

THE PATH TO PROLETARIAN HEGEMONY IN THE INDIAN REVOLUTION.

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(Continued from previous issue).

THE DRIVE TO CRISIS AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE WORKING CLASS TO THE FOREFRONT OF THE MOVEMENT

THE second half of the decade 1920-30, as has been already noted, has been marked by the tightening hold and increasingly reactionary policy of British imperialism in India, and the consequent accelerated gathering of the forces of struggle in the Indian situation. It is in this gathering situation that the working class has come increasingly to the forefront.

The distinctive feature of the new stage of struggle against imperialism, which has developed in a rising wave during these years, is that the most powerful impetus and initiative towards active struggle during these years leading up to the present crisis has come from the new force in the situation, the working class. The mass struggles in the great industrial centres have been the signals of the approaching storm. The petit-bourgeoisie has been drawn in the wake of the rising tempo of struggle, and pressed forward to increasingly revolutionary demands. The bourgeoisie only took up the leadership of the rising forces of opposition at a late stage, when it had no choice save to lead the mass movement in order to behead it, or surrender its position.

Already in 1925, the mass resistance of the Bombay textile workers to the wage reduction offensive of the employers and Government combined, which was reflected in the total for that year of 12 million lost working days (as against 6 millions for the previous high record of 1921), was the first signal of the new stage of struggle, at a time when the bourgeoisie was still settling down to increasing co-operation with imperialism, and the National Congress was disintegrating and dwindling. But the real upward movement of the workers' struggle began in 1927. In 1928 the strike movement reached the enormous total of 506,000 workers and 31 million working days; in 1929, 532,000 workers and 12 million work-

ing days. This strike movement revealed the growing independence of the working class movement, election of strike committees by the workers, repudiation of the reformist leaders, etc. Trade union organisation shot up; the figures for the Bombay Presidency rose from 59,000, according to the Government returns in March, 1926, to 75,000 in 1927, 95,000 in 1928, and 200,000 in 1929. The left wing elements gained increasing dominance, not only in direct strike leadership, but also within the unions and in the Trades Union Congress.

At the same time, the influence of the working class struggle, of revolutionary working class conceptions, of general "socialistic" ideas, and even of Marxist and Communist ideas, began to spread, and affect also considerable sections of the petit-bourgeoisie. The petit-bourgeoisie pressed for more revolutionary demands, embodied especially in the demand for "independence" as the goal of the national movement; and the bourgeois national leadership, although openly opposed to this, found it necessary by the end of 1927 to accept it in form. At the same time, the first confused approaches towards independent working class politics showed themselves in the "Workers' and Peasants' Parties" which were established in 1927, largely out of left elements in the unions and in the National Congress, on a general socialistic and national revolutionary programme.

By 1928-9 the question of "Communism," although there was actually no section of the Communist International in India, began to come to the forefront of politics. Imperialist organs, both in England and India, Nationalist organs, Government reports and employers' report began to occupy themselves ceaselessly with the question of "Communism in India." By "Communism" they meant first and foremost the militant working class struggle and the growth of a militant working class leadership; and secondly, the revolu-

tionising process at work in the national movement.

In this way the working class had by 1929 not only shown itself as a new, active and militant force in the Indian situation, and by the whole character of its fight as potentially the most dangerous enemy of imperialism; but had also made a first unconscious approach to its future hegemony in the national struggle by the revolutionising influence that its activity was in fact exercising on the entire national struggle.

But the actual strength of the working class was still far below its potential importance. The weaknesses of the Indian working class movement at its present stage of development are marked and serious.

In the first place, no organised political expression and leadership of the revolutionary working class in India, *i.e.*, no Communist Party, yet exists. This is the essential and basic weakness. That there is ripeness for its establishment, that revolutionary political working class ideas have already begun to spread, is abundantly shown by the independent workers' demonstrations held under their own slogans and symbols in the principal industrial centres (the Bombay reception of Simon, the demonstration of 50,000 workers to the Calcutta National Congress in 1928 with the slogan of "Indian Soviet Republic," the conflicts over the Red Flag and the Congress flag in Bombay, etc.). But so long as there is no uniting force to express the leadership and organise it, the movement inevitably remains at the level of primitive and sporadic class struggle; and, so soon as larger issues arise, the old national bourgeois leadership takes command as the sole leadership of the whole "nation," with all the apparatus, organised influence, experience and Congress tradition behind them, and the workers, while providing the principal body of actual fight, largely disappear in the general movement.

Trade union organisation has been carried forward to a certain extent, with a marked advance in the past two years; principally in the larger industrial centres in Bombay and Bengal, and mainly among the textile workers, jute workers, railwaymen, seamen and engineering and iron and steel workers, to

some extent among the general workers, very little touching yet the miners, and not yet able to reach the plantation workers. The estimate of the Red International of Labour Unions placed the number of organised workers in India in 1929 as 400,000, of whom 150,000 were judged to be under the organised leadership of the Left. The Trades Union Congress claimed to represent some 125,000 workers in 1927, and in 1929, before the splitting off of the Right unions, according to the figures of J. Nehru, some 190,000 workers. The principal Left union was the famous Bombay Girni Kamgar Union of Textile Workers, which was reported by the Government to have reached a strength of 65,000 by the end of 1928; at the 1929 Trades Union Congress it was affiliated on a strength of 40,000, but is reported this year, with the heavy attacks on it and imprisonment of its successive batches of leaders, to have fallen heavily.

Bourgeois influence is still strong in the leadership of the unions. The old Right reformist leaders (Joshi, Shiva Rao, Bakhale), who represent direct imperialist influence and association with the British Labour Party, were at length defeated at the Nagpur Trades Union Congress at the end of 1929, and seceded from the Congress to form a new one; but they carried with them very nearly half of the affiliated unions, and the victory of the Left was only won in association with the bourgeois Left Nationalists (J. Nehru, S. C. Bose), who now hold the principal positions and work for alliance with the old Right leaders. The building up of a strong and independent trade union movement, based on a programme of class struggle and purged of reformist and bourgeois nationalist leadership, is the principal immediate task for the establishment of the organised strength of the Indian working class.

A further important factor in the present situation of the Indian working class is that the militant working class leadership which was growing up in the struggles of 1927-28, and striking roots and gaining growing influence, has been imprisoned almost in entirety by the Meerut prosecution, thus facilitating the path for bourgeois and reformist influence. While new leaders have successively arisen,

and been imprisoned, and the ultimate effect can only be the strengthening and steeling of the working class and calling forth of ever new forces of leadership from the masses, the immediate effect is inevitably that the working class has entered into the large-scale crisis of 1930 seriously crippled in leadership and organisation. The Indian working class has had to face the conditions of the present struggle after two years of heavy continuous class struggle and sacrifice, and with its best existing leaders imprisoned. This is essential to bear in mind in judging the tasks and problems confronting the Indian working class to be able to realise its rôle of leadership in the present stage of the national struggle.

THE ROLE OF THE MASS STRUGGLE IN THE PRESENT CRISIS AND THE PROBLEM OF THE NEXT STAGE

The tactics of imperialism in preparing for the present conflict have been clearly marked. The necessities of imperialist policy, as already shown, ruled out the possibility of concentrating on the line of conciliating the national bourgeoisie by a liberal policy of concessions; the national bourgeoisie had to be broken in to submission. The inevitability of facing for a period a combined front of all the forces of national struggle had to be recognised, and prepared for by strong measures. The task became to disorganise and paralyse this national front; and the instrument for this purpose lay ready to hand in the national bourgeoisie, which feared a decisive mass struggle even more than imperialism.

The first step was to behead the rising working class movement, where the real point of danger lay, by the imprisonment of the principal leaders and the active repression of all militant working class organisations. This was achieved by the Meerut prosecutions, initiated in March, 1929, and by the terrorist campaign against the militant working class organisations, at the same time as by administrative measures, and by the Whitley Commission appointed in 1929, to assist reformist leadership in the unions and the development of "genuine trade unionism" (in the words of the Labour Indian Secretary of State to the Labour Party Conference in 1929).

The second step was to paralyse British working class action and secure a united front in Britain behind imperialist policy. This was achieved by the appointment of the three-party Simon Commission, with the Labour Party pledged behind it, and through the Labour Government of 1929, whose task became to act as the spokesman of united imperialist policy and hold in the British workers.

The third step was to make it easier for the Indian bourgeoisie to assume the leadership of the gathering mass movement, and thus establish the instrument for the paralysis of the mass movement and for the ultimate capitulation. The manoeuvring here, the simultaneous opposition and co-operation of imperialism and the bourgeoisie, and the rôle of the bourgeoisie between imperialism and the mass struggle, is of critical importance for the character and development of the present crisis.

The essential feature of the rôle of the bourgeoisie in the present struggle has been its extreme **unwillingness** to enter into the struggle at all ("a mad risk"), until absolutely compelled by the situation and finding no other alternative. This has shown itself in all the stages leading up to the crisis. In 1925 Das, before his death, was advancing to new forms of co-operation; in 1926 the *Times* (5.3.26) reported that "the friendliest relations" existed between the Government and the Swarajists; in the Congress at the end of 1926 the demand for independence was defeated by Gandhi and the other bourgeois leaders. The growing popular demand for the independence slogan was only slowly and reluctantly taken up even in form by the end of 1927, after every device of obstruction had failed. It was taken up in 1927 only to be thrown aside at once in the Nehru Constitution of 1928; it was reaffirmed with the twelve months' postponement clause in 1928, only to be thrown aside in the eager response to the Viceroy's declaration in the autumn of 1929; it was reaffirmed in the Congress of 1929, only to be thrown aside immediately after in Gandhi's "eleven points" offer of compromise. In the same way, the promise of action was delayed in execution by every possible device (the twelve months' postponement, the com-

plete vagueness of plans at the Lahore Congress, Gandhi's letter to the Viceroy, etc.). Every possible hope of concessions, of an alternative path, of compromise, every slightest sign from imperialism was eagerly seized; only imperialism ruthlessly closed every avenue and loophole, in order to force the issue. **ONLY THE INEXORABLE PRESSURE OF IMPERIALISM ON THE ONE SIDE AND OF THE GATHERING MASS STRUGGLE ON THE OTHER COMPELLED THE BOURGEOISIE TO RANGE ITSELF AND ASSUME THE LEADERSHIP OF THE MASS STRUGGLE, OR DISAPPEAR FROM THE POLITICAL SCENE.**

When finally action had to be taken, and no alternative remained, the whole concentration of effort was towards limiting and restricting the struggle. For this purpose the issue of the salt tax was chosen as the most narrow and limited possible, and the most remote from the industrial centres; the campaign was to be limited to a handful of chosen, specially trained volunteers, sworn to non-violence; the masses were cast for the rôle of spectators to applaud the heroic deeds of their saintly leaders.

The practical co-operation of imperialism and the bourgeoisie was further revealed when the character of the mass struggle began to extend beyond the control of the bourgeois leadership. Then, and only then, imperialism proceeded to arrest the bourgeois leaders (with careful provision for their comfort in prison—in glaring contrast to the fate of the Meerut prisoners), in order, as the semi-official government press openly declared, to maintain authority and prestige with the masses, save them from responsibility for further participation, and hold in them the means for future negotiation and settlement. The conscious distinction in the policy of imperialism was vividly shown in the bloody conflicts with the mass demonstrations when on repeated occasions the bourgeois leaders would first be carefully removed under arrest, and only then the order given to the police or military to do their butcher's work.

The calculations of both imperialism and the bourgeoisie turned on the question of the

mass struggle. The bourgeoisie hoped, by brandishing the menace of mass struggle, to extort concessions from imperialism, and so was compelled, when its bluff was called, to initiate a limited struggle which it hoped to be able to control. Imperialism calculated on the bourgeoisie's fear of the mass struggle to drive it to surrender, by forcing a limited crisis which should terrify the bourgeoisie, and could then be rapidly suppressed.

But in the event, **THE MIGHTY EXTENT OF THE MASS STRUGGLE WHICH WAS UNLOOSED OVERWHELMED THE CALCULATIONS OF BOTH IMPERIALISM AND THE BOURGEOISIE, AND TRANSFORMED THE WHOLE SITUATION.** This is the outstanding character of the present crisis. The mass struggle broke the limits set for it by the bourgeoisie. The masses took hold of the lead given by the bourgeoisie (there was no other visible), but they transformed its character. They took hold of the salt tax campaign, and turned it from the comedies of saintly individual disobedience and arrest to mighty mass demonstrations, marches on the salt depôts, conflicts with the police, etc. The forms of struggle went far beyond those set by the Congress. Chittagong, Peshawar and Sholapur showed already in the most varied degrees, conditions and regions, the approach to the line of armed struggle and the conquest of power. But these were only high points in a process that was shaking all India.

The mass struggle broke the limits set for it by the bourgeoisie. But in what sense? The answer to this question brings us to the limitations of the stage of development of the crisis up to the present point, and the problem of its further advance. The masses brought into the struggle, even around the limited Congress campaign, the revolutionary uncompromising spirit of fight which was conspicuously absent from the Congress leadership. They turned the campaign into mass actions, although still largely shackled by the crippling doctrines of "non-violence" (actually of free play for imperialist violence). In many points they advanced spontaneously to the offensive, and even to the question of power. The local Congress leadership and "War Councils," influenced by the masses, developed in many

cases in a basically different direction from the central Congress leadership; the Peshawar and Sholapur actions developed through local Congress forms.

BUT THE MASS STRUGGLE DID NOT BREAK FREE FROM THE CONGRESS LEADERSHIP IN THE VITAL SENSE OF ACHIEVING ITS OWN PROGRAMME, ITS OWN DEMANDS, AND ITS OWN LEADERSHIP. THIS IS THE FATAL WEAKNESS OF THE PRESENT STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT OF THE FIGHT.

The highest point of the rôle of the working class in the struggle so far was shown at Sholapur. The population of the textile town of Sholapur is overwhelmingly proletarian. The conquest of power for six days in Sholapur was in fact fought and won by the workers. But the forms and leadership were the local Congress forms and leadership; the workers had no independent leadership, organisation and programme.

This is the situation which confronts us with the burning problem of the next stage of advance. To-day the present wave of national struggle has reached its most critical and dangerous point. The bourgeois leadership openly prepares negotiations and compromise; its only manœuvres (the breakdown of the Yeravda conversations) are the hesitation to move too quickly and isolate itself, so long as the mass struggle may still advance. Both imperialism and the bourgeoisie calculate now on the ebb of the wave. The forces of national struggle are still high, still undefeated, but are uncertain of the path forward, and have found no alternative leadership.

What is to be done? The task now is to find the new forms of national struggle which can carry the movement forward, which can throw over the old bourgeois leadership, in which the leading rôle of the working class can come increasingly to the front, thus alone making continuous advance certain.

This requires the advance to new and wider objectives and slogans of struggle, such as will go beyond the limits set by the bourgeoisie and release the further activity of the masses. It requires, on the basis of this advance in the struggle, the rapid differentiation of the revo-

lutionary national elements from the national bourgeoisie. It requires, further, the independent organisation and leadership of the working class. And it requires, finally, the finding of forms of united action and struggle of the working class, the peasantry and the revolutionary petit-bourgeois elements, such as to combine the action in the common struggle without politically merging the workers.

What is the present position? The present position is that the full forces of the mass struggle have not yet been brought into play. The agrarian movements of revolt are still scattered and partial. The workers have not yet advanced to the plane of the political mass strike, etc. **THE FULL POWER OF THE STRUGGLE AGAINST IMPERIALISM HAS NOT YET BEEN RELEASED. Why is this? BECAUSE THE NATIONAL STRUGGLE, IN ITS PRESENT PROGRAMME AND LEADERSHIP, DOES NOT YET REFLECT THE INTERESTS AND DEMANDS OF THE MASSES.**

The central objective of revolutionary struggle in India is the overthrow of imperialism; on this all further advance depends. This struggle can only be fought to a victorious conclusion as the struggle of the masses of the workers and peasants. Imperialism does not fear the bourgeoisie save so far as they may be able to exercise influence on the masses. The revolutionary nationalist petit-bourgeois elements can only find scope for their aspiration in so far as they can learn to help forward the movement of the masses.

But for the masses of the workers and the peasantry the overthrow of imperialism is not an end in itself; it is only a means to an end, a means to wider liberation. For the peasantry, it is bound up with the agrarian revolution, with the overthrow of feudal domination and landownership. For the workers, it is a stage in the advance to Socialism, to the working class conquest of power; it is bound up with their immediate economic and political demands. So long as a bourgeois national leadership remains in control, directly resisting and throttling the demands and line of fight of the workers and peasants, the national struggle cannot reach its full height.

The weakness of the present stage is that the existing mass struggle is still confined and restricted to the basis of the limited demands and objectives originally set by the national bourgeoisie. These cover: (1) the salt campaign—now passing into the background; (2) the anti-liquor campaign, picketing of Government liquor shops, etc.; (3) the boycott of foreign goods; (4) the non-co-operation campaign for resigning of Government offices, boycott of law courts, of Government educational institutions, of elections, etc.; (5) limited no-tax campaigns in a very few areas. Alongside these have taken place sporadic peasant movements, strikes, etc., but outside the scope of the Congress campaign, and without any conscious political expression or programme. It has further been noticeable that the tendency after the first couple of months of the crisis has been increasingly to restrict the scope of the campaign, to draw back even from those limited demands that draw out the activity of the masses, *e.g.*, the salt and liquor campaigns, and to concentrate on the commercial boycott as the safe panacea.

If this situation is maintained, the movement is doomed to collapse. A mass movement which does not advance, which does not maintain the offensive, which does not go forward to ever new demands and points of attack, is already on the way to disintegration. And this is precisely where the national bourgeoisie is consciously leading the mass movement, not even to an organised retreat, but to collapse by stagnation. Here is the peril and urgent need of new advance.

What is needed? TO TRANSFORM THE STRUGGLE FROM THE BASIS OF THE LIMITED DEMANDS AND OBJECTIVES SET BY THE NATIONAL BOURGEOISIE TO THE BASIS OF THE IMMEDIATE REVOLUTIONARY DEMANDS OF THE WORKING MASSES, AND ESPECIALLY OF THE PEASANTRY. Only when the questions of the agrarian revolution, of the mass non-payment of rent, smashing of the forest laws, and (if the conditions were ripe) of the direct conquest of the land by the peasants, are brought into the forefront, and alongside these the immediate demands of the workers in the towns, only then will the full forces of the

mass struggle be released. The national struggle of India must either advance to this stage or collapse.

This requires a complete break with the bourgeois national leadership and programme. It requires a new national revolutionary bloc of struggle, the core of which will be the workers and peasants, and in which the revolutionary nationalist petit-bourgeois elements which go forward with the struggle will find their orientation towards the workers and peasants, instead of as at present towards the national bourgeoisie. Within such a bloc of struggle the working class will advance increasingly towards hegemony. The advance of the working class to hegemony cannot be achieved in a single jump; the first stage is a process of differentiation within the national struggle, in which the demands and activity of the workers and peasants come increasingly to the front. But unless such a basic transformation of the character and programme of the struggle is carried into practice, the fight against imperialism cannot advance.

The conditions for such a process of differentiation in the national movement, for such advance to a new stage of the national struggle, are visibly ripe. The discontent of the national revolutionary elements with the passivity and visibly approaching betrayal on the part of the leadership of the national bourgeoisie is already strong (the general protests at the Yeravda conversations), and, in the event of a compromise, will reach fever heat. The action of the masses, even on the limited existing campaigns, and the numerous signs of sporadic independent advance of the peasants, show the readiness to go forward to a wider general action. But the danger still lies in the weakness of the political leadership of the working class, and the consequent absence of a driving force of new political leadership. If the revolutionary national petit-bourgeois elements seek to achieve a change simply by a change of leaders on top, or by advance from the Congress form to some new national revolutionary party (*e.g.*, from the leadership of Gandhi and the Nehrus to a party led by Iyengar, Bose, etc.), the movement will still remain within the orbit of the bourgeoisie: the real advance to independent mass action will not be achieved. Such a

development can in the outcome be no less dangerous than the existing situation of the national movement, and serve only to prevent the advance that is needed.

In the present phase of the struggle to attempt to fix rigid forms is fatal. It is the transformation of the character of the struggle that is essential, and that will determine the appropriate forms. **IT IS FROM THE ACTUAL STRUGGLE THAT THE LEADERSHIP OF THE WORKING CLASS MUST DEVELOP.** But this requires, at the same time, the independent development of the working class through its Communist Party and revolutionary trade unions, to be able to act as a single force with its own programme and tactics; and the de-

velopment of temporary, changing (and in the first place, local) united front organs of struggle, drawing together the workers, peasants and revolutionary petit-bourgeois elements around a common programme of immediate struggle, but within which the workers act as an organised and independent political force.

The present situation offers still a historic opportunity. The next few months will show how far the rising revolutionary forces in India, and especially the revolutionary working class forces, are sufficiently developed to be able to take advantage of it in the present crisis, or will have to pursue a slower and more difficult path through temporary defeat to the new stage of struggle.