

WITCH-HUNT IN INDIA

By Himoo Kalani

CALCUTTA -- Sensing that a revolutionary party is going to strike roots among the Indian masses, India's ruling class has declared a virtual war on the left Communists. In a countrywide crack down on the left Communist party of India, started in the small hours of the morning of December 30, the police rounded up hundreds of the party's leaders and active workers. The arrests were made under the emergency powers assumed by the government in October 1962 on the outbreak of border hostilities.

It is highly significant that India's Home Minister has openly linked up these arrests with the adoption of a revolutionary programme by the left Communists at their recently held Calcutta Congress and their repudiation of the earlier Amritsar thesis advocating the parliamentary road to socialism. It clearly indicates that all those who stand for revolutionary doctrines are in for serious trouble henceforward in this country.

The total number of arrests in the first raids was 660. More were scheduled. Most of the left CP's central and state leadership were thus taken into police custody; in some cases even district leaders were arrested. The editorial staff of party organs in various states have been the special targets of attack in view of the growing popularity of the ideas of the left CP among the masses.

Of the party's Political Bureau of nine, elected after the Seventh Congress, all are now in jail, with the conspicuous exceptions of E.M.S.Namboodiripad and Jyoti Basu, the leaders of the "centrist" faction inside the left CPI. Namboodiripad more than once characterized China's military action of October 1962 as an "aggression" against India, while Basu maintained a position of equidistance from Moscow and Peking in the Sino-Soviet conflict and he has always been noted within the party for his parliamentary predilections.

As regards the new Central Committee, at least a half of its membership is now in detention. Political Bureau members who have now been arrested are P. Sundarayya, General Secretary; A.K.Gopalan (Kerala), M.Basavapunniah (Andhra), P.Ramamurthi (Madras), H.S.Surjit (Punjab); B.T.Ranadive (Maharashtra), the brain behind India's left CP and the originator of the famous "Ranadive Period" of 1948-50 in CPI history, and Promode Dasgupta (West Bengal).

Detailed reports, indicating the total number of arrests as well as the important leaders arrested in the different states, are given below:

West Bengal: Arrests were made in this state in three rounds. The first round occurred just on the eve of the party congress in Calcutta, involving the State Secretary Promode Dasgupta and the

entire top leadership of the state party [see World Outlook November 6, 1964]. The second round of arrests took place in the first part of December when eight members, including two editorial staff members of the party's Bengali organ and one member of the West Bengal Legislative Assembly, were taken in. Now the third round of arrests has taken place, involving Mohit Moitra, the editor-in-chief of Desh-Hitaishi, weekly organ of the state party, and M.A.Rasool, the new State Secretary (in place of P. Dasgupta) and vice-president of the peasant front organisation. Total arrests exceed 40.

Maharashtra: Total arrests number 63, of which 28 are in Bombay city alone. Those arrested include Vimal Ranadive, wife of Political Bureau member B.T.Ranadive; D.P.Kashyap, Secretary, Nagpur branch; Shyam Patil, Secretary, Wardah branch; and D.Tukaram Patil of Amaranati; some peasant workers also have been arrested from the villages.

Andhra: Total arrests, 146, including T.Nagi Reddi and Guntar Bapanayya, leader and deputy leader respectively of the left CP group in the state Legislative Assembly. Others include three MP's [Members of Parliament], eight MLA's [Members of the Legislative Assembly], and two MLC's [Members of the Legislative Council]. Also arrested are M.Hanumantha Rao, State Secretary; A.B.K.Prasad and K.Rama Rao, editor and assistant editor respectively of the party organ Jana-Sakthi.

Madras: Eighty-six arrested, including Rama Raj, the State Secretary; K.Ramani, Secretary of the District Committee of Coimbatore, a famous textile industry centre; and L.G.Geeta, secretary of the local textile workers' union.

Kerala: Total arrests 127, including C.H.Kanaran, State Secretary and a member of the Central Committee; A.Raghavan and E. Balanandan, members of the State Secretariat; K.Gouri, an ex-Minister in the Kerala CP ministry; K.P.R.Gopalan and Govindan Kutty, editor and publisher-printer respectively of the party's daily newspaper Deshabhimani.

Punjab: Thirty-two arrested, including Gurcharan Singh Randhwa, secretary of the Bhatinda district committee.

Rajasthan: Seven arrested, including Mohan Punnamia, the State Secretary.

Orissa: Two arrested; Lakshman Pattanaik, the State Secretary, is one of them.

Uttar Pradesh: Total arrests 19, including Sankardayal Tewari, a Central Committee member; T.Rahman, a State Committee member; Mela Ram, a trade-union leader and State Committee member.

Bihar: Central Committee member S.B.Srivastava.

Assam: Thirteen arrested, including Gouri Sankar Bhattacharyya, an ex-MLA and one of the prominent state leaders.

Gujarat: Twenty-six arrested, including Chimanlal Mehta, a state leader.

Tripura (a centrally administered area): Six arrested.

Delhi (a centrally administered area): Nine arrested.

Madhya Pradesh: Three arrested.

Jammu and Kashmir: Two arrested.

Reactions to the Arrests

It is worth noting that the only person to come out openly in support of the government's action at the time of the raids was M.S.Golwalkar, the saffron-robed leader of a fascist current, based on the ideology of Hindu revivalism and run on the model of the Nazi storm troopers.

The Central Secretariat of the right-wing Communist party of India has issued a press statement, expressing its "shock and revulsion" over these "wanton arrests and detention." N.C.Chatterju, an MP and president of the Civil Liberties Association, characterized the arrests as "illegal" and "an abuse of the emergency powers" assumed by the government in the name of defence of the country.

Kanai Pal, a Trotskyist member of the West Bengal Assembly, declared in a press statement that the real aim of these arrests is to behead and suppress the growing movement of the masses against high prices, food scarcity, and the government's callous attitude towards the masses' problems.

He has appealed to "the democratic and progressive forces in the country" to unite "to resist this onslaught as a common danger to their integrity and existence."

The reactions among other parties were not immediately clear cut. The social democrats are now on the verge of a split again; the right-wing PSP [Praja Socialist party] component being expected to acquiesce willy nilly in the government's action. A similar policy is to be expected from the right-wing opposition parties; e.g., the communalist Jan Sangh and the big business mouthpiece, Svatantra party. However, the left wing of the social democracy, led by the eccentric Ram Monohar Lohia, is most likely to take exception to the government's action and to demand the release of the prisoners.

The Government's Alibis

Immediately after the Calcutta Congress of the left CP, a number of bourgeois dailies started circulating, at the none-too-

concealed promptings of the government, hair-raising stories about the alleged plots being hatched by the left CPI, to stage "Telengana-type revolts" all over the country, particularly in the border areas. (This is an allusion to the peasant uprisings in Andhra organised prematurely by the CPI during the Ranadive period in 1948-50). P. Sundarayya, the General Secretary of the left CP, in his press statement of November 22, categorically repudiated these insinuating news reports.

Even so, the reports continued to appear off and on in the papers, which indicated that the government was sedulously cultivating the ground to deliver a decisive blow, at the opportune moment, against the left CP. The pre-Congress arrest of West Bengal leaders of the party, which appeared to many as straws in the wind, now appears fully in its true sinister light.

In his radio speech January 1, G.L.Nanda, India's Home Minister, defended these arrests on the following grounds:

(1) The need of ensuring the country's internal law and order and external security.

(2) The left CP's consistent pro-China stand on a series of issues, including that of China's nuclear test.

(3) Since the Tenali convention, the left CP has shown itself to be an instrument of Chinese design.

(4) The adoption of a revolutionary line at the Calcutta Congress and rejection of the pacifist thesis of 1958.

(5) Attempt to synchronize internal revolution with external aggression; and, with that end in view, to elaborate plans for conducting insurrectionary movements.

(6) Establishment of a network of underground cells which were developing so fast that after two or three months their extermination would have been a more difficult operation.

(7) The government's present action was not the result of a sudden decision, but of long deliberation and watch over the left CP's activities.

Left CP's Warning against Adventurism

It seems reasonable to assume that in the last few weeks the left CP leadership had a premonition of the shape of things to come. As late as December 24, the West Bengal State Committee of the left CP issued a printed circular to all district committees and party units, reminding the party members about the danger of impatience, of loose talk, emphasizing the need of laborious and ceaseless work in the mass front to win the confidence of the major sections of the

toiling people and finally warning them against the government's sinister machinations to unleash repression against the party by building up a false case of insurrectionary plots against them.

The circular cautioned the party members not to fall into the government's trap and to beware of the activities of agents provocateurs who were probably active even within and around the party.

"We must remember that the broadest mobilisation of the masses remains our central task today," the circular concluded.

The Government's Real Worry

It is precisely this realistic, hard-headed and serious political approach of the left CP leadership, rather than their alleged attempt to engage in insurrectionary movements here and now, that is most worrisome to the government. Anybody who is conversant with the developments inside the left CP knows that insurrection is not what is engaging their attention at the moment. The main Political Resolution, adopted at their Seventh Congress, gives an idea of their current thinking. It is a sensible and mature document.

The government is alarmed at the growth of discontent among the masses and the occasional outbursts occurring in various parts of the country, through which these deep-seated discontents now manifest themselves. The ruling regime knows too well their own incapacity to solve a problem of this magnitude. And they are afraid that of all the available parties in India, the left CP is most likely to assume leadership of these movements and that their militant approach will evoke the heartiest response from the masses. The left CP's political resolution devotes considerable attention to these growing movements and the need of the left CP's leadership in them. It is this and not "insurrection" that has made the Congress government nervous and panicky.

However, there is a long-term aspect of this problem as well. Through these arrests, the ruling class seeks to ensure its survival not only for today but for tomorrow as well. Because, they know, between the scattered economic struggles of today and a conscious and mighty political movement of the masses tomorrow there is no sharp line of demarcation and that a countrywide political movement, backed by the toiling classes, can quickly give rise to a prerevolutionary situation which again can easily escalate into a revolutionary upsurge.

What is essential in all this process is the existence of a revolutionary leadership. Construction of such a leadership was long blocked in India by both the traditional left parties here, the SP and the CPI, who followed basically the same reformist line. But the split in the CPI and the formation of the left CP has introduced a completely new element in the Indian political scene.

The left CP has now declared, in its political resolution,

its aim of developing a mass revolutionary party in India. This declaration has struck terror in the hearts of the Indian bourgeoisie which is historically doomed.

The Struggle Ahead

The arrest of a few hundreds or a thousand cadres and leaders of the left CP is not going to solve the problems of India's ruling class. They are still reckoning without the host -- the Indian masses. These arrests may or may not have much effect on the course of movements in the immediate period ahead. The ruling class has already shown its teeth unmistakably; its attempt to shed off the bourgeois-democratic façade, to surrender to the demands of foreign capital, to follow a path of growing intimacy with Anglo-U.S. imperialism in defiance of the peoples' desire -- all these are becoming increasingly clear.

But, despite all these calculations and machinations of the ruling class, the actual course of developments in the country may take an altogether different road. Thus, within nearly seven or eight months of the declaration of "national emergency," the country witnessed a unique strike in Bombay in 1963, led by a nationalist left party, the Socialist party of R.M.Lohia and later on, in the teeth of severe governmental opposition, an All-India strike in September 1964, supported by all left parties. All this demonstrates once again how irrepressible are the mass movements in India as elsewhere in today's world conditions.

Thus, the temporary creation of a cleavage between the masses and their advanced leadership cannot lead to the complete subjugation of the masses or the destruction of their fighting potential. The reserve of fighting power of the Indian masses still remains, by and large, intact, not to speak of being exhausted or destroyed, because the masses have not yet engaged in any serious combat with the ruling class. The real struggles lie still ahead of us, maybe in the not too distant future. And when that day comes, the thousands of militant, revolutionary-minded cadres of the left CP, as well as revolutionary elements working inside other left parties despite the sell-out by their official leadership, will know how to play their due role in that process.

The events of the last two years have taught the left CP cadres much of the art of functioning, under difficult conditions, in a variety of forms, legal as well as extra-legal. All these experiences will now stand them in good stead; it will steel and temper them and equip them fully to assume the leadership of tomorrow's upsurge. The present difficult period should, therefore, be regarded as a dress rehearsal.