

THE INDIAN BOURGEOISIE*

Q u e s t i o n : The Central Committee has characterised the Government of India as a "bourgeois-landlord Government, headed by the big bourgeoisie having links with British imperialism." Would it not be more correct to characterise it as a Government led by the *progressive* section of the big bourgeoisie as distinct from the *reactionary* section, or led by the national bourgeoisie as distinct from the collaborationist bourgeoisie? How else are we to explain the progressive orientation in the Government of India's foreign policy and the new features in the internal policy, e. g., the Plan-frame with its emphasis on industrialisation?

A n s w e r : The question presumes that the bourgeoisie in India has already got split into a progressive section and a reactionary section, or into a national bourgeois group and a collaborationist group. Or at least it assumes that the differentiation between sections of the bourgeoisie has already proceeded so far that the Government can be definitely associated with one section. It is this basic assumption itself that is theoretically unsound and practically untenable.

History of Question

The role of the bourgeoisie is a very important question in our country. It not only occupies an important position in our economy, but it wields enormous political influence and has played the leading role in our national

* *New Age*, No 12, 1955.

movement. Differences have cropped up in our Party from time to time on this question of the nature of the Indian bourgeoisie, its attitude to imperialism and feudalism and the position to be adopted towards it by the Communist Party and the democratic movement.

At times it was argued that the bourgeoisie as a whole had ceased to be oppositional since the transfer of power in 1947, and had to be considered an enemy. Later on the thesis was advanced that only the big bourgeoisie had gone over to imperialism and had to be fought as the enemy, while the national bourgeoisie had to be won over as an ally. And the national bourgeoisie was equated with the middle and small sections of the bourgeoisie.

The historic Programme of the Communist Party of India rejected both theses. The Programme rejected the view that all *key* industries should be nationalised. It stated that only the enterprises owned by British capital should be taken over. This was done with the definite understanding that in India the national bourgeoisie included the entire bourgeoisie — big, medium and small, monopoly as well as non-monopoly. Despite the compromise of 1947*, no *section* of the bourgeoisie could be said to have *gone over* to imperialism, though individuals might have. The contradiction between imperialism and the bourgeoisie *as a whole* remained.

The Central Committee of the Communist Party of India in its June 1955 Resolution and its proposed Amendments to the Party Programme takes its stand firmly on this basic thesis of the Party Programme. It holds that while the bourgeoisie is maintaining its links with imperialism and continuing its alliance with the landlords, conflicts have arisen particularly in the recent period — conflicts based on the common aim of the entire bourgeoisie to develop India along capitalist lines. The Central Committee holds that it is the *dual role* of the bourgeoisie as a class that alone can satisfactorily explain recent developments as well as past events. The

* Assessment of the historical significance of India attaining independence and of the role of the Indian national bourgeoisie is given in *New Situation and Our Tasks* (Ed.)

radical change in the foreign policy, the new features in the internal policy, the conflicts over policy that arise — all these are to be explained not by the postulate that one section of the bourgeoisie was responsible for the past and has now been replaced by another section, or that one section wants independent capitalist development, while another section wants to maintain imperialism and feudalism intact.

Dual Role of Bourgeoisie

In this connection the Thesis on the *Revolutionary Movement in the Colonies and Semi-Colonies* adopted by the Sixth Congress of the Communist International in 1928, throws the floodlight of the fundamentals of Marxism-Leninism on the contemporary Indian situation.

After distinguishing the comprador bourgeoisie as “native merchants, engaged in trade with imperialist centres, whose interests are in continuation of imperialist exploitation,” the thesis says that the rest of the “native bourgeoisie, especially the portion reflecting the interests of native industry, supports the national movement and represents a special vacillating compromising tendency which may be designated as *national reformism* (or, in the terminology of the theses of the Second Congress of the Communist International, a “bourgeois-democratic” tendency.) ...In India and Egypt, we still observe, for the time being, the typical bourgeois-nationalist movement — an opportunist movement, subject to great vacillations, balancing between imperialism and revolution. ...The native bourgeoisie, as the weaker side, again and again capitulates to imperialism. Its capitulation, however, is not final as long as the danger of class revolution on the part of masses has not become immediate, acute and menacing” (emphasis in original).

The thesis goes on to point out that the bourgeoisie in its struggle against imperialism strives to secure the support of the vast peasantry but at the same time it fears agrarian revolution, which alone can end the unbearable exploitation of the peasants. “The bourgeoisie of China, India and Egypt is by its immediate interests,

so closely bound up with landlordism, with usury capital and with the exploitation of the peasant masses in general, that it takes its stand not only against the agrarian revolution but also against every decisive agrarian reform."

The conclusions that follow from this analysis are *firstly*, that the bourgeoisie as a whole (barring compradores) has conflicts with imperialism; *secondly*, that neither the bourgeoisie as a class nor any section of it finally goes over to imperialism until the menace of internal class revolution becomes acute; *thirdly*, that the bourgeoisie adopts a policy of reformist opposition to imperialism, a policy of balancing between imperialism and revolution. In other words, the national bourgeoisie in colonial and semi-colonial countries is a class with a dual character, resulting from its dual position as a class which is both oppressed and is an oppressor, a class which desires national freedom but has at the same time close links with foreign capital, a class which tries to secure the backing of the peasant masses but cannot support a struggle for radical agrarian reforms. The sharpest expression of this dual character in India was the reformist method of struggle — satyagraha — which could exert pressure on imperialism but not overthrow it, the culmination of which could be either a compromise with imperialism or defeat.

The entire history of the Indian national movement has brilliantly confirmed the correctness of this estimation of the national bourgeoisie, of its *intermediate* position between imperialism and revolution.

The same position continues, in a new set-up and therefore in a new way, today also.

Question of Differentiation

The Indian bourgeoisie is certainly no undifferentiated, homogeneous mass. There are the monopolists and non-monopolists, the big and the small, those with greater links with imperialism and those with less, those with closer ties with feudalism and so on. But the whole

bourgeoisie is *national* in the sense that its interests as a class are not identical with imperialism but on the contrary come into conflict with it. The class as a whole wants independent capitalist development.

Again, the class as a whole wants to carry through this capitalist development by: (a) strengthening its position vis-à-vis imperialism; (b) by curbing feudalism; (c) by simultaneously maintaining its links and compromise with British capital and alliance with landlords; (d) by throwing the burden of this development on the mass of the people. This is the general policy. On this general, basic policy, there is agreement among the bourgeoisie as a whole, especially among all sections of the big bourgeoisie. The conflict over policies that arises is within this basic framework. Compromise and struggle are not two different policies of two different sections but two aspects of the basic policy of the class as a whole.

The thesis that a split has taken place within the Indian bourgeoisie, with one section having gone over to imperialism, is theoretically unsound. Going over of the class or of big section of it can take place only under such conditions as: (i) satisfaction of the aspirations of the bourgeoisie or a section of it by imperialism; (ii) actual imperialist invasion when a section of the bourgeoisie capitulates, thinking that their position is hopeless, e. g., Wang Ching-wei at the time of the Japanese invasion of China; (iii) when a powerful internal challenge matures, when the forces of popular revolt threaten to shake their class domination, e. g., betrayal of the Chinese revolution in 1927 and the final going over of Chiang Kai-shek after the Second World War. These are very specific conditions and none of these conditions obtain in India at the present time.

Lesson of National Movement

Moreover, actual events, both past and present, disprove this thesis. Take the history of our national movement. We know that the bourgeoisie throughout the na-

tional movement took recourse alternately to struggle and compromise. The 1919—22 struggle with the Chauri Chaura withdrawal, the 1930 struggle followed by a fresh round of compromise. In 1942 the same Tatas and Birlas who minted crores through war contracts also tried to engineer strikes from above and gave help to the “do or die” struggle.

In all these struggles Gandhiji was both the initiator of the struggles and the architect of the compromises. Struggles were waged in order to achieve compromise on “suitable terms”; compromises were made in order to strengthen the position for future struggles — inside and outside the legislature. It would be ridiculous to say that the national bourgeoisie was responsible for the struggle and the collaborationist bourgeoisie sabotaged the struggle and forced a compromise. As a matter of fact the bourgeoisie as a whole remained remarkably united under the leadership of Gandhiji.

Conflict over policies certainly did take place. Not all sections at once took to the slogan of complete independence passed in 1929. Nor was the Gandhi-Irwin Pact or the Faizpur agrarian resolution unanimously approved. During the 1942 struggle there were differences in the Congress leadership. On these and many other issues there was a right-wing and a left-wing inside the Congress, with the left-wing often expressing the sentiments of the radicalised petty bourgeoisie. But there was a common link also — satyagraha as the main form of struggle. Throughout the national movement the dominant leadership remained that of the big bourgeoisie. Hence the conflicts over policy invariably got reconciled within the framework of the basic policy of bourgeois reformist opposition to imperialism.

Period After 1947

It is this policy which has been carried forward to a new level since 1947. The main weapon now became the control over the state. The big bourgeoisie entered into a compromise with imperialism not in order to retain

the colonial order intact but in order to realise its own ambitions — capitalist development in their own interest as distinct from imperialist interests. The Indian bourgeoisie counted on help from British and American imperialism to realise their interests, the price for which was the protection of these interests from the popular anti-imperialist movement which had attained an unprecedented sweep and strength.

But in the years after 1947, British and American imperialism far from satisfying the needs of the Indian bourgeoisie began to put all manner of pressure to draw the new Indian state into their war plans, began to set afoot plans which could only undermine even the freedom that had been won. At the same time, the general elections in India and subsequent events revealed the growth of mass discontent inside the country, a serious weakening of the mass base of the ruling Congress party, and increasing mass radicalisation manifested in the demand for basic economic and social reforms, for rapid liquidation of the backwardness of the country and the poverty of its people. This was an extremely serious state of affairs with which the dominant bourgeois leadership had to reckon. Side by side, the emergence and strengthening of the Socialist world market presented certain new opportunities for industrial development and also an extremely useful bargaining counter with the imperialists. Hence the contradiction with imperialism, which had always been present — though in a dormant form after 1947 — began to come to the forefront, the conflict began to sharpen.

Nobody will dispute this growing conflict and it would be certainly wrong to minimise its significance for the democratic movement. The Central Committee has drawn pointed attention to this conflict. But the point at issue is whether there are any indications that this conflict has led to a *split* or a sharp *differentiation* inside the Indian bourgeoisie.

Take the Second Five Year Plan. Much has been said about the emphasis placed by the Plan-frame on heavy industries. This has to be recognised and welcomed. But we must see that the Note of the Federation of Indian

Chambers of Commerce and Industry on the Second Plan also lays down large figures for investment out of which Rs. 2,000 crores are set apart for industry and of which 65 per cent is intended for heavy and basic industry. So on the basic policy of industrialising the country there is no opposition from any important section of the bourgeoisie. Similarly there is agreement on the method of financing the Plan — increased taxation on common people, deficit financing, foreign loans.

The opposition to the acceptance of the Soviet steel plant offer from some quarters stemmed mainly from the fear that this might overstrain relations with Britain and America. When the contrary proved to be the case opposition weakened. It is of great significance that *The Eastern Economist* which a year ago supported Kasturbhai Lalbhai's slanderous statement against the quality of Soviet industries, has now emphasised the possibilities of obtaining aid in industrialisation from the Socialist world (*vide* its Indian Industries Fair Supplement and editorial in the 11 November issue). This clearly shows that we cannot yet speak of a sharp *differentiation* inside the bourgeoisie even on such an issue as economic relations with the USSR.

Same is true about their political representatives. Sri Nanda goes to the Colombo Plan Conference and makes an abject appeal for private foreign investment — from "traditional" sources (Britain and America) — to the tune of Rs. 1,000 crores. At the same time Sri Malaviya comes back from the Soviet Union and announces that Soviet help will be taken with regard to oil prospecting. Both are known Nehruites. This is a clear example that what we have here are not *two policies of two wings*, but two aspects of the same basic policy of the same class.

Same is the case with the nationalisation of the Imperial Bank with heavy compensation and heavy monopoly representation on the board of directors. It would be absurd to say that the nationalisation was due to the anti-imperialist wing and compensation, etc., due to the pro-imperialist wing of the bourgeoisie. It is precisely because of this basic unity of policy that we find one

and the same representative of the bourgeoisie advocating industrialisation — which can be called progressive — and at the same time coming out viciously against civil liberties — which is reactionary — e. g., Sampurnanand in Uttar Pradesh and Morarji Desai in Bombay.

Conflict Over Policies — Its Significance

The point to be grasped is that a conflict over policies need not necessarily connote conflict amongst sections of the bourgeois class. It does not happen that the class gets split up and then the representatives go to argue as lawyers. Generally what happens is that political leaders first put forward policies and then members of the class begin to take positions around certain policies.

Sometimes differences in policies also relate directly to differences in the interests of particular sections. At other times differences on policies arise because the political representatives of the class look to the long-term political-economic interests of the class and frame policies which may come into conflict with the immediate interests of sections of the class. An example of this is the conflict over the extension of the public sector into the sphere of heavy industries.

On yet other occasions conflicts over policies may arise because of differences over the assessment of the situation, the likely consequences of a particular policy, the position of certain leaders among the masses and so on. An example of this was the controversy over the acceptance of the Soviet steel plant offer mentioned earlier. Certain political leaders were apprehensive that such things might "strengthen Communism" inside India, while others like Nehru had more confidence in their own influence and strength.

Apart from being wrong theoretically and untenable practically, the thesis that the bourgeoisie in India has already got split into two sections — progressive and reactionary — has dangerous implications. If such a dif-

ferentiation has already taken place, if the pro-imperialists are out to sabotage the Second Five Year Plan and maintain the colonial order, then it would be perfectly correct to join hands with the Government and to fight against the pro-imperialists. Such a thesis would derail the Party into a wild-goose chase after specific *compromisers* instead of concentrating the main fire against the policy of *compromise*. Such a thesis would disarm the masses in face of the attacks from the Government and reduce the Communist Party to an appendage of the bourgeoisie. Such a thesis confuses possibility with actuality and prevents the Communist Party from so working as actually to strengthen the mass movement and thus bring about a differentiation. It is because of all this that this thesis has to be rejected.

Question of United Front

A question arises: if the whole bourgeoisie in India is to be considered national, and if conflicts have arisen between it and imperialism, then why not have united front with the whole class, including the big bourgeoisie and the Government? Such a united front is not possible because the struggle of the democratic movement against imperialism cannot be isolated from the struggle against the big bourgeoisie which is the leading force in the present Government — *the very Government that protects British capital and landlords*.

The fact that the whole class has its conflict with imperialism and feudalism does not alone create the basis for a general united front with it. We have to see how it seeks to strengthen its own position in the conflict — by attacking the people or by attacking imperialism and feudalism. If, in the main, its policy is one of attacking the people, then that policy despite the relative strengthening of Indian monopoly capital vis-à-vis British capital that may be achieved and despite the limited curbing of feudalism, does not strengthen the forces of democracy, does not expand the home market to any great extent, and does not appreciably weaken the fetters on

the forces of production. It does not fight the crisis in our economy and help us to liquidate the colonial order. Such a policy is not progressive but reactionary.

The decisive question, therefore, is not the growth of the conflict but the *specific manner* by which the national bourgeoisie strives to strengthen its own position in this conflict. It is by this criterion that we determine our attitude towards it.

This is not a new criterion. During the period of the national movement against British rule also the same criterion was adopted. The bourgeoisie had its conflict with imperialism and it sought to resolve this conflict in its own interests. Even such acts as participation in the Round Table Conference in London, the formation of Ministries in 1938, individual satyagraha in 1939, the acceptance of the Mountbatten Award in 1947 — even these were acts by which the national bourgeoisie tried to strengthen its position.

These moves the Communist Party and the advanced democrats rightly opposed. The reason was that these acts and methods restrained, weakened and derailed the mass movement against imperialism. The Communist Party on the other hand fully participated in all such forms of movement as actually moved the masses into struggle, e. g., boycott of the Simon Commission, mass action against imperialism and supported demands which had an anti-imperialist content, such as the demand for a constituent assembly, the demand for the withdrawal of the British army and for the protection of Indian industries, etc. It was this attitude which demarcated the Communist Party from the petty-bourgeois parties which took the stand of unconditional support to the policies of the bourgeoisie vis-à-vis imperialism on the plea that the Congress was "fighting the British" — a stand of actual surrender to the bourgeoisie.

Such was the attitude of the Party in the days when state power was wielded by the imperialists against the Indian people as a whole, against the bourgeoisie too. Today, it is the big bourgeoisie itself that is the leading force in the Indian state; and in their struggle for democratic rights the people come into conflict with this

very state power. Evidently, therefore, the possibilities of united front today are far less and its scope far more limited than in the years before 1947.

Nevertheless, even today united front can take place and does take place on such issues as defence of peace, defence of freedom against threats like the Pak-US Pact, opposition to imperialist plans in Kashmir, etc.

The *criterion* today too is the same as in the past. Not the mere existence or even the growth of conflict but the specific *manner* in which the bourgeoisie and the Government seek to strengthen their position in this conflict — by attacking the position of imperialism and feudalism or by compromising with them and attacking the people. As was shown in the November issue of the *New Age* (Monthly), the latter is yet the main method adopted by the Government — and this is reactionary.

Q u e s t i o n : At the Third Congress of the Communist Party of India the central political slogan advanced was that of the replacement of the present Government by a Government of democratic unity. Why is there no slogan of an alternative Government in the Central Committee Resolution? Should not the Communist Party at all stages advance the slogan of power?

A n s w e r : The Communist Party at all stages fights for power. In the June Resolution of the Central Committee, it has been pointed out that one of the important tasks of the Communist Party is to popularise the concept of people's democracy, of people's power, as the way forward for the Indian people to Socialism and a happy future. That Resolution has pointed out that the Communist Party believes that without the winning of people's democracy, rapid, all-round advance will not be possible, the elimination of the imperialist-feudal fetters on our forces of production cannot be accomplished. This too is a slogan of power.

The slogan of power should not, however, be confused with the slogan of *an interim Government*. The latter slogan can only be advanced in a specific situation: when there is a situation of crisis in the country, when there is a rapid shift in the loyalty of the masses away from the ruling party and a favourable correlation of

forces; or when there is a serious threat to the existing Government from the side of right reaction which has to be unitedly combatted; or when there is an acute threat of or actual invasion of the country by imperialist forces. It is only when such and similar conditions obtain that the Communist Party can advance the slogan of an interim or coalition Government. It is quite clear that none of these conditions obtains in India at the present time.

Changes in Objective Situation

While there was undoubtedly an element of exaggeration in the assessment of the situation made at the Madurai Party Congress, it has also to be borne in mind that the situation then was also different from now. The general elections and the subsequent by-elections revealed a rapid shift amongst the masses away from the Congress. The struggle of the people for their immediate demands at that time made a definite impact on the *political* situation. The Calcutta tram-fare movement and the by-elections in Calcutta; the Lucknow students' struggle and the municipal elections in Uttar Pradesh and so on. Even big business organs like *The Eastern Economist* and representatives of big business like S. K. Patil bemoaned the fate of the Congress and were sceptical about its future.

The elections in Travancore-Cochin in early 1954 also showed that possibilities existed of replacing the Congress Government. An alternative Government could not be set up there only because of the betrayal by the PSP leadership and the unscrupulous methods of the Congress. If such an alternative, democratic Government had been established in Travancore-Cochin, there is no doubt that it would have had a tremendous radicalising influence inside the country and would have considerably sharpened the differentiation inside the Congress.

Subsequently certain changes have taken place in the objective situation. The food crisis has been temporarily solved (due mainly to good monsoons). A consolidation

of the Congress has taken place, though of an unstable and partial nature. A new orientation has appeared in the foreign policy and there have been certain measures of reform internally. Besides consolidating the reactionary forces under its banner, the Congress has also launched a strong ideological-political offensive under the slogan of building a Socialistic pattern of society. As a result of all this, the spontaneous disintegration of the mass base of the Congress is no longer taking place at the present time. Big actions and struggles of the people do take place — Kanpur, Amritsar, Darjeeling, the Goa movement, etc.— but they do not produce the same political impact as previously.

Unite Masses for Alternative Policies

As a result of all this, at the present time, it is not possible to unite the masses, it is not possible to raise the mass movement to a higher level under the *central* political slogan of an alternative Government. The Central Committee has pointed out that the main division of the democratic forces today is between the masses who follow the Congress and those who follow the parties of the democratic opposition. The ending of this division is one of the important tasks confronting us.

In the many mass actions that are taking place around the immediate demands of the people, this unity is being forged. These struggles for the partial interests of the masses will continue to be of decisive importance in the coming period as well. But to confine the basis of unity on this alone is not enough. As a matter of fact, the partial struggles themselves are raising questions of policy which agitate the broad masses. The Kanpur strike raised such policy issues as rationalisation, civil liberties, recognition of Trade Union.

The masses following the Congress are not yet convinced of the necessity for the replacement of the present Government but large sections among them do want a change in the internal policy of the Government, they do want a reversal of the reactionary policies of the Govern-

ment which add to their burdens and deny them their rights. The masses do want the adoption of certain concrete progressive measures and policies which will weaken seriously their enemies, which will help to eliminate some of the glaring features of our backward, mal-adjusted economy, which will bring at once industrialisation of the country as well as some improvement in their living standards.

It is because of this that the Central Committee has not only called for a struggle for a reversal of the reactionary internal policies of the Government but has also outlined a series of concrete alternative policies and measures. These alternative policies have been embodied in the pamphlet *Communist Party and Problems of National Reconstruction*. The Central Committee has called upon all patriots, all democrats, irrespective of their party affiliations, to rally round these measures and demand their adoption so that the country may begin to step forward along the path of national advance. It has called upon members of the Congress, the PSP and other parties to fight inside their organisations for the adoption of these policies. Through the struggle for these policies, the unity of the masses will be strengthened and taken to a higher level. Through the struggle for these policies and concrete measures the masses will learn from their own experience and be prepared to take the next step forward.

The question is raised as to why the Central Committee has not put forward the slogan of a coalition Government or at least of a reorganisation of the Government by purging the reactionary pro-imperialist, pro-feudal elements. The basis of this question lies in the erroneous notion that a split or a great measure of differentiation has already taken place inside the Indian bourgeoisie and in the Congress so that reactionary policies can be associated with specific sections and specific leaders. This erroneous notion has already been analysed in the answer to the previous question.

If we are to make any sense to the broad masses, then a call for a coalition Government at the present time is nothing more than a call for an *extension of the pres-*

ent Government which would be *decisively dominated* by the Congress and in which the Communist Party and other democratic parties would be mere appendages and even prisoners. Such a call would confuse the masses, would ideologically disarm them and would blunt the edge of the struggle against the policy of compromise with imperialism and feudalism, of attacking the people, which continues to be the basic feature of the internal policy of the present Government.

It may be argued that we are not proposing a coalition with the present Government but demanding the removal of reactionaries as a pre-condition before such a Government can be formed. This way of posing the issue is sheer self-deception and also deception of the masses.

In the first place, it exaggerates the strength of the radical forces inside the Congress, it exaggerates the possibility which exists at the present moment. This however is not the only or even the main defect of the above argument. It is also self-contradictory.

If inside the Government there has already come into existence a left-wing and a right-wing, if the left-wing is fighting for progressive policies which are being opposed by the right-wing, if despite that opposition the policies of the Government as a whole are becoming progressive — if all this is happening, then the slogan today should be neither reorganisation of the Government nor a united front Government *after the reactionaries have been removed*, but simply a Government of national coalition. For, in such a situation, the Communist Party and the democratic forces, by joining the present Government itself, would be able to strengthen the position of the left-wing and thus accelerate the shift towards progressive policies. The presence of men like Sri T. T. Krishnamachari, Dr. B. C. Roy, etc.— the alleged representatives of “reactionary sections of the bourgeoisie”— should not deter us from giving such a slogan.

The Communist Party does not give such a slogan. It considers that the policies are reactionary not because of the presence of “bad men” in the Government and their “evil influence.” It considers on the contrary that

it is the policies of the dominant leadership itself which are reactionary. Hence the task today is to unite the masses to fight against these policies and for alternative policies.