

LETTERS TO
THE CONGRESS SOCIALIST PARTY
written in 1934, 1935, 1936

M. N. Roy

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Publisher's Note

In his reply to the 'indictment' of the General Secretary of the Congress Socialist Party, Comrade M. N. Roy stated, 'Since the leaders of the C.S.P. have chosen to join issues publicly, I shall take up the challenge and, with the object of placing the discussion on a higher level, publish my letters written three years ago setting forth the reasons for my objection to the formation of the C.S.P. and suggesting the alternative method of radicalizing the anti-imperialist struggle.' The letters are being published in fulfilment of that promise.

The letters will show that Comrade Roy had from the beginning advised against the formation of the Party and in a long letter addressed to the pioneers of the Party stated his reasons which were purely political and organizational. The letters, incidentally, deal with a number of theoretical and tactical questions of supreme importance to the nationalist movement. They have therefore an importance of their own; an importance which will continue long after the controversy and its objects are forgotten.

Bombay 1
October 1937

Introductory editorial note

On the eve of the All-India Congress Committee meeting at Patna on 18 and 19 May 1934, a group of Congressmen who were opposed to suspension of civil disobedience and participation in the forthcoming election to the Central Legislative Assembly, came together and held the first All-India Socialist Conference, also at Patna, and decided to organize an All-India Congress Socialist Party. There were about a hundred delegates from various parts of India, and Jayaprakash Narayan was elected Organizing Secretary. Shortly afterwards the CSP was formed in Bombay and adopted its own Constitution, Programme, and Resolutions, although it remained part of the Congress.

Prior to the formation of the CSP there had been efforts to organize socialist groups in India, as distinct from the Communists. In September 1931 a socialist group had been formed in North Bihar. Jayaprakash, according to his own account, had 'first imbibed Marxism in the United States through the writings of M. N. Roy', particularly from reading *India in Transition*, and after his return to India he founded a Bihar Socialist Party in 1932. In 1933 a Socialist group was formed in the Nasik Road Central Prison with Narayan, Charles Mascarenhas (a follower of Roy), M. R. Masani, and C. K. Narayanswamy as members (Thomas A. Rusch, 'Role of the Congress Socialist Party in the Indian National Congress', Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1955, p. 147). According to Horace Williamson, Director of the Intelligence Bureau, 1931-6, 'at the end of 1933 draft proposals for the formation of a Congress Socialist Party made their appearance in Bombay, bearing upon them the unmistakable imprint of M. N. Roy's influence' (H. Williamson, *India and Communism*, 1935; rpt., Calcutta, 1976, p. 212). The same source mentions that in April 1934 some 'Royists' from Bengal, Bombay, and the United Provinces and some followers from the Central Provinces of R. S. Ruikar, at that time a Vice-President of the All-India Trade Union Congress, met at a conference at Jubbulpore 'to hold the inaugural meeting of the All-India Socialist Party' (Williamson, *ibid.*, p. 207). These various efforts lay behind the founding of the CSP.

From the beginning the Royists were closely associated with the CSP; at the same time within the CSP there were divisions, and some of the leaders like M. R. Masani and Purshottam Tricumdas at Bombay were quite hostile towards Roy and the Royists (Roy Archives at Nehru Museum, File No. 111/2, 'Letter from Bombay associates to Roy', 12.12.1934). Among the Royists who held prominent positions in the CSP organization were Mascarenhas (executive member), Rajani Mukherji (General Secretary, Bengal CSP), V. M. Tarkunde (Secretary, Maharashtra CSP), Dharamdas Goonavardane, Maniben Kara, Dr M. R. Shetty, H. R. Mahajani, A. K. Pillai (founder of the CSP in Kerala),

Dasarathlal Thakar (Gujarat) (these names appear in the issues of the *Congress Socialist*, Bombay, of 1936 and 1937). Among the founder-leaders of the CSP, Jayaprakash was an ardent Marxist at that time, though not a communist, and he was keen on collaboration with the Royists. Masani had been a member of the British Labour Party and was opposed to Marxism. Asoke Mehta was a democratic socialist, while 'Achyut Patwardhan and Ram Manohar Lohia shared Gandhi's faith in governmental and economic decentralization and non-violent revolution' (J. P. Haithoox, *Communism and Nationalism in India*, Princeton, 1971, p. 219).

The 'linie' or official communists were initially very antagonistic to the CSP, but after the Seventh Congress of the Comintern, the communists, following Moscow's instruction, began getting into the CSP, and through it, into the Indian National Congress. The Communist Party had already been declared an unlawful organization by the government; the communists now sought legal shelter via the CSP in the Congress, on which the government's ban had been lifted (12 June 1934) after it had suspended the Civil Disobedience movement. Both the Royists and the Communists tried to influence and gain control of the CSP, but at least initially, as the Director of the Intelligence Bureau reported, 'Roy's disciples triumphed and the programme which the Congress Socialists eventually produced came very near to that which Roy has had in mind for a number of years past' (Williamson, *ibid.*, p. 217).

However, subsequently, as Roy and his followers left the CSP, the communists rapidly extended their influence and control over the organization. By 1937 two leading communists, E. M. S. Namboodripad and Sajjad Zaheer, had become joint secretaries of the CSP, and two others were on the Executive Committee. Several others occupied key organizational positions (Sundarayya in Andhra, Gopalan, Ramamurthi, and Jeevanandan in Madras and the south). In 1938 the communists tried to capture the organization after a confidential CPI document fell into the hands of the CSP leadership revealing the communist plan to either gain full control of or destroy the CSP. The Communist bid was very narrowly defeated at the Lahore Conference of the CSP, and the break took place in May 1940 when the CSP executive decided to expel all communists from the Party. (M. R. Masani, *The Communist Party of India*, Bombay, 1967, pp. 48-54.) But by that time the communists were so well-positioned in the CSP organization that they succeeded in taking away with them 'one-half to one-third of the party membership in Bengal and the Punjab, as well as the greater part of the party organization in Travancore-Cochin, Andhra, and Madras. The CSP also soon lost control of the All-India Students Federation, the All-India Kisan Sabha, and the All India Trade Union Congress' (Thomas A. Rusch, *ibid.*, pp. 354-6).

From the outset Roy's attitude to the CSP would seem to have been ambivalent. From behind prison bars he instructed his followers to cooperate actively with the Congress socialists. He hoped to persuade the latter to accept his analysis, programme, and guidance, and to a considerable extent succeeded in this. He continually cautioned them against errors and deviations, sending them letters of advice through clandestine channels. However, there were important differences. Both from theoretical and practical consideration, he wanted the CSP to drop the term Socialist from their nomenclature and rather than forming a separate political party within the Congress, to work there as cent per cent Congressmen, becoming an organized left wing of the Congress that would eventually dislodge the right wing leadership and capture the organization. At the same time he wanted an independent revolutionary working class party with organizational form and method of operation suitable for such a party in the given conditions of India. Besides, although initially he favoured collective membership, he later completely rejected this form which he thought would weaken the Congress; but the CSP leadership continued to support collective affiliation. Central to Roy's approach was the thesis that 'the struggle for the leadership of the Congress must take place not under the flag of Socialism, but under that of democratic national revolution'. And the instrument for achieving political independence and socio-economic revolution would be the Constituent Assembly.

It would appear from Roy's unpublished letters to his followers and his writings after his release from jail, that he did not hold in particular regard the leaders of the CSP. In his estimate they were a vacillating group of people, who had not quite freed themselves from the influence of Gandhian and reformist varieties of socialism, and were excessively dependent on Jawaharlal Nehru who, in turn, could not or would not break away from his dependence on Gandhi. In any case, by March 1937 Roy and his followers decided to resign from the CSP; the resignations occurred in groups at intervals; and the break was completed by August 1937.

The letters to the Congress Socialist Party were written and clandestinely sent out from jail, and provoked debates and discussions. One of them is mentioned in Williamson's Report (pp., 221-2). After his release from jail, when Roy got publicly involved in controversies with the CSP leadership, he published the three letters together as a booklet with an 'Introduction' by A. K. Pillai and a 'publisher's note'. As a whole the booklet consisted of $78+8+2=88$ pp. and carried the publication date as Bombay, October 1937. The first letter has been reproduced here exactly as it appeared in the 1937 edition; consideration of space have enforced some abbreviation of the second and third letters and Appendix IV without, I hope, affecting the author's argument; the

omissions are indicated by ellipses. Where footnotes existed in the original edition, these have been retained with the initials M. N. R. against them.

In connection with these letters, I acknowledge my debt to my late friend Dr Thomas A. Rusch, who had kindly made available to me a photocopy of his Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Chicago, 1955 entitled 'Role of the Congress Socialist Party in the Indian National Congress 1931-42'. Among other works that I found useful for their bearing on the CSP, and particularly for the relation between Roy and the CSP, the following may be mentioned: *Congress Socialist Party: Programme and Resolutions*, 1934; Hari Kishore Singh, *A History of the Praja Socialist Party Bombay*, 1959; Jayaprakash Narayan, *Why Socialism?* Benaras, 1936; Jayaprakash Narayan, *Socialist Unity and the Congress Socialist Party*, Bombay, 1941; Jayaprakash Narayan, *Towards Struggle*, Bombay, 1946; Jayaprakash Narayan, *M. N. Roy*, Poona, May, 1954; Horace Williamson, *India and Communism*, rpt. Calcutta, 1976; J. P. Haithcox, *Communism and Nationalism in India*, Princeton, 1971; Narendra Deva, *Socialism and the National Revolution*, Bombay, 1946; Sampurnanand, *Memories and Reflections*, Bombay, 1962; M. R. Masani, *The Communist Party of India*, Bombay, 1967.

SNR.

Letter No. 1★

To the Organizers of the Congress Socialist Party

The Bombay Congress closes a chapter in the history of our struggle for freedom. But unfortunately it does not directly open the new chapter which must inevitably follow. The closed chapter has been a chequered one. Beginning in 1919 with the slogan of non-cooperation, it dragged on long after it was due to be closed. The chapter should have closed as far back as 1928, by which time all the possibilities of non-cooperation had been exhausted. The great success of the movement of protest against the Simon Commission should have marked the beginning of a new stage in the fight for freedom—a stage in which negative slogans of non-cooperation and boycott should be replaced by militant mass action with a positive programme. But this did not happen owing to the fatal fact that although ever since 1919 the Congress had objectively become the organ of the democratic revolutionary movement, it remained under a leadership and ideology which discountenanced revolution.

At the Lahore Congress the forces of democratic revolution did make an effort to get out of the vicious circle of the politics of negation.² It appeared that the belated stage of the higher form of the struggle for freedom was about to be opened. Jawaharlal's Presidential Address as well as the Independence Resolution committed the Congress by implication to the programme of democratic national revolution. That in its turn meant that the Congress must outgrow the ideology of orthodox nationalism which is utterly incompatible with the programme of the democratic national revolution. But the rank and file were outmanoeuvred by the established leadership. The Congress was switched off from the line of development towards a straight fight by the spectacular 'salt war' and Civil Disobedience Campaign which ended in a crushing defeat as they were foredoomed to be. Defeat threatens the Congress with disintegration. At this juncture, the right wing leaders proposed to steer the Congress back to the calm waters of constitutionalism while indulging in qualified radical phrases. There developed a left wing opposition, but it was too belated, feeble, and hesitant to be effective. The right wing consolidated its position. It has captured the Congress with the help and blessing of the Mahatma. The process of reaction culminated in the amendments to the Congress Constitution adopted by the Bombay Session.³ These amendments established a dictatorship in the Congress and guaranteed it against the democratic pressure from the rank and file.

* Written and delivered in May 1934. MNR.

On the other hand, the left wing opposition, defeated in the struggle for the leadership of the Congress, proposes to organize itself into a new party—the 'Congress Socialist Party'. The defeat was not inevitable; it was caused by the failure of the left wing leaders to lead the rank and file in an offensive against the politically bankrupt old leadership. The habit of hero-worship and ideological weakness were responsible for that failure. And the tactics adopted by them after the defeat have been very ill-calculated. They have resulted in the exclusion of the radical left wing elements from the Congress leadership and they have delivered the Congress machinery entirely to the right wing. Besides, the assumption of the none-too-suitable nomenclature has placed the left wing in a position which appears to be somewhat outside [the] orthodox Congress fold. There is no concrete gain to counter-balance these disadvantages. Incidentally, the resolution of the Benaras Socialist Conference, which did not allow its members to stand as Congress parliamentary candidates, or to accept any office in the Congress organization, may be pointed out as the most regrettable blunder on the part of the left wing. Such mistaken policy of self-effacement only clears the field for complete right wing domination. Having been defeated in the struggle for leadership, the left wing should have contested every inch of the ground so as to retain some share in the control of the Congress machinery. Now the prerogative of speaking in the name of the Congress is monopolized by the right wing. The left wing, representing the rank and file of the movement, and therefore, the accredited spokesmen of the masses at present, plays the role of *Cinderella*.

The spread of Socialist tendencies in the Congress left wing is welcome. It testifies to an ideological mobility. It is the sign of class differentiation in the Congress rank—a process blurred and obstructed for so many years by Utopian doctrine. The development of this process is a condition for the radicalization of the Congress rank and file—*radicalization in the democratic sense*.

At this juncture a number of pertinent questions rise before the radical left wings. Conditions for the mobilization of the masses in new forms of militant action with a definite revolutionary objective are ripening. *Do we need a 'Socialist Party'? Has a 'Socialist Party' any place in the scheme of the democratic national revolution? Will the battle in the next stage of struggle for freedom be fought under the flag of Socialism or of national revolution? Can these two objectives be compounded?*

The line taken by the Congress left wing necessarily raises these questions which must be carefully considered so that the radical tendencies are not misdirected. But correct answer to these questions of practical politics is conditional upon the answer to another question of a theoretical nature. *What is Socialism—what is a Socialist Party?*

These questions may appear superfluous, but there are very important reasons to raise and definitely answer them. We hear all sorts of people talk of Socialism and call themselves 'Socialist'. It can be stated without the risk of being refuted that there are not a few in the Congress Socialist Party itself who find 'Socialism' in reactionary economics and Utopian ethics. The Mahatma himself professes sympathy for the ideals of Socialism, although his dislike for a Socialist programme is not concealed. Besides, the doctrine of all-inclusive love is a traditional bulwark against any movement for the liberation of the masses. Yet Gandhiji has been held by many as the 'greatest Socialist'. Again, not a few out-and-out right wing nationalist leaders also profess sympathy for Socialism. Obviously what they mean by Socialism is something very different from real Socialism. Dr Ansari, for example, has informed us what his idea of Socialism is.⁴ In his opinion, expressed publicly on his return from abroad, the National Government of England has realized fifty per cent of Socialism. He also expressed his admiration for the economic achievements of the Nazis in Germany. The catalogue can be prolonged without limit to show that they have vague and fraudulent ideas about Socialism. Therefore it is necessary to define the term, and then to discuss the role of a Socialist Party. Once all ambiguity about Socialism is removed, there can be no doubt or difference about the role of the Socialist Party.

In brief, Socialism is the abolition of private property in the means of production, distribution, and exchange. The basic thing, however, is production. Private property in that key position of public economy once abolished, socialization of distribution and exchange inevitably follows. For, the organization of these subsidiary branches of public economy is always determined by the mode of production. Therefore, the more exact definition of Socialism would be 'abolition of private property in the means of production'. This stricter definition rules out (guild socialism, for example) schemes for the organization of national economy through the public control of distribution and exchange.

The role of the Socialist Party obviously is to establish socialism. In other words, the Socialist Party is the instrument of a social revolution which will establish a specific form of society, free of all class domination. This transformation is possible only when society is well advanced in the line of capitalist development. Because *then only* the objective conditions for such transformation become ripe; the social revolution then becomes not only a historic necessity, but to a *great extent* (not altogether) inevitable.

By its very nature, the Socialist Party is a revolutionary party. The established social order which it proposes to abolish is fortified by the machinery of the state through which the dominating class (or classes)

exercises political power. The line of action of the Socialist Party should therefore be determined by the nature of its task. The ideology of the party must reflect the consciousness of its revolutionary role.

Now, it is an outstanding fact of contemporary history that Socialist Parties throughout the world deviated from the path which must be travelled for reaching their proposed goal. They have signally failed to discharge their role. Consequently, since the debacle of the great Socialist Parties on the eve of the world war, Socialism in the current sense (as distinct from the theoretical sense) has taken on a distinct character; and Socialist Parties no longer stand for the establishment of a classless society, because they refused to travel the road of revolutionary struggle—the only road that leads to the goal of Socialism.⁵ Steadfast advocates of social revolution, who did not approve of the degeneration of the old Socialist Parties, broke away, to carry on the struggle for the liberation of the masses under a new flag of Communism, and forged a new instrument, the Communist Party.

These facts of history have placed a distinctive mark on the term Socialism, and show the Socialist Party in a new light. *Today*, Socialism means the repudiation of revolutionary struggle against Capitalism and, *ipso facto*, against Imperialism. It means rejection of the struggle for the capture of power in the only way possible—namely, revolutionary mass action. Consequently, it means loyal support to the parliamentary democratic State—the weapon created by the bourgeoisie to fortify their domination. It means capitulation of the Working Class to the established system of Capitalism and Imperialism. It means, at the very best, some sort of readjustment of the decayed system of capitalist production with the approval of the ruling classes. When it is known that Socialism has come to have all these meanings, which have nothing to do with *real* Socialism, it becomes understandable why practically nobody finds it difficult to declare himself a 'Socialist', or take a patronizing attitude towards Socialism. The nature of its goal having changed so radically, a Socialist Party today has a distinctive role given to it by history. It cannot outgrow the role. Today a Socialist Party is not a party of revolution, but of reform. It is not an instrument for the overthrow of the established social order. It seeks to *reform* the order. The shameful record of great Socialist Parties of Europe conclusively proves what Socialist Parties are bound to be.

Now, it can be confidently asserted that few ideologically clear and politically conscious members of the Socialist Party would want such a party in India. It would simply be of no use. It has no place in the politico-economic setting of the country. By its very reformist, anti-revolutionary nature, it cannot be an instrument in our struggle for freedom. The only argument of any force to justify the existence of a Socialist Party is that it educates, organizes, helps, and leads the working class to improve their

condition (political as well as economic) gradually, but surely, within the framework of the capitalist system, instead of plunging into the risky adventure of revolution. This argument has no force in India, because in a capitalist society any improvement in the conditions of the working class, as took place in some of the countries of Europe and America, is possible only in the period of capitalist prosperity. Again, acquisition by the workers of democratic political rights, by the exercise of which (in the opinion of Socialist theoreticians) they can gradually change the class character of the State, presupposes the existence of a democratic regime. Neither of these conditions obtain in India. So in this country a Socialist Party has absolutely no ground to stand upon.

In support of this conclusion a few facts can be recollected. The effort to organize a Socialist Party in India is not new. As far back as 1920 there was a plan to organize in India a political party on the principles and model of the British Labour Party. An able and popular politician like Lajpat Rai was interested in the plan. A few years later, again under the distinguished patronage of Lajpat Rai, efforts were made to establish an *Indian affiliate* of the Independent Labour Party.⁶ The plan was to form socialist groups of radical intellectuals. Later, a number of Swarajist members of the Legislative Assembly constituted themselves into a Socialist Party. The attempt to form a Labour Party was repeated more than once, emissaries coming from England with the purpose. Mr N. M. Joshi and his associates in the Indian labour movement have all along been actively concerned with the promotion of Socialism.⁷ This did not prevent them from retaining their membership of the Liberal Federation, the Congress being too revolutionary for them. Some years ago, distinguished leaders of the I.L.P. visited India with the purpose of promoting the formation of a Socialist Party. A Socialist Party was actually inaugurated in the Punjab.

It is not necessary to prolong the list with less known plans locally made. All the efforts failed. There must be some deep-seated reason. It would be frivolous to contend that in the past the plans were not seriously conceived, the people concerned were not sincere, or determined efforts were not made. The reason is that objective conditions under which a Socialist Party can thrive or even have a precarious being, are, *now* utterly absent in India. In other words, in her present conditions, India does not offer a social basis for such a party. And a political party can grow, function effectively, and be of any use, one way or the other, *only when* specific social conditions call it into being. Reformist Socialist parties are features of countries enjoying, in greater or less degree, the freedom of normal capitalist development; that is, of countries not subjected to the misfortune of colonial slavery. Reformism can corrupt the masses only when the bourgeoisie are in a position to make fairly substantial concessions.

It follows from this analysis of the genesis of a Socialist Party, that it has no place in colonial countries, and very small room in countries with backward capitalist production. Further, the decay of Capitalism as a world force has pronounced the death sentence over Socialism (reformist) and consequently on Socialist Parties. The tragic downfall of the great Social-Democratic parties (as distinct from Marxist parties) of Europe teaches us a wholesome lesson.

Every time there was an effort to organize a Socialist party, I discouraged the organizational plan while encouraging the socially radical tendencies finding expression therein. My argument was always objective. I always explained why the plan could not succeed, and appealed to the radical elements to form some more suitable instrument for bringing their admirable spirit to bear upon the general political situation effectively. I do not claim the credit of a prophet. I simply mention these circumstance to bear out the fact that what is being said here is the result of mature consideration, and based upon experience.

From the above it can be concluded that if the Congress Socialist Party be crowned with greater success than the previous efforts, then it will succeed *not as a Socialist Party*. To succeed, it will have to act either as a Communist party or as the Party of national democratic revolution, *both of which are historical necessities, having the respective social backgrounds*. Why then begin with a misleading name? Why sail under a discredited flag? Why use terms which, if not hapazardly adopted, indicating ideological vagueness and political indecision, commit you to the programme of sterile reformism?

In one respect the Congress Socialist Party appears to be born under better auspices. Past efforts to form Socialist Parties had no mass support. It would be an exaggeration to contend that the Congress Socialist Party is the creation of a mass movement. What distinguishes it from past ventures is that it represents a process of class differentiation and radicalization in the Congress rank and file. And precisely therefore, the denomination chosen by it is inappropriate. It does not concretely represent the social and political striving of the Congress rank and file. *It either goes too far or does not go far enough*. If the Congress Socialist Party intends to rally the nationalist masses under the flag of Communism (*real Socialism*), it is making the mistake of running too far ahead of those it wishes to lead. If, on the country, it proposes to be a Socialist Party in the historical sense of the term, then it hinders, instead of helping, the process of radicalization of the nationalist masses. Radicalization, that is to say quickening, of the revolutionary consciousness of the oppressed and exploited classes, is an advance towards the decisive fight with Imperialism. This, in its turn, cannot take place under the leadership of Socialist Party because, notoriously, *gradualism* is the cardinal principle of Socialist theory and consequently must dominate all the policy and tactics of Socialist Parties. In short, anti-imperialist struggle, the task of

the Movement in India, cannot be conducted by a Socialist Party—a party by its very nature committed to the non-revolutionary doctrines of reformism and gradual advance.

You may contend that you are not going to organize a reformist and gradualist Socialist Party. *Then, I say, you will not form a Socialist Party. Why then assume a misleading name?* It will only confuse the situation. By the very nature of the forces it represents, the Congress Socialist Party cannot be the camouflaged name of the real instrument for the establishment of Socialism, namely, the Communist Party. The fact that you prefer the discredited 'Socialist flag' proves that you desire to differentiate your Party from the Communist Party. In what is the Socialist Party distinct from the Communist Party? Contemporary history gives a clear answer to this question. The Socialist parties reject the path of revolutionary struggle as the means for the realization of Socialism. By pinning its faith in parliamentary democracy, the Socialist Party logically becomes an advocate of constitutionalism. Obviously such a party has no place in contemporary India. You certainly do not propose to organize such a party. The forces you represent require an instrument for revolutionary action. The type of political organization historically adopted to reformist purposes is obviously unsuitable for a situation in which revolutionary mass action is the supreme task of the moment. *The Congress Socialist Party represents the revolutionary democratic elements in the Congress.* Theirs is a struggle against foreign Imperialism and the pre-capitalist, reactionary forces of the native society. Their goal is national freedom and the creation of conditions for unrestricted economic, social, and cultural progress. Therefore, in order to be the rallying ground of the revolutionary democratic anti-imperialist forces, the party must adapt its method of agitation and form of organization to its social background. It should not call itself Socialist; nor should it adopt a Socialist programme.

If to organize a Socialist Party will be a misadventure, theoretically as well as politically, it will be a *great blunder tactically*. The plan to get the Congress to adopt a really Socialist programme is Utopian. The programme of a particular political organization cannot be arbitrarily imposed upon it. It is determined by its social composition. Socialism is the programme of the working class (in which the poor peasantry and salaried intellectuals are included). The social basis of the National Congress is much broader. Traditionally the Congress is the organ of the struggle for the national freedom of the Indian people. Nevertheless, up till now its programme and policy have been coloured by the social character of its leadership. In order to become an effective instrument in the struggle for national freedom, the Congress must adopt a revolutionary democratic programme. But it can under no circumstances go to the extent of endorsing a Socialist programme. To *avoid* the adoption of the programme of democratic national revolution (which

necessarily involves a form of social revolution in so far as it will destroy the pre-capitalist social relations), the present leadership of the Congress may profess sympathy for the Utopian notion of Socialism, and formally endorse some such pseudo-radical programme, as for example the *Karachi Resolution*. The immature radical elements were outmanoeuvred by that adroit move. Its effect was to thwart the process of radicalization which had made itself manifest by forcing the adoption of the *Independence Resolution* at Lahore.

Since, for social and historical reasons, the Congress cannot adopt a Socialist programme, any attempt to do the impossible will only result in the isolation of those making such efforts. That would mean an opening of an artificial gap between the objectively revolutionary *democratic rank and file* and the consciously revolutionary *left wing leaders*. This unfortunate situation is already created to some extent. The mistake must be rectified before it is too late. The line adopted by the Congress socialists, if consistently followed, will inevitably lead not to the capture of the Congress by the radicals democratic elements, but to the isolation of a small group of radical inside the Congress completely dominated by the right wing. The struggle for the leadership of the Congress *must take place not under the flag of Socialism, but of democratic national revolution*. The present political situation demands not the organization of a Socialist Party inside the Congress, a party which by the logic of the relation of forces will inevitably be an impotent and isolated group, but the capture of the Congress as such by the radical national revolutionary elements.

Undoubtedly there are genuine Socialists in the Congress left wing. There are many more who are tending towards Socialism. The Conscious and convinced Socialists naturally desire to have their own party. But their party is not the Socialist Party, but the Communist Party, and that Party, while it is a great historical necessity and is of decisive political importance in the anti-imperialist struggle, cannot openly bid for the leadership of the Congress. It must act as the revolutionary nucleus around which the national democratic revolutionary forces will be mobilized in the struggle for the capture of the leadership of the Congress, as the condition for a more effective and decisive fight against Imperialism. The revolutionary vanguard of the proletariat (the genuine Socialists, that is, the Communists), organized in their own party *outside and independent of the Congress*, will remain in the Congress as the most active members of the left wing, and through it, influence, change, and guide the policy of the Congress. Eventually the radical left wing, under proletarian hegemony exercised through its Socialist (Communist) members (who may be the leaders), will come to predominate the Congress, and the Congress will adopt the programme of the democratic national revolution. That will be the beginning of the decisive stage of the anti-imperialist struggle. The control of the Congress machinery will

be a valuable asset in that struggle. With its roots stuck deep into the masses, organized so as to be in effective contact with its constituents, constituted not of a loose membership but of local and functioning bodies* as well as of individual members, with a clear revolutionary perspective and under a resolute leadership, the Congress may in the course of the struggle become the skeleton of the revolutionary State; of the democratic dictatorship which will challenge the power of Imperialism and its allies.

The possibilities of the Congress developing on the this line, in addition to other advantages, makes the struggle for its control an important item in the scheme of the Indian revolution. It is a mistake for the left wing (and this applies also to the genuine Socialist elements in it) to put on the misleading and discredited label of 'Socialism', because, sailing under this colour, it will not be able to occupy the position of vantage in the struggle for the leadership of the Congress, but will land in the backwaters of impotent isolation. Even leaving aside this consideration regarding the future transformation of the Congress leadership, a Socialist Party cannot be fitted into the scheme of Indian Revolution. With the Congress or without it, the proletariat has a very important place in the scheme; but to occupy that place it should be organized not in a Socialist Party but in the Communist Party. The tactical considerations weighing against the labelling of the left wing with the name 'Socialist Party' do not, however, hold good as regards the organization and the existence of the Communist Party.

Granted that the Utopian plan of the Congress Socialist Party will be realized, that it will capture the leadership of the Congress, its programme, if framed with any regard for realities, will not be Socialist. It must necessarily be *revolutionary democratic*. Indeed, the plan itself has to be dropped if the Socialist Party will stand by a full-fledged Socialist programme, even of the reformist brand, unless the Congress Socialists entertain the notion that the landlords and capitalists can be persuaded to change their hearts and be godfathers to the peasants and workers. In other words, if the C S P ever captured the leadership of the Congress, it would then have ceased to be a Socialist Party.

The struggle for the capture of the Congress, to be a matter of practical politics, must take place under the flag and programme of the National Revolution. Why should we not call a spade a spade? A genuine Socialist (not of the reformist type) should have no objection to supporting and actively fighting for the national democratic revolution, as such, without

* Since this was written in May 1934, I have come to realize that collective membership would weaken instead of strengthen the Congress organizationally. The perspective of the development is the transformation of the Congress into the Revolutionary People's Party. Collective membership will hinder that process. A federated body, composed of autonomous organizations, is not a *political party*, and therefore cannot lead the revolutionary struggle for the capture of power. MNR.

putting a red label on it. On the contrary, the mistaken policy of naming the revolutionary democratic programme 'Socialist', will mean *abandoning the real* Socialist programme: Because, the selfsame party cannot possibly advocate two different varieties of Socialism. If you call National Democratic Revolution Socialism, we must put away real Socialism. So, the mistaken zeal of the Congress Socialists to hoist the flag of Socialism is likely to end in the betrayal of the ideal cherished by them. On the other hand, to support and fight for the programme of Democratic national Revolution as such will not preclude the Socialists from carrying on propaganda for a genuine Socialist programme. The realization of the former will be the condition for the attainment of the final goal of Socialism. This can be done by all the genuine Socialists organizing themselves in a Communist Party independent of the Congress, and at the same time operating inside the Congress as the left wing.

The programme of the National Democratic Revolution to be advocated by the left wing is outlined in another document* (addressed to the rank and file); concrete suggestions regarding the methods of the struggle are also made therein. Certain amendments to the Congress Constitution are formulated too.+ These are of particular importance, because they are essential for the democratization of the Congress and its transformation into an effective organ of revolutionary struggle.

Finally, let me repeat that the process of radicalization evidenced in the formation of the Congress Socialist Party must be developed in the direction of Democratic Revolution. In this situation all talk about Socialism is irrelevant. No new party is necessary. We do not want to be a group of outcastes maganimously tolerated inside the Congress, dominated directly or indirectly by the bourgeoisie. We represent the nationalist masses. The Congress belongs to us. We must assert our claim. For the time being, the right wing has the upper hand. Unless we rectify the mistake before long, the Congress will become the instrument of the nationalist bourgeoisie. Our slogan for the moment should therefore be:

Save the Congress as the organ of
Militant mass action!

Preserve it as the platform of
United Anti-imperialist Front!

Develop it as the leader of
Democratic National Revolution!

May 1934

M. N. Roy

*See App. II MNR.

+See App. III MNR.

Notes

¹ The 1937 first edition of the *Letters to the C S P* gave May 1934 as the date of the First Letter, but the Bombay Session of the Indian National Congress mentioned here took place in the last week of October 1934. Consequently, it seems unlikely that the First Letter was delivered before November 1934. However, earlier that year (May) the Congress had suspended Civil Disobedience and adopted the Council entry programme, and the Socialists had held their first conference at Patna. (B. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *The History of the Indian National Congress*, 1935, pp. 959 *et seq.*) SNR.

² The Lahore Session of the Congress (December 1929) declared that 'the word Swaraj in Article I of the Congress Constitution shall mean Complete Independence', thereby reaffirming the resolution passed at the Madras Session (December 1927) that 'this Congress declares the goal of the Indian people to be Complete Independence'. In December 1928, however, at the Calcutta Session the Congress, at Gandhi's initiative, had resolved to accept Dominion Status as recommended by the Report of the All-Parties' Committee, should the constitution proposed by that committee be accepted by the British Parliament in entirety 'on or before the 31st December 1929'. An amendment moved by Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose was lost by 973 votes to 1, 350.

Sitaramayya, *ibid.*, pp. 559-60; R. C. Majumder, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. III, 1963, pp. 316-18; Subhas Chandra Bose, *The Indian Struggle*, Vol. II, pp. 220-2. SNR.

³ Various amendments to the Congress Constitution proposed by Gandhi were adopted at the Bombay Session. These included compulsory spinning of 500 yards of yarn per month by every Congress member, compulsory wearing of *khaddar* by every Congress officeholder, reduction of the number of Congress delegates to a maximum of 2,000 (1,489 rural and 511 urban), reduction of AICC to half its strength, investing the Congress President with the right and responsibility of forming his Working Committee or Cabinet entirely of his own choice. After the Bombay Session Gandhi announced that he would not remain 'even a primary member of the Congress', but a new autonomous body was set up, the All India Village Industries Association, which was to work 'under the advice and guidance of Gandhiji'. It 'shall have the power to frame its own Constitution, to raise funds, and to perform such acts as may be necessary for the fulfilment of its objects'.

Sitaramayya, *ibid.*, pp. 971-93; Majumder, *ibid.*, pp. 537-42. SNR.

⁴ Dr Mukhtar Ahmad Ansari (1880-1936), a distinguished physician, was for many years General Secretary of the Congress and member of its Working Committee; in 1927 he was President of its Madras Session. From 1928 to 1936 he was also Chancellor of the Jamia Millia Islamia. S. S. Sen (ed.), *Dictionary of National Biography*, Vol. I, 1972, pp. 65-7. SNR.

⁵ The literature on varieties of Socialism and the break between democratic socialists and communists is very large. Some of the more informative are: A. Fried and R. Sanders (ed.), *Socialist Thought: A Documentary History*, New York, 1964; G. D. H. Cole, *A History of Socialist Thought*, 5 Vols., New York, 1953-8; Elie Halevy, *Histoire du Socialisme europeen*, Paris, 1938; F. Borkenau, *World Communism*, Ann Arbor, 1962. SNR.

⁶ Lala Lajpat (1865-1928), honoured by his countrymen as Sher-I-Punjab, came early under the influence of the Arya Samaj movement, joined the Congress in 1888, became one of its more militant leaders, went to England in 1905 where he came in touch with Labourites and Socialist groups, and in 1907 was deported by the government for some time to Burma for organizing militant agrarian movements in Punjab. From 1913 to 1920 he lived abroad, and during his sojourn in the United States, M. N. Roy stayed and worked with him for a short while in 1916-17. The Lala presided over the Calcutta Session of the Congress in 1920 and the founding Session of the All India Trade Union Congress at Bombay that year. Later he joined the Swarajya Party founded by Chitta

Ranjan Das and Motilal Nehru. In 1928, while leading a procession protesting against the Simon Commission, he was severely beaten by the police; he died eighteen days after the brutal assault. A. R. Shastri, *Life of Lala Lajpat Rai*, New Delhi, 1957. SNR.

⁷ Narayan Malhar Joshi (1879–1955) joined the Servants of India Society in 1909, founded the Social Service League in 1911, and was active in the labour movement for nearly forty years. A leader of the AITUC since 1921, and its General Secretary for some years, he broke with it in 1929 when the Communists temporarily gained control of the organization. He was often nominated by the government to represent Indian labour at International Labour Conferences. An elected member of the Central Legislative Assembly for many years, he was largely responsible for several enactments on labour welfare. A member of the Royal Commission on Indian Labour (1928–9), he also became Chairman of the Labour Subcommittee of the Indian Planning Commission (1937) headed by Jawaharlal Nehru. S. P. Sen(ed), *Dictionary of National Biography*, Vol. II, pp. 261–3.

SNR.

Letter No. 2*

An Open Letter to the Congress Socialists

[Opening four paragraphs deleted. The text starts from fifth paragraph.]

... The right-wingers won at Patna primarily due to the weakness of the rank and file revolt, owing to the failure of the radicals to go over to the offensive at the opportune moment, that is, immediately after the Poona Conference.⁸ The failure in its turn was due to the absence of any programme of rank and file action. But the Mahatma's support was the decisive factor which gained the victory for the right wing. That support nonplussed the radicals, thus making it an easy sailing for the would-be parliamentarians.

To avoid misunderstanding, it should be specified that the misfortune was not the adoption of the policy of entering the Legislatures. Under the given conditions there was nothing else to do. The misfortune was that the right-wingers were given a free hand in the Parliamentary activities. Further, Parliamentary activities conducted by the right-wingers free from all control were bound to degenerate into futile gestures; a drift towards compromise, unless they were linked up with extra-parliamentary mass movements. This was suspended at the instance of the Mahatma himself who, thus, delivered the destiny of the Congress to the tender mercies of the parliamentarians.⁹

It was with the help of the Mahatma and his orthodox associates that at the Bombay Congress the right-wingers consolidated their victory. I need not tell you about the significance of the amended Constitution; it was a precious gift for the right-wingers. Under the amended constitution the rank and file are deprived of all initiative. Dictatorial power is vested in the Working Committee, and that power is exercised today to stifle all opposition and endorse everything done by the parliamentarians violating the principles of the Congress. The dictatorial power of the 'High Command' is further increased by the new rules adopted at Jubbulpore. The power of the President to convene the A.I.C.C. at short notice will enable the Working Committee to have all its actions endorsed by a packed and unrepresentative body. Convened at short notice, the A.I.C.C. will never represent more than a fraction of its members. Mostly those in favour of the High Command and in control of the local machinery will be present. Indeed, the Jubbulpore

*Written and delivered in May 1935. MNR.

meeting already gave a foretaste of what is coming. Internal democracy is killed.

When you started talking about a Socialist programme, the leaders smiled benevolently. They expressed their sympathy for 'Socialism', which everyone interpreted in his own way. Only, none had real Socialism in mind. They thought, 'let the children play with the new toy, or ask for the moon, we shall go on in our own way'. But their attitude changed from benevolence to hostility as soon as you wanted to say something about the actual issues of the moment. Socialism is a matter of distant concern. Talk about it can be permitted. The adoption of a Socialist programme by the Congress is an academic proposition which can be regarded with indifference or amused benevolence. But the programme of action for the attainment of the professed goal of the Congress—that is a different matter.¹⁰

You can no longer entertain the illusion that the orthodox Gandhists really had any sympathies for a Socialist programme, and they would help you to force it on the Congress to the teeth of the right wing opposition.

You will never be able to make any change in the Congress programme or, what is of immediate importance, stop the dangerous drift towards compromise, so long as the machinery of the Congress remains in the control of persons who not only hate Socialism, but detest democracy, and profess the ideal of 'Poorna Swaraj', because it is so delightfully vague as to enable them to deceive their trusting followers. . . .

The objective strivings of the nationalist masses and the immediate necessity of the struggle for freedom, are compelling the radical elements to take up the fight for the leadership of the Congress. The fight will be successful, the Congress will be emancipated from the domination of the right wing and become a militant mass organization, if the fight is concentrated upon the immediate issues, that is, if it takes place for the adoption of a programme of immediate action, for an uncompromising struggle against Imperialism and its allies.

To confuse the immediate issues of the struggle for National freedom by bringing in the question of a Socialist programme will be to play directly into the hands of the right wingers.

You should answer those who attack you for advocating a socialist programme with a declaration that they are fighting a bogey set up by themselves in order to confuse the issues, that the left wing, representing the rank and file of the Congress, is not asking for the adoption of a Socialist programme, but demanding a relentless struggle for the realization of the Congress programme of complete Independence; that the left wing is not insisting upon a specific form of class struggle, but upon an uncompromising struggle against Imperialism, together with all

its supporters; that the left wing does not accuse its present leaders of antagonism to Socialism, but hostility to democratic freedom.

In short, the left wing should demand the adoption by the Congress not of a Socialist programme, but of a programme of Democratic Revolution.

Historically that is the correct programme for the Congress which, by virtue of its social composition, can serve only as the instrument of bourgeois democratic revolution. In India it is the long overdue bourgeois democratic revolution that is on the order of the day. . . .

A mass agitation should be started without delay in support of the demand for the Constituent Assembly. The most suitable method of starting an agitation will be a Conference of left wing leaders to discuss the future of Congress politics.

The demand for the Constituent Assembly will be reaffirmed in a Manifesto issued by the Conference to the rank and file of the Congress. The Manifesto should be signed individually, the signatories appearing as Congressmen and not as Socialists. It should remind the rank and file of the ideal of Independence and point out how the present policy represents a deviation from that ideal. The claim to the right of self-determination will be advanced and the Constituent Assembly demanded in accordance with that claim. The Manifesto will further set forth the fundamental principles of a revolutionary democratic constitution.

The next step should be provincial left wing conferences to consider the Manifesto and endorse it. Then the document will be submitted to the local Congress organizations throughout the country. Thus the question of the Constituent Assembly and a National Democratic programme (which will be formulated as the principle of the constitution advocated by the Congress)⁺ will become the issues at the next session of the Congress. And these issues will inevitably raise the associated issue of leadership.

Once the plan of action is agreed to on principle, it can be easily developed in concrete detail. Meanwhile one point of vital importance may be mentioned. Propaganda with the slogan of the Constituent Assembly is useful as far as it goes. But it does not go very far. All who seriously contemplate the idea must clearly visualize the perspective of its realization. . . .** Therefore the agitation for the demand must be followed by organizational measures. . . .** Under a revolutionary leadership, its constitution and its organization thoroughly democratized, the Congress *may* itself assume the function of the Constituent Assembly *in a revolutionary crisis*.

⁺Appendices I and II will give an idea. MNR.

^{**}Passages left out, set forth organizational measure to be adopted, and specified conditions under which the C. A. can and will arise. MNR.

While preparing for the general attack with the purpose of raising the struggle against Imperialism to a higher level, demands should be made to alleviate the sufferings of the masses. These can take the form of forcing our parliamentarians to act under mass pressure. Partial and immediate, political as well as economic demands may be formulated by the local Congress organizations. When the demands got endorsed at mass meetings, the Congressmen in the Assembly should be called upon to press them on the Government. Repeal of repressive laws, release of political prisoners, implementing the recommendations of the Whitely Commission, relief for the peasantry, measures to combat middle-class unemployment, concrete measures for shifting the burden of taxation from the masses to the rich, specially the landed interests—these may be among the demands.

Now I touch the most vital point. To be effective, the left wing of the Congress should free itself from the handicap of operating under the label of the Congress Socialist Party. The reason for this is purely tactical. I do not for a moment suggest that Socialist Congressmen should not be organized in a separate party. My point is that such a party cannot be inside the Congress. It must be independent of the Congress, although its members will individually remain in the Congress and constitute the driving force behind the left wing. Indeed, a radical left wing leadership of the Congress with a National Democratic programme, can and will arise only with Socialist support and under Socialist influence. Because, owing to historical reasons and existing world conditions, the overdue bourgeois democratic revolution in India will be carried through under the influence of the ideological vanguard of the working class.

Therefore, a political party of the working class is an indispensably necessary factor of the Indian Revolution even in its initial bourgeois democratic stage. It is bound to play a decisive part in the anti-imperialist struggle. The object of the Socialist party of the working class is not to persuade the Congress to adopt a Socialist programme, but to wield it as the instrument in the struggle for national independence. The *Congress Socialist* Party cannot take over the role of the historically necessary party of the working class. On the contrary, the Socialists in the Congress should join with the others in the organization of the Working Class Party, independent of the Congress, while functioning inside the Congress as its radical left wing. . . .

Concretely, and to put it frankly, I appeal to you, comrades, to consider the proposition of amalgamating all those standing for the liberation of the toiling masses into a single political party, and from that base operate in the Congress with the object of freeing it from its present ideological, political, and organizational deficiencies, and converting it into a mighty mass instrument in the struggle against Imperialism.

May 1935.

M. N. ROY

Notes

⁸ The Poona Conference of Congressmen authorized Gandhi (July 1933) to seek settlement with the government. The session of the AICC at Patna (May 1934) suspended Civil Disobedience and adopted the Council Entry programme. Sitaramayya, *op. cit.*, pp. 943-60. SNR.

⁹ Shortly after the Bombay session of the Congress, elections took place to the Central Legislative Assembly. In the Assembly, the government commanded 50 votes (Europeans 11, Nominated Officials 26, Nominated Non-officials 13), but the Congress (44) and Congress Nationalists (11) together had a majority of 5 over them. The balance was held by 22 Independents. In practice, the majority was ineffective since the Governor-General certified the Bills and measures proposed by the government, even when they were rejected by a majority vote in the Assembly. Majumder, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 542-5; Sitaramayya, *op. cit.*, pp. 996-1002. The meeting of the AICC at Jubbulpore (24-5 April 1935) nevertheless 'expressed its satisfaction at the work of the Congress Party in the Assembly'. Sitaramayya, *ibid.*, p. 1010. SNR.

¹⁰ On 17 September 1934 Gandhi issued a statement that *inter alia* declared: 'I have welcomed the formation of the Socialist group. Many of them are respected and self-sacrificing co-workers. With all this, I have fundamental differences with them on the programme published in their authorized pamphlets.' (Sitaramayya, *ibid.*, p. 975.) The Congress Working Committee had passed a resolution stating that confiscation of private property and the necessity of class war were 'contrary to the Congress creed of non-violence'. *Congress Bulletin*, Allahabad, 27 June 1934. SNR.

Letter No. 3*

To the Executive Committee of the Congress Socialist Party

MY DEAR COMRADES

It is unfortunate that my attitude towards the organization of the Socialist Party has been misunderstood. I gather that the misunderstanding is particularly about the suggested liquidation of the party. The suggestion was made more than a year before, and on the strength of a critical analysis of the tendency then prevailing. The grounds of the suggestion were clear enough. . . .

I suggested liquidation of the party as originally formed (there have been modifications, having regard for which my suggestions now can also be modified) on the following grounds:

- (1) Tactical and strategical considerations as regards the immediate tasks of the party;
- (2) the necessity of adapting the organizational structure of the party to the *political* conditions of the country, and
- (3) the possible danger of deviation from the path that alone leads to the ultimate goal, through the creation of conditions indispensably necessary for the realization of the goal of Socialism—namely, capture of political power.

Now, let me explain how these grounds are still valid; and therefore, certain modifications are necessary in the method of tackling the immediate tasks of the party, in its organizational structure and in the mode of operation as regards advance towards the ultimate objective.

1. The immediate task of the party is to hasten the accomplishment of the Democratic National Revolution. (To obviate misunderstanding, let me say that I do not visualize the process of revolutionary development as broken up into clearly demarcated stages; there will be overlapping. What I mean is that, irrespective of the possibility of direct transformation into a deeper social revolution, the revolutionary struggle in the next stages must be conducted with a democratic programme). We agree that the National Congress is historically forged as the instrument for the accomplishment of this task. And I venture to presume that *now* we further agree that, as at *present* constituted, ideologically oriented, and led, the Congress cannot serve as that instrument. Consequently, the accomplishment of the immediate task becomes conditional upon such a radicalization of the Congress as will

* Written and delivered in Feb. 1936. MNR.

transform it into the instrument which it is historically and potentially destined to be. But there is no historical inevitability. The subjective factor failing to react effectively upon the situation, the most favourable objective conditions do not guarantee the success of revolution.

I never had the erroneous view that the Congress is a bourgeois organization, although the fact is undeniable that its leadership has been dominated by the capitalist and the landowning interests, though not always consciously. The mistake was to confound the movement with its leadership. The leadership can always change. Nevertheless, I have always been alive to the danger of the Congress eventually becoming the party of the nationalist bourgeoisie (plus landlords) which would not travel the road of bourgeois revolution. The guarantee against this danger is the rise of an alternative leadership. For the present the danger has become very imminent.

The development towards the transformation of the Congress from an objectively revolutionary mass movement to a party of the nationalist bourgeoisie began on the suspension of the C. D., and the inauguration of parliamentarianism. The development has been incredibly fast because it encountered no mass resistance. I maintain that the danger would not be so actual today, the Congress would not be so near to neo-constitutionalism, had you operated—as the organized left opposition with a definitely formulated programme of action. The false hope of converting the Congress *as such* to Socialism, persuaded you to neglect the immediate task of converting the Congress to an active, effective, instrument of democratic anti-imperialist struggle. I am sure you are always aware of the task and eager to accomplish it. The negligence was not wilful; *it was practical*, inasmuch as the tactical line [of organizing the Socialist party with the declared purpose of having the Congress adopt a socialist programme] pursued, did not put up any effective resistance to the liquidatory policy of the Congress leadership. . . .

The fact of the situation is that the organization of the Socialist party in *the present form* has prevented the union of all the radical nationalist elements (more or less discontent with the present policy of drift, if not with the leadership responsible for it) into an organized opposition advocating a definite programme of action, because the great majority of these are not prepared to stand under a Socialist flag. Anticipation of this unfortunate state of affairs compelled me to give the disagreeable advice for liquidating the Socialist Party before the erroneous course was pursued too far.

So, the immediate task of the party to capture the leadership of the Congress with the object of transforming it into such a powerful organ of mass energy as will hasten the triumph of the anti-imperialist struggle cannot be accomplished by the party as it proposes to function. This task will be accomplished by operating as the organized left wing of the

Congress. Otherwise, appearing on the political scene as a Socialist party, you tacitly agree to a division of labour. The accomplishment of the immediate task—freedom from imperialist domination—is left to the Congress leadership, while you are assuming the task of fighting for a greater freedom—a fight that will take place only in a distant future.

The result of this decision of labour is easily anticipated. Since the realization of the greater freedom is conditional upon a successful struggle against Imperialism, our march to that ultimate goal will be effectively retarded by the policy of the present Congress leadership. . . .

2. Another ground for the suggestion that those organizing the Socialist Party should operate as the organized left wing of the Congress was the obvious impossibility of a revolutionary party of the working class to function openly under the given condition of the country. The suggestion, in other words, is that the party should have dual organization. . . . Activities for the realization of the immediate minimum programme of democratic National Revolution, can be effectively conducted through the Congress and other mass organizations already in existence or to be created for the purpose.

These precautions are not only of great importance for tactical and practical purposes. They have a bearing upon the nature of the party itself. This brings me to the most serious objections to your method of organizing the Socialist party.

3. It is the danger of deviation from the path to the professed goal. It is not a question of motive. Let me assure you that I am not doubting that. But there is a logic in action as well as in thought. One step taken compels the next. A Socialist party that will be allowed legal existence in the present conditions of the country, cannot possibly perform its historic task.

Do not be deluded by the analogy of the Congress. The creed and the specification of the means—'legal and non-violent'—take the sting out of the professed goal of independence. As a matter of fact, the Congress has never repudiated constitutionalism. What is a striving to attain independence through *legal* means but constitutionalism? There is a method in the madness of our 'ministerialists'. Once the new Constitution is enacted, it is law, and by its professed creed, the Congress is committed to use it as a possible means to attain independence. Every time the Congress actively deviated from theoretical constitutionalism, it was ruthlessly suppressed, even though the deviation was a feeble effort to defy the power that be. I am not against utilizing all the possibilities of legal action. But legal existence secured at the expense of the programme of the party is not worth having. . . .

Your declared adhesion to Marxian Socialism dictates the organizational form of the party. A party organized with the purpose of realizing

the programme of Marxian Socialism, is committed to revolutionary action, and therefore cannot have an open existence in this country. If the party is still tolerated, that is because it has not yet indicated its line of action. Yet the heavy hand of repression is closing upon its less cautious members. A programme, however revolutionary *theoretically*, is not worth the paper on which it is written, unless supplemented by a clear perspective of action to be undertaken in pursuance thereof. Without the necessary plan of action and the determination to act accordingly, a programme is but a collection of phrases. . . .

Profession of Marxian Socialism, however sincere, is no guarantee against the danger of deviation, unless the party *acts* according to the fundamental principles of Marxism. While proclaiming its programme, the party must open before the masses the way to the realization thereof, and there is only one way. Do you believe that this can be done if you insist upon retaining the present organizational form of the party? To put the point without mincing words: The Socialist Party can exist as an open organization if it will refrain from acting in the line dictated by its progressed programme. It is not I who is proposing liquidation. The form of organization which you have chosen will bring about the virtual liquidation of the party. Therefore, I object to it, and advocate an organizational form and method of action suitable to the given conditions in which the party shall have to operate. . . .

Why should the party run the risk of possible deviation, not wilful, but determined by this logic of action, when the peculiar conditions of the country open before it a way in which all the advantages of overt activity with a minimum programme could be had without running the risk involved in its present form of organization and mode of action? The immediate political task as well as the preparatory work necessary for its own development can be most effectively performed by the party functioning, not as a Socialist party, but as the organized left wing of the Congress. . . .

Concretely, my suggestions are: (1) In the field of nationalist politics you refrain from functioning as a Socialist party and merge yourselves in an organized left wing of the Congress; that is to say, you operate on a broader social basis not to be restricted by a party label. (2) The party itself be organizationally independent, not an adjunct to the National Congress. (3) Adoption of organizational form and method of operation suitable for a revolutionary working class party existing under the given conditions of the Imperialist terror. However, I lay special emphasis on suggestion number (1). The rest follows necessarily. Because so long as you function as a Socialist party you will be handicapped in doing the needful as regards the Congress politics, and the growth of the party as a serious political factor will be proportional to its ability in performing that. So you see, that it is an interrelated

complex of problems, some political, others organizational, still others technical, others again theoretical. Consequently, they will have to be posed together to be solved. Therefore, I am compelled to suggest a change in the organizational form of the party. So, my dear comrades, you see what is actually suggested is not liquidation of the party *as such*, assuming, of course, that it will be a Marxist–Socialist party. What is suggested is a less dangerous, more effective form of organization; a form suitable to, or rather dictated by, the conditions in which the party shall operate. What is suggested, further, is a more practical tactical approach to the immediate task we are all eager to accomplish. My conviction is that a Marxian Socialist party cannot be otherwise organized in this country. . . .

I should however, add that I do not prefer the name ‘Socialist’, although I won’t let the question of name constitute an insuperable difficulty. I am a Communist, and as such can never join a Socialist party inasmuch as this name implies the rejection of the cardinal point of Marxism—revolutionary political action. But your declaration of the principles of the party reduces the question of name to a mere formality. Marxist Socialism is identical with Communism. All Marxian Socialists, as distinct from the reformists, parliamentary Social Democrats, are Communists even if, for some secondary reason, they may eschew the denomination. It is the essence that counts and not name. If the name ‘Socialist Party’ is clearly freed from the tradition of reformism, there is no serious ground for objection to it.

Finally, I desire to say a few words about the programme of action of the party—not of the party *as such* but of those composing it and the circle of their influence. . . .

Some time ago I sent a number of draft resolutions to be brought before the Lucknow Congress by the left wing. . . . I believe that the line of action traced by the resolutions, taken together, is the only alternative to the present policy. Not knowing your concrete objections to this or that particular resolution. I shall only point out the main significance of each.

I have already referred to the ambiguous nature of the object placed before the Congress. So long as that ambiguity remains, the Congress policy cannot be free from confusion fraught with the danger of deviation from the proposed goal. The resolution* on the declaration of principles removes all ambiguity about the object of the nationalist movement, defines the object in clear political terms, commits the Congress to a relentless struggle against imperialist domination in any form, and leaves no doubt about the implication of that commitment. All these basic principles of the programme of the anti-imperialist

*See App. I. MNR.

struggle are enunciated in such a form as would not involve any formal change of creed. Only, given such a clear declaration of principles, is it possible to frame a concrete programme of action. How can an organization act effectively unless it knows what it really wants to achieve? Besides, the declaration of principles brushes aside all the cobweb of religious-ethical prejudices that confuse that basic political issue. Yet no venerable doctrine is actually stepped upon.

I need hardly say anything about the supreme importance of the resolution of the constitution of the Congress. The 'New Constitution'* is rapidly transforming the Congress into a close corporation of 'permanent officials'. Internal democracy is killed, the mass basis of membership is narrowed by foolish conditions which only put premium on hypocrisy. Under the new constitution the rise of the urgently needed alternative leadership is not possible.

My resolution on the new Constitution (the new Government of India Act) proposes to supplement the negative policy of rejection with the perspective of positive action. Otherwise rejection has no meaning, as practice is already showing. The resolution on parliamentary action suggests control over the would be ministerialists.

These general implications of the resolutions are obvious. I am sure you will find them quite in line with the accomplishment of the immediate political tasks of your party if you only gave them serious consideration. I shall go into some detail only on the question of the Constituent Assembly as there appears to be some misunderstanding and misgiving about it.¹¹

The slogan of the Constituent Assembly is a practical method of challenging the self-assumed authority of the British Parliament. Unless this challenge is thrown down, the rejection of the New Constitution represents a verbal quibble bound to end in capitulation, not even compromise. How could the people be ever mobilized in the struggle for the practical assertion of the right of self-determination, if they are not clearly told how that will have to be done?

To put the question differently, who is going to decide the political fate of the Indian people? This question demands a clear answer. If the answer is not that it must be done by a body so constituted as to represent the voluntarily delegated sovereignty of the people, there is no avoiding the intervention of the British parliament, one way or the other. The burden of our activities in the next stage of the anti-imperialist struggle must be the endeavour for creating an organ of popular (democratic) power which will make the final capture of political power a practical proposition. The slogan of a Constituent Assembly is the expression of that endeavour. The next stage of the struggle shall have to be fought

* Congress Constitution as amended at the Bombay session. MNR.

with that slogan which summarizes the character of the movement.

As regards the practicability of the slogan, in the beginning it can be but of propagandist nature, and so the question of practical difficulties does not arise. In the propagandist period, the purpose served will be posing of the political problem, clear formulation of the basic issue of the struggle for Independence, putting in the ideal of Independence a concrete political content.

The argument that Imperialism will never permit the convocation of a Constituent Assembly is irrelevant. Who says it will? And who wants a Constituent Assembly that can rise without challenging the position of Imperialism, except as a popular instrument for the capture of power, except as the framework of the revolutionary State? The slogan of the Constituent Assembly can be rejected from the one side by those who discountenance the perspective of the capture of power. They don't really stand for Independence notwithstanding whatever they say. From the other side, by those who believe that it is possible to jump over a whole historical period, that the proletarian revolution can become an actual historical fact before socio-political conditions for it have been created. They are the official Communists trying to make a revolution to order—manufacturing it out of infantile enthusiasm and perverse imagination.

If the radical elements still fail to raise the basic political issue which alone can open up a line of concrete action, well, then the movement is still less mature than it appears. Its development will be delayed. The slogan will have to become the expression of the urge of the movement before it can go further. Seven years of plodding was necessary before the slogan was even formally adopted. It may require still another several years of plodding before its significance and historical necessity will be fully appreciated.

So, I can only make an earnest appeal. Those serious about the ideal of Independence, must be armed with a fully worked out plan of action. All the moves and counter-moves must be calculated. It is not possible to set forth such a plan in correspondence. Therefore, I can only ask you to believe when I say that I shall be able to point out the practicability of the line I advocate. Meanwhile, you are asked to carry on the propaganda with the slogan. Of course, if you cannot trust me, there is nothing more to say. I must patiently wait for my chance. But I am so very firmly convinced of the correctness of the line suggested that I can wait for the chance when I shall be in the position to secure its adoption by all the radical-democratic-socialist elements. You should remember that my suggestions are based upon practical experience in actual revolutionary struggle; an experience possessed by few in this country.

February 1936

M. N. ROY

Note

¹¹ Roy's proposal of a Constituent Assembly, circulated initially in 1930, and included in *Our Task in India* (1932), was in fact substantially incorporated in the Plan of Action of the Constitution of the Congress Socialist Party. At its founding Congress the CSP resolved that 'the right of framing the Constitution is the sovereign right of the Indian people . . . and the supreme authority which should promulgate the Constitution of India is the Constituent Assembly'. In consonance with Roy's Manifesto, the CSP also envisaged the Constituent Assembly as 'the culmination of a mass uprising against foreign rule'. *Congress Socialist Party: Constitution, Programme and Resolutions*, 1934; Thomas A. Rusch, 'Role of the Congress Socialist Party in the Indian National Congress', Chicago, 1955. SNR.

Appendix I

Declaration of Principles

1. The Congress as a movement represents the will of the Indian people to democratic national freedom. As an organization, it is the instrument, created by the oppressed masses, for the enforcement of this will to freedom.

2. The Congress stands for the democratic principles of self-determination. Its object is the establishment in India of a Government of the people, by the people.

3. By a democratic government, the Congress understands a government under the effective control of the majority of the people so that freedom, progress, and prosperity are guaranteed equally to the entire community.

4. The Congress is of the opinion that rapid industrialization is the only remedy for ending the poverty of the Indian masses as well as all other economic evils.

But a full and free industrial expansion is impossible in a colonial country, crabbed and confined within the iron framework of an Imperialist regime. The attainment of Complete Independence is, therefore, an urgent historic necessity for India.

Appendix II

Programme of National Democratic Revolution

1. On the strength of historical experience and proved economic theories, the Congress holds the opinion that antiquated forms of non-productive (feudal, semi-feudal, sacerdotal, etc.) ownership of land are obstacles to the normal economic development of the country. A revolution in the relation of property in the main means of production, the transfer of ownership from the non-productive rent-receivers to those directly concerned with the actual production is demanded by national welfare and prosperity.

2. The Congress is in agreement with the generally established economic theory that industrial expansion and commercial activity of a country are limited by the power of consumption of its people. Therefore the Congress believes that it is the fundamental duty of a democratic government to take measures calculated to increase the purchasing power of the masses. The following are some of the measures urgently required in India:

- (a) Transfer of the ownership of land to the peasant.
- (b) To relieve the burden of the peasantry to such an extent as would leave them in possession of no less than 80 per cent of the gross produce.
- (c) Legally guaranteed minimum wages to assure an irreducible standard of living (representing a corresponding purchasing power) to those working in the fields, factories, mines, transport, office, school, etc.
- (d) Extensive public works, and industrial undertakings by the State for the productive employment of the huge mass of wasted labour.

3. The Congress believes that it is the duty of a democratic government to foster industrial and commercial prosperity. But as a democratic movement the Congress is opposed to the exploitation of man by man. Nor would it permit the accumulation of national wealth in the possession of a few, accentuating the misery of the majority. Therefore it stands for industrial democracy and equitable distribution of national wealth to be guaranteed through:

- (a) Public (national, municipal, or local) ownership of the modern means of transportation.
- (b) Government supervision of mining and other heavy industries in return for financial aid such as credit facilities, subsidies, etc.
- (c) State control over banking and credit.
- (d) Social insurance.

4. The Congress considers the freedom of press, speech, and association as an elementary right of democratic citizenship. It declares its determination to fight relentlessly for this elementary right.

5. The Congress believes that it is the duty of a democratic government to provide free secular education to all children below 15 years of age.

6. The Congress stands for equal political, economic, and social rights for women.

7. The Congress deplores communal distrust and misunderstanding, and is decidedly of the opinion that the Hindus should meet the minority religious communities farther than half-way. The Congress will work on this principle in order to unite the oppressed masses, Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, depressed classes, etc. under the common plan of democratic national freedom so essential for the welfare of all.

Appendix III

Suggested Amendments to the Constitution of the National Congress

In view of the fact that the struggle for national freedom has entered a new stage in which different methods and forms of combat will have to be adopted, the Congress resolves that its constitution and organizational structure should be amended on the following lines:

1. Effective control of the leadership through the rank and file membership. This will be secured through the introduction of the system of the executive reporting to the Congress, so that the delegates elected by the membership will have the chance of examining, criticizing, approving or condemning the actions of the leaders. Severe criticism or condemnation by a majority, of the report of the Executive will mean a vote of no-confidence, and the old leadership must make way for the new, chosen by the delegates in Congress assembled.

2. From the next, the ceremonious opening of each annual session will be followed, instead of the presidential address, by the Report of the A.I.C.C. in which an account of the past year's activities (political as well as organizational), and the defence of these, whenever necessary, will be accompanied by an exhaustive review of the political situation of the moment, an indication of possible development, and a proposed line of action to be pursued in the ensuing year. After a free and full discussion by the delegates, the proposed line will be amended, rejected, or accepted by a majority vote. This method will guarantee the collective nature of the leadership, and rank and file control of policy, both being so very essential for a democratic movement.

3. The report of the A.I.C.C. will be made by the General Secretary. It will be prepared by the Working Committee, and approved by the A.I.C.C. in its session meeting on the eve of the Congress.

4. The Subject Committee is abolished. Resolutions for the consideration of the Congress shall be sent in to the Working Committee either by the A.I.C.C. collectively or by a group (not less than 15) of its members, or by the Provincial Congress Committee, or fractions thereof. Draft resolutions shall be submitted at least two months ahead of the Congress sessions so that they could be given due publicity and circulated to all local organizations to enable them to discuss and give proper instructions to their delegates to the Congress. At the opening session of the Congress one or more committees, composed of delegates, shall be set up, and to these the draft resolutions shall be referred for careful scrutiny. The plenary sessions will discuss the resolutions on the

report of the committees. Finally, these will be adopted by a majority vote. Any group of delegates (not less than 15) shall have the right to introduce emergency resolutions. The Secretariat shall also have similar right.

5. The maximum number of delegates to the Congress will be 1,500. The delegates shall be elected by the membership in mass meetings in which the draft resolutions submitted to the Congress will be discussed. The discussions will impart to the delegates the spirit of their constituents.

6. The A.I.C.C. will be composed of 150 members and 50 substitute members. One half of the number shall be elected from the floor of the Congress, the other half elected by Provincial conferences which will be held immediately after the Congress. The A.I.C.C. shall meet every three months. The secretariat will have the power to convene an emergency meeting on a week's notice whenever there will be demand from 20 or more members of the A.I.C.C.

7. The Working Committee will be composed of 15 members and 5 substitutes. It will meet monthly, and oftener when necessary, the convener always being the General Secretary who will be a member of the Working Committee.

8. There shall be a secretariat of 5 members, including the General Secretary and the Organizational Secretary. Of the rest, one shall be in charge of agitation and propaganda, another shall be liaison officer between the Congress Executive and the Workers' and Peasants' organizations, and other affiliated bodies;* and the third shall act as the coordinator of the parliamentary activities in different provinces. The secretariat shall be in permanent session, and its members shall be recompensated, if necessary. The secretariat, assisted by an efficient staff, and under the supervision of the Working Committee, shall function as the motor for the day-to-day activities of the entire movement throughout the country, in cooperation with the provincial secretariats. The General Secretary shall be elected by the Congress at the close of the annual session.

9. Acceptance of the democratic principles of the Congress and payment of a minimum monthly contribution of one anna shall make everybody eligible to individual membership.

10. To guarantee an organized mass basis for the Congress, the system of collective or group membership shall be introduced. All organizations, groups, and clubs formed with democratic and progressive purposes such as trade unions, workers' clubs, peasants' organizations, students' bodies, socialist or communist associations, co-operative societies, small

* When *affiliation* becomes permissible without prejudice to organizational cohesion or the solidarity of the movement. MNR.

tradesmen's and artisans' guilds, literary and cultural bodies, etc. will be entitled to affiliation with the Congress on the acceptance of its principles. All the rights and obligations associated with the individual membership of the Congress shall accrue to all members of any affiliated* body.

January 1935

* See the footnote to Letter No. 1 signed. MNR.

Appendix IV¹²

(From : 'How to oppose the J. P. C. Report—
A call for a broad *United Front*').

[Five paragraphs deleted. The reprinted text here starts from the sixth paragraph of the 1937 edition SNR.]

A BROAD UNITED FRONT

A slave constitution is being forged for India. We have to mobilize the broadest possible strata of the Indian people for an agitation against it. It is necessary to build as broad-based a united front as possible. All the elements of the Indian population who are against imperialist absolutism must be brought together on a common platform for voicing their dissatisfaction against the proposed constitution. This cannot be done by an empty talk of rejection, nor can it be done by romantic talks about general strike and peasant revolt which can hardly be said to be matters of practical politics *in the immediate present*. Let us act as realists and exploit the possibilities of the situation in the best interest of our common struggle for Independence.

THE PROPOSED AMENDMENTS

The course suggested is, therefore, as follows:

(1) Setting up of a broad anti-imperialist united front for an agitation against the proposed Constitution.

(2) The platform of the united front to consist of a condemnation of the proposed constitution *and* the demand for the incorporation of the following *minimum* demands:

(a) Universal adult franchise for central as well as provincial legislatures; (b) single-chamber legislature; (c) full Provincial autonomy and Responsibility at the centre; (d) no safeguards, commercial or otherwise; (e) no special or emergency powers to the Governors or the Governor-General; (f) constitutional guarantees for freedom of press, speech, assembly, and association, minimum wage, employment benefit, 8 hour day, freedom of strikes, protection of minorities, etc.; (g) full rights of citizenship to States people, the representatives of these to the Federal assembly being elected by universal adult franchise; (h) investing the Indian Legislature with the right of extending or modifying the Constitution.

(3) This platform to be popularized and ratified by meetings and demonstrations all over the country.

DESERTIONS WILL NOT WEAKEN

Efforts must be made for bringing into the united front as many elements as possible, especially the Muslims, by the practical acceptance of the Communal Award. It is likely that some of the constituent elements of the united front may desert it when they actually see the sweep of the movement and realize its potentialities, or may be bought off by Imperialism by the grant of some concession. But once it gains a certain momentum the mass movement will not suffer by these desertions. These desertions, on the contrary, will help the clarification of issues and the differentiation of classes which will, instead of weakening, contribute to the growth of the movement. A mass agitation carried on the lines suggested will be a fitting answer to the insolent challenge of British Imperialism, will be an impressive demonstration of popular will, and will materially help the mobilization of the masses as a condition for the conquest of power. . . .

¹² The three Round Table Conferences (1930-2) were followed by the publication of a White Paper in March 1933 by His Majesty's Government in London. The proposals embodied in the White Paper were referred to a Joint Committee of the two Houses of the British Parliament which produced a Report. Appendix IV refers to this Report. The Government of India Act 1935, introduced as a bill in Parliament on 19 December 1934 on the basis of the White Paper, was passed on 2 August 1935. Sir M. Gwyer and A. Appadorai, *Speeches and Documents on the Indian Constitution 1921-57*, 2 Vol., 1957.

The opening five and last two paragraphs of this appendix have been left out, and this is indicated by an ellipsis (. . .). SNR.