

# THE SPLIT IN THE ALL-INDIAN TRADE UNION CONGRESS

**T**HE split in the All-Indian Trade Union Congress may serve as an example of a split that was prepared for in advance, and carried out from above, against the clearly-expressed wishes of the masses of workers. The bourgeois national reformists provoked the split in the Executive Committee of the All-Indian Trade Union Congress, by trying to avoid a direct meeting with the workers. The session of the Executive Committee, as Subhas Bose, Ruikar and Co. themselves admitted, was prolonged, regardless of the fact that by prolonging it, those workers who were compelled to go in to work at the factories, were thus in actual fact completely deprived of taking part in the further proceedings of the Congress. When it was pointed out to Bose, who was presiding at the meeting, that the opening of the Congress must not be delayed because the next day was a working day for the men, he remarked with a sneer that the workers could "if they wished" arrange for a "hartal"\* and not go to work. This bourgeois lawyer, without the slightest embarrassment, tried to show by his whole attitude during the meetings of the Executive Committee, that the opinion of the workers on questions concerning the working-class movement, could not be considered of much importance.

Several months before the calling of the Trade Union Congress in Calcutta, open negotiations had been taking place between the representatives of bourgeois-landlord national-reformism and the direct agency of British Imperialism in the form of Joshi, Chamanlal, Shiva Rao and Company.

Shiva Rao in a letter to Bose dictated the conditions upon which complete unity could be re-established. He demanded outright the expulsion of the revolutionary trade unions and the open denial of class politics. The split at last year's Trade Union Congress in Nagpur was brought about as a result of the fact, that the overwhelming majority of the working class had suddenly taken the road of independent class struggle. The open agents of British imperialism were left with nothing to do but declare their resignation. The representatives of treacherous, counter-revolutionary national-reformism, headed by Bose, in spite of all its sympathy in favour of the reformist tactic of co-operation, could not take the lead of Joshi and Chamanlal, for such a step would have unmasked them completely. They remained inside the A.I.T.U.C. and made the best of a bad job.

\* Voluntary stoppage of work and closing of shops and educational institutions, as a sign of protest.

Subhas Bose even allowed himself to be elected president. He reconciled himself to the election of Comrade Deshpande as General Secretary. Having got away with a few obviously treacherous and ambiguous phrases of a general kind, the national reformists pretended they were making great sacrifices in the name of working-class unity. For the time being and for the sake of appearances, they "broke" with Joshi and Co. and pretended to be the supporters of unity with the class-conscious trade unions, in order to prepare a deeper, more tangible split in the Indian trade union movement, in the interests of the native bourgeoisie, and also of British imperialism, with whom this bourgeoisie is endeavouring to establish and strengthen its final agreement.

As soon as the provocative plan for the split was drawn up, Bose without the slightest hesitation or any kind of excuse, gave away the secret of his whole plan. In his concluding speech he said: "This rejection of the Deshpande group will certainly mean a great gain to the trade union movement in India. His reputation was such as to repel many bona fide unions from joining the Congress."

By this declaration Bose made it quite clear that the fight against the class-conscious trade union movement is inconceivable without open alliance with imperialism, with its hirelings, paid to deceive and betray the workers.

In 1930, the Indian bourgeoisie arranged a solemn invasion of the working-class quarters of Bombay. The bourgeoisie approached the people, as it were, in the name of the national cause. A few weeks had scarcely passed when the plan came to light: to split the advanced section of the workers—the textile workers—in order to disorganise the struggle of the working class to win the leadership of the revolutionary masses. The Indian National Congress, with its advance upon the working-class quarters of Bombay, prepared the split in the Girmi Kamgar Union. Kandalkar and his associates have turned out to be the right arm of the capitalists and landlords, always ready to serve the bourgeoisie behind socialist phrases. Kandalkar—together with the renegade Roy and his like—are greeted as heroes by bourgeois national reformism. There could be nothing surprising in the fact that all the provocation in connection with the split at the Calcutta Congress began with the quarrel around the question as to whether the Kandalkar group had the right to represent the textile workers. Indian capital first of all made preparations for the disorganisation of the ranks of the textile

workers, making good use of the crisis, unemployment and the vapours of national unity. Then when the policemen's bludgeons and the authority of Congress had brought the Kandalkar group to its knees, the national reformists took up the rôle of arbitrators on questions of the inner disagreements among the workers.

The Mandate Commission of the Executive Committee put forward a demand to recognise the Kandalkar group as the true representatives of the Girni Kamgar Union and to turn down the representation of the textile workers, headed by Deshpande. From the very beginning Bose and Co. hid themselves from the rank and file of the Congress, under cover of the wangled mandate commission, which began, one by one, to disqualify the representatives of the revolutionary trade unions. Already the question had been squarely raised concerning the Girni Kamgar, and the political jobbers of the Mandate Commission disqualified the representation of railway-workers from the G.I.P. railway. By way of excuse the reason was given that this class-conscious trade union had not paid up 615 rupees in subscriptions to the coffers of the All-Indian Trade Union Congress. When the machinations of Bose and Co. against the Girni Kamgar became distinctly provocative, Comrade Randive brought in a proposal to pass a vote of censure on Bose as the Chairman, since behind the backs of the Congress which was about to be opened, he was trying to remove all class-conscious trade unions which he considered of no use for his purpose.

Immediately this proposal was brought up for discussion, Bose who was presiding at the meeting left the room, leaving Kandalkar in charge of the meeting; this could only be interpreted as having a provocative meaning. The right of Kandalkar to represent the Girni Kamgar Union had not yet been recognised even by the Executive Committee, and there could have been only one motive in leaving him in the chair—to demonstrate yet again that the national reformists are prepared to do anything in order to get rid of the class-conscious trade unions. It was natural that provocation of this kind should evoke the indignation of the revolutionary workers. The volunteers of the National Congress who were present at the meeting tried to bring about order by force. However, they were unsuccessful, since the proletariat showed sufficient firmness and resistance. Bose, who then entered the hall again, immediately declared the meeting postponed. On the opening of the Executive Committee meeting again, the question was once more raised of the vote of censure upon Bose; and moreover four representatives of the radical

wing were disqualified from voting, to two of his agents who accidentally turned up opportunely. Bose illegally gave the right to vote, and moreover he himself took part in the voting, appropriating to himself two whole votes. By means of all this mustering of forces, the proposal to pass a vote of censure on Bose was turned down by 26 votes against 24. In the same way Bose tried to get passed his machinations against the Red Textile Workers' Union. Deshpande and others, seeing that there was apparently to be no end of the machinations of Bose, behind the backs of the Congress, demanded that the Congress itself be opened. Bose declared that this was impossible as the report of the Mandate Commission had not yet been confirmed by the Executive Committee, and as we did not know which delegates were empowered to take part. Moreover the Executive Committee was not yet in a position to place a single resolution before the session of Congress, or even give its own report.

This mockery and trickery on the part of the bourgeois advocate would have gone on for ever, if the worker members of the Trade Union Congress, who were tired of waiting, while behind their backs the most important questions of the India trade union movement were being decided, had not entered the hall where the Executive Committee was sitting. The appearance of the members of the Congress immediately brought confusion. Bose, using his doubtful power as president, declared the Congress postponed for an indefinite period. After this the majority, composed of supporters of the class-conscious trade union movement, opened the session of the Congress and got down to business, passing several resolutions and electing its new Executive organ of the Congress which was to take the place of the national reformists who had deserted the Congress.

At first 37 trade unions were represented at the Congress. The representatives of some of the unions remained with Bose and made a whole comedy of their independent Congress. Several trade unions, up to 25, were represented at the Congress which carried on its business without the participation of the national reformists. Out of all these unions the following should be mentioned: the Girni Kamgar, the Bombay Municipal Workers' Union, the Bengal Juteworkers' Union, the Bengal Paperworkers' Union, the Calcutta Tramwaymen's Union, the Calcutta Dockers' Union, the G.I.P. Railwaymen's Union. The present situation of the Indian trade unions is such, that it is very difficult to say at all exactly or definitely, what actually exists behind the various trade union labels. Several trade unions

which have remained with Bose can only to an extremely small degree pretend to be real trade unions. Actually they are patronised by rich lawyers and business men of the National Congress, almost no workers take any part in them, since they wage no economic warfare and know of no trade union democracy. The Indian worker is only now beginning to control the trade union organisations, to subject them to his own interests and requirements. The process of cleansing the trade unions of opulent and high-handed benefactors is only in the very beginning stages. The Indian bourgeoisie is doing its utmost to prevent the Indian proletariat from speaking in its own tongue. In actual fact the tactics of Bose at the Calcutta Congress amounted to this. Bose tried from the very beginning to stir up organisational strife around particularly insolent wangling of the representation of the trade unions. In this way he hoped to remove from the agenda the big questions which face the working-class movement. In this way he tried to gag the workers, preventing them from discussing their most essential needs.

It must be admitted that to a certain extent the national reformists were successful in their plan, in so far as the supporters of the class trade union movement were not able in the course of the strife to bring out the most important questions of the class struggle. The opening speeches of Messrs. Mitra and Bose at the session of the Executive Committee presented sufficient material upon which all the main questions could have been brought up in a decisive manner.

With what did Bose, as President of the All-Indian Trade Union Congress, come forward at the opening of the Executive Committee session? He said literally:

"I doubt whether I can show any record of constructive work in the trade union movement and during the last year and the early part of this year I was engaged in keen struggles with the British Government—we were passing through a gigantic crisis, rare in recent Indian history. Therefore normal progress in the development of trade unionism has been impossible . . ."

It is difficult to say what is uppermost in this declaration—lies and hypocrisy or flagrant opportunism. Bose was "engaged in keen struggles" with the British Government! And if he had really waged war upon, and not engaged in bartering with, the British Government, then how could this struggle have hindered, and not helped, the "normal progress in the development of trade unionism"?

Bose from the very first moment revealed to the Executive Committee of the Trade Union

Congress that all the activities of the national reformists in the trade unions amounted to the fact that they . . . are in the service of the Indian National Congress. Bose had no hesitation in admitting that since the Nagpur Congress the national reformists had been trying to reduce the significance of the Indian trade union movement to a minimum, to sacrifice it to bourgeois national-reformism. Mukunda Lal, who had been elected General Secretary at the session of the fake "Bose" Trade Union Congress, was most eloquent, after the Calcutta events, in his description of the position inside the Indian trade union movement:

"Taking advantage of the weakness of our organisation, the capitalists have been fiercely attacking the workers. During the last year, thousands of workers have been thrown out of employment. On the railways alone nearly 40,000 have been discharged. And many more are fearfully awaiting the same fate. Thousands are working short time, earning correspondingly lower wages. In the jute industry of Bengal about half the workers have been thrown out in the street and forced to a state of starvation. Practically all the rest are working part time. The cotton mills of Bombay and other places to-day can no longer complain of a trade depression. Thanks to the boycott movement, they are enjoying a period of boom in the midst of general depression. Still, there are about 30,000 workers unemployed; and the wages of all those on the job are reduced all round. Unemployment and wage-cuts have become the order of the day, practically in all the industries and trades of the country."

Mukunda Lal himself is fairly skilful at interpreting Bose. The bartering between the Indian bourgeoisie and British Imperialism, the same bartering that Bose calls warfare, did not prevent the Indian capitalists from using all the difficulties of the crisis and unemployment in their own interests. This period of self-denying struggle on the part of the masses, was used by the bourgeoisie for the most flagrant attacks upon the working class. The Indian bourgeoisie manifested considerable cunning of a practical kind. They transferred all the burden of deprivation to the shoulders of the working class. Further they made a profitable investment in the "passive resistance" campaign, by converting even this means of struggle against revolution into an item bearing interest. Malaviya, the cunning old jobber of Congress, appealed to the Bombay mill-owners for support, basing his argument upon the advantages which the National Congress had brought to Indian capital:

"Had the National Congress not supported Swadeshi (national industry) where would the Bombay textile owners be to-day?"

Vallabhbhai Patel, one of the foremost supporters of the National Week Campaign, is even more cunning and sly when he assures the workers that :

"The mill-owners in Bombay are on no account in such a flourishing position or in receipt of such considerable profits. There is a certain amount of friction between you and the mill-owners, but this is a domestic affair and you must work jointly. Do not think of them as capitalists and that co-operation is difficult."

The Indian National Congress during 1930-31, not in words, but in deeds, demonstrated its loyalty to the interests of Indian capital and private ownership of the land; to an exactly similar extent it gave proof of its hostility to the working class. The successful attacks of capital in circumstances of a growing universal national crisis would be impossible if the national reformists were unable to disorganise and demoralise the ranks of the workers by taking away from them the most elementary means of struggle, and even the trade unions. Kandalkar made himself a "somebody" because he was the first to issue the slogan: "The workers and peasants are the hands and legs of the Congress." Only a very short time elapsed, and this formula of political servility was translated into the language of trade unions. In his declaration in May, 1931, Kandalkar and Co. wrote in black and white :

"The trade union does not share the opinion of those who suppose that the interests of the workers demand that the trade union limit its activities exclusively to the functions of a strike committee."

Kandalkar and Co. prove by the whole of their political activities that they consider the essence of the class struggle, by which they swear, to be negotiations with the capitalists. There was a time when in Russia in 1917 Kerensky and Co. made an attack upon the working class and the peasant masses under the slogans of "revolutionary democracy." In a sense, during the embryonic stage of the Indian revolution, the Indian capitalists do the same thing, as Kerensky did, behind phrases about "socialism" and "national liberation."

Indeed, Bose, in his opening speech, managed to : (1) bend the knee to the Round Table Conference; to propose that the trade unions, instead of condemning it, await the results; (2) declare their readiness to co-operate in the Geneva Labour Bureau of the League of Nations, by agreeing to discuss this question each year in the Congress; (3) recommend that the Irwin-Gandhi pact be left

out of the discussion; (4) greet the proposals of the Whitley Commission, the boycott of which had been raised at the Nagpur Session of the All-Indian Trade Union Congress the previous year. To top all this, Bose, in his opening speech, bowed low before the National Congress and menacingly shook his fist at those whose attitude was not sufficiently respectful to it. Only half of the declarations of Bose would be quite sufficient to make the National Congress show its true face. In actual fact the opening speech of Bose is a whole programme of subjection of the Indian working class to "its own" bourgeoisie and to imperialism. The supporters of the revolutionary class-conscious trade union movement lost a fine opportunity of unmasking the enemies of the working class. Instead of quarrelling with Bose and Co. about the rights of the Red trade union of textile workers, inside the narrow walls of the Executive Committee, they would have done much better to have demanded at the Congress itself an open, broad discussion of the question of the counter-revolutionary pact of Irwin and Gandhi, about the Whitley Commission Report, on the question of the cruel attacks being made by capital and imperialism upon the Indian working class.

They let this opportunity slip by, and thus allowed Bose and other representatives of the Indian bourgeoisie to speculate by confronting the Indian labour movement with both its antagonists—Moscow and Geneva (International Labour Bureau). Very little work was required to unmask the fact that Geneva was brought forward by Bose and company only in an artificial, hypocritical sense. Bose spoke in favour of Geneva in his opening speech. As for Moscow, the capitalists and their lackeys call any sort of defence of the interests of the working class "Moscow."

All the Boses, Kandalkars and Ruikars came to Calcutta with the prepared intention of splitting the Trade Union Congress at all costs. The mask of hypocrisy should have been torn from them; they should have been shown up in their true colours. The workers should have been shown that national reformism not only betrays the interests of Indian complete independence, but also is in opposition to the most elementary defence of the interests of the working class. National reformism helped the bourgeoisie during 1930-31 to throw tens and hundreds of thousands of workers upon the streets, without offering them any kind of compensation, without obtaining any sort of assistance for the unemployed. National reformism helped Indian capital to disorganise the strike struggle of the workers. The forty thousand railwaymen mentioned already have to thank Giri and Ruikar for the fact that they have been deprived of bread. The unprecedented

decrease in wages per capita could not have been carried out if the working masses had not been seized unawares by mean, lying phrases about the need for all classes to make equal sacrifices in the interests of national liberation. Indian capital knows full well why it is afraid of Communists in the Indian labour movement. It was no other than the same Patel, greeted in Berlin on his way to the Round Table Conference with rotten eggs, who propounded the question as to why the Indian bourgeois hates Communists: "He throws aside all attempts to bring Communism into the struggle in India, as it only complicates everything. The superlative need of the moment is the united front—with the direct task of finishing with foreign domination. When Swaraj is established in India, there will be sufficient time to examine all governmental systems from the point of view of their respective merits. In the heat of the struggle it would be madness to provoke the united opposition of the Princes, the landlords and industrial magnates." Unity with the landlord and capitalist is to be forced upon the most revolutionary class of our time, the proletariat! This is not a simple task, and it is especially difficult of achievement when the working class has already ceased to be an unconscious mass. Already in 1921 Gandhi sounded a note of warning about the dangers connected with using the working-class movement for political purposes. During the struggles of the last four years an Indian proletarian vanguard has been formed, which is more and more being crystallised into the kernel of the whole Indian working-class movement. The mass of Indian workers has left behind the rich lawyers and moneylenders of the Indian National Congress, and are now speaking through the Communists and the class-conscious trade unions.

In order to save their failing influence upon the radicalised working masses, the national reformists are compelled, on the one hand, to adopt a policy which will provoke splits from above, and on the other hand, to disseminate phrases about "socialism" and "revolution."

The same Bose, in the same opening speech, repeated the declaration of Mr. Roy and other Right renegades. Bose said:

"The Karachi session of the Indian National Congress passed a resolution on Fundamental Rights. However insufficient the resolution may be, it stands for a departure from the old tradition for the recognition of some of the rights of the workers and peasants and for a definite move in the direction of Socialism. It is the potentiality of the resolution rather than the actual contents . . . that appeals to me."

Subhas Bose has a nebulous way of expressing himself. However, he repeats almost word for

word the utterances of the Right liquidators. It is the old appeal to democratise the Indian National Congress from below, but for the time being . . . the Congress will accept "socialism" and "revolution" and absolutely and entirely follow its leadership. The Indian national reformists have borrowed much from international Social Fascism. In the circumstances existing in India, national reformism to a certain extent is called upon to play the same rôle as regards imperialism as Social Democracy plays in European countries. It is just for this reason that national reformism, as the class struggle grows stronger and more intense, makes more and more use of socialist and democratic phrases in its struggle against the working-class movement and revolution. It is just for this reason that national reformism finds its direct agents in renegades from Communism like Brandler, Roy and Co. It is just for this reason that national reformism everywhere tries to bring forward its own falsification, its substitute, its forgery, in place of the true struggle, the real militant organisation of the working class. The heroic struggle of the Bombay textile workers threw up the Girmi Kamgar Union upon the crest of the wave of the working-class movement. The Indian bourgeoisie a few months later created a duplicate of the red trade union, Kandalkar's imitation. The struggle of the workers made class unity an especially urgent requirement. At first Kandalkar and the Roy clique, then Bose, with his associates, tried to unite the agents of capital against the workers, as a substitute for working-class unity. The whole struggle of the Indian workers during the last two years convinced them, however, of the necessity of uniting the Indian trade union movement on a real all-Indian scale. The Boses, Kandalkars and Co. have laid their hands on this as well.

The falsification of Socialism and the revolutionary struggle has become for them an organic requirement, because only by means of such falsification are they in a position to maintain bourgeois influence among the working class. Is not the list of resolutions passed at the Congress of big and small Boses in Calcutta sufficient in itself? —(1) Greetings to the Five-Year Plan and Socialist Construction; (2) Condemning the Government for refusing to issue passports to Messrs. Saklatvala and Gallacher; (3) protest against the death sentence on eight negro strikers in the United States; (4) special resolution on unity; (5) resolution on the offensive against capitalism; (6) resolution demanding "unconditional" transfer of all power to the people, freedom of the peasantry from all exploitation, nationalisation of the land, public utilities, mineral resources, etc., control of the economic life of the country

by the workers and peasants, and so on and so forth.

Here everything is to be found. The more evil there is to hide up, the more flowery and eloquent the phraseology. The capitalists are happy to get off with phrases of this sort, when they are lowering wages by 20-25 per cent., when mass dismissals are universal, when the working hours are being lengthened.

The economic struggle of the workers is spreading more and more throughout the land. The most distant corners of India are in the throes of the strike movement. For the first three months of 1931 alone 3½ thousand workers went on strike, and 730,000 days were lost. Over 20,000 workers were concerned in strikes in Bombay during the first half of the year. The workers are waging a stubborn, desperate struggle against advancing capital.

In Karachi the dockers and factory workers in April were already organising demonstrations and placing pickets before the warehouses and homes of rich merchants with the slogans: "Give us bread or the chance of earning bread," "We demand the payment of two rupees a day to unemployed workers." The pickets of the unemployed workers demanded that the merchants hand over the keys of their warehouses, on the basis that they had the right to the contents of the warehouses. The terrified merchants were compelled to give considerable sums of money to the workers.

Quite recently the textile workers' strike in Bangalore resulted in a conflict between the workers and the police, as a consequence of which there were killed and wounded. The Red Girni Kamgar Union of late has carried out a number of successful strikes, which have forced back the front line of capital. The Girni Kamgar Union is taking the most active part in the Sholapur strike, which is literally the chief interest of the whole town. Not only the workers, but the women workers as well arrange the picketing, struggle with the police and defend their rights.

Now, more than ever before, the time is ripe for the creation and consolidation of militant class trade unions with strong factory and workshop nuclei, strike committees and factory committees formed from among the rank and file. Moreover, it is high time that the all-Indian working-class movement were a united force. British imperialism and the Indian bourgeoisie are more afraid of this militant unity of the working class than of anything else in the world. The *Statesman*, commenting on Bose's speech at the Congress, wrote:

"The best feature of Mr. S. Bose's speech, however, seems to us to be in what he did not say. He did not for the sake of momentary

applause urge his hearers to reckless courses in the present economic crisis. He admitted the difficulties of the employers that it is sometimes impossible for them to maintain their old staff . . ."

The exploiters are not afraid of flowery phrases about "Socialism," but they are always able to find practical use for all confusion and wavering in the ranks of the exploited. Without any exaggeration one can say that the peasant rebellions and revolutionary outbreaks in the towns (like the Chittagong uprising) throw a light upon the road of the working class in its struggle for class self-determination, on behalf of its own organisation, its hegemony of the national revolutionary struggle. Despite the despicableness and foul treachery of Ruikar, the threat of a general strike on the railways is still imminent. The Indian workers need a strong Communist Party capable of leading each individual strike, capable of laying the foundation of general class unity as the basis of each strike. The Indian workers need red trade unions, which live by the class struggle and grow up in this struggle. They need the most elementary militant organisations. The time has come for them to take a good broom and sweep out of their unions and organisations all foreign elements, all agents of the bourgeoisie who are hostile to the workers. The workers cannot afford to have respected lawyers at the head of their trade unions. The Whitley Commission said this in its report. When the workers have no militant trade unions, even during strikes they are compelled to get up to their necks in debt to the moneylenders. The moneylender reaps a rich harvest from the unemployment of tens and hundreds of thousands of workers.

The split at Calcutta cannot be looked upon as a decisive turning point. The kernel of an all-Indian organisation of trade unions has been created, but it is still weak and unfinished so long as the struggle against Joshi and Bose has not been developed to the end on the all-Indian arena, so long as this struggle is not bound up in one with the struggle against advancing capital, so long as this struggle is not converted into a struggle for the class unity of the proletariat. Only the first steps have been taken towards the formation of an Indian class-conscious trade union movement. Time and circumstances demand Bolshevik determination and the Bolshevik rate of development. Those who split the movement from above must meet united, unanimous resistance from below. By organising their counter-attack against capital, the Indian working class at the same time will create the decisive factors necessary for its hegemony in the national revolutionary movement.