

The Communist International on the Anti-Fascist Front and its Impacts on India



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The period from 1925 onwards, was marked for the militant working class movement in India on the prescribed lines of the anti-imperialism and anti-fascist joint front. The period saw a process of gradual ascendancy from the concept of the workers united front to the concept of a popular mass front against fascism and reaction. The entire Indian national movement for freedom, irrespective of its deviations, compromises and retreat, revolved mainly round the theoretical posers of the Communist International, which, with keen interests and political maturity, guided the revolutionary world movement against all forms of exploitation and capitalist onsets against the toiling masses.

The fifth congress of the comintern, which had met on 17 July, 1924, defined its policy for correctly applying the policy of United front. It inferred, “We must be capable day by day of improving our contacts with the masses, making a careful study their needs, desires and tempers, carefully planning our own actions and strongly upholding the interests of the proletariat.”¹ On the question of united front tactics the congress stated that these tactics were and remained essential as a means of drawing majority of the decisive section of the proletariat into the struggle and thereby prepare the ground for launching an attack against the bourgeoisie. The congress particularly stressed the importance of carrying out the tactics of the united front from below, and excluding this from being done only from above. At the same time the congress stated, “unity from below in the rank and file, and at the same time negotiation with the leaders—this the method that will have to be applied very often in those countries where the social democrats are still strong.”² Besides so many other questions the fifth congress discussed at its plenum, one important among them was the discussion on the experience of the communists participation in the liberation movement, and evaluated

on 6 April, 1925 the political situation in India, Indonesia and Egypt by adoption of a thesis which offered to the communists in these countries a number of recommendations on programmatic and tactical questions.

In fifth plenum of the Executive Committee of the communist International evaluated that “the hardening repressive policy of the British Imperialism against Communist elements, the labour movement and consistent nationalists on the one hand, and the contradictions within the national movement, on the other, temporarily weakened the organised resistance of the Indian masses to British Imperialism.”³ Considering this state of affairs to imply neither defeat nor breakdown of the national liberation movement in the country, but merely a temporary crisis within the existing national parties, the plenum found that “one of the important tasks for our comrades in India at the present time is to work actively towards shaping the national movement on the basis of a determined struggle for India’s independence.”⁴ The communists of India were recommended to continue working in the Indian National Congress- the biggest mass national organisation in the country- in order “to create a mass national revolutionary party and an all India anti-imperialist bloc,”⁵ and find a way to make the Indian bourgeoisie wage a more vigorous political struggle and support its every act of resistance to imperialism on the basis of a united anti-imperialist front.”⁶ The plenum regarded it as a major task of the Indian Communists to work to unite the communist groups and elements into a strong party of the working class- the Communist party.”⁷

The above narrated brief account of the comintern’s fifth plenum shows what linkage between the comintern and the Indian national movement had been in existence in the second half of 1920’s. The letters and correspondence between M.N. Roy, who was the incharge of India on behalf of the communist International, and S.A. Dange, show that from 1922 onwards, efforts to organise a strong communist party of India was discussed between Roy and Dange.⁸ M.N. Roy sent one Ashleigh to Dange to invite him to participate in the 4th Congress of the Comintern either personally or to send a delegation to attend it and also assured Dange for “suitable arrangement and support for the socialist as well as literatures and literary contributions.”⁹ Ashleigh managed to contact Dange, Jatin Mitra and others as Muzaffar Ahmad etc. The Government of India and the Secretary of state for India, London, later on came to know all these doings and

concluded the investigation by the Bombay Police as not being adequately sufficient. Now, Ashleigh's passport was cancelled on spot and he was arrested to prevent meeting with other communists. In his statement in the Court Dange has accepted his meeting with Ashleigh.¹⁰

Amidst all these discussions, efforts for welding all the scattered communist groups into one party, the Communist Party, formulating its programme and forgoing a broader united front for fighting imperialism etc. were yet to be decided. In one of his letters to S.A. Dange, M. N. Roy had written, "We counted much on his (Ashleigh's) mission. But we believe that he did the best that could be done under the circumstances, that is to transfer his charge to the best persons available... we look upon you as the most suitable person for the purpose and trust you have seen that some result is achieved, it is needless to say that presence of some delegates from India will be very welcome and will lead to future welfare of the movement."¹¹ While all these discussions were going on¹² that the decision/evaluation of the Indian situation by the fifth plenum of the Executive Committee of the Communist International came in 1925 following which the communists in India formed their independent political party- The Communist party of India in December, 1925 at Kanpur.

The years after 1925 opened a new mental leaf in the Indian National Movement, for the agitation against the Simon Commission occupied the Indian Political scenario and the Communist's activities in the trade unions increased considerably. The Communists, in India, were being guided by the tactical line of the Comintern's fifth plenum, which had endorsed the tactics of an anti-imperialist mass front for execution of the national movement's programmes. On the occasion of the Annual Session of the Congress at Guwahati in 1926 a Manifesto by the Communist Party of India was issued to the session. The Manifesto took a disconcerting note of the national movement and the national parties, which were divorced from the masses. The Manifesto found the national movement in a state of decomposition. The Manifesto evaluated that the leadership of the Swaraj Party was predominantly bourgeois and there was a contradiction between the leadership and its rank and file. Its programme and policy were always dictated by the capitalist and land owning classes. The Manifesto said, "The Swaraj Party will not be able to become a party of the people unless it breaks away

completely from the bourgeoisie seeking compromise with imperialism.”¹³ The evaluation of the Indian Communists of the Swarajists was not in full consonance of the fifth plenum’s decision regarding their works- recommending the communists “to continue working in the National Congress Party.”¹⁴ With a left sectarian orientation the Communist appeared in the national movement to forge a united front with the Congress in the struggle against the Simon Commission.

In spite of their moderate programmes the nationalists at the centre as well as in the provinces, where ever they had majority afflicted upon the government several defeats. But the economic concession given to the Indian bourgeoisie in the form of the protective tariff for some industries C. R. Das, the leader of the Swaraj Party began to see change of heart and Gandhi abruptly embark upon three weeks fast against the different communities which had disrupted Communal harmony.¹⁵ At time of the Belgaon Congress session 26th December, 1924 the line of compromise was to be more concritized, but the left elements again became active to restrict this move of the Congress. They again redistributed the leaflet “An Appeal to the Congress” which they had distributed among the Congress delegates at the time of the Gaya Session of the Indian National Congress.

Belgaon, as such presented the worst when Gandhi, who was presiding over the session, proclaimed “suspending non-violent non-cooperation”¹⁶ and defined the creed of the Congress, which implied “full responsible government.”¹⁷ The decision at Belgaon to disassociate the Congress from all mass action enthused imperialism to launch heavy repressive majors against the national struggle for freedom.¹⁸ The convictions of the prominent Communist leaders in the Kanpur Bolshevik conspiracy case, had blackened that tempo of the movement by the Indian Communists on the Indian Soil. But, simultaneously, there was recrudescence from 1925-26 in a more virulent and militant form. By the trial, the Indian Communists made a bold attempt to capture the trade unions and to convert them into mass trade unions under a working class leadership “close to the workers in factories, guided by the principles of class struggle and operating as a single force in the economic and political fields.”¹⁹

Following the general direction of the comintern “to support its every act of resistance to imperialism on the basis of united anti-imperialist front.”²⁰ The

Communists in India began to mobilise their all scattered forces to forge a viable group to resist imperialism and to mobilise all patriotic forces to form an unity in action. To follow the guideline of the Comintern, exclusively given to the Indian Communists efforts were made on the trade union front to execute it and also to unite other sections of revolutionary wings. In 1925 when the A.I.T.U.C. met at its fifth annual session the opposition against the restrictions imposed on the trade union activities by the government was seriously condemned. The Chairman of the Reception Committee, Sitaram Keshava Bhole, in his welcome address said, "The age of capitalism is set in. Capital primarily owes its debt to labour in the production of wealth. But the capitalists of the day advantageously ignore this fact that their neglect in due to performance of duty in the chief causes of the suffering of labour."²¹ The President of the session, in his speech, put forward some current economic and political demands.²² He clearly distinguished, the sphere of works between the congress and the A.I.T.U.C. and said that "The Congress has to fight with a foreign bureaucracy while the workers have to fight with for our economic emancipation."²³ The President unequivocally said that "the first and the foremost important thing, we can do, is to organise our rank not a single worker in outside the pole of organization."²⁴ The A.I.T.U.C. fought against the reformist ideology of C.R. Das, who efforted to form a Labour Party on the very model of the British Labour Party; and he left the session disappointedly threatening to the A.I.T.U.C. leadership to form an another organization under the patronage of the Swaraj Party.²⁵

Now, the shifting of the trade union leadership in the hands of the leftist nationalists with the Communists as their nearest Colleagues, ended a longstanding deadlock of more than two years and a rising tide in the trade union movement was clearly visible. To win over masses of workers and to have an active united front with the other people the session demarcated two distinct field for worker to act actively in them viz. To work for improvement of the working condition of labour in al respect and in relation to the place of labour in body politics. Here, the trade union movement was fully pollicised with the objectives of the struggle with the common masses for freedom.

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