

**INDIA'S FREEDOM STRUGGLE
AND THE
COMMUNIST PARTY OF INDIA**

By
M. FAROOQI

INTRODUCTION

In its long history many races and tribes have crossed over to India, starting with the Aryan tribes between 2000 and 1500 BC.

However the coming of the British (and other Europeans) falls into a totally different category—it was an invasion.

(a) Most of the earlier races and tribes came and settled down here and made India their home. This is equally true of the various groups of Muslim invaders.

(b) They did not drain away the wealth of India to their mother country.

(c) Through the centuries, despite religious differences, a certain cultural fusion also took place. This laid the basis for a kind of composite Indian culture.

(d) But the Europeans, mainly the British, came here to exploit and drain away the wealth of India and ruined the country. This was a new class—the class of capitalists, of imperialists, that invaded India. *Thus it was foreign rule, pure and simple.*

The British rule constituted the period of slavery of our country.

Both the Hindu and Muslim communal historians must be debunked because they distort the history of India:

(a) According to Hindu communalists, India's slavery begins with the coming of Muslims.

(b) According to Muslim communalists, India's history begins with the coming of Muslims. They negate the pre-Muslim period.

The starting point of our country's slavery is the defeat of the forces of Nawab Sirajuddaullah of Bengal in the battle of Plassey (1757). This was the first big confrontation of arms between Indians and the British, in which our people were defeated and the British emerged on the Indian political scene as a *force to be reckoned with.*

Simultaneously there also took place a struggle between the British on the one hand and other Europeans (the Dutch, the Portuguese and above all the French) on the other for the political control of India. In this struggle the British ultimately triumphed. The Portuguese and the French managed to retain only some outposts (Portuguese retained Goa, etc. and the French, Pondicherry, etc.).

The European invasion had a specific characteristic. The rising (mercantile) bourgeoisie in Europe were looking for manufactured goods etc. in various parts of the world to expand their trade and make profits.

From trade they went over to politics, because this was necessary to protect their trading interests. This explains their political struggle to enslave India.

Having gradually established their political power, the British colonialists used that power to carry out systematic exploitation of our country and its economic resources.

Our people never reconciled themselves to this state of affairs and for nearly two hundred years carried on a struggle against the British rulers—a struggle that passed through various phases and various forms. It is a struggle rich in many lessons. Finally our people achieved victory in the struggle to overthrow the foreign British rule. India became free on 15 August 1947. This marked the end of an era and the beginning of a new one.

The working class and its political party, the CPI, appeared on the political arena of the country in a definite historical period. Its contribution to India's freedom struggle is immense, mistakes notwithstanding.

COLONIAL EXPLOITATION OF INDIA

European capitalist (mercantile) penetration in India began in early 16th century. The Portuguese established their first factory in 1500 at Calicut (Malabar) and captured Goa in 1510.

The Dutch arrived in 1602 and the French in 1664.

The British formed their East India Company for trade with India in about 1600. It got its charter from the British parliament in 1698—renewed in 1708.

This gave the East India Company the *monopoly right of trade with India*.

Briefly, the main features of Indian society at that point of time were: (a) feudalism in decay, (b) the selfsufficient village with its outmoded caste system, (c) decay of towns because of feudal wars, (d) very little surplus produced, (e) decay of old irrigation system, (f) wars and taxes on the people, and (g) preconditions for growth of capitalist relations not yet formed.

After the death of Aurangzeb (1707), the central Mughal authority began to disintegrate and provincial governors became more or less independent.

This situation was exploited by the East India Company to deal directly with the local rulers and get concessions for trade. Taking advantage of interfeudal wars, the East India Company began to interfere politically also, helping one side against the other both with money and arms.

It should be mentioned here that the British capitalist class represented a *more advanced social formation* than the decaying feudal class in India. The British and several other European bourgeoisie had already carried out successful revolutions against their own feudal classes. Thus they were more experienced and better equipped, politically and otherwise, to fight the decadent feudal classes in India—of course not for a revolutionary change, but to overpower them in order to establish their colonial rule.

By the beginning of the 19th century, after defeating the Marathas (1803), the British had already attained a position of being the *most important political force* in our country.

At this time the rule of Shah Alam (the Mughal 'emperor') was confined to Delhi only.

By 1857 even the formal semblance of Indian rule disappeared following our people's defeat in the first war of independence. The British became the *sole political power in India*.

It is possible that we could have retained our independence despite superiority of British arms had there been no disunity among the political forces that counted then in Indian society. Secondly, if there had been no treacherous elements in the society who sided with the British against their own people. Disunity and internal treachery are fertile grounds for the successful penetration of foreign aggression. This is as valid today as it was then. Thirdly, the caste system in our society was another negative factor against us.

I

Plunder of India by the East India Company was already going on in the name of trade (exploiting the weakness of political power in India the company had extracted several concessions from the local rulers), when the British in 1765 took over the dewani of Bengal, Orissa and Bihar. This gave the company the right to collect land revenue.

Dewani became the signboard for the British to rule the country and intensify the exploitation of the *Indian peasant—the main productive force in Indian society* at that time.

While in 1764-65 under the rule of the nawab of Bengal land revenue was Rs 65 lakh, it was almost doubled immediately the British took over (Rs 117 lakh).

By 1793, after the permanent settlement of Bengal, the land revenue had been pushed to a fourfold figure (Rs 268 lakh).

The constantly increasing burden on the peasantry, accompanied by total neglect of the old irrigation system, brought untold misery to the peasants and led to devastating famines.

In 1789 in a dispatch to the home government in London, the British governor-general Lord Cornwallis wrote: "One-third of the

territory under the British rule is now a jungle inhabited by wild beasts."

It should be noted that under the colonial rule of the British famines became a recurring phenomenon. The last great famine of 1943 in Bengal took a toll of more than 3 million lives.

Through the permanent settlement of Bengal, the British imposed the English type of feudalism in India—the right to buy and sell and mortgage land. This was something quite different from the prevailing system in the self-sufficient village community. A new class of landlords as the social base of the British colonial rulers was thus created. This system further ruined the Indian peasantry.

"In this way the characteristic process of the colonial system was in fact carried out with ruthless completeness in India—the expropriation of the Indian people from their land, even though this process was partially concealed under an ever-more-complicated maze of legal forms, which after a century and a half has grown into an impenetrable thicket of intermixed systems, tenures, customs and rights. From being owners of the soil, the peasants have become tenants, while simultaneously enjoying the woes of ownership in respect of mortgages and debts, which have now descended on the majority of their holdings; and with the further development of the process, an increasing proportion have in the past century, and especially in the past half-century, become landless labourers or the new class of the agricultural proletariat, now constituting from one-third to one-half of the agricultural population" (*India Today* by R. Palme Dutt).

The other class in the Indian society of the time participating in the process of production consisted of the artisans and craftsmen, producing cloth and metal and other kinds of goods. The East India Company also used its political power and the weakness of the feudal power to compel this class to sell its manufactured goods at extremely low prices, only to be sold at fabulously high prices in the European markets.

This was another source of colonial plunder.

In this process of exploitation the artisans and craftsmen were also ruined.

The East India Company brought its own English staff for trade and administration. From the clerk to the governor-general almost everyone indulged in corruption. When they returned to England

with their ill-gotten gains they lived like princes. The English people called them "Nabobs".

To maintain the British army of occupation and the administrative apparatus, people had to pay through the nose.

The East India Company sent to England large sums of money as tribute for "good government" in India.

In his letter to the Board of Directors of the company in England Lord Clive quite frankly wrote what monetary gains would accrue to England from the administration of India. He said: "Your revenues, by means of this acquisition, will as near as I can judge, not fall far short for the ensuing year of 250 lakhs of sicca rupees, including your former possessions of Burdwan, etc. Hereafter they will at least amount to 20 or 30 lakhs more. Your civil and military expense in time of peace can never exceed 60 lakhs of rupees; the nabob's allowances are already reduced to 42 lakhs, and the tribute to the king (the Great Mogul) at 26; so that there will be remaining a clear gain to the company of 122 lakhs of sicca rupees or £ 1,650,900 sterling" (Letter to the Directors of the East India Company, 30 September 1765).

Much later when the administration of the country was directly and fully taken over by the crown Sir George Cornwall Lewis, a member of parliament, declared in the House of Commons in 1858:

"I do most confidently maintain that no civilised government ever existed on the face of this earth which was more corrupt, more perfidious and more rapacious than the government of the East India Company from 1765 to 1784" (Quoted by R. P. Dutt in *India Today*).

II

The British plunder of India became one of the chief sources of original and primary accumulation of capital for the English bourgeoisie going over from the stage of mercantile capitalism to that of industrial capitalism. England is the *first country* to have had its industrial revolution—which made England the most powerful industrial nation of the world—a position it retained for more than a century. England has yet to pay its debt to India, because it was the plunder and loot from India that made the industrial revolution in that country possible!

Thus the last quarter of the 18th century saw the rise of a new

class of capitalists in England—the modern industrial capitalist. This new class then began to clash with the old mercantile capitalist class and this clash was sharply reflected in regard to the plunder of India.

Adam Smith (famous bourgeois economist), as the spokesman of the new rising class, attacks the East India Company in his *Wealth of Nations*. He demands free trade in response to the class interests of the new industrial bourgeoisie. So does Edmund Burke in the British parliament.

The main demand of this new class is: *End monopoly of trade of the East India Company*, because this trading monopoly was jeopardising the interests of the rising industrial class which wanted market for the goods manufactured in its factories run on the basis of modern machine.

Sharp struggles between the old and the new capitalists, between the mercantile and the industrial, *inevitably* led to the victory of the new industrial class.

In 1813 the British parliament ended the monopoly of trade enjoyed by the East India Company. It is obvious that now the British parliament had come to be dominated by the political representatives of the industrial class.

Following the industrial revolution, the textile industry in England became the most flourishing industry. It wanted a big market for its manufactured goods.

What was its result on India? While the East India Company was engaged in buying Indian textiles produced by our handloom weavers (Dacca, Murshidabad and Surat being well known in this field) and taking them to the European markets, with the end of its monopoly of trade and with the coming in of the industrial manufactures, the roles were reversed.

India became the dumping ground for British textiles and the new political power attained by the industrial class was used to promote this. This was done in two ways: (a) Nominal duties (2 to 3 per cent only) on the import of British textiles into India; (b) fantastic duties, varying from 10 to 30 per cent imposed on the import of Indian textiles and woollens in England.

Marx mentions that between 1818 and 1836 the export of twist from England to India rose in the proportion of 1 to 5200—fantastic increase in such a short period.

Between 1814 and 1835 cotton textiles from Britain to India rose from one million yards to 51 million yards, i.e. 51 times increase in about 20 years.

In the reverse direction, Indian cotton goods to Britain fell from 1.25 million piecegoods to just 63,000 piecegoods between 1814 to 1845.

By 1850 India already accounted for one-fourth of the world market for England's cotton manufacture. This industry employed one-eighth of the population of Britain.

All this led to the ruination of our handloom industry, the decay of important urban centres of this industry and the unemployment of millions of our weavers.

Similarly towns which were centres of manufacture of metal and other kinds of goods were ruined, because of their inability to compete with England's machine-made goods.

✓ R. Palme Dutt in his *India Today* says: "Decisive wrecking of Indian economic structure took place after 1813, with the invasion of industrial manufactures."

Millions of artisans were rendered unemployed in this process. Where could they go? This naturally led to pressure on agriculture—that being almost the only way left for them to eke out a living. But as we have seen earlier agriculture itself was in a state of decay. In this situation further pressure on agriculture contributed to increased impoverishment of the peasantry and led to unprecedentedly devastating famines. According to the official estimates more than 2 crores of people died in the period 1825-1900 as a result of these man-made calamities.

Thus the classes that constituted the main forces of production in Indian society of that time, the peasants and the artisans and craftsmen, bore the entire brunt of colonial exploitation.

Marx described, almost in poetic style, this state of affairs in Indian society brought about by British exploitation:

"All the civil wars, invasions, revolutions, conquests, famines, strangely complex, rapid and destructive as the successive action in Hindustan may appear, did not go deeper than its surface. England has broken down the entire framework of Indian society, without any symptoms of reconstitution yet appearing. This loss of his old world, with no gain of a new one, imparts a particular kind of

melancholy to the present misery of the Hindu*, and separates Hindustan, ruled by Britain, from all its ancient traditions, and from the whole of its past history.”

III

The last years of the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century are marked by the transition of capitalism from its industrial stage to that of monopoly and the rule of finance-capital—the imperialist stage of capitalism.

The British colonialists while continuing the old forms of exploitation of India (trade, tribute, dumping of manufactured goods) now added new forms of exploitation corresponding to the imperialist stage. The export of capital (the capital the English capitalist class had built on the basis of the plunder of India) to India and profits from its investments became one of the distinguishing features of this period. This capital was invested in plantations, jute, railways, banking, insurance, etc.

This so-called export of capital went on increasing from year to year. For instance while on the eve of the first world war (1914) it amounted to Rs 500 crore, it had doubled by 1933.

By 1914 the interest and profits plus the direct tribute drained out from India was much more than the profits from trade, manufacture and shipping. This showed that the exploitation of India by finance-capital had become the dominant factor in the total system of exploitation of the country.

It has been estimated that in the period of the rule of the company (1765-1858) the total tribute extracted from India was about £ 15 crore. But in the period of the finance capital, in two decades, the *annual* drain from India to England was also about the same, i.e. £ 15 crore.

This shows the intensity of exploitation of our country under the rule of finance-capital.

IV

The British imposed colonial economy in our country to carry out their exploitation. The main features of this economy were: (a) Im-

*Marx used the term 'Hindu' in the sense of an inhabitant of Hindustan.

position of English type of feudalism (which we have already mentioned) and perpetuation of feudal relations. (b) Keeping the country industrially backward, systematically hindering the growth of a national industry and depriving it of basic industries.

Simultaneously, the British colonial rule was marked by cultural and political suppression of our people.

The imposition of English type of feudalism and destruction of the selfsufficient village community was designed to create a social support in Indian society for the colonialists. The new landlord class became such social base—a class that became deeply interested in the perpetuation of colonial rule and its system of exploitation.

As far as the peasant is concerned he was subjected to three types of exploitation under the new system of feudal relations: (a) Land revenue which he had to pay to the government—in cash, irrespective of production in a particular year. The land revenue collections went on constantly increasing. From £ 42 lakh in 1800 it increased to nearly £ 2 crore in 1911 and to £ 2 crore and 39 lakh in 1936-37. (b) Rent to the landlord. (c) Interest to the moneylender.

The indebtedness of the Indian peasant under British rule is proverbial: "The Indian peasant is born in debt, lives in debt and dies in debt." Already in 1937 the burden of debt had reached the fantastic figure of more than Rs 1800 crore.

As a result of these feudal burdens the majority of peasants were gradually deprived of land. For the first time a large class of agricultural labour (almost one-third of the rural population) was created. More than 90 per cent of the peasants held less than 5 acres of land, while 4 per cent of the rural population, composed of noncultivating landlords, held the monopoly of land.

As to industry, the British adopted a systematic policy of hindering its growth. It will be evident from the fact that by 1914 the number of industrial workers covered by the Factories Act was not more than 9,51,000. It increased to just 15 lakh by 1931. If you add miners and railwaymen, the total number of workers in India in that year was only 26 lakh.

No basic industry was allowed to be built up. That the Tatas were able to set up a steel mill at Jamshedpur was because of the compulsions of the first world war—disruption of communications with England, the need to meet the requirements of the railway system, etc. demanded such a step.

At the time India became free in 1947, the country's total steel production was a paltry 9 lakh tons! A damning commentary on the policy of the colonialists in regard to building of heavy industry.

Through devious means the British colonialists dominated the industrial economy and took all possible measures to either prevent or at least retard the growth of *Indian* industry.

The *British* finance-capital dominated banking, insurance, commerce, exchange, shipping, railways, plantations (tea, coffee and rubber) and even jute.

Even in the cotton textile industry, where Indian capital was predominant, the British devised the method of managing-agency system to control operations in this sphere.

The Reserve Bank of India set up in 1935 and the Imperial Bank of India set up earlier in 1920 along with the exchange banks were owned or dominated by the British capitalist class and worked to the advantage of that class and against the development of a local Indian bourgeoisie.

The system of imperial preferences was established to maintain the hold of British capital on the Indian market in the competition against other imperialist countries. This also worked to the disadvantage of Indian capitalist development.

* * *

The British left a legacy of appalling illiteracy. In 1947, 90 per cent of the people of our country did not know how to read and write, despite all the humbug of their "civilising mission". Only a little more than a lakh were studying in universities and institutes of higher learning. (In the university of the capital city, Delhi, the number was just 3 thousand, while it is more than a lakh today.)

The facilities for specialised studies (medicine, engineering, agriculture) were nominal—about 700 graduates per year in medicine!

Woeful lack of medical facilities, abominable sanitary conditions, low vitality, etc. resulted in the average life expectancy being just about 27 years.

While English was the official language, the regional languages were suppressed or discouraged.

The absence of democracy and civil liberties, suppression of political parties (particularly the CPI and even the Congress at times), lionine repression against popular movements, particularly against

the workingclass, peasant and militant movements, restricted franchise (based on educational or property qualifications) were some of the features of the political suppression of our people under the British.

Such was the nature and extent of the exploitation of the British during the two hundred years of their rule.

Against this our people repeatedly rose in revolt and finally brought the British colonial rule to an end.

RESISTANCE TO COLONIAL RULE AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF NATIONAL-LIBERATION STRUGGLE

I

Throughout nearly two hundred years of British colonial rule, the Indian people carried on continuous resistance to foreign rule in one way or other. It was both spontaneous and organised, with arms and without arms, and took on various forms—religious, social and political. The prolonged resistance threw up a variety of forms of struggle that have now become part of the rich armoury of our mass movement.

For nearly a century up to the great revolt of 1857, the leadership of this resistance was ~~to a large extent~~ feudal and the freedom movement had the imprint of feudal ideology. But along with this peasants in a number of places rose in spontaneous revolts in protest against the misery heaped upon them by the colonialists. In 1857 the peasant element in the anti-British revolt was considerably important.

In the post-1857 period the leadership passed to the new rising Indian bourgeois class and to its political representatives who were drawn from the new educated middle class brought up in western bourgeois education. Naturally the aim of this class in the freedom struggle was different from that of the old feudal class. It wanted to develop its own industry and for that a share in political power.

In the period after the first world war, the great October socialist revolution of Russia, which opened a new era in the history of mankind, began to exercise deep influence on the further development of our freedom struggle. By this time the Indian working class also had started coming into its own. A new factor thus entered the political situation. Although the bourgeoisie and its political representatives continued to maintain their domination on the freedom struggle, the new class (i.e. the working class) and its

political representative (i.e. the CPI) along with other socialist-oriented and left forces began to challenge the exclusive bourgeois aims and induct their ideological-political outlook on the freedom movement. How far they succeeded in this effort will be examined later.

I

Before proceeding to a discussion of our people's struggle for freedom it would be necessary to make a few preliminary observations.

As part of their propaganda and in their effort to maintain their ideological-political hold over the masses, the bourgeois political leaders of the Congress party claim, firstly, that independence was achieved solely because of the efforts and sacrifices of the Congress party and its leadership and, secondly, that the overthrow of the then mightiest empire in the world (i.e. the British empire) was achieved because of the Gandhian technique of struggle—'satya' and 'ahimsa', i.e. truth and nonviolence. The power of this technique melted the heart of the imperialists who had to surrender and finally leave India, so runs the argument.

The history of our people's struggle for freedom is a clear refutation of this claim and this line of propaganda. Of course it is not to deny the historic role of the Indian National Congress in the freedom struggle and the new turn that the Congress gave to that struggle. But historical objectivity also demands recognition of the role of other forces as well as of the non-Gandhian forms of struggle which made significant contributions to the freedom movement.

It should be emphasised that in the struggle for freedom our people adopted several forms of struggle and that the Gandhian forms constituted only a part—a very important part, though—of the totality of forms of struggle.

It should also be pointed out that the composition of the present-day Congress or postindependence Congress is not the same as it was during the days of anti-imperialist national-liberation struggle. Several sections of the preindependence Congress, including communists and socialists, are now out of it. These too have played a very significant role in the fight for freedom.

The national-liberation struggle is a multiclass struggle against imperialism and its ally, feudalism. In such a struggle various classes participate—workers, peasants, petty bourgeoisie as well as the

bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie has of course its own class aims and has a dual role, but to the extent that the bourgeoisie fights against imperialism (because of its contradiction with the latter) and for the freedom of the country, it becomes an ally of workers, peasants and the petty bourgeoisie. This does not mean absence of conflicts between the bourgeoisie on the one hand and the exploited classes on the other. But these conflicts have to be fought within the framework of the national-liberation struggle and the main enemy (imperialism-feudalism) should not be forgotten.

Thus the working class and its closest ally the peasantry must have an alliance with the national bourgeoisie in the anti-imperialist national-liberation struggle.

II

In a backward country which is still under the sway of foreign imperialism, it is often the case that because of the prevalence of feudal ideology the struggle against foreign rule in its initial stages takes a religious form. It happened in our country too. The sanyasi movement (among Hindus in Bengal) and the wahabi movement (among the Muslims) against colonialism wore a religious garb. They hated British rule and fought against it because they considered British invasion as an attack on their own religion. But they looked backwards into the dying past and hence gave religious revivalist orientation to their movements.

Despite their religious character however these movements did play a certain role in rousing anti-British sentiment among our people. These were among the earliest anti-British movements in India.

Along with this the ruined peasants in some places rose in spontaneous revolts (no kisan sabhas yet!).

The accumulated anger of not only the various disinherited classes (viz the old feudals) but above all of the ruined peasants and the artisans—burst into a big storm in 1857 the like of which India had not witnessed since it came under the foreign British rule. The “peasant in uniform” (i.e. the Indian soldier) who had been watching the growing misery of his class rose in revolt with gun in hand and on 9 May 1857 the Indian soldiers in Meerut marched to Delhi, overthrew British rule, took control of the capital and proclaimed Bahadur Shah Zafar, the last of the Mughals, “emperor”

of India. Another armed force from Barielly led by Subaidar Bakht Khan marched to the capital to reinforce the Indian army in revolt and to defend the capital against the British. The revolt spread to various parts of the country—right up to Barrackpore in Bengal. But the Hindi-speaking belt of the north (Delhi, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar) were the main storm centres of the great revolt. It produced heroes like Tantia Tope, Rani of Jhansi, Bakht Khan, Kunwar Singh, Ahmedullah and others. Bahadur Shah Zafar became the national symbol.

It is obvious that the class that was mainly leading the revolt was the *old* feudal class (the new feudal class created by the British colonialists was on the side of the British). And it could not be otherwise. After all the new bourgeois class was yet to be formed. However in the process of the development of the revolt nonfeudal elements like Bakht Khan also came up in the leadership. He had risen from the ranks of the soldiers and Bahadur Shah Zafar made him a general. He did a great deal in maintaining law and order in the capital, curbing hoarders and profiteers and stabilising the price-level. He was a sort of a man of the masses. Besides it has to be remembered that it was the "peasant in uniform" who first rose in revolt and compelled the old feudal chieftains to take up arms against the British.

The main significance of the 1857 revolt lies in the fact that this was the *first national revolt* against the alien British rule or the first war of independence. Equally significant was the Hindu-Muslim unity that was achieved in the course of this struggle—a factor of immense importance in the specific conditions of our country's fight for independence.

However the revolt failed and the British colonialists succeeded in crushing it for the following main reasons: (1) lack of unified all-India leadership and unified plan of action; (2) superiority of the British arms; (3) the nizam in the south and the feudal princes in the Punjab and the new feudal class that the British had created played a treacherous role and supported the British.

The defeat of our people in the uprising of 1857 led to terrible demoralisation. The British let loose a reign of terror to crush the spirit of resistance of our people. It is obvious that the old correlation of class and political forces had to be replaced by a new

correlation of forces, before our people succeeded in their aim of complete independence.

1857 marks a watershed in our people's struggle for freedom. After 1857 new classes and new forces appeared on the arena and a new kind of national-liberation struggle with a new type of political leadership came into being. New conditions arose for the growth of our freedom struggle.

III

Even before 1857 new forces as well as certain types of movements which bore a modern scientific outlook had begun to emerge. Raja Ram Mohun Roy regarded as the father of Indian renaissance realised in the first half of the 19th century that India must imbibe the spirit of modern science, adopt modern education and discard obscurantism, superstition and the like—i.e. heritage of the feudal ideology. He visited Europe and saw the advance that it was making.

In 1828 he founded the Brahma Samaj—a social reform movement. This was not a religious movement of the old feudal type. Raja Ram Mohun Roy along with Vidyasagar created a new consciousness and deeply influenced sections of the new educated middle class, particularly in Bengal. M. G. Ranade in Maharashtra and Veeresalingam Pantulu in Andhra played a similar role.

It must be remembered that an Indian renaissance was an essential condition for the rise and development of a modern national-liberation struggle. Hence the importance of the role of Raja Ram Mohun Roy and Vidyasagar and of Ranade and Veeresalingam.

The thirties and forties of the 19th century saw the beginnings of the rise of a new middle class educated in western education. Lord Macaulay's education policy though aimed at producing a limited number of Indians as clerks (babus) for the British administration brought about certain political results which the British ruling class had not anticipated. The new educated middle class, although feudal in its origin and imbued with a sense of property, acquired the new concept of bourgeois democracy which was then developing in England along with the growth of industrial capitalism. Those who went through the new educational institutions set up

by the British in India learnt about the struggle for democracy in England, about the French revolution and its slogan of "Liberty, Equality and Fraternity!"

Questions naturally arose in their minds: If democracy is good for England, why not for India? This gave birth to modern democratic ideas, to ideas of representation, etc. In 1843 representatives of this class formed an association, called the British Indian Society (of Bengal) which in 1851 merged with the British Indian Association (another organisation of the representatives of this new class).

In 1852 the association submitted a petition to the British parliament which expressed a kind of mild protest against the way the British were ruling. The association's petition contained statements like: "They (i.e. the Indian people) cannot but feel that they have not profited by their connection with Great Britain to the extent which they had a right to expect."

The petition listed a number of grievances concerning land revenue, discouragement in regard to manufactures, education, admission to higher administrative service, etc. It demanded representation of Indians in legislative councils.

Both the sentiments and the demands contained in the petition may not be considered revolutionary by our standards today. But judging by the yardstick of those days, this did represent a definite advance in political consciousness of a new type. The new class was learning to express its political sentiments against the British rule.

The fifties of the 19th century marks the birth of the Indian capitalist class. The first cotton textile mill was set up in 1853 in Bombay. This also marks the birth of the Indian proletariat—whose class origin was peasant, the peasant ruined by the invasion of British capital. It is obvious that the Indian bourgeoisie was much better placed politically than the proletariat. It had its spokesmen in the new educated middle class about whom we have spoken earlier. The proletariat did not have that advantage yet.

With the introduction of the railways and telegraph in the fifties (the British colonialists took these steps for their own selfish interest of organising the exploitation of the resources of India) conditions were created for the building up of a centralised means of communications—something which in subsequent years also helped the development of national-liberation struggle on an all-India plane.

Thus, as Marx has said, the British became the "unconscious tool of history".

The Indian capitalist development, even though of a limited nature thanks to the deliberate policies of the colonialists, proceeded gradually in the subsequent period. By 1880 the number of factories had gone up to 156 and that of industrial workers to 44,000. It had increased to 193 mills and 161,000 workers by the end of the century.

The development of India's incipient textile industry inevitably led to a clash with the British capitalists for whom the Indian market was such a rich source of exploitation and profits. With political power in their hands, the British capitalist class abolished in 1882 all duties on the import of cotton goods from England into India.

Now all these developments were leading to the emergence of a new type of national-liberation struggle. By the last quarter of the 19th century objective conditions had been created for such a development. These may be summarised as: (a) The birth and rise of the Indian bourgeoisie (and of course the working class along with it); (b) the growth of a new educated middle class from which arose the political representatives of the new bourgeois class (their conflict with the British ruling class was developing); (c) along with this came the Deccan peasant uprising of 1875 as a result of growing impoverishment and unbearable burdens on the peasantry (such was the magnitude of this uprising that the British government was forced to appoint a commission to go into the cause of the peasant unrest).

In 1885 the political representatives of the bourgeoisie took the historic step of founding the Indian National Congress, the first political party in the country *on an all-India scale*. Earlier in 1875 Surendranath Banerji (later a president of the Congress) and in 1883 Ananda Mohan Bose (also president of the Congress subsequently) had attempted to set up some kind of a political party and Ananda Mohan Bose had even called an all-India conference. But it was not till 1885 that a well-defined political party came into being which marked a turningpoint in the development of our freedom movement.

The British realised that they could not prevent the formation of such a party. So why not keep a check over such a party? Thus argued the British. A. O. Hume, a British civilian till 1882, who is listed as one of the founders of the Congress (and the bourgeois historians hail him as a "great friend" of India for his participation in the foundation work) had actually had prior consultations in this matter

with Lord Dufferin, the then viceroy. But it was beyond Hume or Lord Dufferin to check the onward march of the freedom struggle as the subsequent development of the Congress and the national-liberation struggle was to show.

IV

For almost 20 years after its formation the Congress was dominated by the politics of petitions and resolutions. The leadership was essentially moderate, but with a modern western outlook. Dadabhai Naoroji, Phirozeshah Mehta, G. K. Gokhale, Badruddin Tyabji were undoubtedly great men. But they were not men of the masses. In fact the masses as a political force did not enter into their calculations. These leaders reflected the political aspirations of the rising Indian bourgeois class, which was still weak.

But in their petitions and resolutions adopted at the various annual sessions of the Congress in this period the direction of their demands was fairly clear. These centred round mainly two things: (a) Indian participation in legislation-making—i.e. setting up of such legislatures in the centre and in the provinces—and participation in the government; (b) encouragement and protection to Indian industry. Both the demands were interconnected—sharing of power in the sphere of politics and economy.

However the Congress and its leaders had not yet acquired the confidence and the strength *to fight* for these demands. But the main thing is that certain strata of our people were becoming increasingly conscious of the nature and significance of these demands and of the need for steps to get them realised.

The Congress had set in motion new political forces and when the time came these forces broke the bounds that had been set by the leadership. 1905 marks a point of departure from the old forms and methods of struggle as well as from the old leadership of the national-liberation movement. From petitions and resolutions sections of the people came over to militant actions.

The partition of Bengal in 1905 masterminded by that crafty British viceroy, Lord Curzon, became the signal for the unleashing of a mass movement demanding annulling of the partition. Actually partition of Bengal was the first *major* attempt on the part of the British to communalise Indian politics, to create permanent political divisions

between Hindus and Muslims. It is no mere coincidence that this synchronised with the formation of the Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha in 1906. The British had sown the poisonous weeds, which unfortunately the bourgeois leadership of the national-liberation struggle failed to destroy in time because it could only be done by adopting a correct, objective and scientific policy in regard to the Hindu-Muslim question. As we shall see later this failure led to the partition of the country itself in 1947. Anyway this is another question.

The agitation against the partition of Bengal was spurred on by the news of the defeat of tsarist Russia in the Russo-Japanese war (1905) and of the first bourgeois-democratic revolution in Russia against tsarist autocracy. A new kind of upsurge of nationalism, radical in character, swept *the urban areas* (mainly) and considerable sections of petty bourgeoisie were drawn into it. Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Aurobindo Ghosh, Lala Lajpat Rai, Bipin Chandra Pal became the spokesmen of this militant nationalism. Radical anti-British journals began to appear and Tilak proclaimed: "Swaraj is our birth-right!" This was accompanied by the rise of the terrorist movements in Bengal and Maharashtra in particular. Tilak and others of the new radicals in the leadership kept close contact with the terrorist movements. In fact the terrorist movement was conducted as part of the national-liberation movement. The Anushilan and Jugantar were the two main terrorist organisations that were formed in Bengal. Although they worshipped the goddess Kali before resorting to terrorist acts against the British, these terrorist organisations considerably radicalised the youth in the towns and many of whom joined them. This was the case not only in Bengal, but in Maharashtra and other places also.

An event of considerable significance during this period is the *first political strike* of the working class of Bombay against the arrest of Tilak in 1908—a strike which Lenin hailed as an event of revolutionary significance. This may be regarded as the beginning of the emergence of the Indian working class on the political arena of the country. (Tilak was finally sentenced to six years' imprisonment and deported to Mandalay in Burma, which was then part of India.)

The Muslims and particularly their intelligentsia were at the same time agitated over the attitude of the British towards the Turks. Du-

ring the Balkan wars (1911-13), leaders like Dr M. A. Ansari, the Ali brothers, Maulana Azad and Hasrat Mohani organised a medical mission to help the Turks. (Ansari, Mohammed Ali and Abul Kalam Azad were in subsequent years presidents of the Indian National Congress.)

A number of patriotic and anti-British journals were started by the Muslim intelligentsia. Abul Kalam Azad's *Al Hilal*, Zafar Ali Khan's *Zamindar* (Lahore) and Maulana Mohammed Ali's *Comrade* (English) played a very important role in raising anti-British sentiment among the urban Muslims. In Aligarh itself a strong anti-British section grew up among the Muslim students.

Thus the stage was set for the development of the national-liberation struggle to a higher and more militant phase.

However this phase of the movement, although radical and militant as compared to the earlier phase, had some negative features also. The urban petty bourgeoisie, both Hindu and Muslim, had religious sources of inspiration too in their fight against imperialism. This led to a certain religious revivalism among both the communities and a man like Aurobindo Ghosh later relapsed into mysticism and finally ended up by setting up an ashram in Pondicherry. Because of their different sources of religious inspiration, the Hindus and Muslims fought *convergent* actions and not yet *joint* actions against the common enemy—the British imperialism.

V

The post-first-world-war period is marked by an *entirely new stage* in the freedom struggle of our country. The great October socialist revolution in Russia inspired the freedom fighters in various parts of the world. It similarly exercised a tremendous influence on our national-liberation struggle. The specific characteristic of this period is that while in the prewar period (1905-11) the movement spread to the urban petty bourgeoisie and acquired a certain radical nature, the postwar upsurge was of a mass character, which drew the peasantry along with the working class in a very big and massive way into the struggle. The spread of movement from the towns to the countryside gave a new sweep to it. It threw up an entirely new kind of leadership (Gandhiji being the tallest among them) as also new forms of mass struggle.

It should be remembered that the same Gandhiji who during the first world war had given a call for recruitment of soldiers into the army was now leading a mass upsurge the like of which had not been witnessed before. The British imperialist rulers, true to their nature, far from conceding some kind of selfgovernment (dominion status) which the bourgeois political leadership was demanding and expecting to be bestowed on India, resorted to unprecedented repression against the freedom movement. Draconian laws like the Rowlatt act were promulgated; martial law was declared in Punjab and in April 1919 on Baisakhi day, the British staged the Jallianwala Bagh (Amritsar) massacre, in which more than three hundred innocent and defenceless persons (Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs) were killed. This sent a wave of horror and indignation throughout the length and breadth of the country.

Gandhiji launched a mass movement with the slogan: "This satanic power which cannot be mended must be ended!" He raised the demand of swaraj, although he did not define it precisely because the Congress leadership was still toying with the idea of dominion status.

He based his mass movement *mainly* on two pillars: rousing the peasantry and building Hindu-Muslim unity. Gandhiji's noncooperation movement and Ali brothers' khilafat movement merged into one. This period witnessed an unprecedented Hindu-Muslim unity.

Gandhiji asked the students to leave their institutions, and the lawyers to boycott the courts and join the national movement for freedom. This was in a way Gandhiji's means of getting educated cadres for the struggle. And it proved effective. Many left their institutions and their legal profession to join the struggle.

Now the noncooperation movement, even though its form of struggle was "nonviolent and peaceful satyagraha", reflected a new strength and selfconfidence. To tell the masses of the people that they have to noncooperate with the foreign government showed how far it had advanced from the days of petitions and resolutions. Correspondingly the organisational character of the Indian National Congress was transformed. The earlier form of organisational structure could not meet the requirements of a *mass* struggle and noncooperation. Thus the Congress was now transformed into a *mass organisation* with a mass membership. The membership fee was reduced to enable the masses of the peasantry and others to join the organisation.

Gandhiji even had the organisational concept of a permanent *whole-time cadre* to man the organisation. They may spin charkha or do some other constructive work in normal times, but should be available for satyagraha struggle whenever the call came.

The 1919-22 mass movement (including the khilafat movement) stirred the whole country from one end to the other. But once the mass initiative was unleashed, it could not be contained within the limits set by the bourgeois leadership. This has been proved again and again in the course of our national-liberation struggle and it was so in this movement also.

The peasantry which had been aroused did not see the freedom struggle as an abstract question. It saw in this movement a way out of their age-long feudal oppression and the police repression which was always unleashed to support the feudal landlords against the peasants. There were peasant rebellions in Malabar (Moplah revolt), in Andhra, UP and other places. Thus the concrete *class* question also came up on the agenda along with the question of freedom from alien British rule.

In the course of this phase of the freedom struggle the peasants of Chauri Chaura (in Gorakhpur district of Uttar Pradesh) fought back the oppression of the feudal-police combine, attacked the police station and in the militant fight between the police and the mass of the peasants, the police station was burnt down and a few policemen were killed.

Gandhiji cried "violence!" and withdrew the struggle. It is obvious that the bourgeois leadership, though relying on the support of the peasant masses, was at the same time afraid of their revolutionary potentialities. This was an expression of the *dual character of the Indian national bourgeoisie*.

The Congress working committee meeting at Bardoli on 12 February 1922 which decided to withdraw the noncooperation movement stated the following main reasons for its retreat:

(1) "... inhuman conduct of the mob at Chauri Chaura in having brutally murdered constables and wantonly burned police thana;

(2) "In view of the violent outbreaks every time mass civil disobedience is inaugurated, indicating that the country is not nonviolent enough,..."

The Bardoli resolution then "instructs the local Congress committees to advise the cultivators to pay land revenue and other taxes due to the government and to suspend every other activity of an offensive character".

It then declared pontifically that the "suspension of mass civil disobedience shall be continued until the atmosphere is so nonviolent as to ensure the nonrepetition of atrocities such as Gorakhpur or of the hooliganism such as at Bombay and Madras. . ."

It is particularly significant that the Bardoli resolution while withdrawing the movement thought it necessary to assure the landlords that the Congress was not opposed to their (landlords') interests. This assurance is contained in the resolution in the following words:

"The Congress working committee advises Congress workers and organisations to inform the ryots (peasants) that withholding of rent payment to the zamindars is contrary to the Congress resolution and injurious to the best interests of the country.

"The working committee assures the zamindars that the Congress movement in no way intended to attack their legal rights, and that even where the ryots have grievances, the committee desires that redress be sought by mutual consultation and arbitration."

The withdrawal of the movement led to terrible demoralisation among the masses and the active freedom fighters. The youth was particularly disillusioned with the Gandhian way of conducting the struggle and sections of them started coming over to the ideology of Marxism-Leninism and started building the party of the working class, the Communist Party. Some others were drawn to a broad left ideology. A new kind of left, different from the petty-bourgeois radicals of the first decade, began to be formed in the Congress and in the broad national-liberation movement. The October revolution and the building of a new society in the Soviet Union began to exercise influence even on sections of the leadership of the Congress, Nehru and Subhas Bose being the most prominent among them. The Nehrus, father and son, both visited the Soviet Union in 1927.

The rise of the Communist Party in the twenties marked an important milestone in the development of the national-liberation movement. By pursuing a correct political line of combining national and class tasks and implementing the Leninist approach of work in the colonies and semicolonies, the first communist groups which in 1925 at the Kanpur foundation conference constituted themselves into

the Communist Party of India, made a considerable impact on the national-liberation movement. They fought for acceptance by the Congress of complete independence as its goal, built up a militant workingclass movement, conducted such a historic strike as the 6-month long textile strike in Bombay, built up Asia's biggest trade union (Bombay Girni Kamgar Union), organised an open party (Workers' and Peasants' Party) to conduct their work and propaganda among workers and peasants, and brought out papers to reach out to the cadres and workers of the freedom movement. They maintained good relations with Congress leaders like Motilal Nehru and C. R. Das who supported them whenever the British launched repression against them. The communists could organise an independent demonstration of 30,000 people at the time of the first all-India conference of Workers' and Peasants' Party held in Calcutta in 1928 simultaneously with the Congress session (also in Calcutta). This demonstrated the growing mass base of the communists who had acquired it in such a short time because they were pursuing a correct policy.

A considerably important development that took place in the latter part of the twenties was the birth of a new kind of terrorist movement which was different from the one that had come up in the first decade of this century. The new terrorist movement in Punjab, Bengal, UP and some other places was different in the sense that it was somewhat vaguely influenced by the October socialist revolution and by the new left currents in the national-liberation movement. The movement in Punjab led by Bhagat Singh had given itself the name of Hindustan Socialist Republican Army. And then there was the band of youth who raided the Chittagong armoury. It is significant that most of these subsequently accepted Marxism-Leninism and joined the Communist Party. One of Bhagat Singh's colleagues in the Lahore Conspiracy Case was Ajoy Ghosh, who joined our party in 1931 and became its general secretary in 1951. There is no doubt that if Bhagat Singh had not been hanged, he too would have been in the CPI. He was reading Lenin when he went to the gallows.

Simultaneously with these revolutionary developments, another kind of development—a most negative one—was also taking place. Taking advantage of the demoralisation that had set in after Chauri Chaura the imperialists brought out their weapon of "divide and rule" to disrupt the Hindu-Muslim unity that had been built up in 1919-22 in the course of noncooperation and khilafat movements.

They engineered communal riots of an unprecedented magnitude and succeeded in creating considerable Hindu-Muslim division. This again proved the bankruptcy of the bourgeois national leadership and its failure to solve the Hindu-Muslim question.

The Gandhian leadership was caught in a political jam after the withdrawal of the movement. The leadership was sharply divided on the question of the withdrawal. Three of the tallest leaders of the Congress, Motilal Nehru, C. R. Das and Lala Lajpat Rai, had expressed anger and protest from inside the jail when Gandhiji withdrew the movement at Bardoli. Their fears came true when the British imperialists engineered and organised communal riots. Gandhiji had no alternative plan. The British imperialists took advantage of the withdrawal of the movement to put him in prison. Gandhiji's only recipe was: Spin the charkha and engage in 'constructive' work.

C. R. Das and Motilal Nehru did not agree with this Gandhian approach and demanded that the Congress should enter the legislative assemblies in the provinces and at the centre. This divided the Congress into 'pro-changers' and 'no-changers'. (Gandhiji and C. Rajagopalachariar were among the leading lights of no-changers). C. R. Das and Motilal Nehru then formed the Swaraj Party to contest the elections under the 1919 reforms. This no doubt represented a better tactic in a period of retreat than the one Gandhiji was offering. The Swaraj Party participated in 1923 elections, emerged as the single largest party in the central assembly and with the help of some moderates and liberals it even managed a small majority.

By 1925 the swarajists had captured the Congress and the Gandhians were politically in full retreat.

But the imperialists had also succeeded in creating communal divisions.

It was in this context that Lord Birkenhead, secretary of state for India, announced towards the end of 1927 the appointment of an all-white commission (Simon commission) to visit India to discuss the question of constitutional reforms. The Congress leadership was disappointed and the country was indignant at this insulting behaviour of the imperialists in appointing an all-white commission.

The call went out: "Boycott the Simon Commission!" The Congress leadership and the left forces (that had meanwhile come up in the country, including the formation of the CPI) joined hands

in the countrywide "Simon Commission Go Back!" demonstrations.

The Congress at its Madras session (December 1927) declared, for the first time, that complete independence was its goal. This represented the beginning of a new change in the correlation of political forces inside the national-liberation struggle.

But the Madras resolution on complete independence was kept in abeyance for some time. Meanwhile the Congress leadership took the initiative to set up an all-party committee under Motilal Nehru (called the Nehru committee) to hammer out a common line of action to confront the British. However the Nehru report with its demand for dominion status, as against the resolution on complete independence, was opposed by the left wing in the Congress—led by Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Bose. It also failed to satisfy the Muslims in regard to their representation in the legislatures. ~~This~~ latter fact was utilised by the British to foist on our people the round-table conference which was held in London to hammer out the so-called constitutional reforms for India.

By the end of the twenties and the beginning of the thirties, the Congress leadership realised that the British imperialists would not yield without another *mass struggle*. The mood of the country had undergone a complete change during the recent years—from demoralisation and frustration after Chauri Chaura to a new militancy and mass upsurge in which the rising forces represented by the working class, and the militant youth and students and revolutionary trends of the kind that Bhagat Singh symbolised constituted a new factor. The building of socialism in the Soviet Union, the ushering in of a new civilisation and making of a new man in the land of socialism were influencing newer sections of our people and the freedom fighters.

The British saw the writing on the wall. On the one hand, they dangled the round-table conference and the British viceroy even glibly talked of the "goal of dominion status" (October 1929) in some distant future to draw away a part of the bourgeois leadership from launching a new struggle. On the other hand, they attacked the leadership of the rising workingclass, peasant and revolutionary movements (called the terrorist movement) by launching the Meerut Conspiracy Case (directed against the rising communist movement) and the Lahore Conspiracy Case (directed against the revolutionary movement led by Bhagat Singh). As in 1919 they had promulgated

the repressive Rowlatt act, the British now put the so-called public safety bill before the central assembly and after its rejection by the assembly promulgated it as an ordinance.

However, despite certain attempts at compromise and after some hesitation, the Congress leadership was compelled to accept the resolution on complete independence at the Lahore session of the Indian National Congress (December 1929) presided over by Jawaharlal Nehru. The Congress session gave a call for mass action, starting with the countrywide unfurling of the new tricolour flag on 26 January 1930.

Between 1930 and 1934 (with a short break in 1931 after the Gandhi-Irwin pact when Gandhiji was persuaded to visit London, where he made an abortive attempt to get something through the round-table conference) the Congress launched the second round of mass movement, starting with Gandhiji's Dandi march or salt satyagraha in Gujarat. Whatever may be the limits set by Gandhiji, this period witnessed several revolutionary events whose significance cannot be overemphasised. The Chittagong armoury raid, the refusal of the Garhwali soldiers to fire upon people in Peshawar, taking over of the city of Sholapur in Maharashtra by the people led by its textile workers, the uprising of the peasantry in UP and their refusal to pay land revenue, militant Hindu-Muslim unity forged as in Peshawar—these and similar other events marked a sharp departure from the Gandhian forms of struggle.

These revolutionary events need some elaboration. As earlier stated Gandhiji had set certain limits beyond which the movement against the British must not go. And it must remain strictly under his political leadership. These developments did not conform to Gandhiji's set pattern. Each of these events has its own special significance.

In Sholapur (Maharashtra), for the first time, *the working class in alliance with other anti-imperialist forces of the city* overthrew the coercive British apparatus and established a kind of people's power. This power did not last more than a few days. But it showed the possibility of assuming power in a revolutionary way based on the unity of popular forces with the working class playing an important role. Sholapur also reflected the growth in the political maturity of the working class.

The Peshawar event has two aspects—both of a revolutionary character. Firstly, a section of the Indian army refuses to fire on

the demonstration organised by the Red Shirts of Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan and comes over to the side of the anti-imperialist forces. The demonstration itself was part of the all-India call given by the Congress and was perfectly peaceful. The Pathans had taken to the non-violent path of Gandhiji and yet the British would not tolerate a peaceful demonstration. The Garhwali regiment stationed there was called to disperse the demonstrators by firing on the them. The soldiers refused to comply with the orders of the British masters. Secondly, while the Garhwali soldiers were Hindus, the demonstrators were mostly Muslims. This established a new kind of unity—unity through revolutionary struggle—and showed the way how Hindu-Muslim unity can be built.

Gandhiji, it should be noted, expressed his disapproval of this act of “defiance” on the part of the army. According to him the army was to carry out orders. “After all I will also need an army after independence”, thus argued Gandhiji.

Because the army had joined hands with the anti-imperialist fighters, Peshawar remained in the hands of the people for almost 10 days—from 25 April to 5 May 1930. Peshawar had to be recaptured with the help of a *British army*.

The “defiant” Garhwali soldiers were courtmartialled and given life imprisonment (death sentences were demanded by the prosecutor, but the popular outcry forced the British to retreat). It needs to be mentioned that the leader of these Garhwali soldiers, Chandra Singh Garhwali joined the Communist Party after his release. He is still alive.

The Chittagong armoury raid was organised by a band of young revolutionaries, led by Surya Sen, to collect arms to carry out what they then thought a revolution against the British. There was a regular fight between these revolutionaries and the police with casualties on both sides. They were finally captured. Their leader was awarded death sentence and others life sentence. Practically all the survivors joined the Communist Party in subsequent years.

Thus the bulk of the terrorist movement of this period came over to the revolutionary workingclass movement, to the Communist Party, after its adherents realised that Marxism-Leninism and a mass revolutionary movement alone could bring about the fulfilment of their cherished dreams.

Although the no-rent campaign by the peasantry was no part of Gandhiji's movement, sections of the Congress itself in UP took to this form of struggle. This roused the peasantry in a big way and in the process radicalised large sections of congressmen.

Thus along with the Gandhian form of struggle also developed a powerful revolutionary trend inside the national-liberation movement. This was to exercise considerable influence in the following years on the course of the freedom movement.

British imperialist repression in this period was much more severe than in the earlier phases of the struggle. The Meerut Conspiracy Case aimed at smashing up the young communist movement was already launched. The case continued for four years till 1933. After the Lahore Conspiracy Case, young Bhagat Singh and two of his comrades-in-arms, Rajguru and Sukhdev, were hanged. The leader of the Chittagong armoury raid was hanged and his surviving colleagues got life sentences. Similarly, the Garhwali soldiers who had refused to fire on the demonstrators in Peshawar were courtmartialled and given life sentences. The Congress, the Red Shirts of Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan and many other organisations of youth, students and peasants were declared illegal. The CPI was already illegal. Shootings and beatings were on a much larger scale. In this period over 150,000 people were put behind prison bars, while in the 1919-22 movement about 30,000 people were in jail at its climax in early 1922.

At the suggestion of Gandhiji, the AICC withdrew the movement in May 1934. Gandhiji again declared that the people had not learnt the significance and technique of his satyagraha and nonviolence. In fact he was very unhappy at the growth of radical and socialist ideas in the Congress as well as with the rise of militant forms of mass struggles. The contradiction between his specific methods and forms of struggle and of the masses whom he himself had helped to come into the political arena in a very big way was becoming increasingly evident. His own satyagraha had its limitations. He could not bring down the British raj by confining the movement within the four corners of his set form of struggle. But he was not prepared to go to the higher form of struggle. So he had no other choice but to withdraw the struggle and again retire into "constructive" activities. He even resigned from the primary membership of the Congress. This of course was a ritual, since he remained the

tallest leader of the Congress and therefore of the national movement.

VII

But 1934 was not 1922. Having released the mass forces which now moved on a scale bigger than in the earlier period and in a different correlation of political forces, it was beyond Gandhiji to put even a temporary brake on the onward march of the freedom struggle. The next few years, before the outbreak of the second world war, saw the unprecedented growth of the forces of the left within the national-liberation movement, in the Indian National Congress. This left composed partly of communists, partly of socialist-oriented sections, and also radical and militant anti-imperialists began to exercise immense influence on the Congress workers and masses. The left also began to build and develop independent all-India mass organisations and to conduct independent mass struggles.

The following are the noteworthy features of this period:

(1) The Congress Socialist Party was formed in 1934. Although initially led by petty-bourgeois socialists, it had a large number of people who were making a serious effort towards a socialist orientation of the Congress. Many of them subsequently joined the Communist Party.

(2) The Communist Party corrected its earlier sectarian mistakes which had kept it aloof from the mass movement of the period 1930-34. Dimitrov's report at the seventh congress of the Comintern (1935), the Dutt-Bradley theses (February 1936) helped to set the CPI back on a correct political course. The CPI took initiative to restore the unity on the trade-union front (AITUC was reunified); built up the All-India Kisan Sabha, All-India Students' Federation, All-India Progressive Writers' Association (all in 1936). It became the leader of many struggles of workers, peasants, students, etc.

(3) For the first time, the states' people's movements against princely autocracy were drawn into the national-liberation struggle and gradually became part and parcel of the broad struggle. These movements joined together to form the All-India States' People's Conference. The leftwing leadership in the Congress made this its own cause.

(4) The All-India Students' Federation attracted students throughout the country and helped to radicalise them in a big way.

The AISF gave a large number of militant cadres to the broadly left, socialist and communist movements, and to the national-liberation movement in general.

(5) It was during this period that the idea of collective affiliation of the mass organisations of workers and peasants to the Indian National Congress was projected—something which, if accepted, would have changed the class composition of the Congress. The idea was mooted by Jawaharlal Nehru in his presidential address to the Congress, first in Lucknow in April 1936 and later at Faizpur in December 1936. But Gandhiji and the rightwing led by Patel opposed and it was therefore dropped.

(6) The Congress after considerable debate decided to contest the elections in 1937 for provincial assemblies under the Government of India Act, 1935. It won majorities in 9 provinces where it formed ministries. The Congress swept the poll despite limited franchise because by now the mass base of the Congress had tremendously expanded. However it has to be noted that except in NWFP the Congress failed to win in Muslim-majority provinces viz Punjab, Bengal and Sind. This again demonstrated the failure of the Congress leadership to draw the majority of Muslim masses under its banner.

The 1937 elections electrified the political atmosphere in the country, accelerated the process of radicalisation of the masses and further raised their anti-imperialist consciousness.

(7) The opposition to the British proposal for a federal assembly, which was to be constituted on the basis of the reactionary 1935 act, and the demand for a constituent assembly to be elected on the basis of adult franchise gathered momentum.

(8) By the end of the thirties the left in the Congress emerged as a very powerful force. It decided to challenge Gandhiji in the Congress presidential election (Tripuri session—early 1939), with Subhas Bose as the candidate of the united left (communists, socialists and others) against Pattabhi Sitaramayya who was sponsored by Gandhiji and the rightwing led by Patel. Subhas Bose won by a majority of nearly 199 votes (1575 for Bose and 1376 for Pattabhi). This represented the high watermark of the influence and prestige of the left forces in the Congress.

However, in the face of the Gandhian counteroffensive, the left was disorganised, Bose resigned and decided to set up his own

party, a step that the CPI opposed. Our party's line was to stay in the Congress, develop the left and the mass character of the freedom movement and fight the compromising tendencies of the Gandhian leadership. Our party was opposed to hand over the Congress to the Gandhian leadership entirely.

Thus by the time the second world war broke out in September 1939 the left in the national-liberation movement had been considerably strengthened and so also its mass base. But the left could not yet claim that it had attained the *decisive* position in the movement. The mass influence and prestige of the Gandhian leadership was still decisive. The majority of the people were still under its influence, although considerable sections of the cadres of the national-liberation struggle were gradually coming under the influence of the leftwing.

Before concluding this section and discussing the second war period, it is necessary to point out that over the years, particularly since after the October revolution, our freedom struggle increasingly linked itself with the international struggle against imperialism and developed a friendly attitude towards the Soviet Union. It is not only the communists, but even the tallest leaders of our national-liberation movement who supported and admired the Soviet Union—Tilak, Gandhiji, Motilal Nehru, Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhas Chandra Bose and poet Rabindranath Tagore and writer Munshi Prem Chand among them.

Jawaharlal Nehru attended the world conference of the League against Imperialism held in 1927 in Brussels. A branch of the League was even set up in India.

In the thirties Indian National Congress condemned fascism and its aggression against China and Abyssinia. Jawaharlal Nehru visited the trenches in the civil war in Spain and expressed support for the antifascists. The Congress sent a special medical mission to China to help the victims of Japanese aggression. The Congress supported the cause of the Palestinian Arabs and condemned the Balfour declaration by which the British imperialists (who held Palestine under the League of Nations mandate) paved the way for depriving the Palestinian Arabs of their national right.

Thus the Congress became the ardent supporter of the anti-imperialist struggles the world over. Of course, the rightwing leaders

in the Congress led by Patel did not entirely share these views. But they did not oppose the various steps and resolutions of the Congress on international issues.

It must also be noted that the Soviet Union right from the beginning supported our freedom struggle at every stage.

Similarly our freedom struggle received support from communists all over the world and particularly from the British communists.

We must never lose sight of the international link of our national-liberation movement.

VIII

During the period of the second world war (1939-45), the main question was: what attitude to adopt to it and what form should the mass movement take? The war passed through two phases: *First*, when it was being fought between the imperialist powers (the fascist axis on the one hand and the British and French imperialists on the other). This was between 3 September 1939 and 21 June 1941. *Second*, when Hitler attacked the Soviet Union (on 22 June 1941), with the resources of practically the whole of Europe at his command. With Japan's attack on Pearl Harbour in the Pacific, the USA also formally entered the war at the end of 1941. A new worldwide alliance came into being against Hitler—the anti-Hitler coalition consisting of the Soviet Union, USA, UK and France.

We are at the moment concerned with the attitude of our freedom movement towards the war in its first and second phases. In the first phase, there was a *broad* agreement within the national-liberation movement that the two groups of imperialist powers were fighting for redivision of the world in their selfish imperialist interests and therefore should be opposed. When the war entered the second phase (i.e. after attack on the Soviet Union), the national-liberation movement got divided on the basic attitude and form of action. The CPI had one attitude and the rest of the national-liberation movement quite a different one.

In the first phase, the left in the Congress and within the broad national-liberation movement demanded a *mass struggle* against the imperialist war, while the Gandhian leadership first sought a compromise with the British imperialists (demand for a national government to prosecute the war was raised) and when this offer was

spurned, launched a *limited* struggle against imperialism in the form of individual satyagraha. This form of action was opposed by the left forces, with the CPI and the mass organisations that it was leading being the most active in opposition to this line. The CPI conducted a big antiwar strike of the workers in Bombay on 2 October 1939—the first antiwar political strike anywhere in the world.

Thus two lines of action against the imperialist war were clearly in evidence. However it is obvious that the left could not launch a *countrywide mass struggle* against imperialism *on its own*—i.e. minus Gandhiji.

Imperialism however could not ignore the strength of the left which had grown tremendously in the recent years. Thus, while Gandhiji was attempting a compromise with the British and later conducting his individual satyagraha against the British, the imperialists struck hard at the left forces—communists, socialists and other left elements, to decimate the most militant anti-imperialist section of the national-liberation movement. By May 1941 more than 20,000 freedom fighters, mostly leftists, had been put behind prison bars under the hated Defence of India Rules and other repressive laws. Notorious concentration camps were set up, as in Deoli (Rajasthan) and Hijli (Bengal) for confinement of political prisoners from various states.

The war period witnessed a series of glorious anti-imperialist actions of students led by the All-India Students' Federation—against war and against imperialist repression. University campuses all over the country were stirred as never before. The communists were in the forefront in these struggles. This won them great prestige.

With Hitler's attack on the Soviet Union, the land of socialism, the world war took an entirely new turn. It was no more the continuation of the first phase, i.e. the imperialist phase. That the war was now different in character was recognised even by a section of the Congress leadership led by Jawaharlal Nehru, who had an international outlook and a sense of history. The national leadership led by Gandhiji would have liked to have a compromise. The AICC in January 1942 in a resolution expressed its solidarity with the Soviet Union, China and nations enslaved by hitlerites and the Japanese fascists. It offered conditional support to war and raised the demand for a "national government for national defence".

But the British imperialists, despite Britain's participation in the anti-Hitler coalition, had no intention of setting up a government composed of national leaders. On the other hand, they exploited the developing Hindu-Muslim political conflict which had by now taken a new turn (Muslim League adopted the Pakistan resolution at Lahore in 1940) to deny a national government.

This was a complicated situation. To the CPI, it presented a serious dilemma. How to combine the national with the international tasks? It was also a dilemma for a section of the Congress leadership led by Jawaharlal Nehru—although not to the same extent. The CPI which was still working underground termed it a people's war and put forward its line openly in January 1942 at the Patna session of the AISF. The Congress leaders, after having failed to secure a compromise called for a struggle to the end. The Cripps mission (March-April 1942) failed to satisfy the national leadership on the crucial question of immediate political power. "Do or Die!" became the slogan of the "Quit India" movement, launched by the Congress (AICC session, Bombay, 8 August 1942). Soon after the Congress leaders, including also Gandhiji and Nehru, were arrested and detained. Thousands upon thousands were arrested all over the country. The "Quit India" movement started on 9 August 1942.

But the movement though spontaneous (Gandhiji and the Congress leaders had made no preparations for this movement) engulfed the whole country in no time. While most of the Congress leaders were in prison, the actual leadership of the movement passed into the hands of various groups some of whom even set up an underground apparatus. The forms of struggle were varied—violent as well as non-violent. It included disruption of communications also. In some places the British power was overthrown and some kind of people's rule was set up, even though temporarily. Some of those who had set up popular rule subsequently joined the CPI—Nana Patil of Satara patri sarkar in Maharashtra and Sarju Pande in Ghazipur (Eastern UP) being the most prominent among them.

Outside the country, Subhas Chandra Bose who had by now reached Japan (after escaping from India earlier) set up the Indian National Army (INA) consisting of Indian soldiers and officers who had surrendered before the Japanese in the various battlefields in South-east Asia. It set before itself the goal of hoisting the tricolour on the Red Fort in Delhi. "Dilli Chalo!" became the slogan of the INA.

Although the INA and its leadership did not have a correct political orientation, its significance lies in the fact that it assumed the character of being the *first national armed force* which set before itself the task of liberating the country with arms and the people accepted it as such. It is important to note that Hindu-Muslim-Sikh unity was a marked feature of this army. It even constituted a women's brigade. We have taken the slogan of "Jai Hind!" from the INA.

This must be said that both the types of movements, one inside the country and the other outside it, received popular response. The people by and large saw in the success of these movements the way to attain the goal of freedom.

Even though the British government was part of the antifascist coalition along with the Soviet Union, it refused to form a national government in India with the participation of Congress leaders. With leonine repression let loose against the people, with Congress leaders in jail, the mass of the people could not possibly be enthused to fight against the fascists. On the other hand, a trend grew inside the national-liberation movement, which affected sections of the masses also, that India's freedom would come with the help of the Japanese and the Germans.

The anger against British imperialism increased further with the devastating famine in Bengal in which more than 30 lakhs of people died.

The CPI during the period ceaselessly campaigned for the release of the Congress leaders, for Congress-League unity and for the formation of a national government to prosecute the war against fascism with popular support. But in view of the factors which we have described earlier our party's political line (of people's war), far from getting popular response, isolated us from the broad national current. Our tactics and approach on some of the issues made the freedom fighters hostile to our party. Our loss was particularly great among the students, who had been drawn in large numbers towards the party in the earlier years.

However the intense mass political campaign for the release of Congress leaders, for Congress-League unity and for the formation of a national government for national defence coupled with our party's most creditable work during the Bengal famine kept the morale of the party ranks intact and to an extent even increased its strength.

This helped the party in the period immediately after the end of the war—the period of unprecedented mass revolutionary upsurge against imperialism.

The party utilised the new possibilities for expansion that had opened up after the ban on it was lifted in July 1942. The following year the CPI held its *first congress* in Bombay.

IX

By the beginning of 1943 the war against Hitler had already taken a favourable turn. The winter offensive of the Red Army turned the tide and the Hitler armies began to retreat under the powerful hammerblows of the valiant Soviet soldiers. It was becoming increasingly clear that Hitler's defeat was inevitable.

Under the compulsions of new international factors, and with the increasing role of the Soviet Union, the British imperialist rulers realised the need for change of tactics. As a first gesture, the British government released Gandhiji (ostensibly on grounds of health) on 6 May 1944. He announced that 1944 was not 1942 and that the movement could not be continued. But the British took another year to release the rest of the Congress leadership (June 1945). By now the Hitler armies had already surrendered and Hitler had committed suicide. The role of the Soviet Union in international arena was tremendously enhanced. Then the Japanese crack army also surrendered before the Red Army in the east in August.

A new chapter opened in world history with the defeat of the fascist powers. The British foresaw the coming events and soon after the release of the Congress leaders started talks with them and with the League leaders (the Simla conference). The British had sent Lord Wavell as viceroy to conduct negotiations with Indian leaders. However the Congress and League leaders failed to present a joint front against imperialism. The lack of unity was utilised by the imperialist rulers for their own manoeuvres. The Simla conference ended in a deadlock.

The period between the end of the war and the independence of the country in August 1947 is marked by the following two processes:

One: Unprecedented mass upsurge which attained revolutionary heights, with the Communist Party fighting in the front ranks.

Two: The attempts at a compromise between the British on the one hand and the Indian leaders (Congress and League) on the other. This tactic was combined by imperialism with the sinister game of organising and abetting communal riots on the one hand and planning to smash the mass revolutionary movement on the other.

The Congress and League leaders were set on a course of compromise. The revolutionary mass upsurge came in the way of such a course. They were therefore sometimes found to be opposing the revolutionary mass upsurge or at least trying to calm it down.

The British also realised the meaning of the new mass revolutionary upsurge and that the days of their rule were numbered.

The mass revolutionary upsurge in India came in the background of a new correlation of political forces that was being established after the defeat of fascist powers, in which the Soviet Union had played the most decisive role. Just as the great October socialist revolution in Russia had opened a new chapter in the growth of the national-liberation movement and our own freedom movement had acquired new dimensions, the victory of the antifascist forces headed by the Soviet Union in the second world war created entirely new and favourable conditions for the final victory of our freedom struggle.

It was no mere accident that the British people defended Churchill and his Conservative Party in the general election that was held soon after the end of the war—the very Churchill who had led them to victory. Instead they put the Labour Party in power. It may be recalled that once during the war, Churchill had declared that he had not become the prime minister to preside over the liquidation of the British empire. This was in connection with the demand for transfer of political power to an Indian government. This very Churchill saw the liquidation of his cherished empire in his own life time.

In this new situation the Labour government dispatched what is known as the British cabinet mission to India to negotiate a political settlement with the Indian leaders. But before we deal with this aspect of the political development, let us revert to the far more important event of that time—the unprecedented mass revolutionary upsurge that shook the very foundations of British imperialism in India. Those who have lived through that stormy and thrilling period will testify to its uniqueness—something quite different from all the previous phases of the freedom struggle.

Some of the outstanding events of this memorable period are :

(1) The INA trials in the Red Fort in Delhi in the winter of 1945-46 sparked off countrywide protest and indignation. Three officers of the Indian National Army formed by Subhas Chandra Bose were put up for court martial by the British. Interestingly enough, one was a Hindu, the other a Muslim and the third a Sikh. This automatically created a sense of unity between Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. Jawaharlal Nehru and Asaf Ali and some other Congress leaders appeared on behalf of the accused and demanded their release since their only crime was that they wanted to fight for the freedom of the country.

“Release the INA prisoners!” became the main battle-cry of the masses throughout the country. Seeing the sweep of this movement, the British were compelled to release the INA prisoners. This sent a wave of jubilation among the masses and instilled a new sense of selfconfidence among them. A similar trial of another INA officer, Abdul Rashid, again brought the people—Hindus and Muslims, into the streets. The British again retreated.

(2) By the beginning of 1946, the Indian armed forces and the police were also swept into the mass anti-imperialist struggle.

The ratings of the Royal Indian Navy (RIN) wrote a glorious page in the annals of our freedom struggle. On 18 February the ratings of the ship *Talwar* in Bombay harbour raised the banner of revolt. Within 24 hours the revolt spread to all the Indian ratings (about 20,000) on the ships lying in Bombay harbour. They set up a revolutionary committee, hauled down the hated British flag (the Union Jack) and raised up the flags of the Congress, Muslim League and Communist Party on the flag-masts of their ships. The mutiny spread to the Karachi port also. The Indian soldiers who were sent to suppress the mutiny of the ratings refused to fire. Then the British troops were called in. There was a regular seven-hour battle between the RIN ratings and the British soldiers.

But that did not settle the issue. It was on 21 February that the British Admiral Godfrey issued his ultimatum “to surrender or face destruction of the whole navy”. The RIN ratings refused to surrender and called for support of the people.

)) The Communist Party and the trade unions called upon the working class and the people of Bombay to come to the support of their

fighting brothers on the ships. The whole of Bombay rose as one man in defence of the RIN revolutionary ratings. There was total strike and hartal in the city. This went on for three days. The British replied with brutal firings. About 250 people were killed during those three days—in defence of their fellow freedom fighters on the ships.

This was a glorious demonstration of solidarity between the people and the revolutionary armed forces who had come over to the side of the people for the emancipation of their motherland. Solidarity demonstrations in support of the RIN ratings took place all over the country.

The airmen in Bombay, Karachi and Bangalore, and the policemen in Delhi and in some other places also joined the battle and came over to the side of the people.

The RIN ratings surrendered only on the advice of the Congress and Muslim League leaders who promised them protection against victimisation. But while surrendering, the RIN strike committee declared: "We surrender to India and not to Britain."

The RIN revolt in Bombay had widespread repercussions on the armed forces and police in various points of the country—not only in Karachi and Delhi as already indicated. The fact that the armed forces came over, openly or otherwise, to the side of the masses in the struggle to overthrow the British rule changed the balance of forces. A qualitative transformation of political situation was taking place and the colonial regime was about to disintegrate. This was becoming evidently clear to all sides.

(3) The working class led by the All-India Trade Union Congress went into big strike actions all over the country. Starting as economic struggles, these actions very soon assumed a political character and contributed to the further disintegration of the colonial system in India. Strikes took place not only in private industries, but in government departments also. It was during this period that the first all-India postal strike took place. Sectional strikes took place on the railways also. The communists emerged as the most important force on the railways during this period—a position that we lost after 1949 when under B. T. Ranadive's sectarian and adventurist line a call for a general strike on the railways was given, which never materialised.

The AITUC emerged as the most important force in the working class, with the communists at the head of it.

(4) The states' people's movements against princely autocracy and against the new conspiracies of the princes with imperialism reached new heights in this period. Even princely states hitherto unaffected by popular movement were drawn into this current.

The highlights of these movements were:

(a) The "Quit Kashmir!" movement launched by the Kashmir National Conference headed by Sheikh Abdullah. The Kashmir National Conference advanced its "New Kashmir" programme, which among other things demanded abolition of landlordism without compensation. The communists helped in the formation of this programme.

(b) The struggle against the maharaja of Travancore, led by the communists, developed into an armed struggle and about 400 communists laid down their lives (October 1946).

(c) Similar struggles took place in the princely states of Orissa and Punjab. Here also the communists were in the forefront.

(d) The most outstanding struggle against princely autocracy took place in Hyderabad against the nizam, who had the title of the most loyal ally of the British. Although a movement for popular rule was already going in Hyderabad state, the communists gave a new form and content to it in the postwar period. It ultimately developed into the famous Telengana armed struggle in which more than four thousand communists sacrificed their lives. A large part of Telengana was liberated from feudal oppression and land distributed to the peasants.

All these movements against princely autocracy made a historic contribution in defeating the conspiracies of British imperialists who were planning to carve out their bases and plant time-bombs after they are forced to leave.

(5) In the various struggles in this period Hindu-Muslim unity was established, even though the Congress and League leaders had not come to any agreement. In fact they were talking at cross-purposes. But as we shall see subsequently, this unity did not have a sound basis—a weakness exploited by the British to engineer Hindu-Muslim riots on the eve of independence and to effect the partition of India.

(6) Finally, it was during this period that the Communist Party, which had suffered a great deal because of its mistaken political tactics after 1942, reformed its links with the broad freedom movement. It participated most actively in the various movements in the postwar period. It was in the forefront in the revolutionary mass upsurge of that period. This again earned the party a new stature and political prestige.

X

The RIN revolt acted as a catalytic agent. We have already discussed its impact on the development of the national-liberation struggle, how it represented the high watermark of that struggle. Now let us see the other aspects of the postwar political development in India.

As we have mentioned earlier, the British imperialists realised the significance of these revolutionary events—that their days are numbered. When even the Indian armed forces joined the anti-imperialist struggle, what was there for them (the imperialists) to rely upon?

As soon as the news of the RIN revolt reached London, the Labour Prime Minister Attlee announced the decision to send a cabinet mission to India.

Meanwhile, in March 1946, elections were held to the legislatures on the basis of restricted franchise. These elections revealed the rallying of the masses behind the Congress and the Muslim League. It also became obvious that majority of Muslims stood behind the Muslim League. The Congress won hands down in provinces with a non-Muslim majority as also in the NWFP, a Muslim-majority province.

Our party participated in a limited way in the general election (held on the basis of restricted franchise). It won 9 seats and 7 lakh votes. This was the first time in the history of the CPI that it fought on its own, under its flag.

The terms of reference of the cabinet mission were:

- (1) Discussion with elected representatives of British India and the princely states in regard to the framing of a constitution;
- (2) Convention of a constitution-making body;

(3) Formation of an interim government enjoying support of political parties.

For the first time the British government talked of the possibility of independence in place of dominion status.

The leaders of the Congress and Muslim League failed to present a united front during the discussions with the cabinet mission.

The British had two trump cards—the rights of minorities, and the princely states.

But the British manoeuvre could be countered only if the representatives of the two main political parties had come to an agreement, which they did not.

So the cabinet mission announced its own plan on 16 May 1946, which included, among other things, the formation of an interim government and the setting up of a constituent assembly to be indirectly elected. The future of the princely states was left to be decided by negotiation with the princes.

After initial hesitation, the Congress accepted to join the interim government along with the Muslim League. However the experiment did not succeed. The Muslim League pressed for the partition of the country on the basis of its Lahore resolution (1940).

Finally came the Mountbatten award in June 1947 (Lord Mountbatten had by now been appointed the viceroy and governor-general of India to negotiate the final settlement). The communal atmosphere had already been vitiated by the ghastly riots in Noakhali (Bengal) followed by the riots in Bihar.

According to the Mountbatten award the country was to be partitioned into India and Pakistan and both were to get independence within a year. The question of princely states was still left for negotiation.

On 15 August 1947 India became independent. The two hundred years of colonial rule of the British came to an end. It was a historic event in the life of our people and marked the beginning of a new era.

Political power was transferred to the political representatives of the Indian bourgeoisie—the leaders of the Congress Party.

But this did not mean the completion of the tasks of the democratic revolution—anti-imperialist and anti-feudal. The Indian people are now embarked on the path of struggle for the completion of the unfinished tasks of the Indian revolution.

Here one may legitimately ask two questions. *One*, how is it that the imperialists succeeded in their conspiracy to partition the country along communal lines? *Two*, despite the somewhat negative attitude of the Congress leadership towards the revolutionary mass upsurge of the post-second-world-war period, this very leadership (i.e. bourgeois leadership) was able to assume exclusive leadership of the state when it came to transfer of power to the welcome of the masses of our people.

As to the first question, it is very obvious that the partition of the country into India and Pakistan demonstrated the utter failure of the bourgeois leadership to resolve the Hindu-Muslim problem which arose and developed in the course of the national-liberation struggle after 1857. It has to be recalled that between 1857 and 1947, there were several occasions when Hindus and Muslims fought shoulder to shoulder to oust the British imperialists, and Hindu-Muslim unity was established. It was so in 1857 (our first war of independence), again in the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, and in the first great mass upsurge of 1919-22 when the Congress-led civil disobedience movement and the khilafat agitation merged into one big stream of Hindu-Muslim unity. In the period after the second world war, in the period of the great revolutionary mass upsurge, there were memorable scenes of Hindu-Muslim unity, as at the time of the INA trials and the trial of Captain Abdul Rashid again of the INA, during the RIN revolt when Congress, Muslim League and CPI flags went up on the flag masts of the RIN ships. Hindu and Muslim workers and peasants fought together their class battles under the red flag of our party. The terrorist movement of the late twenties had revolutionaries drawn from both the communities. The Congress and Communist Party had always cadres and leaders of both these communities.

Despite all these and other things there occurred tragic Hindu-Muslim communal riots several times and in several places in the course of nearly one hundred years. And in 1940 the Muslim League adopted the resolution on Pakistan. In the following years it gathered mass support of the Muslims and became the spokesman of the Indian Muslims. What is behind this phenomenon?

This is no place to go into this question in great detail. Only its most salient aspects may be pointed out here. Of course there is no doubt that the British imperialists pursued their notorious policy of divide and rule in this country and finally ended up by dividing the

country itself. But who expected the imperialists to behave differently. It was the special responsibility of the leadership of the national-liberation movement to scotch the plans of the imperialists and to establish firm unity between the masses of the two communities.

It should be realised that the Muslim community as a community was 50 years behind the majority community in producing a modern educated middle class. Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, the Muslim counterpart of Raja Ram Mohun Roy, brought modern science and western education to the Muslims at the end of the 19th century. Similarly the development of a bourgeois class among the Muslims is a much later development. Thus the Muslim bourgeoisie—and its political representative, the Muslim educated middle class—felt itself at a certain disadvantage as compared to those in the majority community. Thus it is that a certain conflict developed between the two sections of the Indian bourgeoisie. As the question of political power acquired increasing importance, the two sections looked at it from their own class interests. Because of its comparatively weaker economic position the Muslim bourgeoisie first relied more on imperialism to secure its class interests and later turned to the Muslim masses for mass support and mass pressure. An economic question was deliberately given a communal turn by the political leadership of the Muslim bourgeoisie.

But the Congress leadership cannot absolve itself of its responsibility. Firstly, in the Muslim-majority provinces the Muslim peasantry oppressed by the landlords and moneylenders who were mostly Hindus (as in Bengal, Punjab and Sind) was not roused to fight the oppression of these classes because many of the Congress leaders in these provinces were themselves drawn from these classes. In this case also an economic conflict assumed a communal colour. Secondly, the Congress leadership (or the bulk of it) mixed up religion with politics and since most of them came from the majority community they gave a certain Hindu colouring to the national-liberation movement. For instance Gandhiji defined swaraj as Ram raj. This kind of imagery could obviously not inspire the Muslim masses. Thus lack of secularisation of politics or insufficient separation of politics from religion played havoc and was exploited by the imperialists to create a cleavage between the two communities.

Those who were secular and modern, like Nehru, went to the other extreme. They denied the peculiar and complex nature that the Hindu-

Muslim question had acquired. That explains Nehru's failure in his Muslim mass-contact programme when he assumed presidentship of the Congress for the second time in 1936.

The bourgeois political leadership was incapable for these reasons to put forward a revolutionary programme which alone could unite the Hindu and Muslim masses on a firm foundation for the overthrow of British imperialism.

As to the second question (i.e. how the bourgeois leadership assumed exclusive control of political power), it needs to be pointed out that right from the time that the Indian bourgeoisie was born its conflict with British imperialism began because the latter adopted a calculated policy of retarding India's industrial development. To fight its battle the Indian bourgeoisie took the step to set up the Indian National Congress. But it was not a consistently anti-imperialist class. In the following years its dual role was revealed. It fought against imperialism, then sought a compromise for sharing power; again prepared for the next round of fight for greater share of power, till it acquired the confidence and strength to demand complete independence (December 1929). Every time the Congress leaders conducted a mass movement against imperialism, they increased their mass base. Whenever they retreated or compromised, there was no doubt a certain amount of disappointment. But the mass of the people did not consider it to be a betrayal nor did they think that the Congress leaders had gone over to imperialism. Failure to realise this fact sometimes led to sectarianism in the CPI and to its isolation from the main national current.

The Indian bourgeoisie being essentially industrial and interested in the industrialisation of the country increasingly came to a clash with the imperialist policy of retarding the growth of industrial development of the country. But as the masses came more and more into the arena of politics and the national-liberation movement got radicalised and the class question came to the fore, the bourgeoisie occasionally sought a compromise with imperialism. But this could not be a permanent feature. This conflict between the interests of imperialism and those of the Indian bourgeoisie was of a fundamental nature.

By the time independence came, the bourgeois leadership had acquired an immense mass base. The Congress had won the confidence of the majority of people.

Its struggle with imperialism (and imperialism's feudal ally) did not cease with the attainment of independence and assumption of political power. It still continues. So does its other aspect—the aspect of compromise.

Hence the line of struggle and unity that the CPI has been pursuing.

ROLE OF THE CPI IN THE FREEDOM STRUGGLE

Since the history of the CPI forms a separate subject, a detailed discussion of the role of the CPI in the freedom struggle is not needed here. Besides, some of the aspects of it have been covered when the progress of the national-liberation struggle was being described and discussed. Hence it may be necessary to highlight here only some of the important contributions of the CPI in developing the ideological-political content of the freedom struggle, as well as in enriching the forms of struggle.

Before independence, as well as after independence, there have been persistent attempts to denigrate the glorious role of the CPI in the freedom struggle and the immense sacrifices that it has made in the fight against British imperialism. As a matter of fact, the CPI from its very inception has suffered the most under the rule of the British imperialists. It is because in certain periods our party made some mistakes, which we ourselves have criticised openly and boldly as a Marxist-Leninist party is expected to do, that our party's enemies and critics take advantage to hurl those mistakes against us and call us all manner of names. In any case the great merit of our party is that it never betrayed the masses, whose interests have always been nearest to its heart. Our party is what it is today—the second largest all-India political party, the biggest opposition and the biggest left party in the country—not because of anyone's charity. Our party's enemies have “finished” us off several times. But every time history has proved them wrong.

It should be remembered that the political party of the working class, the Communist Party of India, was born 40 years after the political representatives of the bourgeoisie had founded the Indian National Congress. Thus, by the time the CPI was born, the political representatives of the national bourgeoisie had already established their leadership over the nation, both in the urban and rural areas. Because of the various kinds of struggles, and particularly because

of the great mass struggle of 1919-22 led by Gandhiji, the bourgeois political leadership had acquired immense prestige. The Congress was acknowledged the *main* party leading the fight against the alien British rule. All this needs to be recalled because sometimes some of our own comrades begin to ask questions like this: How is it that the Communist Party of India has not yet carried out a revolution in India? This historical gap of 40 years coupled with certain other factors in the subsequent period, including our mistakes, must be taken into account.

Coming to the question of our party's contribution to the anti-imperialist freedom struggle. As mentioned already, the great October socialist revolution of Russia successfully led by Lenin exercised a tremendous influence on the national-liberation movement all over the world. This influenced the course of development of our country's freedom struggle too. The CPI itself was born as a result of the impact of that world-shaking event in the crucible of our people's anti-British struggle. That is why the preamble of the constitution of the CPI says: "... The CPI arose in the course of our liberation struggle as a result of the efforts of Indian revolutionaries who under the inspiration of the great October revolution were seeking new paths."

Thus communists were the first to see that the struggle for freedom is not merely a *national* struggle, but part of an *international* struggle against imperialism and for social liberation. Besides, communists combined national task with class task, as the second congress of the Communist International led by Lenin had enjoined. It is when Indian communists deviated from this Leninist path that they committed serious mistakes as in 1930, in 1942 and 1948.

The CPI's positive contributions to the freedom struggle are manifold.

One: Communists were the *first* in the Indian National Congress to raise the demand for *complete independence* as early as 1921 (Ahmedabad session of the Congress). This was formally put in the manifesto in the following year issued for the Gaya session of the Congress, in which communists also called for abolition of landlordism, and demanded adult suffrage, democracy, nationalisation of public utility services, transport, mines, state control of big industries and workers' committees. Communists also raised the demand for a constituent assembly to frame India's constitution.

Communists persisted in the fight for the demand for complete independence, inside and outside the Congress, till it was accepted in 1927 at the Madras session of the Congress and finally at the Lahore session in 1929, presided over by Jawaharlal Nehru. This marked a turningpoint in the history of the Congress and a great victory of the leftwing in the Congress in which the young Communist Party was playing a notable role. The national-liberation struggle entered a new militant stage in its development.

It is significant that on the eve of the Lahore session of the Congress, Gandhiji visited the Meerut jail to meet the Meerut Conspiracy Case prisoners (mostly communists) and to tell them that the Congress had decided for complete independence as its goal.

"Now you should have no complaint against me", Gandhiji had remarked, and asked for the support of the Meerut prisoners. He of course readily got it, because these prisoners had been demanding precisely such a thing for years. But one of the prisoners, S. A. Dange, also asked for an assurance that Gandhiji would not withdraw the struggle as he had done after the Chauri Chaura incident in 1922. And Gandhiji gave such an assurance.

This story confirms that even Gandhiji recognised our party's contribution in bringing forcefully to the forefront the question of complete independence as the goal of the Congress.

Two: Our party has done pioneering work in bringing the idea of socialism to our country and in popularising it among the masses. Communists had to undergo terrible sufferings and face severe repression for this. But they bore it cheerfully and heroically.

Now, looking back to those early days and to the whole history of our party, we can be legitimately proud that today the idea of socialism has been accepted as a national goal. Even those political circles who do not know the real meaning of this term proclaim that they are fighting for socialism. There are many progressive congressmen today who are becoming socialist-oriented. That the Congress has accepted socialism as its goal shows the great attraction of socialism for the masses.

Three: Communists gave a new turn to the Indian workingclass movement, rescued it from reformism and turned it to the revolutionary path. The process began in the twenties along with the birth and growth of the communist movement.

In the thirties, the CPI took the initiative in founding the All-India Kisan Sabha. Under its banner peasant struggles were conducted in various parts of the country against landlordism. The All-India Kisan Sabha gave a new militant orientation to the peasant struggles and brought the question of active fight against feudal oppression into the national-liberation movement.

The orientation that the CPI gave to workingclass and peasant struggles imparted a new content to the national-liberation struggle. The class demands of the workers and peasants began to be integrated with the fight for national freedom. Of course this was not without conflicts. But inside the national-liberation struggle a strong trend grew which saw the new political reality—workers and peasants asserting themselves as an independent political force—and wanted it to be recognised. It is not without significance that by 1936 the question of *collective affiliation* of the independent mass organisations of workers and peasants to the Indian National Congress began to be discussed in the official sessions of the Congress. Jawaharlal Nehru as president of the Congress supported it. But it was opposed by the rightwing led by Patel.

Four: Communists made an effective contribution in building a left wing in the Congress. Communists occupied leading positions in the Congress Socialist Party formed in 1934. Communists helped in orienting the left to a scientific ideology and in putting forward the idea of communist-socialist unity inside the Congress. Sections of socialists subsequently joined the CPI.

In the thirties, after we corrected our sectarian mistakes, reformed our links with the Congress, engaged ourselves in building mass organisations and utilised new opportunities to popularise Marxism-Leninism, we won over to the party large sections of terrorists and other militant radicals also. Majority of the Andamans prisoners, who had been sentenced to long terms of imprisonment and transported to that island joined the Communist Party.

Five: We popularised the concept of internationalism, the concept that our national struggle is part of the worldwide struggle against imperialism. Gradually a section of the leadership and later the Congress as a whole began to recognise the fact that our struggle against British imperialism has to be linked up with similar struggles against imperialism in other parts of the world.

By the thirties it had become a practice for the Congress in its working committee, AICC and annual sessions, to adopt resolutions on international situation—condemning imperialism and expressing solidarity with freedom struggles (Palestine, Abyssinia, China, Spain, etc.). It condemned Hitler fascism and the Munich pact (surrender of British and French imperialists to Hitler).

Six: Communists popularised the achievements of the Soviet Union in building socialism and the idea of planned economic development. It is not without significance that by 1938 the Congress had already set up a planning committee with Prof. K. T. Shah as its chairman to work under Jawaharlal Nehru.

Seven: A most important contribution of communists to the freedom struggle is the *armed mass struggle* against princely autocracy. Telengana against the nizam and Punnapra-Vayalar against maharaja of Travancore are its outstanding examples. These were not only peasant struggles, but also had democratic goals. The peasants led by the Communist Party conducted armed guerilla struggles on the basis of mass support. Thus they are distinctly different from individual armed actions.

While Gandhiji gave one form of struggle, communists gave some other forms, which were more revolutionary. We are not posing the one against the other, because both played an important role in mobilising the masses for the overthrow of imperialism.

The armed struggles against the princely autocracy had another aspect also. They frustrated the conspiracies of British imperialism to encourage these princely autocrats to declare their territories "independent" when India became free. The so-called "independence" of princely states was in fact a manoeuvre of imperialism to keep them as bases for imperialist intrigues against free India.

All these facts should debunk the bourgeois claims and propaganda that their leadership and their methods of struggle alone led India to freedom. We communists, without underestimating the positive role of noncommunist patriots in the freedom struggle, are rightly proud of our own positive role in the great battles for the freedom of our motherland.