

“Congress Socialism” A Contradiction in Terms (*)

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The appearance of a “Congress Socialist Group” in Bombay has given rise to widespread discussion in the ranks of the Indian National Movement. The programme of this group was issued in February, 1934, under the signatures of Krishna Menon, M.Shetty, M.R. Masani and others. It was issued with an approving letter from Jawaharlal Nehru, who stated that he “would welcome the formation of Socialist groups in the Congress to influence the ideology of the Congress.” †

What is the significance of this development? What should be the attitude towards it of supporters of the fight for national and social liberation in India? Does this programme show the correct path forward for the fight?

An answer to these questions is essential at the present time, when the collapse of the Civil Disobedience Movement in ignominious capitulation has left a general confusion in the ranks of the national movement and a widespread seeking for new paths.

What is the situation in which this programme appears?

In May, 1934, took place the Patna Capitulation of the National Congress to the British Government. The Civil Disobedience campaign, which had been inaugurated with a flourish of trumpets in 1930, as the opening of the fight for absolute independence, was unconditionally called off. Council-entry was decided.

(*) A Critique of the Programme of the Bombay “*CONGRESS SOCIALIST GROUP*”, published by: “Indian Forum” October 1934, from London.

In June, 1934, the British Government raised the ban upon the National Congress and set the stamp of its approval upon it as a legal organisation.

In July, 1934, the British Government proclaimed the Communist Party of India an illegal organisation.

Here we have a chain of events, the significance of whose connection should be plain to the dullest. On the one hand, the British Government proclaims that the National Congress is no longer to be regarded as a dangerous enemy outside the law, but rather as a potential friend and ally. On the other hand, the British Government proclaims that its most dangerous enemy, against which its main fire is to be directed, is the young Communist Party of India.

Shifting of Forces

This action of the British Government, which is a cunning and realist rule and knows what it is doing, reflects and lays bare to all the *Shifting of forces* which has taken place in the camp of the fight for emancipation in India. The national *bourgeoisie*, which led the Congress campaign, alarmed at the overwhelming forces of the mass movement and menace to its own interests revealed by even this incomplete and largely strangled fight, calls off the whole campaign and moves to closer co-operation with the British Government. The masses, betrayed by the Congress leadership, seek for new leadership for their struggle. This leadership can only be forthcoming from the organised working class, the sole force which fights imperialism and all exploitation to a finish. The party of the working class, the Communist Party, is revealed ever more clearly as the rising leader of the mass struggle in India. Increasing numbers of the previous supporters of the Congress begin to turn with greater and greater attraction to the revolutionary theory and programme of Communism as the only way.

It is at this point that the newly formed “Congress Socialist Group” is brought to the front, under the direct sponsorship of the official Congress leadership responsible for the capitulation, represented by Jawaharlal Nehru, and even with the blessing of Gandhi. Is it not obvious that we have here, not a genuine new

political programme and leadership, but a *manoeuvre of the bankrupt Congress leadership to conceal its bankruptcy and adapt its force under a new "socialist" coat of paint (the Nazis also call themselves "socialist") to the new currents among the masses?*

This may seem a harsh judgement to sincere elements among the new grouping who are drawn by the illusory hope of giving a "socialist direction" to the Congress and believe that here lies the path of advance. But it is essential that these sincere elements—like the sincere elements who were drawn by the "socialist" promises of the Nazis—should rid themselves of their illusions and realise that, on the basis of this "socialist" programme, under the auspices of the Congress, they are only being politically exploited for the benefit of the bourgeoisie.

Fundamentals of Socialism Omitted

The character of the programme abundantly confirms this analysis.

What is Socialism? Socialism, by the consensus of the Socialist movement for decades in all countries, as well as by the teachings of Marxism, which is the theory of Socialism, is the movement for emancipation of the working class, leading all exploited strata, against the rule of the *bourgeoisie*, for the overthrow of *bourgeois* rule and for the establishment of the rule of the working class to build up the new society of collective production.

The heart of Socialism is the class struggle, the organisation of an independent political party of the working class separate from all other parties, the fight for the overthrow of the *bourgeoisie* (both the imperialist *bourgeoisie* and the Indian *bourgeoisie*), and for the dictatorship of the proletariat (in India, in alliance with the poor peasants).

Of all this. the A B C of Socialism, there is no word in this precious "socialist" programme. There is no word of the class struggle. There is no word of the dictatorship of the proletariat. There is no suggestion even of the necessity of an independent political party of the working class.

These are no accidental “omissions”. They are inherent in the whole character of the programme. The programme elaborately sets out its proposals for trade unions for the workers, for *kisan sanghs* for the peasants, for organisations for the small traders, artisans, tenants. But it makes no mention of the mention of the necessity for a political party of the working class.

Why?

Because *the real essence of the programme is the subordination of the working class and peasantry to the political leadership of the bourgeoisie, represented by the National Congress.*

Glaring Contradiction

This is made abundantly clear, both by the programme statement and still more by the accompanying letter of Jawaharlal Nehru. The warning is constantly emphasised that the “socialist ideology”, the economic organisation of the workers and peasants, must be kept *within the limits* of the political leadership of the National Congress--“must be related to the Congress struggle”, in the words of Nehru, who warns against the “fashion for strong criticism of the Congress activities”, and declares that “although ideologically backward, the Congress is undoubtedly to-day the most advanced effective (?) revolutionary (?) organisation in action (?) in India”.

But since the Congress is the party of the Indian *bourgeoisie*, this means that the proposed “socialist” programme and organisation is to the political leadership of the *bourgeoisie*. The result is a complete contradiction from any Socialist point of view.

How is this glaring contradiction attempted to be converted? “Socialism” is presented as an “economic programme” to be tacked on to the “political” programme and leadership of the Congress. The weakness of the Congress, declares Nehru in his letter, is that it has confined itself to “pure politics” :--

“We in India cannot afford to remain in the backwater of pure politics. . . World events as well as the natural consequences of our mass struggles have forced the Congress to think, to some extent at least, in terms of economics”.

Such an “economic” programme, he declares, is provided by Socialism, which can be “tacked on” to the Congress struggle provided any action is “co-ordinated” to the action of the Congress.

Gandhi, in a statement on the relationship of Socialism and the Congress, is even more explicit :--

“Mahatma Gandhi, in reply to a question regarding the attitude which Congressmen should take towards their Socialist friends, advised that they should offer complete co-operation to the Socialists in agitating for workers' and peasants' demands in the day-to-day struggle, but he asked the Congress workers to oppose the Socialists vigorously whenever their preaching went against the fundamental principles of the Congress creed and programme.”

Two opposing Political Lines

Here, in the complementary statements of Nehru and Gandhi, we have a complete system. A familiar division of labour is proclaimed between the *bourgeois* leadership of the Congress and their “socialist” supporters. The task of the “socialists” is to preach an “economic” programme, to preach an “ideology” more suited to the moods of the masses, and to organise the workers and peasants on the basis of “day-to-day” demands. But politics and political leadership must be left to the *bourgeoisie*. This is in fact a gross and caricatured version of the line of “Economism” long ago criticised by Lenin (the theory that in the period up to the *bourgeois* democratic revolution the tasks of Socialist and working class organisation lie in the economic sphere, while the political leadership of the fight against autocracy must rest with the *bourgeoisie*). Here is nothing of the line of Socialism. But it is the familiar line of class-co-operation, of *bourgeois* politics in the working class.

The line of Socialism in India can only be the exact opposite. The contrast between the line of Socialism, the line of the working class and the line of the Congress, the line of the *bourgeoisie*, is not the contrast between an “economic” line and a “political” line. It is a contrast between *two opposing political lines*--the line of revolutionary mass struggle against imperialism and all class

exploitation, and the line of capitulation to and alliance with imperialism against the mass struggle. The working class, fighting for the ending of all class-exploitation, can alone lead the revolutionary mass struggle against imperialism to a finish. The *bourgeoisie*, seeking only to increase its share of exploitation in opposition to the privileged position of the imperialist *bourgeoisie*, necessarily fears the extension of the mass struggle which threatens to end all exploitation, and at every critical point draws closer to alliance with imperialism against it. Therefore the task of the Socialists in India, not only for the victory of the fight for social liberation, but equally for the victory of the fight for national liberation, must necessarily be to strive to establish *the hegemony of the working class in the mass struggle in opposition to the leadership of the national bourgeoisie, represented by the Congress.*

Build Independent Political Organisation

But the hegemony of the working class in the mass struggle requires as its first condition *the independent political organisation of the working class.* This is the first task confronting all serious Socialists in India. Whoever renounces this task has nothing in common with Socialism. Only on the basis of the independent political organisation of the working class can the revolutionary national *bloc* of struggle be built up. Even when the national *bourgeoisie* temporarily enters into the common struggle, such temporary co-operation with the *bourgeoisie* for the purposes of the struggle can only be conditional on the complete political and organisational independence of the working class. This was shown in the experience of the Kuomintang in China. There the national *bourgeoisie* for a period joined in the common armed struggle against imperialism. Nevertheless, the working class and its party, the Communist Party, maintained its political and organisational independence within the common *bloc* of the Kuomintang. The correctness of this policy was shown when the Chinese *bourgeoisie*, led by Chiang Kai Shek, betrayed the national struggle in 1927 and entered into alliance with imperialism. Despite this heavy blow, the working class, led by the Communist Party, in alliance with the peasantry, was able to

carry on the fight and lead the way to the present victories of Soviet China, maintaining its independence and extending its range against all the attacks of imperialism. The whole of this process of the Chinese Revolution has profound lessons for India as to the correct path to follow.

The programme of the "Congress Socialist Group" of Bombay can therefore only be regarded as a false lead, calculated to confuse and distort the mass struggle and draw back the rising revolutionary Socialist and Communist currents in the national movement once more into the fold of counter revolutionary *bourgeois* leadership of the Congress. The urgent task of Socialism in India to-day is to build up the independent political party of the working class, in despite of the opposition of the British Government, and in despite of the opposition of the *bourgeois* leadership of the National Congress.