

Our Efforts at Restoring Party Unity

It was at this stage that the comrades in Andhra and Tamilnad were released—releases had taken place in Kerala little earlier. Despite all the slanders that had been heaped on them while they were in jail and even after they had come out, these comrades without getting provoked considered the very grave inner-Party situation and formulated certain proposals for restoring Party unity. These proposals were embodied in the no *Threat to Party Unity—How to Avert it?* submitted by seventeen members of the National Council to its session in October 1964. The seventeen comrades confined themselves to solving the problem of urgent and pressing issues which, in their opinion, “constitute the first minimum necessary steps in the arduous struggle for achieving inner-Party unity....” On the ideological differences in the international Communist movement, they proposed, “Our Party, as an independent, sovereign unit of the international Communist movement, shall arrive at its own independent decisions after a full and democratic discussion in the entire Party. No question of either ‘Pro-Peking’ or ‘Pro-Moscow’ shall arise whatever our enemies shout to slander the

cause of Communism. We should not resort to open criticism and attacks either on the positions of the CPSU or the CPC until our Party concludes its inner-Party discussions and arrives at its own conclusions." On the India-China border dispute they said, "We got stuck in discussing the differences from time to time and allowed the situation to be exploited by all sorts of chauvinistic and Right reactionary forces in the country to fan the flames of hatred against China and do everything possible to prevent the formation of the climate for a peaceful and negotiated settlement of the dispute....The most important issue that can bring about a radical change in the situation is the peaceful and negotiated settlement of the Sino-Indian border dispute. Whether we succeed or not in bringing about a negotiated settlement as speedily as we wish it, one thing is certain, that is, the further advance of the democratic and revolutionary movement is very much dependent upon the systematic and persistent struggle we carry on to bring about such a settlement.....

"Our Party cannot play any effective role by merely giving support to the declared intentions of the Nehru Government for peaceful settlement, etc., without mobilising popular opinion independently with its main stress on peaceful settlement and for a fresh initiative by our Government to that effect while, of course, taking all necessary steps to strengthen the defence of the country. To do this, our Party should reorientate its whole agit-prop line and evolve correct slogans of action from time to time, instead of being swayed by anti-Chinese propaganda of the rightist forces in the country, as is now often done. The unbridled criticism of the Chinese Government and the open and vituperative attacks on them, irrespective of the correctness or otherwise of their contents, are not conducive to creating a climate of peaceful negotiations in the country. The increasing stress on peaceful negotiations and for a fresh initiative to break the deadlock, by our Party will not only bring about greater unity among us, but also unite the broadest democratic opinion behind the slogans of negotiated and speedy settlement of the border dispute. We should defer the discussion on those aspects that divide us and concentrate on the pressing and urgent issue of

negotiations. The details cannot be worked out here and the CEC and National Council will have to undertake that task if the Party leadership takes on hand, and in right earnest, the unification of our Party."

On the current political line of the Party, the seventeen comrades proposed, "Any attempt to enforce the Vijayawada line as interpreted by one section of comrades who now occupy the leading positions, through organisational methods such as disciplining individual leaders for their political views, the dissolution of elected committees and appointing of organising committees, will not pave the way for either effectively implementing the line or keeping the Party united, leave alone helping the process of further unification.

"... In view of such specific directives (of the Party Constitution) and the critical inner-Party situation prevailing now, we should concentrate on the pressing and urgent problems of the mass movement and desist from attempting to rush through political-ideological decisions arrived at under conditions of sharp differences and divisions. It is precisely on pressing mass issues that we can attain maximum unity amongst us and such united work in turn will pave the way for greater unity and understanding. While abiding by and implementing the political line as adopted at Vijayawada, we shall have to organise the inner-Party discussion on the following subjects without delay: (a) reassessment of the Vijayawada line in the light of developments since then and particularly during the last one year; (b) 'National Democracy' and 'non-capitalist path' as applied to Indian realities; (c) the Party programme."

For conducting organised and principled inner-Party discussions both on the ideological questions in the international Communist movement as well as problems connected with the revolutionary movement in our country, the seventeen comrades proposed that "the National Council should set up a small body of seven comrades who represent and command the confidence of all comrades in conducting free and fair discussion. Similar bodies may be set up at different state centres wherever it is found necessary. Pending final decisions at the appropriate Party

Conferences and Congress, the dates of which will have to be decided keeping in view the nature and intensity of Government's repression on our Party, the Party press should not act as a vehicle to propagate views held by one or the other section of comrades on the accepted policy of the Party. The Party press also should decisively come out in defence of all Communists while sharply refuting the slanderous attacks of the bourgeois press which constantly vilifies some as 'pro-Peking' and 'anti-national', urges on the Government to arrest them, appeals to the central leadership to expel them, etc'.

To restore mutual confidence and promote the cause of Party unity they proposed the review and revising both at the centre and in the States of certain organisational measures taken during the acute inner-Party crisis—the dissolving of the West Bengal POC and the restoration of the State Council, restoration of the Provincial Council elected by the regular conference in Punjab in the place of the Council elected by the special conference, stopping of enquiries about Comrades Sundarayya and Gopalan, etc.

To ensure that the Party Conferences and Congress be held in a democratic manner, the proposal was made: that the membership rolls on the basis of which the Vijayawada Congress was held should form the basis for next Party Congress, that full opportunity should be given to all Party members to renew their Party cards. Wherever new membership recruitment had taken place, that membership to be scrutinised by agreed sub-committees to recommend whether it is genuine or not and whether it should be accepted for the purpose of participation as delegates in the conferences and the Congress.

The note of the seventeen comrades had scrupulously avoided laying responsibility on anybody's shoulders for the serious inner-Party situation that had developed, but taking note of the actual situation had made proposals, which none could turn down as unreasonable, for taking the first steps to restore Party unity.

S. A. Dange while admitting these were "very serious propositions" gave a reply to the proposals which showed the least concern for Party unity. All these reasonable proposals were

rejected out of hand while the reply made a cheap attempt to damn all political opponents as "pro-China". Far from making any proposal himself, he demanded the seventeen comrades accept their "obligations". These were obviously not meant as serious proposals for Party unity, it was an attempt to dictate terms which in the context of the inner-Party situation could only intensify the differences and widen the split.

What they did afterwards in the National Council confirmed the fact that Party unity was the last thing Dange and his followers wanted. Without organising any discussion inside the Party, with the majority they commanded in the National Council, they committed our Party completely to the positions taken by the CPSU. Far from reviewing and rescinding the disruptive disciplinary actions which had already been taken, the proposal was made to suspend Comrade Gopalan from the CEC for six months and though this had to be changed Comrade Gopalan was publicly censured.

An explanation was demanded from Comrade Sundarayya for his speeches in general body meetings. The demand for the restoration of the West Bengal PC was rejected. It was clear that Dange and company were bent on continuing on the path of disruptive organisational methods which could only widen the gulf inside the Party.

After the National Council session, in State after State Dange and his followers intensified their disruptive activities. In Andhra, a series of slanderous accusations were made against Comrades Sundarayya, Basavapunniah, Hanumantha Rao, Nagi Reddy and others and these were circulated to the Party ranks which necessitated a reply from these comrades. Insistent demands began to be made in Andhra for the expulsion of Comrade Sundarayya, in Tamilnad for the expulsion of Comrade Ramamurti and others. In Punjab, the State Council decided to suspend Comrade Surjeet for six months from Party membership and to expel Comrade Des Raj Chadha. In Bombay, charge-sheets and notices were served on a number of comrades.

It must be noted that the Dange group flouted all inner-Party democracy in order to pursue their chauvinistic, tailist line. In

Kerala, despite the demand made by four out of the nine district councils, representing more than fifty per cent of the Party membership and despite the demand made by a number of members of the State Council itself to convene a special Party Conference, the State Council flouted the Constitution and refused to convene the conference.

Similarly, as early as in February 1963, Comrade E. M. S. Namboodiripad had submitted a document on revisionism in which he had nailed down the revisionist activities of the Dange group and demanded inner-Party discussion. Unable to reject the demand out of hand, they appointed a commission to organise inner-Party discussion on question of controversy. But the Commission was dead even before it was born and no inner-Party discussion was organised.

This was the pattern which Dange and company were following when the Central Executive Committee met in January 1964.

Again, without getting provoked by all that was happening, ten members of the CEC made an appeal for the restoration of Party unity. After pointing out the ideological-political-organisational line and methods of Dange and his followers which were seriously threatening the unity of the Party, the ten comrades again put forward concrete proposals for arresting the fast-deteriorating situation and creating an atmosphere where the work of restoring Party unity can begin. These proposals were:

—Revoke all the disciplinary actions that have been taken in this period. Call off the so-called enquiry which the Control Commission is conducting.

—Restore the West Bengal State Council.

—Restore the Punjab State Council which was elected at the last regular conference.

—Withdraw from circulation to Party members the charges and counter-charges in Andhra.

—Start immediate inner-Party discussions on ideological-political questions including the Programme in preparation for the Party Congress.

—Convene the Party Congress to resolve the differences. Fix

date, place and agenda. Regarding the membership on the basis of which the Congress should be held, a proposal was made in the Note to the National Council (October, 1963).

—Appoint an agreed commission to conduct the discussion and prepare for the Party Congress.

—During this period, have agreed understanding on building and developing mass movements so that we can go to the masses with one voice.

“Unless these measures are taken”, the ten comrades stated, “there is no prospect of our Party overcoming the present crisis and averting further disruption that threatens our Party. Any continuation of the attitude that since one is in a majority, one can go ahead and do whatever one wants, any attempt to mechanically impose discipline in this situation where we are preparing for a Party Congress, will only lead to further worsening of the situation which should be prevented in the interests of not only our Party but also of the democratic movement of our country. It is in this spirit that we are submitting this note and our proposals with the hope that they will get more serious consideration and a better response than the earlier note by some of us to the National Council”.

But this appeal went unheeded, these proposals had the same fate as the earlier one. With their majority, they rejected the demand for convening an early Party Congress and the proposal regarding membership which left out nearly 30% of the membership transforming their minority in the Party into a majority. They used their majority even to decide the personnel of the Commission to prepare documents for the Party Congress. Their whole attitude was such that it became impossible for Comrade E.M.S. or anyone of us to participate in the work of the Commission.

It was at this meeting also that the CEC endorsed the line of the Tamilnad Committee on the municipal elections and though this endorsement formally mentioned the election tactics for the general elections worked out by the National Council at Bangalore, it was really an endorsement of the line of general united front with the Congress which actually led to

the rout of the Party in the municipal elections.

At this stage itself, many of us were convinced that Dange and company were out to disrupt the Party and would not allow a democratic verdict at a democratically held Party Congress. But because of our anxiety for Party unity we wanted to go to the Party Congress and fight there for a democratic verdict. It was for this that we made the proposal to the CEC. But they were rejected. Even then we began work for preparing documents to be placed before the National Council. After preliminary discussions drafts were prepared on both the ideological questions and the Party Programme and they were circulated to leading comrades of our view in all States with the proposal that they should be finalised in a meeting in the beginning of April. The meeting in April was not for setting up any rival Party but to finalise these documents and as the introduction to these documents themselves said they were to be submitted to the National Council after they were finalised.

It must be acknowledged to the glory of the Party that Party comrades throughout this period resisted these anti-Party and factional activity of the Dange group. In West Bengal, the POC was thoroughly isolated and almost all Party units refused to accept its authority. Throughout the country, many Party units organised mass meetings to be addressed by Comrade A. K. Gopalan. Immediately after the National Council took disciplinary action against A. K. Gopalan and publicly censured him, the Trivandrum comrades organised a grand reception to him. Almost every district in Kerala organised grand receptions and mass rallies.

The Dange Letters

It was in this background that the revelation came about the letters which Dange wrote offering his services as an agent to the British Government while he was a prisoner after conviction in the Kanpur Conspiracy Case. The CURRENT of March 7, 1964 published the story with the text of the incriminating letter. It is a fact that some time earlier a cyclostyled copy of these letters