

The Nature of the Social Revolution in Colonial Countries

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[Saumyendranath Tagore attended the Sixth World Congress of the Communist International in Moscow in 1928. At this Congress, Bukharin presented the programme of the Communist International. In this programme, a special section was on the nature of anti-imperialist struggle in the colonial countries. A special colonial thesis was presented by Kuusinen to the Congress. Kuusinen dealt with the role of the colonial bourgeoisie in the national struggle. Tagore, who spoke both before the preparatory committee and at the open session, opposed Kuusinen and pointed out that the colonial bourgeoisie had no revolutionary role to play in the national struggle in India or for that matter in any colonial country. On the contrary, the colonial bourgeoisie were likely to play an increasingly counter-revolutionary role in national struggles. The Kuusinen thesis was finally modified on Tagore's

criticism. (Sudarshan Chattopadhyaya)]

On behalf of the Indian delegation, I welcome the programme which has been submitted to the Congress. The Fifth Congress of the Communist International had accepted a draft. Four years have since passed, and the proletarian revolution in China and in the colonies has given us sufficient material for drawing up a programme.

One of the most important features of the draft programme is the stress laid upon the colonial aspect of the proletarian revolution. But it is precisely this aspect of the world revolution as formulated in the programme that confronts us with certain difficulties.

Take, for example, that section in the first chapter of the draft programme where we find the statement: “That the colonial movement of the proletariat should march under the leadership of the revolutionary proletarian movement in the imperialist home countries.” This means that the proletarian movement in India should march under the leadership of the British Communist Party, or, that the Javanese Communist movement should march under the leadership of the Dutch Communist Party. Nobody will deny that in the organic structure of British imperialism, India and England are closely connected with each other and, for the same reason; the Communist parties in India and Britain are also organically linked up with each other for carrying out the proletarian revolution in these two countries ; but this on no account means the subordination of the colonial party to the leadership of the imperialist home country. I am sure that the author of the Draft Programme does not mean to imply this, at all. But the formulation forces one to this conclusion. We must correct this. Of course, the movements in the colonial countries should not be

deprived of the experience of the world proletarian movement and the guidance of the Communist International. The only leadership acceptable is the leadership of the Communist International. I think the formulation is not quite clear, and this section should be formulated differently.

Then, take the fourth chapter of the draft programme. There it is said that in colonial and semi-colonial countries, industry is still in the embryonic stage, and sometimes, in a fairly well-developed stage, but is inadequate for independent socialist construction. I consider this formulation also not to be a very valid one. To lump together different countries at very different levels of industrial development is methodologically wrong and illogical. For example, India and Morocco: it is impossible to make a valid comparison between the relative industrial developments of India and countries like Morocco. If we say that industry in these countries is at an embryonic stage, then so far as India is concerned, this is not true. If we say that India's development is inadequate for socialist construction, it is a fact. But I think in this formulation two different points or aspects have been mixed together, and must be separated and independently formulated.

Further, it is said that in these countries there exist feudal, medieval relationships, both in regard to the economic base as well as the political superstructure. So far as India is concerned, this is not accurate. The recent development of industries, the penetration of the villages by capitalism, the predominance of commodity relationships in villages are established facts. This formulation may be applicable to Morocco, but it is certainly not correct so far as India is concerned.

Later on, it has been stated that colonies and semi-colonies are of

importance, in this transitional period, for the reason that they represent the world rural districts. in relation to the industrial countries, which are the world towns. This formulation too is not a very happy one. If we say that colonies and semi colonies are world villages it means that there has been no capitalist development in them. This is not even remotely true for India. Another implication is that if there is any capitalist development, it should be hindered and suppressed, and that the colonies and semi-colonies should be kept to supply raw materials to the industrial West. I am sure that this is not the intention of the Communist International, but the inexact and inaccurate formulation gives rise to very different implications. I think that here also the formulation requires a better and more clearer statement.

The Sixth chapter of the Draft Programme declares regarding the Communist parties in the colonial and semi-colonial countries: “Temporary agreements with the national bourgeoisie may be made only insofar as they will not hamper the revolutionary organisation of the workers and peasants and will genuinely fight against imperialism.”

I consider this formulation to be fundamentally wrong. After our experience in India, in 1922, when the bourgeoisie betrayed the great mass movement, which shook India from one end to the other, it is high time that we now re-formulate this point more clearly y to indicate that the bourgeoisie cannot genuinely fight imperialism. The demonstrations, which the Indian bourgeoisie have organised all over the country against the Simon Commission, have given rise to an illusion in the minds of some of the comrades here that the bourgeoisie are still capable of playing a revolutionary role. But if we look for a revolutionary programme, for the concrete steps the bourgeoisie in India are taking for the fulfilment of such a revolutionary programme, we find that

they do not exist.

Their fight will lead to a compromise on the basis of better division of the spoils gathered by exploiting the Indian masses. Surely, there are contradictions between the imperialist bourgeoisie and the native bourgeoisie as there always will be contradictions between two exploiters for the monopoly of the Same spoils. Of course, the Indian Communist Party and the proletarian movement should take advantage of these differences and utilise them for furthering of the revolution. We must not, however, forget that this quarrel among the national and the imperialist bourgeoisie is in the nature of a family quarrel between two brothers over property, and that the forces of the rising proletariat in India will certainly be met by a common front of the native and the imperialist bourgeoisie—if not today, then tomorrow. The Indian bourgeoisie are fighting on the same old constitutional issues that are entirely for their own benefit. This is clearly demonstrated in their programmes and tactics in every phase of their struggle against the imperialist bourgeoisie. Even a partial alliance with the bourgeoisie means abandoning the slogan of agrarian revolution, resulting in virtually abandoning the revolutionary struggle in colonial countries, especially in a predominantly agricultural country like India. I think that this formulation is not a correct one. I would like to emphasize the point that the bourgeoisie in India have gone over to the side of reaction, even if not as yet to the side of open counter-revolution.

On behalf of the Indian delegation, I will present our resolution to the Bureau at the appropriate time.

IIOne of the most fundamental differences between the opportunistic attitude

of the Amstardam International to the colonial policy and the revolutionary attitude of the Third International has been very well defined by Comrade Lenin at the Second Congress of the Communist International in his theses on the colonial countries. Since then, the Communist International has adopted a definite revolutionary attitude towards the colonies.

Between the Second and the Sixth Congress, fundamental changes and developments have taken place in the colonial countries. On behalf of the Indian delegation, I welcome the theses on the revolutionary movement in the colonies and semi-colonies, especially because of the very great stress that has been laid on the Indian question. But there are some contradictions in the theses which I wish to point out here.

On page 6 of the theses, we find the statement: “The real industrialisation of the colonial countries, especially building up of efficient machine industries which might be needed for the independent development of the productive forces of the country, are not fostered by imperialist monopoly, but are retarded. This is the basic function of colonial subjugation. The colonial country is forced to sacrifice its interests of its independent development and to serve as the economic market for capitalism in order to strengthen the economic and political power of the bourgeoisie of the imperialist country in order to perpetuate monopoly in the colony and to increase the expansion power of the respective imperialists as against the rest of the world.”

I think that this statement does not give a true picture of the dynamic growth of capitalism, and of industrialisation in India. Till the world war, the policy of British imperialism was the classical form of imperialistic exploitation. It consisted in keeping India as a source of raw materials and as a market for

the industrial products of British industries. There was a policy of deliberately keeping India industrially undeveloped. High tariffs, high duties and embargoes on machinery were imposed by the British imperialists in order to prevent India's industrialisation. During these years, British capital was exclusively used for railways, for irrigation work and for the development of harbours. In other words, British capital was used for the sole purpose of the expansion of the market. British imperialism does not adopt the same methods today to exploit India. Fundamental changes in objective conditions have brought about changes in the policy of British imperialists.

The causes of these changes are: first, the conditions during and after the war. During the war, it became necessary that war materials should be manufactured in India to meet the requirements of the troops in Mesopotamia and other eastern theatres of war. Britain could not effectively supply these unless industries especially war industries, were developed in India. This resulted in the setting up of the Industrial Commission, which marked a major turning point in the policy of British imperialism.

Secondly, Japan and America posed a serious economic challenge to the British monopoly over the Indian market. Britain realised its inability to cope with this situation without changing its policy in India. This led to the virtual abandonment of the traditional policy of free trade and the recognition of differential protectionalism in India which we find, for instance, in the Bombay textile industries. This shows clearly that stabilisation of British industries, during this period of decay, made industrialisation of India an absolute necessity.

The industrialisation of India created an additional market for engineering and

metallurgical industries. Cheap Indian labour could be more effectively utilised in order to stabilize British industry.

Thirdly, the Taxation Commission was set up. Its sole aim was to distribute the burden of taxation in order to expand the internal market. The scheme for the modernisation of agriculture was drawn up to raise the purchasing power of the peasantry.

Finally, India could not be converted into a military base of British imperialism in the East unless the national bourgeoisie were won over, and the national bourgeoisie could not be won over unless some concessions were given to them.

What is the political expression of this policy? It is this: that in order to industrialise India, it is necessary to extend the internal market, to make certain agrarian reforms which is impossible for British imperialism to achieve, owing to the very complicated land tenure system.

Thus, industrialisation tends to pauperise the peasantry, which creates the possibility of an agrarian revolution. It also gives rise to the development of the proletariat, which brings with it the possibility of a socialist revolution. Moreover, it brings about a change in the attitude of the national bourgeoisie. All these are the political consequences of the change in Britain’s economic policy towards India.

Unless we see this process dialectically, and in its proper perspective, we will arrive at wrong conclusions regarding the role of the native bourgeoisie and we shall draw the same wrong conclusions, which the author of the theses has

drawn.

So long as imperialism obstructed capitalist development in India, the Indian bourgeoisie were the driving force of social change. But the changes in British policy had already led to a corresponding change in the attitude of the Indian bourgeoisie towards imperialism. We find that to the corresponding degree to which the hindrances to capitalist development have been removed by British imperialism the bourgeoisie are moving towards co-operation with it, one group after another capitulating to imperialism. Never in their history, the Indian bourgeoisie have adopted a revolutionary attitude towards British imperialism. They never crossed the boundaries of acceptable constitutional agitation, and at the critical moment, they betrayed the movement. One who is conversant with the Indian national movement knows that the Indian bourgeoisie have close ties with feudalism; therefore, they cannot rouse the masses; they cannot bring about agrarian reforms without undermining their own position. They, therefore, cannot be expected to rouse and lead the masses to complete the agrarian revolution in India.

Now let us see how this role of the bourgeoisie has been formulated in the theses. We see on page 17, paragraph 19: “As an independent class rule, a future of ‘free’ and independent capitalist development, a hegemony over an independent people—this will never be given voluntarily to the national bourgeoisie by imperialism. But this is precisely the class aim of the bourgeoisie, their future as an independent class, as a ruling representative of an independent nation. In this point, the conflict of interests between the national bourgeoisie of the colonial country and the imperialists is objectively of a principle character; it is unbridgeable; it demands capitulation from one side or the other.”

Too much stress on the nature and intensity of the conflict between the national bourgeoisie of the colonial country and the imperialist bourgeoisie has led to certain incorrect conclusions. It is stated on page 21 paragraph 23: “In the first preparatory period of the revolutionary movement of these countrie when the organisation of the proletariat and the influence of the Communist Party is still weak, but that of the bourgeois parties on the other hand is much stronger, when the latter occupy the leading position in the national movement because in the interests of the demands of the national bourgeoisie for power they still temporarily demonstrate their opposition (no matter how vacillating and reformist) against the ruling imperialist-feudal power bloc, and when the masses of the population follow along behind them, in this stage (as at present e.g. in India and Egypt), it would be an ultra-left mistake to start the Communist Party’s agitation by simply identifying the national-reformists (Swarajists, Wafdists and others) with the ruling counter-revolutionary bloc of imperialists and feudal lords.”

“It is not true that the Swarajists, Wafdists and others have already exposed themselves in the eyes of the toiling masses as allies of imperialism, as counter-revolutionary traitors to the national movement.”

A few lines later: “The Swarajists, Wafdists, etc., have not yet betrayed the national liberation struggle in the decisive manner in which, for example, the Kuomintang did in China.” The conclusions that are drawn from this formulation are that the Communist Party in India should keep quiet and not Criticise the vacillation of the reformist bourgeoisie because they have yet to play a revolutionary role. It is also stated that “they have not betrayed the national liberation movement in a decisive manner.” This is far from being true. The Bardoli decision was a definite betrayal of the Indian masses by the

nationalists in 1922 when great mass upheavals took place, and there was the greatest possibility of an agrarian revolution breaking out in India. The bourgeoisie decisively betrayed the movement under the leadership of Gandhi out of pure and simple class interest. It was the menace of the agrarian revolution which forced the national bourgeoisie to betray the movement. Perhaps, may not be in the same manner as the treacherous counter-revolutionary Chinese bourgeoisie who have shed the blood of millions of workers and peasants, but the Indian bourgeoisie did deceive the masses in 1922.

At the end of the paragraph. we find: “The Indian Communists agitation in this stage should not concentrate the sharpest fight against the bourgeoisie but should turn it against the present immediate chief foe, the ruling imperialist-feudal bloc.”

I consider this statement does not give a realistic appreciation of the situation in India and of the growing counter-revolutionary attitude of the bourgeoisie towards the national revolutionary movement. This formulation may lead to a tactical blunder.

Now, I come to another question which is in the last paragraph of the theses on page 37, paragraph 32. Here, in describing the activities of the Workers’ and Peasants’ Parties and in drawing the conclusions from their experience, it is said: “The special Workers’ and Peasants Parties, no matter how revolutionary they may be, can easily be transformed into ordinary petty-bourgeois parties. Therefore, the organising of such parties is inadvisable just as the Communist Party cannot build itself upon a foundation of an amalgamation of two classes, so it is just as wrong to organise other parties

on this foundation, which is typical of petty-bourgeois members."

It seems to me that some of the comrades are scared of a nightmare, which is the result of their own irrational fantasy, that the Workers' and Peasants' Party is a substitute for the Communist Party. Nobody has ever put forward the idea that the Worker's and Peasants' Party would become a substitute for the Communist Party.

The petty bourgeois elements in a backward country who have been proletarianised are sometimes more proletarian than the proletariat themselves. The petty bourgeois intelligentsia, the urban petty bourgeoisie, have a role to play in the revolutionary movement in the colonies. What should be the organisational expression of an anti-imperialist front of the petty bourgeois elements? Can we afford to swamp the Communist Party with such petty bourgeois elements? We cannot. On the other hand, the Communist Party of India should utilise the revolutionary energies of the petty bourgeoisie. I think it is clear that this anti-imperialist front can only take the organisational form of a Workers' and Peasants' Party composed of the urban intelligentsia and the petty bourgeois elements under the leadership of the proletariat.

These Workers' and Peasants' Parties which started in India in 1925 have been carrying on a definite line of action. This party organised 30,000 workers in Bombay in demonstrations against the Simon Commission under such revolutionary slogans as "Down with Imperialism", "Complete Independence of India". Strike movements today are being led by the Workers and Peasants Party. The strike in Lilloah was led by the Workers' and Peasants' Party under the control of the Communist Party of India. We have been able to take over

some trade unions. Now we are told to liquidate all these Workers' and Peasants' Parties. This is pure and simple professional dogmatism which Lenin warned us so many times.

But if we look at the situation in India itself, which are the channels through which the Communists are making their influence felt among the masses? I think it is quite clear that, under the leadership of the Communist Party of India, the Workers' and Peasants' Parties are valuable channels for the propagation of Communist ideas in India. There was no leftist tendency in the Indian national movement before the Workers' and Peasants' Parties appeared in the field. Today all the leftist elements in the country are veering round these organisations, and a certain crystallisation of leftist forces have been taking place through these parties.

And, therefore, I think that this formulation is wrong, both tactically and in principle.

In the same clause, it is said that this by no means excludes the organisation of the fighting bloc of the workers and peasant masses, which is necessary for the conquest of power in the bourgeois democratic revolution at the time of the uprising, in the form of elected Soviets and other loose organisational forms. Loose organisational forms are admitted, and such organisations can be formed on the basis of an alliance between the peasants and workers. But when a concrete party comes in the field as a leftist party which gives a leftist orientation to the nationalist revolutionary movement in India, it is to be liquidated. I do not understand the logic of this argument, and I consider it to be a wrong and unrealistic attitude towards the Workers' and Peasants' Party.

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