

THIRD LECTURE

STRUGGLE AGAINST IMPERIALIST RULE

THE ENSLAVEMENT OF INDIA

(a) India is a country with a glorious history. It produced a unique civilisation and culture. Its monuments, literature and other cultural achievements rank with the highest achievements of man. These achievements were based on economic development and the labour of the toiling millions and bear testimony to the skill and industriousness of countless generations of peasants, artisans, litterateurs and scientists. Right up to the end of the 17th century economically, culturally and socially India was one of the leaders of world civilisation. Foreign travellers from Europe in the 15th and 16th centuries were unanimously of the view that the towns of India and the technological achievements of India were in no way inferior to that of their own countries. Indian goods, especially textiles, were highly valued in European markets. Indeed, it was the wealth of India that attracted the greed of the merchant adventurers of Europe, especially England.

(b) Yet in about 50 years, starting from the battle of Plassey in 1757 to the defeat of the Marathas in 1803, this great country with its huge population was conquered by the British.

How could this happen? It was not at all because physically or mentally the Britishers were superior to our forefathers. Nor was it because England, in absolute terms, was wealthier than India in treasure or superior in firearms. England could conquer India because it had a higher type of social organisation. It was not so much England that conquered India but capitalism that conquered feudalism, albeit a particular kind of feudalism.

By the middle of the 18th century and in the first decade of

19th century England went through its capitalist economic revolution, moving on from the merchant capitalist stage to the industrial capitalist stage. England was in the progressive phase of capitalist development at the very time she was setting foot on Indian soil. Feudalism had been more or less uprooted in the countryside and capitalism had conquered in the fields of the manufactories (pre-factory industrial establishments) as well as trade. It was this new social order, the most progressive history had thrown till that time, that provided the strength in men and material that enabled England to conquer India.

What was the position of our country? Basically speaking and taking the country as a whole, feudalism was in an advanced state of decay (a decay of the village community, special type of feudalism and extreme decadence in the towns), but the new capitalist relations were at a very low level of development. The village community with its petrified caste system, largely isolated and self-sufficient, continued to be the central feature of Indian life. Most of the trade and crafts were confined to the production and exchange of weapons of war and luxury goods for the nobility. The towns were largely administrative centres and did not become independent centres of traders and self-employed artisans and small entrepreneurs. The surplus exacted from the peasantry was increasingly dissipated in minor wars and wild debauchery by the kings, courtiers and other sections of the nobility. The feudal potentates were so busy fighting each other and in wallowing in luxurious living that the intricate system of irrigation, on which Indian agriculture depended, was falling into gradual ruin. The common man was being ground down by ever-increasing taxes, having to lose his life by the lakhs in wars under the banner of one or another feudal ruler, by famines caused by the increasing breakdown of the irrigation system. Breakdown and decay on the one hand, and lack of the growth of commodity production and insufficiently developed private property in land and in industry, which were essential preconditions for the rapid breakthrough of capitalism, produced a social situation which was very vulnerable to foreign invaders.

(c) This generalisation is borne out by the fact that the English conquered India mainly by using Indian troops, by putting one Indian feudal ruler against another, by using treacherous officers and courtiers who were won over by bribes and offers of high positions. Mir Jafar was only typical of the attitude taken up by the feudal princes and princelings. The betrayal of Tipu Sultan by the Nizam and other rulers is yet another example. The English merchant adventurers and officers began by first taking up office under one or another Indian ruler and even accepting their formal overlordship—Clive did this, for example, in Bengal. They also began by first only putting up trading establishments. Then they sought “permission” to have their armed forces to guard these establishments. Then, in the name of “protecting” their trade and establishing proper “law and order” they started on their war of conquest from Bengal, Madras and Bombay. The technique of using fictitiously independent rulers, of using trade to gain a foothold from which complete conquest would be attempted, is as old as colonialism itself.

This sad historical experience has important lessons to convey. The most important of these is that a country which is socially backward and whose destiny is in the hands of a class which is obviously historically obsolete and fully decadent is an easy prey for greedy capitalists and colonialists. Another important lesson is that the colonialists’ usual technique is first to burrow within, use the advantages of their superior economy and then subvert the independence at an appropriate moment by all possible and vilest means.

THE LOOT OF INDIA AND BRITISH RULE

a) From 1757 to 1947 can be said to be the period of the colonial enslavement of India. It is the saddest and the most degrading period of Indian history. At the same time, as will be shown later, it was a period of the magnificent struggle of the Indian people to regain their freedom and win a new society.

At this stage, it is necessary to emphasise that the British conquest of India was of a qualitatively different character

from previous invasions. Jana Sangh propagandists as well as reactionary Muslim communalists alike preach that India had been conquered by the Muslims and that India has been under "foreign" rule from the time of the Khaljis and Tughluqs, that the Mughol emperors were only the precursors of the British Viceroy. The Jana Sangh does this propaganda in order to whip up hatred against the Muslims and the Muslim reactionary communalists preach this in order to breed contempt and a sense of aloofness on the part of Muslims.

But this is a total distortion of history. Nations are a historical product, they arise only at a certain stage of history, at the stage of the rise and development of capitalism which creates a national market. Just at the time when the British invaders appeared on the Indian scene, i.e. by about the beginning of the 16th century, the first feeble shoots of Indian capitalism had begun to sprout and the Indian nation was in the pangs of birth. All had contributed to the making of this nation—all the different nationalities, all the different religions. Akbar as much as Ashoka was part of this heritage of these long, long years of preparation. The Indian nation had not been formed at the time of the so-called Muslim invasions. If we are to talk as the Jana Sangh does, then the Aryans, from whom the makers of the Vedas, Mahabharata and Ramayana sprang, were also "invaders" of India.

Another point to be noted is that while the Aryans, the Bactrians, the Afghans and the Mongols became fully part of India and made it their home, helped to make India India, the British always remained alien rulers who never regarded India as their own country. It is true that once class society appeared in India, there were exploiters and exploited in India, rich and poor. This has been the fate of our country for thousands of years. But the nature of British exploitation was qualitatively different. It was imperialist exploitation and the literal bleeding of the wealth of India and the draining away of its resources for the benefit of the monopolists and capitalists in Britain. It is literally true to say that the ruin and impoverishment of India was the basis on which the growth of industrial capitalism and later full-fledged monopoly capitalism took place in Britain.

Three Phases

b) In the *first phase* (up to 1813), the British engaged in colossal direct plunder in the name of trade. They simply forcibly compelled the Indians to buy what they brought and to part with what they wanted. They arbitrarily decided the prices at which they would sell their goods as also the prices at which they would buy goods from the Indians. There was no question of any supply or demand neatly balancing each other. They next went in for direct robbery of the people as well as the Indian rulers by taking over the revenue department of the administration. They simply looted all the taxes that the people were paying and kept on levying more. The principle on which they operated was—to draw wealth out of India without sending back anything in return. Land revenue was raised to reckless heights, leading to the total ruin of the main productive force of the then Indian society, i.e. the Indian peasant. Here are some figures.

In 1764-65 in Bengal (the last year of direct Indian rule) the land revenue amounted to £817,000. The British raised it in 1765-66 to £1,470,000; then to £2,341,000 in 1771-72; it was pushed up to £2,818,000 by 1775-76 and again to £3,400,000 in 1793 under the famous Permanent Settlement of Cornwallis.

This terrible exploitation led to the most devastating famines and resulted in a situation where the British Governor-General himself declared in 1789 that one-third of the territory under British rule "is now a jungle inhabited only by wild beasts."

The *second phase* of the plunder of India by the British was based on industrial capitalism having won decisive sway in that country. It is a tragedy of history that the spoliation of India provided one of the main sources of British industrialisation. In his great work: *Capital*, Vol. I, Marx had drawn attention to the fact that one of the chief sources of the original and primitive accumulation of capital was precisely colonial plunder. He wrote that "if money, according to Angier, 'comes into the world with a congenital bloodstain in one cheek', capital comes dripping from head to foot, from every pore, with blood and dirt." It was after the victory of Plassey in 1757 that treasure

began to flow from India to Britain and it was a decade after this that the Industrial Revolution in Britain developed apace, making that country for almost a century "the workshop of the world".

Once the Industrial Revolution had been accomplished what the British colonialists needed was the decisive opening up of the Indian market and the total destruction of whatever remained of Indian handicrafts industry. In the middle of the 19th century, huge duties were placed on the import of Indian textiles and woollens to Britain (ranging from 10 to 30 per cent), while British textiles imported into India paid very light duties (between 2 to 3 per cent). Along with this preferential treatment went the decisive advantage that British capitalism had entered the stage of machine production in factories.

Here we have a striking illustration of the Marxist law that the development of the instruments of production and other productive forces plays a decisive role in the development of society. India's artisan textile manufacturers just went under in the unequal struggle. Between 1814-35, British cotton manufactures exported to India rose from one million yards to over 51 million yards while the export of Indian cotton goods to Britain fell from 1.25 million pieces to 63,000 pieces in 1844. Whole towns like Dacca and Surat were rendered desolate.

The metal trades were almost completely wiped out. Millions of ruined artisans lost their old jobs but found no new profession. The village community was destroyed but with no new superior productive system put in its place. The Indian economy and the Indian people were literally bled to death. From 1825 to 1900 official estimates put the number of famine deaths at over 20.5 million.

It was about this phase of British rule that Karl Marx wrote "All the civil wars, invasions, revolutions, conquests, famines, strangely complex, rapid and destructive as their successive action in Hindustan may appear, did not go deeper than its surface. England has broken down the whole framework of Indian society, without any symptoms of reconstruction yet appearing. This loss of his old world, with no gain of a new one, imparts a particular kind of melancholy to the present

misery of the Hindoo, and separates Hindustan, ruled by Britain, from all its ancient traditions and from the whole of its past history."

From the beginning of the 20th century new forms of exploitation were added to the old. In addition to the old tribute which increased from £4.3 million in 1851-55 to £59.2 million in 1935-36 and in addition to the profits on trade which came to about £12 million a year in 1913-14, there was £40 million a year earned on British capital investments in India which in 1914 were estimated to be about £500 million. This was the new feature of exploitation, the opening of a new source of loot as a result of the so-called export of capital which Lenin characterised as one of the distinguishing features of the imperialist stage of capitalism.

Even though Britain's share in the total trade of India was diminishing right through the 1920s to the 1940s, British capital investment was going up reaching about £1,000 million in 1933. The annual drain from India to Britain in the modern period, in the period of finance-capital exploitation came to £150 million which is equal to the total tribute drained away in the previous periods. The British exploitation of India became increasingly intense.

Feudalism Encouraged

c) On top of these different types of loot, the British colonialists grievously damaged India in two other ways. One was the imposition of and protection to the feudal vested interests in the countryside and the consequent total stagnation and deterioration of Indian agriculture. The British colonialists destroyed the productive forces of Indian agriculture and established a type of production relations in the countryside which obstructed any possibility of the growth of Indian agriculture. The irrigation system which had been one of the essential features of the Indian village community was completely destroyed. Not the slightest attempt was made to introduce the modern techniques of agricultural production. Unbearable burden of land revenue was placed on a deteriorating rural

economy rising from £4.2 million in 1800-1 to £20 million in 1911 and to £23.9 million in 1936-37.

In addition to this burden was added the counter-revolution effected in the land system by the British conquest. Fixed money payments, the creation of a class of zamindars and other types of landlords, the depriving of the ordinary peasant of all his traditional rights in the land and the total destruction of the village community resulted in that monstrous product which we know as Indian feudalism. The British rulers quite openly declared that it was necessary to create "a vast body of rich landed proprietors deeply interested in the continuance of the British dominion" (Lord Bentinck, Governor-General of India in 1829). The feudal landowners, from the Nizam of Hyderabad downwards, unceasingly declared their loyalty to the foreign rulers. The Nizam, for example, gloried in the title of the "Most Faithful Ally of the King Emperor". Indian feudalism was based on monopoly ownership of land on the one hand and the expropriation of the actual tillers from the land on the other, reducing them to tenants without rights and to a semiserf status. Some estimates made in the 1920s showed that 93 per cent of the peasants had holdings of less than 5 acres. Another estimate is that noncultivating landlords formed about 4 per cent of the population, the tenants and small-owners about 65 per cent and the agricultural labourers about 33 per cent. It was the 4 per cent of the rural population who concentrated in their hands all the land, other means of production and the entire wealth of the village.

On top of feudal exploitation by the landlord, the peasants groaned under the crushing semifeudal burden of debt. The peasant families, in many instances, lived in a condition of debt-slavery for generations together—the Indian peasant is born in debt, lives in debt and dies leaving debts, was not a flight of fancy but the stark truth. Tremendously high rates of interest, seizure of crops, animals and the miserable small patches of owned land from the peasant by the moneylender were characteristic features of the Indian village under British rule. In 1921 the agricultural debt was estimated to be of the order of £400 million. It had risen to £1,350 million in 1937.

Nor was it a matter of economic exploitation alone. The peasants had absolutely no political rights and civil liberties. The landlords, backed by the British imperialist state, were the despotic rulers of the village. They did not allow the peasants to assert themselves in any way, imposed all sorts of petty personal exactions, treated the peasants like animals. Most of the impoverished peasants belonged to the lower castes and had to suffer all the iniquities of caste discrimination.

It should be noted that the British imperialists for the very sake of the preservation and extension of their capitalist profits, imposed and protected feudalism over Indian countryside and pushed our people down the historical ladder of social evolution. As a result of protecting thoroughly outmoded and decadent feudal and semifeudal relations of production, the British imperialists did not allow the growth of the productive forces of our nation. Above all, they physically decimated the main productive force of India—the Indian toiler, especially the peasant.

Agricultural production in the last 50 years of British rule, it is estimated, did not rise at all, though the population did increase. Semistarvation conditions were a permanent feature of the Indian scene. There were also periodic eruptions like the 1943 Bengal famine, when some 15 lakhs of people perished in a few months from hunger and disease.

Industrial Backwardness

d) Similar was the position on the industrial front. The British imperialists, as has been mentioned earlier, totally destroyed whatever handicrafts and manufactories of artisans that existed. Their next step was, through various kinds of zamindari enactments, to turn the money-capital in the hands of the Indian merchants and moneylenders away from industry and into land. In an unconcealed manner, they set their entire strength against any attempt to build industries in India. For their profits, they had built some railways, linking the raw material producing rural areas with the ports. And with railways, there came some minimum amount of growth of a few industries.

The stark fact was that up to 1914 the number of industrial workers under the Factories Act was only 951,000.

During the First World War there was a certain change. This was due to the needs of the war, the compulsions of economic competition with other imperialists and the desire to secure some cooperation from the Indian capitalists. The Indian capitalists also had secured considerable money-capital from trade, usury and acting simultaneously in opposition against and cooperation with the British imperialists, began to establish some industries, especially in the field of textiles. Somewhat of an exception was the firm of the Tatas who set up the first steel plant in India at Jamshedpur in the teeth of British opposition.

But right up to the Second World War (1939-45) the Indian capitalist class was weaker, by far, than its British counterpart. In the sphere of industries, banking, foreign trade, as well as wholesale internal trade, the British imperialists were the topdogs. Not merely did they hold a dominant position but they prevented the Indian capitalists from having free access to foreign markets as well as sources of machinery and industrial raw materials. They themselves concentrated on plantation, mines and some light industries.

As a result, right at the time when British rule ended, India was producing less than one million tonnes of steel, had no heavy engineering industries, basic chemical factories, etc. From pins to railway engines everything had to be imported, mainly from Britain. India lacked even the basic elements of an industrial structure. And with the poverty of the people, as well as the iron grip of the feudalists in the villages, the market for industrial and consumption goods was extremely restricted.

Hence, out of their own class interests, out of a desire for expansion of their base and their profits, the Indian capitalist class found itself opposed to British imperialism. At the same time, the Indian capitalists, as exploiters, feared the workers and other toilers. They were linked with feudal and semi-feudal interests in the villages through landownership, usury and trade. They also had connections with the imperialists through contracts, credits, trade, etc. Thus it was the economic

position of the Indian capitalists which gave them a dual character politically as well.

Another specific feature of the Indian capitalist class which distinguished it from the capitalists of other colonial and semi-colonial countries, was that from the 1940s onwards, it began to develop monopoly homes and oligarchic syndicates of its own. Tatas, Birlas, Jains, Singhanias, Mafatlals, etc. had already developed into monopoly homes owning a wide range of industries, banks and trading institutions. They began acquiring many of the reactionary parasitic features of the monopoly finance capitalists of the imperialist countries without, at the same time, having an independent industrial base. These Indian monopolists, or big bourgeoisie, also multiplied their links with the British imperialists in the economic sphere during World War II. Indo-British joint enterprises began springing up. All types of partnerships were set up. The Indian monopolists also started buying up British firms, plantations and mines. Some initial links were also established with the US imperialists. The Indian big bourgeoisie began to entertain plans of large-scale capitalist development in India in collaboration with the imperialists as evidenced by the Tata-Birla Plan of 1946.

Social Throwback

e) It is essential to remember that British rule in India was not only a matter of economic exploitation and loot. It was not only a question of retarding the economic growth of our country and throwing it back on the historical scale. British rule saw the spiritual and cultural impoverishment of the people. At the time the British were driven out of the country, some 90 per cent of the Indian people were illiterate. The number of students in universities and higher educational institutions annually was about 115,000; the total number of graduates in engineering, agriculture and commerce was less than 1,000 per year; the death rate in India was 27 per thousand and infant mortality about 255 per thousand; the total number of medical graduates was less than 700 per year; the average life expectancy was 27 years. All Indian languages were undeveloped as they were not allowed to be used for purposes of

education even in the secondary schools, to say nothing of colleges. In our own country, we, Indians, were subject to insult and humiliation for the simple and sole reason that we were Indians. India suffered national indignity.

The British imperialists prevented the full, harmonious growth of the different Indian nationalities. They cut up the various Indian nationalities into different states. They buttressed caste, superstition and all the worst feudal obscurantist practices. They deliberately worked up prejudice based on religion and instigated ghastly Hindu-Muslim riots.

Under British imperialism, the state was an imperialist-bureaucratic one. There was no adult suffrage. Even the assemblies and councils elected on a limited franchise had no powers and could not control the executive and administration. The Viceroy and governors were supreme. Civil liberties were practically nonexistent. Whenever the people went into action on any issue, they had to face arrests, lathis and bullets. Newspapers of a patriotic nature had often to pay heavy fines, had their presses and offices sealed and so on. The Communist Party was illegal throughout British rule, except for a few years. The Congress was often placed under ban, to say nothing of revolutionary parties and groups. All meaningful political activity had to be carried out under the constant threat of illegality.

Under British rule India was a classic colonial country—economically ruined, politically unfree and nationally humiliated.

INDIA'S FIGHT FOR FREEDOM

(a) The Indian People never reconciled themselves to imperialist rule. They rose up in defiance and struggle right from the start. It is through adopting a myriad forms of struggle, peaceful and armed, that the Indian people won through to freedom. Freedom did not come as a gift from the British nor did it result from some Gandhian "maya" which won the hearts of the British. It was through mass revolutionary struggle, sweeping mass revolutionary movements repeated again and again on an ever-increasing scale and with rising militancy that finally compelled the British to withdraw.

It is wrong to make out that it was the Congress alone which

won freedom for our country. Our freedom movement began much earlier than the Congress which was founded only in 1885. And there were other streams of the freedom movement—the terrorists, the socialists and the communists—apart from the Congress, who played a notable role. For example, it was the communists who in 1921 first raised the demand for complete independence, which the Congress at first rejected and accepted only after 8 long years. The methods of general strike of workers was also the contribution of the CPI, as was the organisation of trade unions, kisan sabhas and students' unions. The galvanising slogan "Inquilab Zindabad!" was given to the freedom movement, not by the Congress, but by the great martyr and terrorist Bhagat Singh.

It is also quite wrong to make out that India won freedom solely through nonviolent struggle. Certainly, India's path to freedom had its own specific features and threw up specific types of struggle like hunger strike, satyagraha, hartal and so on. Certainly sweeping mass revolutionary movements and struggles made up the major part of our freedom struggle. The Indian people's freedom fight has numerous examples of heroic armed actions, e.g. 1857 revolt, the terrorist groups in 1905 from the Chaphekar brothers to Aurobindo Ghose, Bhagat Singh and his party, the Chittagong armoury raiders, the 1942 struggle in UP, Bihar, Eastern UP and Maharashtra, the INA of Netaji and the naval mutiny of 1946.

The Indian freedom movement was a mass revolutionary movement which used a multitude of forms of struggle.

Stages of Battle

(b) Early resistance to British rule took forms that were appropriate for the time, i.e. they were sporadic, often spontaneous peasant outbursts. Their ideological form was often religious, reflecting the popular consciousness of the time. For example, the so-called dacoits of Bengal, the Sanyasis, the thugs and Pindaris. Then there was the Wahabi movement of the late 18th century which organised a holy war against the foreign rulers. There were peasant uprisings in Bengal and Bihar inspired by the Wahabis. Many tribal revolts broke out in

different parts of India, the Santhal outbreak being one of the most notable.

At the same time, there were courageous social reformers who wished to fight the feudal evils and to bring modern knowledge and ideas to the Indian people. Though their outlook was vitiated by illusions about the British rulers, they deserve to be remembered with pride as builders of modern Indian consciousness. The most outstanding among them was Raja Ram Mohan Roy.

The next important event in the freedom struggle was the 1857 revolt. It was the first all-India organised rebellion against the British imperialists. It was a popular armed uprising, mainly of the ruined peasantry, spearheaded and led by the sepoys who were peasants in uniform. The 1857 revolt had feudal elements in the leadership but there were also what can be called plebeian and intellectual leaders like Bakht Khan, Ahmedullah. The aim of the revolt was to overthrow foreign rule and reestablish Indian independence. It united Hindus and Muslims. It established national unity stretching from feudal patriots like the Rani of Jhansi to the simple, poor artisans and soldiers. It threw up original forms of organisation like the Chapati couriers and the Court of Mutineers. It failed because of the superiority of British military force; the treachery of the bulk of the big feudal rulers like the Nizam, the various Maharajahs of Rajasthan and Punjab; the disunity of the heterogeneous leadership, the lack of fully coordinated all-India action; the absence of a thought-out comprehensive programme.

Next phase—the intellectual critique of imperialism and the presenting of petitions, etc. This coincides with the formation of the Congress in 1885. Dadabhai Nauroji, Gokhale, Ranade and others were the outstanding representatives.

Then—the mass movement against the partition of Bengal in 1905. The lower middle class of the towns come decisively into the movement. The forms of boycott, picketing, of defiance of laws are adopted. Terrorists are active in Bengal, Maharashtra and Punjab. Tremendous public campaigns of an all-India character are launched. Patriotic journals and dailies flourish. The swadeshi movement takes up the programme of

national regeneration through industrialisation. Magnificent patriotic songs are composed by Rabindranath Tagore who joins the masses in the streets, outstanding leaders arise like Tilak, Bipin Chandra Pal and Lala Lajpat Rai. "Swarajya is our birthright and we shall have it"—thundered Tilak and electrified the whole country. There are some unhealthy aspects also like the stress on revivalism and the use of religious forms which aided the imperialist game of dividing Hindus and Muslims.

The next advance is made in the 1920s with the noncooperation movement led by Gandhiji. It is Gandhiji who gives the ringing call—"This satanic power which cannot be mended, must be ended." He calls for a total noncooperation with the imperialist rulers and for an identification with the poverty-stricken people (*Daridra-narayana*), especially the peasantry. He tries to forge Hindu-Muslim unity in the shape of the Khilafat Committee. A no-tax campaign develops in Midnapore in West Bengal; the Sikh peasants rise at Nankana Sahib; the great Assam-Bengal railway strike takes place; the Moplah rebellion occurs in Malabar; all over India students leave their classes; thousands upon thousands begin the trek to jail; the whole nation is stirred as never before. Just then in 1922 only because of the burning of some police constables at Chauri Chaura, who had repeatedly fired on the peasant masses of the locality, Gandhiji calls off the movement. This becomes a typical technique used with amazing skill by Gandhiji and the leadership of the National Congress. A mass movement of national unity and countrywide in scope is built up and the struggle is launched against imperialism. But when it looks as if the masses are getting out of control, when they are taking to higher and more militant forms of struggle, when they are acting on more radical and democratic demands, then the brakes are applied; on some pretext the movement is called off and a compromise is struck with the imperialists. This exactly corresponds to the position of the national bourgeoisie and its dual character. Struggle against imperialism and the rousing of the masses with that object in view goes hand-in-hand with the tendency to compromise with imperialism, as well as a bias against militant mass struggles.

By the time of the next phase of the mass anti-imperialist struggle (1930-33) certain important developments had taken place. There had taken place a definite turn to the left in sections of the national movement, those sections who were disillusioned by the compromising character of Gandhism.

One group of radical-minded youth took again to the path of terrorism. But the difference was that the ideas of socialism had spread among them and also that they thought in terms of eventually building up an army of revolution. But in the interval, they resorted to the characteristic terroristic actions of bomb throwing, eliminating hated individuals and wanting to galvanise the masses by the heroic deeds of a band of devoted young. The Chittagong Armoury Raiders led by Surya Sen and the Hindustan Socialist Republican Army led by Bhagat Singh and Jatın Das were outstanding figures here. Many of the participants in these groups later joined the CPI. Our late General Secretary, Comrade Ajoy Ghosh, is an outstanding example. The daring, self-sacrifice and burning patriotism of these young men are an inspiration to all freedom fighters.

In the same period another group of young patriots took to another path, i.e. the path of building up a communist party. The CPI was founded in Kanpur in 1925. It was founded by ardent, radical nationalists who were not only dissatisfied with the methods of Gandhism but who had been inspired by and learnt from the Great October Revolution of 1917. They had embraced the teachings of Marxism-Leninism. Prominent among them were S. A. Dange, Muzaffar Ahmad, S. V. Ghate, Singaravelu Chettiar and others. The CPI had a clear-cut programme and demanded that the whole British imperialist system should be overthrown.

It was also quite clear that, within the anti-imperialist struggle, the class struggles of the workers and the toiling peasants must be unleashed. CPI stood for radical agrarian reforms and the total uprooting of feudalism. It worked for the building up of the mass organisations of the workers, peasants and students. It worked for the unleashing of revolutionary mass struggles and mass revolutionary movements culminating in a nationwide armed uprising against and overthrow of

British imperialism.

The British imperialists not only came down heavily against the terrorist groups but also against the communists. The famous Meerut Conspiracy Case which brought together almost all the leading communists and the Lahore Conspiracy Case involving Bhagat Singh and his colleagues were practically simultaneous events.

Left trends and ideas also influenced a section of the congress leadership at this time. Prominent among these were Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhas Bose, Jaya Prakash Narayan and Acharya Narendra Deva. They, too, stood for the ideal of complete independence, were inspired by the Soviet Union and stood for a socialist programme. But they believed that the Congress was a fit vehicle for all these ideals to be realised and they did neither believe in the building of the independent mass organisations of the workers and peasants nor in unleashing their struggles. They also did not believe in breaking from Gandhiji and the rightwing leaders, though Subhas Bose changed his views on these points after 1939.

The people were on the move. In 1930, the first Independence Pledge was taken and the Civil Disobedience Movement commenced. While Gandhiji went on his celebrated March to Dandi, massive demonstrations shook the whole country. Midnapore district freed itself for some months from British rule. The raid on the armoury at Chittagong took place. Peshawar drove out the British authority for ten days. The working class took power for some days in Sholapur, the high point of a wave of hartals and mass strikes all over India. In Peshawar a battalion of the Garhwali soldiers refused to fire on the patriotic demonstrators. The movement assumed the form of a no-rent campaign in many areas, particularly in the Uttar Pradesh.

Just at this moment, once again, the national bourgeois leadership, acting through Gandhiji, struck a compromise with imperialism through the notorious Gandhi-Irwin Pact. Once again the mass revolutionary movement was betrayed out of the craven fear that it might go beyond the bounds set for it by the congress leadership.

It should be noted here that every time this kind of letting

down of the popular upsurge took place, the frustrated mood of the masses could easily be utilised by the British imperialists and the communal politicians. Serious communal riots broke out in the 1930s and the poisonous seeds which brought the horrible harvest of partition were sown at this time. Indeed, one of the most glaring failures of the national leadership was its inability to solve the Hindu-Muslim problem and to weld Hindu-Muslim unity.

After the ebbing of the high-tide of the mass revolutionary movement from about 1933, there was again a revival from 1936 onwards. The Congress started issuing radical slogans and programmes through the Presidential Addresses of Nehru and Subhas Bose and the appointment of a National Planning Committee. The Second World War was approaching and the crisis of the entire world imperialist system was deepening. In 1939 anti-war strikes and demonstrations broke out and these were led by the CPI. The Congress started its individual satyagraha campaign. Then, as the war burst and the British imperialists were being mercilessly beaten by the German and the Japanese imperialists and the living conditions of the people sharply deteriorated, a new wave of unrest gripped the nation.

At the same time, there was a factor which complicated the situation and this was the Nazi aggression against the Soviet Union in 1941, coming on top of the Japanese invasion of China. All anti-imperialists and progressives in India had been thrilled by the October Revolution, the stupendous feats of socialist construction in the Soviet Union. They saw in the Soviet Union a friend and ally, a fellow anti-imperialist and the builder of a new, just social order of equality. Jawaharlal Nehru had given expression to these sentiments, so had Bhagat Singh, Subhas Bose and Rabindranath Tagore. China's war against the Japanese, particularly the heroic role of the Chinese communists based on Yen-an, had also attracted the admiration of patriotic India. The Congress had despatched a medical mission to China, to the liberated areas which had Yen-an as its capital, as a token of the solidarity of the Indian people for the Chinese people. It was in these years especially that a good tradition

of anti-imperialist international solidarity was being built in the national movement as a whole.

Thus, on the one hand, the people wanted to go into another round of struggle against British imperialism and, on the other, the war had assumed the character of an antifascist liberation war, taking the world as a whole.

The CPI correctly pointed out that the perspective of the national struggle had changed. The point was to correctly link up the anti-imperialist struggle in India with the worldwide battle against fascism. The point was to forge national unity, declare support to the antifascist war and demand a national government for national defence. The dominant leadership of the Congress, however, wanted to use the threat of a mass struggle to win very far-reaching concessions from the British imperialists or, if the threat did not work, then to go in for a short and swift struggle which would make the British quit. When the Quit India resolution was passed in August 1942 and when the British imperialists resorted to leonine violence, the people hit back on a scale and in a way that was unprecedented. Regular armed uprisings and seizure of power and setting up of independent governments took place in different parts of India—Midnapore, Ballia, Satara. In other parts, the masses took part in tremendous strikes, demonstrations, no-tax campaigns and the like. The tragedy was that this tremendous spontaneous militant national upheaval had no leadership, no coordinated, organised vanguard.

Unfortunately, the CPI took the theoretically and tactically wrong approach of keeping away from the 1942 struggle. It should be noted, however, that the Congress leadership cannot legitimately claim credit for the 1942 struggle as it did nothing to properly organise it. And another significant fact is that many of the heroes of the 1942 struggle have joined the CPI.

Transfer of Power

When the Second World War ended in 1945, the imperialist system was flung into a tremendous crisis. Everywhere in the colonial world there was a mass revolutionary upsurge for freedom and against the efforts of the imperialists to reestablish

their domination. The whole of South-East Asia was a scene of unprecedented turmoil. China was on the brink of its third revolutionary civil war which in 1949 led to the victory of its historic revolution.

In India, too, the mass revolutionary movement erupted in 1945 and continued for over two years. The tremendous demonstrations, strikes, hartals and open breaking of the law following the decision to try the INA soldiers was the herald of the revolutionary storm. The high point was reached with the strikes of policemen, the revolt of the soldiers and airforcemen and above all, the great RIN mutiny. The armed forces and the entire military system of British imperialism had obviously started cracking. And this came at a time and as an integral part of the mass national revolutionary upheaval.

Imperialism saw the writing on the wall and knew that there was a real danger of its being completely, root and branch, swept away by the revolutionary storm. The national bourgeois leadership also took alarm. Gandhiji cried "Red ruin!" and Sardar Patel called upon the naval ratings to surrender, while Nehru vacillated.

Both the imperialists and the leadership of the National Congress were moving to a compromise through tortuous negotiations. The National Congress leadership simultaneously used the mass revolutionary upsurge and sought to curb it, to keep it within limits, to control it. They were especially alarmed at the fact that the RIN mutineers had also run up the Red Flag on their mastheads, that there was active fraternisation between the sailors in revolt and the workers and other toilers, especially of Bombay. They were also upset by the tremendous sweep of the mass movement for the abolition of princely states which in many places—Punnapra-Vayalar, Kashmir and later Telengana—reached the level of regular people's armed war led by the communists. At the same time, they knew that without this mass upsurge there was no hope of getting the imperialists to quit.

The people of India were in a thoroughly revolutionary mood and displaying marvels of heroism. They wanted to sweep away the whole wretched system of imperialist exploitation and end

the feudal grip. They wanted to build a new, radical and democratic India. But they still had illusions about the congress leadership and there was no alternative leadership whom they could follow with confidence. The CPI, for reasons to be outlined below, could not fulfil the expectations of the people and emerge as their revolutionary leader.

The imperialists wanted, above all, to disrupt the mass revolutionary upsurge, utilise the fears and contradictions of the national leadership and make Indian independence formal. They launched their counteroffensive through the medium of communal holocausts. In 1946-47 India witnessed communal riots the like of which history has seldom witnessed. Millions of Hindus and Muslims were butchered. Many more were uprooted from their homes. The country was partitioned and a trail of bitterness was laid between the two independent states of India and Pakistan and between the two major communities of the subcontinent.

Thanks to the compromising attitude of the national leadership, while independence was won, the imperialist system and feudal exploitation were not ended. Imperialist capital remained. The administrative system set up by imperialism remained intact. The preconditions for ending the backward state of the economy and society were not created. The national-democratic revolution remained unfinished.

At the same time, it should be emphasised that there is a world of difference between stating that the revolution is unfinished and saying that independence is false and fake. The imperialist strategy to give only formal independence to India was thwarted by the sweep of the revolutionary mass movement in the country and by the sweeping forward of the world anti-imperialist struggle, headed by the Soviet Union and other socialist states, which eventually brought about the collapse of colonialism within a decade. The imperialist strategy was also thwarted by the fact that the representatives of the Indian capitalist class, whose representatives were in the leadership of the national movement, were determined to consolidate their class positions on the basis of winning state power. They compromised with imperialism precisely to attain this objective.

The winning of national independence by India on 15 August 1947 opened a new epoch in the history of our people. It was a historic event, not only for our own people but for all mankind. It meant that one stage of the Indian revolution was over. Now the task presents itself of completing the national-democratic revolution and moving on to make the transition to socialism.

Role of CPI

(c) At this stage, the question has to be answered as to why in India the freedom struggle remained in the hands of the Indian capitalist class, at least from 1885 onwards. It is quite clear that because of the dual character of the leadership while freedom was won, the national-democratic revolution remained unfinished. But how was it that despite its dual character, despite its continuous combination of compromise with struggle, the Indian capitalist class could not be dislodged from the honourable position of leadership of the nation? How is it that the working class and its party could not take over the leadership at a certain stage?

There are, of course, objective reasons for this. The Indian capitalist class, relatively speaking, was far stronger, had a firm industrial base, had roots in the villages and so on, than the capitalist class of any other colony or semicolony. It had a longer period of historical existence (one must take into account its preindustrial history) and more historical experience than the comparatively younger Indian working class which, moreover, had not fully become a class in itself, let alone a class for itself.

But the subjective reasons must not be minimised on any account. It is a fact, which nobody can deny, that the CPI, as the political vanguard of the Indian working class, has a most glorious history of sacrifice and struggle. Its leaders and members bear the scars of many a bitter battle against imperialism. The CPI, as has been mentioned above, was the first to advance the demand for complete independence and to advance a comprehensive programme of a thorough-going anti-imperialist and

antifeudal nature. It also built up class organisations of the workers and peasants.

But it has also to be admitted that the CPI could not properly work out the strategy and tactics of the anti-imperialist and antifeudal Indian revolution. As Comrade G. Adhikari has correctly put it: "In the preindependence period, the main mistake from which our party suffered most was the inadequate understanding of the specific and main task which faced us, viz. the national-liberation revolution; incorrect understanding and approach towards the national movement and its organ, the National Congress, that developed under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi; incorrect understanding and inadequate concrete study of the role of the Indian national bourgeoisie in the revolution."

This was particularly true of the 1930 Civil Disobedience Movement led by Gandhiji. The CPI opposed the movement in the name of its not being revolutionary. The CPI overlooked the vast masses that had been set in motion and got isolated from the national movement as a whole. It should be remembered that this led to a split in the trade-union movement itself. This sectarian error was compounded by attacking the left-nationalist leadership of Nehru and Subhas Bose and the radical groups orientating towards socialism as "a left manoeuvre of the bourgeoisie" and still more dangerous than Gandhi.

Again in 1942, at the time of the Quit India upsurge, the CPI stood aloof from and opposed the mass revolutionary movement. This wrong stand, as Comrade Adhikari points out, "arose from our dogmatic understanding of proletarian internationalism and sectarian attitude towards the national movement."

In the revolutionary struggle against imperialism, two contradictions are involved. The first contradiction, which is the main and basic one, is between imperialism, feudalism, on the one hand, and the entire people, including the national bourgeoisie, on the other. The other secondary contradiction, which must not be overlooked, but which must also not be given the primary position, is that between the vacillating national bourgeoisie and the revolutionary forces of the people.

The CPI, like many other CPs, did neither correctly understand these two contradictions, nor the relationship between them.

The struggle for leadership in the anti-imperialist revolution was also consequently wrongly understood. The struggle for leadership is the struggle to build the anti-imperialist national front, uniting with the national bourgeoisie, while exposing and struggling against its compromises, developing antifeudal struggles as part of the national revolution, building the worker-peasant alliance and thus overcoming the vacillations of the national bourgeoisie. On the contrary, the CPI took the stand that the leadership of the national revolution could be won and the revolution itself could properly develop when the national bourgeoisie had been discredited and had gone over to the camp of imperialism. Consequently, not imperialism but the national bourgeoisie became the main target of attack. And the attitude to any struggle against imperialism led by the national bourgeoisie was to expose it, denounce it and oppose it.

The important lesson to be drawn from this experience is that in order to properly guide the revolutionary movement and in order to be accepted by the revolutionary masses as their leader, the CPI must concretely study the stage of the revolution, pick out the main contradiction and the secondary ones and strike the main blow at the main enemy of the revolution and not at a vacillating ally.