practice to join it. Students left colleges and schools in a large numbers. About 40 lakh volunteers were enrolled and 20,000 charkhas manufactured. The non-co-operation included surrender

1. Bolshevic optimistic outlook of the prospects in India has been calculated in a very effective manner by Kerzhentsev, who said, "India is the "most profitable" of the British colonies and when it throws off the Imperialist yoke Britain will be deprived of "huge revenue". But more than that, he said, when India rises up against Imperialism it will ignite revolutions throughout the colonial world; Mesopotamia, Syria, Arabia, South Africa, Egypt, China, Tibet, Persia — all these he said, will follow the Indian example. "In a word", he concluded, "the liberation of India from British domination will be a signal for a whole series of Asian countries to take up the struggle against imperialism." Quoted in Gene D. Overstreet and Marshall Windmiller; University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1959), Page 8.

2. Roy conducted his revolutionary techniques from abroad between 1920 and 1928. He not only directed Indian communist activities from abroad but also interpreted India to the Comintern.
of titles and honorary offices, boycott of government educational institutions, law courts and the legislatures, resignation of nominated members of the local bodies, boycott of foreign goods, adoption of Swadeshi in piece-goods on a vast scale and revival of hand spinning and hand weaving and also non-payment of taxes.

The year 1921 witnessed the triumphant results of Gandhi's non-violent non-co-operation movement which made the Congress to define its objective as "the attainment of Swaraj by the people of India by all legitimate and peaceful means".

On November 17, 1921, the British Government sent Prince of Wale's to India, but he did not receive enthusiastic welcome from Indians. For the people observed strike all over India as a mark of protest against the Britishers. There followed a mounting wave of civil disobedience but Gandhi advised the people to create an atmosphere of non-violent movement.

On November 5, 1921, at the All India Congress Committee Meeting, it was resolved that every province would undertake the Civil-disobedience movement including non-payment of taxes. Gandhi had to undertake it at Bardoli. Before this could have been implemented, a violent mob burnt a police station at Chauri-Chaura and Gandhi called off the whole movement as it was feared that movement had taken a violent turn.
Gandhi became a centre of criticism from all quarters for this sudden retreat. (calling off the movement). Especially, the communists were more vehement in their condemnation of Gandhi, his non-co-operation movement its collapse and Bardoli resolution of Congress Committee.

M.N. Roy observes,

"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".  

Perhaps the sharpest critique of Gandhi's leadership during the national freedom movement was put forth by Rajni Palme Dutt,

for whom, non-violence was nothing more than double edged weapon
keeping the masses away from threatening the privileges of
Indian landlords and capitalists at one side and winning
concessions from the Britishers by showing the fear of mass
awakening on the other. In his own words, "The prophet who by
his personal saintliness and selflessness could unlock the door
to the hearts of the masses where the moderate bourgeois leaders
could not hope for a hearing - and the best guarantee of the
shipwreck of any mass movement which had the blessing of his
association. This Jonah of revolution, this general of unbroken
disaster was the mascot of the bourgeoisie in each wave of the
developing Indian struggle. All the hopes of the bourgeoisie
(the hostile might say, the hopes of imperialism) were fixed on
Gandhi as the man to ride the waves, to unleash just enough of
the mass movement in order to derive a successful bargain, and
the same time to save India from revolution".4

Rajni Palme Dutt dealt with specifically Gandhi's
practical politics and his role during the episode of 1919-1922,
of non-co-operation and Civil Disobedience movement. In his own
words,

"The achievement of Gandhi consisted in that he, almost
alone of all the leaders, sensed this and reached out to the
masses. This was the first great achievement of Gandhi. He did
— at one point — reach the masses". "This positive achievement

4. Dutt, R. Palme; INDIA TODAY (Bombay; People's Publishing
of Gandhi is bigger than all the idiosyncracies and weaknesses which may be brought against him, and constitutes his real contribution to Indian Nationalism”.

Gandhi's second achievement according to Dutt consisted in his "policy of action, of action of the masses, Non-co-operation to win swaraj and at the height of his agitation, the policy of Mass Civil Disobedience".5

In his further observation, he considers Gandhi's non-violence and spirituality as insignificant in relation to Gandhi's own declarations in the manifesto of December 1921 saying as,

"The Non-co-operators are at war with the Government'. We want to 'overthrow the Government' and 'Compel its submission' to the people's will. This is a fight to finish". But he was very critical of his decision to withdraw the movement, Reacting to it he said,

"The battle was over. The whole campaign was over. The mountain had indeed borne a mouse".6

He continued, "Gandhi failed as the leader of the national struggle because he could not cut himself loose from the upper class interests and prejudices in which he had been brought up".

5. Dutt. R. Palme; Modern India (London; 1927), pp. 72-73.
"The spirituality of Gandhi", he adds, "is only the expression of this class interest. All parasitic and propertied classes have to weave around themselves a fog of confused language, superstitions, tradition, religion, revivalism etc. in order to hide from the masses the fact of their exploitation".  

In his final analysis, the breakdown of 1922 was not the failure of revolutionary spirit of masses but it was completely a failure of the bourgeoisie leadership. In his view, Gandhi's leadership was indirect leadership of big bourgeoisie and there is a clear manifestation of his "beauty of compromise" with the landlords, merchants and capitalists and an acceptable settlement with the British Imperialism even during a big height of the mass movement.

Increasing popularity of Gandhi as an undisputed national leader on Indian political scenario and his increasing hold on masses and their positive response to him was considered by the Communist International as a big challenge to its political position. Hence, Communist International in its First World Congress held in September 1920 in Moscow, observed,

"Tendencies like Gandhism in India, thoroughly imbibed with religious conceptions, idealize the most backward and economically most reactionary forms of social life, see the solutions...

of the social problem not in proletarian socialism, but in a
reversion to these backward forms, preach passivity and
repudiate the class struggle, and in the process of the
development of the revolution become transformed into an openly
reactionary force. Gandhism is more becoming an ideology
directed against mass revolution, it must be combated by
Communism*. 8

Moscow took direct interest to fulfil this object and
appointed M.N. Roy to organise in India the communist movement.
In July 1924, the Comintern decided to adopt M.N. Roy’s advice
that the Communist Party of India should be established as a
branch of the Communist International. 9 For the fulfillment of
those aspirations, the Bolsheviks needed both, a revolutionary
plan and revolutionary agents. Moscow trained Indian communists
were taught in their political classes that “Gandhi was an agent
of the British imperialists and his national Congress was a
reactionary, counter-revolutionary organisation of the Indian
bourgeoisie.” 10 In 1924, several communist agents were involved
in Cawnpore conspiracy case who conspired to overthrow British
government in India to establish Soviet hegemony. The Communist
International developed in the meantime doubts about Roy’s
efficacy who was really finding it difficult to handle the India's
nascent Communist Party from abroad. Rajni Palme Dutt, a member

8. Quoted in Masani, M.R.; The Communist Party of India:
A Short History (Bombay; Shartiya Vidya Bhavan, 1967), p. 10.
10. Sinha, V.B.; The Red Rebel in India (New Delhi; Associated
of Communist Party of Great Britain was then entrusted with the task to have organisational link between Commintern and the communist organisation and groups in British India. Although the formal birth of CPI took place in 1925 but due to Meerut conspiracy case party's members functioned through Workers' and Peasants' Party which almost kept it (CPI) neglected.

On 1st September 1928, at the Sixth World Congress of Comintern a resolution was passed entitled as the Revolutionary Movement for the colonies and Semi-colonies which put forward the following policy before the Indian Communists. It was suggested that,

"To utilise the connections of the existing Workers' and Peasants' Parties with the labouring masses for strengthening their own party bearing in mind that the hegemony of the proletariat cannot be realised without the existence of a consolidated steadfast Communist Party, armed with the theory of Marxism".11

Adopting the independent line of action, the Sixth Comintern advised the Indian Communists to make severe propaganda against the bourgeois leadership which under Gandhi's leadership was damaging the proletarian revolution in India. Hence it was advised that,

"The Communists must unmask the national reformism of the Indian National Congress and oppose all the talk of Swarajists, Gandhists etc., about passive resistance. The greatest threat to the victory of Indian revolution is the fact that great masses of India still harbour illusions about the National Congress and have not realized that it represents a class organisation of the capitalists working against the fundamental interests of the toiling masses. It exhorted the CPI to wage a 'ruthless war' and 'mercilessly expose' the nationalist-reformist leaders.\textsuperscript{12}

Gandhi launched his Civil disobedience movement on March 12, 1930, with his historic Dandi March accompanied by 78 followers. The Congress Working Committee had called upon the workers, peasants, students, merchants, lawyers and Government servants to withdraw cooperation from the British rule and join the movement by stopping payment of all taxes, picketing liquor shops and boycotting foreign cloth. But in such a situation of gigantic struggle when the satyagrahis were sentenced to long terms of imprisonment, "the Indian Communists were in the state of wilderness." For, according to M.R. Masani, "instead of identifying themselves with the national struggle, they turned their backs on the mass anti-imperialist movement and kept themselves aloof from the well spring of Indian political life." \textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{12} Sixth Comintern observed Ganshism as the ideology, which originally belongs to the radical petty bourgeois movement which later on converted itself to the service of the big bourgeoisie. Ibid.; p. 541.

Actually, the Indian Communists kept away from the Indian National Movement on the direction of the Communist International of 1928. The Sixth World Congress adopted the thesis for the Communists to isolate themselves from the bourgeois nationalist movements. The Communist International, in its open letter advised the Indian working class to realise the reformist politics of Congress which, in their view was a retarding factor to the revolutionary elements.

The "Draft Platform of Action of the C.P. of India" was published in Pravada in December 1930, which analysed the Indian political situation and outlined the programme of the Communist Party of India. The Platform declared Gandhi and Congress responsible for the betrayal for the cause of revolutionary struggle of the working masses while following the policy of compromise with British imperialism. The Platform also identified the Native Princes, merchants, moneylenders, landlords and national bourgeoisie as collaborators of British imperialism. Gandhi was criticised that "under the cloak of vague statements about, love, meakness, 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 was also charged with preaching in 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. The left-wing of the Congress also came under bitter attack as an appendage of imperialism and the enemy of the masses. It was also recognised that these left elements harmed the revolutionary struggle of the masses. Under the revolutionary phraseology they carried on the confusing and disorganizing bourgeois policy.

On the guidance from the Platform, the Communists planned to have no compromise between the counter revolutionary nationalist movement and the revolutionary struggle of working masses. Apart from this, it was also held that the real struggle that was going on was not between the Congress and the British imperialism but between the Congress and the Indian Revolutionary Movement. The Platform of Action further declared:

"The exposure of the left Congress leaders who may again undertake to set up a new party or organisation like the former League of Independence in order once again to mobilize a mass of workers in 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 National Congress. Against the bourgeois compromise front
established by the national reformists, they must create a
united front of toilers from below, on the basis of a definite
proletarian revolutionary demands and activities".15

Communism came to India as an ideological movement
for the liberation of working masses deeply involved in the
International Communist Movement controlled by the Comintern.
Imbued with the teachings of Marxian doctrines of class
struggle, dictatorship of the proletariat, liberation of
colonial countries and proletarian internationalism on the
basis of an alliance of working class and the peasantry, they
could not reconcile themselves to Gandhi's approach of putting
up a united front of all Indian classes and of interests
against British imperialism. Perhaps, it was due to this
ideological clash with Gandhi that Indian Communists combated
Gandhism and endeavoured for the socialist revolution in
India. The Communists maintained that Indian National Movement
arose from the social and economic forces of inherent class
contradiction. So, they believed that the proletarian must
prove itself worthy to take over the bourgeoisie role as the
social progressive class and must reorganise the society.

The Comintern call for the "ruthless exposure" of
"reformist leadership" was aimed at Gandhi and the National
Congress. This direction from outside without understanding

15. Indian C.P. Documents; 1930-56 (Bombay;1957) pp. 8-9.
the national realities, brought the CPI to oppose all those national protests which latter denounced merely as 'bourgeois illusions'. It must be recalled that CPI did not participate in the peasant struggle of Bardoli started by Vallabhbhai Patel, National Boycott of the Simon Commission, Salt-Satyagraha of 1930 by Gandhi. Not only this, but they tear down the tri-colour Congress flag at Chowpatti. The Communists of India were vigourously propagating to expose the Congress organisation of the Indian bourgeoisie working in alliance with landlords and capitalists. Their denunciation of Gandhi as an agent of Indian bourgeoisie and the 'repeated betrayals' emphasised for an alternative, genuinely revolutionary front — the Anti-Imperialist League.16

Civil Disobedience movement of 1930 and 1932 brought about greater consciousness among the Indian masses as for the first time mass involvement in the national freedom movement from each section was seen. In the words of Jawaharlal Nehru, "Congress at present means Gandhiji, and his leadership had produced a wonderful awakening of the masses". Gandhi's identification with the poor peasants and labourers, his simple style of living and "Indian-ness" of thought and personality predominantly merited him with unparallel popularity. "And a

16. The Manifesto of the Anti-Imperialist Conference, 1934, issued by the Provisional Committee of 'Anti-Imperialist Leage'.
man who could command such tremendous devotion and loyalty must have something in him that corresponded to the needs and aspirations of the masses". At such a stage, the non-participant and anti-national role of CPI, not only doubted its character among the masses but defamed it too. The revolutionary spirit of Communists, of which they were making propaganda in their public speeches, was found nowhere. In fact, they not only kept away from anti-imperialistic struggle but did everything they could do to weaken and sabotage it. "While love of Swadeshi was in the air, they supported suits made of foreign cloth as a gesture of solidarity with the British workers in Lancashire". This approach of CPI became a negative factor to the Communists against mass psychology. Since it was a failure of CPI to find out a strategy of their own; following the Comintern line meticulously, they got cut off from the masses.

Actually, the Indian communists could not observe the national reality, their opposition to national struggle under Gandhi was based on Comintern call for 'ruthless exposure' of 'reformist leadership'; but Indian National Congress dominated by the colourful and dynamic personality of Mahatma Gandhi was an expression of people's hopes and aspirations. To be isolated from the Congress was to be isolated from the people and hence from the national mainstream. And the Communist leaders, from

outside direction, followed anti-Congress, anti-Gandhi attitude which gave the impression as anti-people and anti-national, spoiling the revolutionary image of communists among the masses.

However the leadership of the Communists International was not very clear about their assessment of Gandhi's role in the national liberation struggle against British imperialists. For, it became a crucial point of dispute between Lenin and M.N. Roy on the Communist Policy towards colonial countries. M.N. Roy had pleaded that communist parties should not assist the bourgeoisie democratic struggle led by the national bourgeoisie since they were not genuine revolutionary. He did not agree with Lenin who regarded Gandhi as an inspirer and revolutionary leader of mass movement. Roy argued that being a religious and cultural revivalist, Gandhi was bound to be a socially reactionary, however revolutionary he might appear in political field. Roy compared Gandhi's politics of denouncing capitalism as a western vice and return to village life, with the Russian Populist and socialist Revolutionary Movements characterising them as revolutionary, but reactionary. Lenin refuted Roy's opinion and held the view that in view of the historical determinism of social development, colonial countries must have their bourgeoisie - democratic revolution before they could enter the stage of proletarian revolution.

and that the bourgeoisie objectively represented a "revolutionary force" in the first stage. The Communists must recognise this fact and therefore must help the colonial movements under the national bourgeoisie.

However the Chinese Communist leader Wang Ming, prepared a report on colonial countries under the title 'The Revolutionary Movement in the Colonial Countries', who reported in Seventh World Congress of the Comintern in Moscow as:

"Our comrades in India have suffered for a long time from "left sectarian" errors; they did not participate in all the mass demonstrations organised by the National Congress or organisations affiliated with it."

"Nevertheless, our young Indian comrades, having taken this road, showed a great lack of the 'United Front' tactics. They put before the Indian National Congress such demands as "the establishment of Workers' and Peasants' Soviet Republic," "Confiscation of all lands that belong to the Zamindars without compensation", "a general strike as the only effective programme of action", etc.

In his report he further said, "The Indian Communists should in no case disregard work within the National Congress and the national revolutionary and national-reformist organisations affiliated with it, maintaining
at the same time their complete political and organisational independence. Both within and without the National Congress, the Indian Communists must consolidate all the genuine anti-imperialist forces of the country...". 22

Another expression of Comintern policy appeared in a speech by Georgi Dimitrov at the Seventh Congress, he said:

"That the CPI, while retaining its independence, must carry on active work inside the organisations which take part in the Indian National Congress, facilitating the process of crystallization of a national revolutionary wing among them, for the purpose of further developing the national liberation movement". 23

Then arrived Dutt - Bradley thesis24 following Dimitrov's dictum, in India in 1936, which called upon the CPI to rally the Congress left-wing for an attack on the right-wing leadership. This meant 'United Front from above', an alliance with the Congress socialist Party and penetration, 'United Front from below' of the Indian National Congress.


This policy, however, put the CPI in a dilemma that had been inherent in 'Anti-Imperialist People's Front' for it required that the CPI aimed at unifying the nationalist movement, and at the same time try to capture it. These goals were fundamentally incompatible, and the CPI was increasingly forced to face the question as to which it should sacrifice the campaign for a United Congress, or the campaign against Gandhi and the nationalist leadership. The need of United Front was felt by the Communists to combine with Indian National Congress most important forces which were present outside the Congress. Dutt-Bradley thesis goes further saying that such a programme could make Congress a 'real' anti-imperialist front embracing all genuine forces.

CPI was banned by the British government for its activities of violence in mills and factories. On getting the green signal from Comintern CPI joined hands with the Congress. Communists tried to go closer to the Congress and dissolved its Red T.U.C. and got it affiliated with A.I.T.U.C. Now Congress was neither a bourgeois nor a reformist organisation but it was a national revolutionary to the communists. The opportunity for mass contact thus afforded was of incalculable value, and the label 'Congressmen' gave the Communists unprecedented respectability and influence. The CPI's membership grew tremendously.

Many prominent Communist leaders joined the Congress and got top ranking status in the National Executive in 1937-38. Communists were elected to important executive posts in various Congress Committees and there were no fewer than 20 in the All-India Congress Committee.  

The Politbureau declared that agitation was not to be carried on from inside alone, but supported from outside. It was also suggested that Communists should emphasise on demanding collective affiliation etc., by mobilising all anti-imperialist mass organisation outside the Indian National Congress. But these tactics were not in the spirit of joint - anti-imperialist struggle but calculated on other motive to dislodge or isolate the national leadership from the rank and file in order to capture it.

Soft line towards the Congress and freedom movement brought the Indian Communists closer to Congress. After his release from prison in 1936 Roy also said, "My message to the people is to rally in the millions under the flag of the National Congress and fight for freedom. Socialism or communism is not the issue of the day, and socialists and communists should

27. Dutt, R.P.; India Today, op. cit.; p. 397.
realize that the immediate objective is national independence. We should realize that the National Congress is our common platform".  

It was for this categorical statement of M.N. Roy that he received warm welcome from Congress leadership. The long time critic of Gandhi again came on ideological issues when he attacked Gandhi under article "Science and Superstition". According to M.N. Roy, Gandhi reacted heavily on it and declared him "enemy number one". Roy's opposition to the formation of CSP within the Congress was based on his belief that left wing should prepare themselves offering an alternative to the Gandhian programme of national revolution.  

Roy also opposed the formation of CSP as he wanted to have secret organisation within the National Congress under his leadership.  

On January 1936, at the Annual Conference of CSP at Meerut under the guidance of CSP and CPI, the All-India Kisan Sabha was founded which championed more drastic proposals than the Congress party. At many times there appeared tussle

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28. The Tribune (Lahore), Nov. 23, 1936, p. 16.  
between rival groups to have control over them. The situation became very controversial in 1937-39 when in his presidential address Swami Sahajanand complained that "there was no material difference between the ameliorate measures adopted by the Congress and the non-congress ministries. At every step the former seemed to be more anxious to enter into agreements with the Zamindars and other vested interests than to improve the lot of the peasants". 31

Jawaharlal Nehru became aware of the increasing problems that All-India Kisan Sabha put in the way of national freedom movement and objected to the red flag of it which he considered "as a kind of rival of the national flag". Thus, opposing the Kisan Sabhas he said, "Congress is usually considered by the peasantry as their organisation and that is as it should be." 32 But the Kisan Sabhas charged the congress ministry in Bihar as more sympathetic to the landlords than to the poor peasants. In support of this view they found that mostly local congress committees were dominated by the landlords in rural areas.

The development of Bihar Kisan Sabhas made Gandhi unhappy who felt that rival Kisan organisations had been formed "only with a view to capturing the Congress organisation".

31. Independent India (Bombay; May 22, 1938), p. 121.
He again observed that "the Kisan Sabhas were weakening the Congress rather than strengthening it" and added "if the Sabha was a rival organisation and a Congress organisation only in name, its strength and energy will be utilized in resisting the Congress and those of the Congress will be utilized in resisting the Kisan Sabha". The Congress leadership feared from the task of communist infiltration among the peasants and warned the Kisan Sabha to follow the non-violence creed of Congress otherwise they would be subject to disciplinary action.

Congress passed a resolution in Haripura in February 1938 directing its members not to associate with the Kisan Sabhas but champion the cause of peasants and work for the spread of the Congress organisation in every village and not do anything which weakens this organisation in any way.

The United Front tactics on the direction from the Seventh Congress of the Communist International produced desirable results. It was the period when the communists made a considerable headway through the trade union activities. The move on the unity of Left-Wing parties was utilised as a good channel by the communists in the process of infiltration.

33. Harijan; April 23, 1938, pp. 85-86.
34. Ibid.; January 8, 1938, p. 411.
35. Ibid.; February 26, 1938, p. 25.
through the CSP to its parent body, the Indian National Congress. Since the Communist Party was an illegal organisation but CSP gave it a cover through which CPI got enough opportunity to build up their image and organisation. Earlier the communists had got isolated from the masses but now by changing their tactics through infiltration into Congress they came to occupy important positions in the PCCS and the AICC under the CSP umbrella.

The policy of United Front against the imperialists got severe blow on the outbreak of the Second World War. The Indian Communists again started attacks on the National Congress leaders Gandhi and Nehru whom they denounced as "saboteurs of Indian independence and agents of imperialism". The Congress Socialists were described as "henchmen of Gandhi for not sabotaging the Congress policy of compromise". This new policy they described 'United front from below.' i.e. unity with the rank and file against the Congress leaders.

Undoubtedly, the Communists have been partially successful in causing the splits in the All-India Kisan Sabha and All-India Students Federation. But their opposition to the national campaign of Quit India Movement again discredited them and brought to the state of isolation.

Gandhi's relationship with the Capitalists and their participation in the freedom movement made Indian Communists suspicious towards him. Hence, to the India communists, Gandhi was not a revolutionary seriously concerned with bringing about any real social change but merely a visionary and subtle apologist of the status-quo. In the words of Hiren Mukerjee, "Gandhi was at the same time conservative and revolutionary - he did not, for example, deny the moral validity of the institution of the rich as such, though he sought to change the nature of its working, and ultimately even to eliminate it".\(^37\) Truely, Gandhi wanted actual and far reaching social consciousness among the masses but avoiding violence. To T.K.N. Unnithan, "Gandhi does not question the historical existence of the institution of the rich as such, though he questions the nature of its working and envisages a future possibility of its complete elimination. This probably is due to his passionate desire to give effect to his cherished doctrine of non-violence. It is unlikely that Gandhi sought to justify the historical growth of the institution of wealth; the probability is that he ignored it or tolerated it as a result of his conviction that any attempts to question it would result in violence".\(^38\)

Obviously, Gandhi's 'fixation of non-violence' made a good cause for the attraction for the rich sections of the

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37. Mukerjee Hiren; Gandhiji A Study. *op. cit.*; p. 197.
38. Unnithan, T.K.N; Gandhi and Free India *op. cit.*; p. 230.
society towards the freedom movement. During the Non-cooperation movement in 1920-22 the leading industrialists were suspicious and unsure of Gandhi's effectiveness as a leader against alien rule. As Hiren Mukerjee observed that later on, when the capitalists sensed Gandhi's willpower and potentiality as an effective leader with mass appeal, they came in his support with money though they were less interested in jail-going and similar other trials.  

Unlike 1920-21, the Indian big businessmen were backing Gandhi's programmes and his policies when they realised his utility and saw his hold on the Indian masses and felt secure under the fixation of his concept of non-violence. Leading businessman G.D. Birla, once told his eager colleagues that "he too was opposed of course to any idea of limiting private property of the means of production, but it would be much better if people like Gandhi, who had given up all earthly possessions would oppose the socialists. That would be much more effective than any action by the owners who in everyone's view would represent only their interests".  

Obviously, the Indian Capitalists and industrilists tried to use Gandhi's sincerity and ideology in their class interest.

39. Mukerjee Hiren; Gandhiji A Study op. cit.; p. 201.
40. Quoted in Herbert Fisher; Mahatma Gandhi Personality and Leader, op. cit.; p. 48.
At the Calcutta session of the Congress in 1928, when Gandhi came to active leadership again, Rajni Palme Dutt had observed, "whatever the views of the moderates might be with regard to his personal idiosyncracies, there was no question that he was the most subtle and experienced politician of the older group, with unrivalled mass prestige which world publicity had no enhanced as the greatest Indian figure; the ascetic defender of property in the name of the most religious and idealist principles of humility and love of property; the invincible mytaphysical theological casuist who could justify and reconcile anything and everything, tangle of explanation and arguments which in a man of common clay might have been called dishonest quibbling". 41

Gandhi's politics of boycott also went in favour of capitalists. When Gandhi was preaching 'Go Native', 'Buy Indian' and 'Boycott British', 42 the mill owners of Bombay and Ahmedabad, the headquarters of the Indian bourgeoisie increased their production to meet the increasing demand. For they were sure that hand spun and handwoven Khadi could never compete with mills. They supported Gandhi's boycott of English textiles. For, such appeals went in favour of Indian Capitalists who declared three-figure dividends and made huge profits. Tata's,

42. Mukerjee Hiren; Gandhiji A Study. op. cit.; p. 201.
who had long stubbornly refused to 'go-native', Gandhi himself, in the late 20's would put in the forefront of national demands settlement of the Rupee exchange ratio in the interest of Indian big business. Thus, when 1930 came, unlike the 1920-22, Gandhi had the countries bourgeoisie backing his movement. 43

Gandhi's theistic ideology and its underlying tenets expressed in mystic terms e.g. Truth and Non-violence, Change of heart, honesty on the part of the rich trustees, inner voice, renunciation and self-purification etc. as the best means for the solutions of the political and economic ills and his pious wish that adoption of these ideals would establish in an ideal state (Ram Rajya) has been considered by the leftists as utopian and visionary and essentially Gandhi's upper class prejudice. According to them such unscientific and loose terms i.e. divine faith and superstitions of mediavalism leads nowhere as the social institutions based on exploitation continue because in Gandhi's thought purification of means and love towards the exploitators and honesty on the part of the rich trustees is a necessary condition. The adoption of Gandhian ideals meet with difficulties, primarily because of the resistance required on the part of the individual to certain natural changes warranted by the social and economic forces

43. Ibid.; p. 201.
that surround him, thus, tending to make the ideal seem "remote" from the "actual condition of human life". 44

Though logically, the reasoning does not appear to be unsound in Gandhian phraseology but leftists approach towards Gandhism has been to examine the relation of Gandhi's social philosophy to its practicability in social development and individual behaviour.

Leftists found such philosophy as more pernicious to their revolutionary creed of emancipation of society from the clutches of the bourgeoisie and hence they kept watch over Gandhi and his nature of leadership during the freedom movement. According to them, language of mysticism and dogmatism suited the Indian bourgeoisie because political activity was needed to frighten the Britishers as they were the devastating competitors with the Indian rising bourgeoisie and the ideas of superstition, religion, decentralised self-sufficient village communities, although reflecting the peasants' opposition to the new capitalist development but the capitalists were convinced that they were completely utopian and would never be realized.

In the words of Hiren Mukerjee, "Social institutions based on exploitation continue because, in Gandhi's thought, the exploiters and the exploited both co-operate in their

44. Unnithan, T.K.N; Gandhi and Free India, op. cit.; p. 225.
maintenance, if only the exploiters' individuality could be persuaded to shed their selflessness and the exploiters no longer feared the grip of the exploiters, everything would be lovely in the garden. A supremely moral way of revolution will, in Gandhi's scheme of things, bring about through God's grace and of course God's good time, a condition of happiness, equality and human dignity on earth. The process may take long, but it is really short because it is sure. 45

The Indian communists held the view vociferously that the class character of the Indian National Congress was a mass organisation of the Indian bourgeoisie. Both from organisational and ideological point of view its leadership and policies were regarded as of bourgeois nature as they served particularly the bourgeoisie interests.

But nationalism in India developed as a non-class ideology and cannot be articulated with rationalisation of the distinct economic interest of a class. Thus, the composition of Congress organisation was all-class. For this, "Congress movement", from the Communist point of view, confused many as synonymous with "national movement". The Indian National Congress, the Communists believed was a

45. Mukerjee Hiren; Gandhiji A Study, op. cit.; p. 207.
people's party which remained under the bourgeois hegemony. National bourgeoisie, they maintained, nourished the Indian National Movement by the financial aid. But, at no stage, according to Bipan Chandra, from its initiation to its later development was the capitalist class either the driving element behind the struggle for freedom or a leading class standing at the head of the national movement. The Indian Capitalist class was anti-imperialist and joined the nationalist intelligentsia which led the multi-class movement against imperialism. The Indian National Congress which represented the national movement was the complex ideological system of the leader of a multi-class party. Gandhi, the leader of Indian

46. Leading Capitalists G.D. Birla and Purshotamdas Thakurdas deliberately failed the attempts of few capitalists to form their separate class party. According to them this was the surest way of getting alienated from the national movement. The strategy suggested by them was to stay within the Congress and fight for hegemony. (Bhaqwan Josh; Congress and Politics of the Capitalist Class; Party, Class and Nation (Unpublished)).

47. National bourgeoisie, specifically the capitalist class, was one of the classes involved in the all-class anti-imperialist-movement. They (Industrialists, traders and merchants) supported the national movement on a large scale. (Mukherji Aditya; "Indian Capitalist Class and Congress on National Planning and Public Sector, 1930-47").

48. Bipan Chandra; Nationalism and Colonialism in Modern India (New Delhi; 1979), p. 144.

49. "The question concerning which class Gandhi represented in his ideology has aroused great discussions both among Indian and English authors and among Soviet students of India. The following points of view have been held: Gandhi was the representative of the landowners; Gandhi was a representative of the national bourgeoisie; Gandhi was a representative of the peasants. This is a very difficult question to decide. Gandhi was an extremely complicated figure." Quoted in Gene Overstreet and Marshall Windmiller; Communism in India (University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1959), p. 521.
National Congress performed an indispensable task, and commanded the respect of all the educated, peasants as well as of the business and professional elites.

Obviously, the communists critique of Gandhi and Gandhi's attitude towards capitalist class has been observed by the Indian Communists from the class point of view. It would be improper to regard Gandhi one-sidedly as a complaisant tool in the hands of the rich capitalist class. Undoubtedly, Gandhi was a master who influenced the rich capitalists and zamindars to join the national struggle and received their co-operation positively.

Gandhi became a great representative of Indian culture and India's aspirations, and entire nation without any hesitation prepared to follow him. He used their simple language in simple words and thoughts. His leadership with uncommon humility and self confidence became reminiscent to that of a great ocean in which all rivers got emerged losing their individual identity. Our diversified cultural and linguistic traditions, our different religious and philosophic backgrounds and mental make-up all got identification with his multi-faceted personality and leadership to win the dream of Swaraj. The quality of his leadership could best be judged by the fact that for a long period of three decades he never loosened his faith in Truth and Non-violence. He firmly stood
to show the priceless reserves of his nation's cultural and spiritual heritage among the material mind nations of the world. Gandhi touched hearts of every section of the society. If he were a tool in the hands of the bourgeoisie as the charge often levelled against him by the communists, he would have been a utter failure to acquire his hold on the masses. Obviously, Gandhi has been misunderstood or misrepresented by Marxists as a defender of private property and as being soft on capitalism. Clearly, the concept of 'Aparigraha' is obviously the strongest denunciation of capitalistic form.

Gandhi's multi-dimensional personality, his grasping of human nature and practical approach towards Indian politics during the national struggle raised many apprehensions among the Marxists. He not only philosophized certain concepts but as a practical politician made a dynamic adjustment of those values with whatever struggle he was carrying on against the existing system. Therefore, it is much more difficult to be a Gandhian revolutionary than to be a Marxist revolutionary. For quite a long time, he was an enigma to them during the national movement as they were unable to understand him. His practical politics of a reformer and revolutionary and his role as the biggest organiser of national struggle on non-violent lines with mass appeal and response from different sections of the

51. Sethi, J.D.; Gandhi Today p. 17.
society shows the big quality of a leader in which communists could not compete him. They also failed miserably to appreciate the great services he rendered to the peasantry, harijans and labourers and his constructive politics during the different phases in the anti-imperialist struggle. Marxists have often unjustifiably accused Gandhi as a defender of the propertied classes. In a strictest sense of the term, even no statement of Gandhi can be produced to show where he defended the right to property. Communists have one sidedly stressed the aspect of his compromises with imperialism and his softness with the vested interests while neglected the real aspect of his methods of struggle and hold on the masses especially the poor.

The dilemma of the Indian Communists consisted in the fact that they could not comprehend the national aspirations. They attempted to win over the masses by attacking the Indian National Congress and its leaders including Gandhi to get them isolated from the mainstream by raising the issues that Gandhi and his Congress represented the rich capitalists, landlords and zamindars. The leaders and writers of Marxists school looked at Gandhi and Congress through the spectacles of their class ideology and the conflict between them throughout was an allround effort and struggle to capture the leadership and replace it by the leadership of working class. Also, the communists critique of Gandhi could not be consistent and uniform. Perhaps it was
due to alien loyalty of our communist leaders, isolation from the nationalism, lack of unified leadership and factionalism that they would not identify the India's national culture while challenging and criticizing the leadership of Gandhi. The only consideration which entered into the comintern and the Soviet calculations with regard to the Indian freedom movement was the actual and potential usefulness of India as a centre of revolt against capitalism and as a base for the further explanation of Communism.  

52. As a result, relations between Gandhi and Indian Communists passed through a number of vicissitudes.