

Against the Theory of “Decolonization”

By JOHN PEPPER

(NOTE: This article is based on Comrade Pepper's speech made at the Sixth World Congress of the Comintern in the course of the discussion on the colonial question. The second part of this speech, which deals with the problems of the bourgeois-democratic revolution in the colonies, will be printed in the next issue of *The Communist*.—Editor).

Comrade Kuusinen's theses are based upon a discussion of two fundamental problems: first, *the colonial policy of imperialism*; and, second, questions of the *bourgeois-democratic revolution* as a preparatory step to the socialist revolution in the colonies. The arguments, which have here been directed against the basis of the theses, are wrong. In my opinion, the basis of the theses in both problems is quite right, and there is no need to revise the theses in this respect. Of course, a sentence here and there might be changed. For many questions—for example, for the question of the peasantry and the city petit-bourgeoisie—differentiating formulations should be given. Attacks directed against the main line of the theses should most certainly be rejected.

Let us first consider the *colonial policy of imperialism*. Here, of course, *India* plays the leading role, since many of our future problems are now concentrated there. Comrade Bennett's speech, which attacked the main lines of the theses on India, was rather unfortunate, for it leads to entirely false, incorrect deductions.

Bennett put the question: *Is there industrialization in India or not? Does this industrialization signify a certain decolonization?* Comrade Bennett even maintained that Comrade Bukharin is an exponent of “decolonization.” He is mistaken in this, however. Comrade Bukharin has never taken a stand for this theory. I recall quite clearly what he said in the Political Secretariat at the time this question was under discussion. His statement may also be found in the minutes. He said only the following: “The report of the Indian comrades on the questions of industrialization and decolonization of India should be carefully investigated.” It cannot be maintained, however, that if one desires to investigate a problem, this in itself signifies the acceptance of a “theory.”

WHAT IS INDUSTRIALIZATION?

Comrade Bennett said that if he had to choose between the two theories, he would be for the theory of decolonization rather than for the contention that India is a "village continent." *But can the question really be formulated as simply as it was by Bennett, i. e., that industrialization is equivalent to decolonization?* In my opinion, industrialization and decolonization should not be confused one with the other. Comrade Bennett simplifies the task entirely too much. One should, first of all, investigate the following:

1. Is there industrialization in India?
2. What is the character of this industrialization, and to what extent has it developed?
3. Is it an industrialization capable of making the country really independent?
4. What role does the British bourgeoisie play in this process of industrialization?
5. What is the relation between industrialization and capitalist development in India and the non-capitalist section of the country?

Comrade Bennett has not discussed any of these questions at all; he has reduced the whole problem to the question of industrialization *in general*. He has not grasped the fundamental questions at all. The fundamental questions are:

Is industrialization in India characterized by heavy industry—*the manufacture of the means of production*, machines, etc.—or only by *light industry*, such as the textile industry, which depends on direct consumption? One must investigate furthermore as to who has captured the "*commanding heights*" in Indian economy. Only if all these problems are investigated, it is possible to come to a correct conclusion regarding the question of "decolonization."

The first question upon which I will touch and which is rather decisive is *the question of the role and extent of heavy industry and of capitalism in general in Indian economy*. It must be conceded that capitalism has as yet touched only the outer surface of the vast domain of India, which Comrade Kuusinen rightly called a "village-continent." The great bulk of the population still lives in many respects under *pre-capitalist* conditions; this is indeed one of the most important characteristics of the general situation in India. *The majority of the population in India suffers today from the disintegrating consequences of capitalism, which presses forward more and more, and at the same time from the backwardness of the country, of those elements which are still pre-capitalist.* This must be grasped. If it is not, one has likewise not grasped Lenin's theses at the Second Congress, which characterized India as a *pre-capitalist* country in many ways. Of course, it might be said that since 1920,

since the theses of the Second Congress, a major change has taken place in the situation in India. If this view is held, however, one should frankly declare it. It was Comrade Bennett's duty to explain that Lenin's theses, which characterized India as still a pre-capitalist country, are no longer correct today, that India is no longer a colony, or, at least, that the principal process of development in India is the process of decolonization. Comrade Kuusinen is entirely correct in characterizing India as a giant *village-continent*. Reality shows that industry, as it exists in India, is limited to small sections, and that the overwhelming majority of the population lives under agrarian conditions which are even yet in many respects pre-capitalist.

Comrade Bennett declared—and that was really his trump card—that Kuusinen is wrong, that India is not an agricultural appendage of the British Empire, for if one investigates India's export trade, one finds that India does not export much raw material to England. In my opinion, this formulation of the question by Comrade Bennett falls rather flat. The question is not how much raw material India exports to England; *the only correct formulation of the question is one which analyzes the general relation of India not only to the British Empire but to all imperialist countries*. The correct Leninist formulation can only be one which analyzes *the role and function of India in the world imperialistic system*. If this is done, however, it is seen that the main function of India in the world imperialist system is the provisioning of the metropoles with agricultural products and raw material. Industry in India—the development of her natural resources, the extension of her railway system, etc.—serves the purpose of making her capable of fulfilling her function as an agricultural appendage of imperialism. Imperialism robs India of her raw material, and wishes to export its goods to India. Capitalism may also make further great advances in India; it may, for example, transform the agricultural economy into a capitalist one. However, this will not change the basic function of India in the world imperialist system; i. e., that it constitutes an agricultural appendage of imperialism.

LIGHT INDUSTRY AND INDEPENDENCE

Let us take *the question of industrialization in a narrow sense*. India possesses no heavy industry or almost no heavy industry; almost no metallurgy. The two or three large metal works which India does have are known to everyone—even those who have studied the country only superficially—by name. Indian industry, to the extent that it exists, is light industry. Its main purpose is the manufacture of textile goods. One should distinguish between industrialization and industrialization. It is now necessary to analyze

the question as to *what role light industry can play in the development of a country*. Two questions are to be taken into consideration here:

1. *Can the existence of light industry transform a country from an agrarian into an industrial country?*
2. *Can the existence of light industry make a country independent of the imperialist powers?*

It is my opinion that both questions must be answered with a decisive "No!"

I shall now cite a few passages from Lenin and Stalin to show how they judged this question. Lenin said the following in regard to Soviet Russia:

"Without the recovery of heavy industry, without its rehabilitation, we cannot build up any industry, and without it we are completely lost as an independent country."

The following citation from Comrade Stalin likewise has reference to Soviet Russia:

"What is an agrarian country? An agrarian country is a country that exports agricultural products and imports means of production, that does not itself produce any, or hardly any, of these means of production (machines, etc.). If we remain at a standstill at this stage of development—where we do not manufacture the means of production from our own resources, but have to import them from abroad—then we cannot be secure against the transformation of our country into an appendage of the capitalist system."

Soviet Russia, as is well known, is much more industrialized than India. The proletariat in Soviet Russia possesses a much greater specific gravity than the working class in India. Soviet Russia has, comparatively speaking, much more heavy industry than India. Soviet Russia is the land of the dictatorship of the proletariat, where the working class is already in power, where the political rule of imperialism has been overthrown. Nevertheless Lenin and Stalin have established that:

(1) The existence of light industry is not sufficient to transform an agrarian country into an industrial country; (2) only the development of heavy industry, of metallurgy, only the manufacture of the means of production can transform a country into an industrial country; (3) without heavy industry a country cannot maintain itself economically as an independent country; (4) with-

out heavy industry, without the manufacture of the means of production a country necessarily becomes a mere appendage of the capitalist, imperialist system.

Moreover, the above Leninist points of view cannot be simply dismissed from consideration, if one is to investigate the question as to what extent the industrialization of India, as it is at present, is capable of bringing about the "decolonization" of the country.

One of the most important arguments which Comrade Bennett put forward to prove the industrialization of India was the large amount of *capital exported from Great Britain* to India. It undoubtedly is a fact that England has exported a great deal of capital to India. But it is also a fact that not less than 90 per cent. of the English capital which went to India was sunk in government loans and only 10 per cent was directly expended for economic purposes. Of course, a part of the government loans were also expended for economic ends, but in the main they were used to cover war and administration expenses. Also the other 10 per cent was only in small part invested in industry; it went very often for agriculture or for the extraction of raw materials. Comrade Magyar reported, for instance, in the Indian Commission, that not less than 500 million rupees of English capital are invested in tea plantations. Nobody will argue that tea plantations constitute heavy industry.

On the other hand, it would, of course, be ridiculous to maintain that there is no industry in India. British capital naturally plays a great role in the industrialization of India. But nevertheless it should not be overlooked that Indian industry, as it is today, is first of all, light industry. Moreover these facts cannot be disputed: that in India today there is still almost no heavy industry; that India, being able to supply only between 4 and 8 per cent of her iron requirements, must import the balance. The industrial development of India has not yet reached the stage of the manufacture of the means of production. Four per cent of the amount necessary to cover her iron requirements is still very little. And it is even less, when one takes into consideration that the total iron consumption in India is very low compared with capitalist countries. *Moreover it should not be overlooked that, on the one hand, in large sections of Indian economy pre-capitalist conditions prevail in many respects, while, on the other hand, British capitalism is in complete possession of all the "commanding heights" of Indian economic life.* The question cannot be stated so "super-simply" as it was by Comrade Bennett. It is clear that Indian capitalism cannot develop quickly and vigorously, because it is hemmed in from above and below. From above it is hemmed in by the world system of imperialism; from below by the pre-capitalist elements in Indian economy. It must be understood that both these elements still continue today to hamper the development of an independent Indian capitalism.

The relativity of industrial development in India is also overlooked. That certain processes of industrialization are doubtless present in India nobody has denied. But if this development is compared with the development of large industry, with the building up of heavy industry, with the creation of powerful international trusts in the imperialist countries, it is clear that India cannot keep pace with the development of the imperialist countries. The historical stage of our present epoch, characterized by Lenin as one of division of countries into backward and highly-developed capitalist countries, is not changed by the fact that certain industrialization processes are taking place in the colonies, that capitalism is making advances there. The development of India must be taken in connection with the development of the giant world trusts in the imperialist countries. Only in this way can it be understood that, *in spite of certain industrialization processes, India nevertheless has remained an appendage of the world imperialist system* and must so remain until the Revolution in India or in Great Britain changes this situation.

THE REAL ROLE OF BRITISH IMPERIALISM

Comrade Bennett understands the role of British imperialism in India very one-sidedly, very undialectically. *He sees only that British capital is industrializing India, while he overlooks the fact that the same British capital hampers by all the means in its power the industrialization of India.* The whole economic and political system of British imperialism is a unified plot against the independent development of the economic life of India. I shall cite here only a few facts from recent times. British rule in India regulates the whole *system of customs* in India against Indian industry. British rule has rejected the raising of duties on iron and, inversely, has initiated preference duties for British iron products. It refused the duties on coal which the Indian industrialists demanded. The whole *financial policy* of British imperialism in India is based upon the frustration of financial and industrial independence. The artificial rise in the exchange rate of the rupee brought with it heavy deflation and likewise a severe crisis in Indian industry as a whole. It is also not an accident that *the export of capital from England to India has been greatly diminishing of late.* Great Britain is even trying to do everything in order to induce Indian capitalists to export capital abroad, for instance, to Brazil, so that it will not be invested in Indian industry itself. These hard facts cannot be argued away by various incorrect theories. It was Comrade Bennett's duty to discuss these facts, to take a stand on these facts, to accept them or to deny their existence. He did not do this; instead he formulated theories on "decolonization."

Comrade Bennett has cited Comrade Varga here to the effect that there are four causes for the rapid development of industry in India. The first is the war. The second cause is the desire of the British to bribe the Indian bourgeoisie. The third cause is that England is not able to supply the Indian market with goods. I shall not at all dispute the correctness of these causes, as given by Comrade Varga, as applied to the *past*. But why has Comrade Bennett brought them forward now as applied to the *present*?

Comrade Bennett, we certainly concede that the first imperialist world war is already over. This "cause" can, therefore, no longer be a factor. The second "cause" also has very little weight. As is well-known, the Indian bourgeoisie can be bought very cheaply, can be bribed by concessions of very little value. This, then, is also no argument for an extensive industrialization. As to the third "cause," it is really ridiculous today to talk about England not being able to supply the Indian market with goods. England, now suffering from the greatest over-production in her history, not able to supply the Indian market! Nobody in Manchester will believe that, Comrade Bennett.

WHY A REVOLUTIONARY SITUATION IN INDIA?

Comrade Bennett's whole argument suffers from the fact that it is most undialectical. *He believes that the revolutionary development in India is a consequence of the fact that Indian capitalism is becoming very strong, that the industrial development of India is striding forward with seven-league boots.* That is incorrect.

Why is a revolutionary situation developing in India? Just because Indian capitalism, which is not great nor strong and has not yet a firm grasp on the country, comes in conflict with the pre-capitalist conditions, with the backwardness of the country, on the one hand, and with imperialism, on the other. This conflict, these contradictions—these, and not the absolute strength of capitalism, form the basis of the revolutionary movement in India. This conflict and the process of disintegration, not the rapid development of capitalism, form the basis of the revolutionary situation. It should be observed, moreover, that, on the one hand, capitalism, which has already reached a certain stage of development in India, has created a proletariat which can lead the Revolution, but that, on the other hand, independent industrial and economic development in general is hampered by the pre-capitalist elements and by imperialism. If one one-sidedly, undialectically, sees only the existence of industrialization and the rapid development of capitalism; if one wishes to see only the historical role of the proletariat; if one simply ignores India's colonial state; if one characterizes the process of "decolonization" as the main process—then one

comes rather dangerously near to the standpoint of the Second International. It is indeed well known that the Second International maintains that the "normal" development of India and of the other colonies is a capitalist development, that they are becoming gradually decolonized and are developing a proletariat, and that this proletariat, in the far distant future, will make the proletarian revolution against the native bourgeoisie.

A RIGHT POSITION WITH ULTRA-LEFT COQUETTRY

The position taken by the Second International is equivalent to dropping the struggle against imperialism in the colonies. And in this connection appears Comrade Bennett's second error, which consists in an incorrect estimation of the disposition of classes in India. His argument proceeds from the assumption that there are only two camps in India—one the camp of the imperialists, the other that of the workers and peasants. It is not as simple as all that. *There are still three camps*, for it cannot yet be said that the Indian bourgeoisie has entirely and definitely gone over to the camp of imperialism. The Indian bourgeoisie has betrayed the national revolution innumerable times, will likewise betray it in the future, and will even eventually betray it definitely. But today three camps are still to be discerned in India. It is clear that *English imperialism continues to be the principal enemy*; and, of course, it is also clear that the final victory over English imperialism is possible only by means of the defeat of the Indian bourgeoisie. If one says, however, that the Indian bourgeoisie is already today the principal enemy, this would mean that one underestimates the significance of British imperialism; and this is quite dangerous. Comrade Bennett coquettishly remarked that he would not feel concerned if he should be dubbed an ultra-left on the ground of his arguments on decolonization and his estimation of the disposition of classes in India. Comrade Bennett, however, has no cause to fear. We know Comrade Bennett, and nobody would call him an ultra-left. The interpretation which he has put forward is by no means an ultra-left one. *A few minor insignificant ultra-left gestures are indeed present, but the basis of his interpretation and of his criticism against the theses of Comrade Kuusinen is a quite well-developed right deviation.*