

III. SECOND PHASE OF THE WAR, PEOPLE'S WAR

IN 1941 TWO OF THE BIGGEST AND MOST DECISIVE events of the war took place—Hitler's attack on the Soviet Union (June 1941) and Japan's entry into the war (December 1941).

Hitler's aggression against the USSR sealed his ultimate doom and immediately upset the balance of forces in the Allied camp, the isolation of the Soviet was replaced by the Anglo-Soviet and the American-Soviet alliance.

Japanese aggression threatened the whole East with Fascist enslavement replacing the existing imperialist domination.

Both events together meant that both India's western and eastern frontiers were in danger. War came to our door. The Fascist-Imperialists were no more swallowing Europe or China, our allies, but now meant to carry out their old plan to swallow us. Their designs on India as revealed in *Mein Kampf* and the Tanaka document were not the idle dreams of mad men but had actually materialised in the world fascist military strategy of closing their blood-stained claws over the bodies of our own people, as the Eastern and Western pincers in their battle for India.

These two historic events did signify obviously a mighty change in the character, and deepened our concern for the outcome of the war. They made us think, they made everyone think afresh his attitude to the war.

Among the progressive peoples of Britain and particularly among Labour ranks, two big demands arose immediately; one for alliance with the Soviet Union and the other for settlement with India. All the nationalist papers put up the demand for your release, for a reconsideration of the situation and of policies. You were released in December 1941 and the Cripps Mission came in March 1942.

Two Camps In The War

In your open statements you admitted that the world alignment of forces had changed, as also the situation for India, and you called it one of "peril."

Pandit Nehru, immediately on his release from jail, held a Press Conference on December 8, 1941 at Lucknow where he said:

"In the grouping of powers struggling for the mastery of the world, on either side, there seems to be dreams entertained by Governments for world domination. Undoubtedly this is so on the part of Hitler. It is not proclaimed as such on the other part. . . . Still, I think that in the grouping that exists, *there is also no doubt that progressive forces of the world are aligned with the group represented by Russia, China, America and England.*"

The Working Committee which met at Bardoli on December 30, 1941, said:—

"While there has been no change in Britain's policy towards India, the Working Committee must nevertheless take into full consideration *the new world situation* that has arisen by the development of the war into a world conflict and its approach to India. The sympathies of the Congress must inevitably lie with the people who are the subjects of aggression and who are fighting for their freedom."

All open-eyed and serious people saw the change but there were two groups in our country who did not—the Congress Socialists and the Forward Blocists.

Purshottamdas Tricumdas, General Secretary of the Congress Socialist Party issued a Press Statement on December 6, 1941 clarifying Congress Socialist policy regarding the character of the war and said:

"In the absence of the grant of freedom to India and other colonies the war must remain imperialist and we can have no truck with it."

Hindu, December 12, 1941.

Sarat Bose, leader of the Forward Bloc in a message sent to the Behar Provincial Forward Bloc Conference said :

“The world has been witnessing for the few months a fortuitous combination of conflicting ideologies, the offspring of which has been described as the ‘Atlantic Charter’ . . . To my mind, the Forward Bloc cannot co-operate in the slightest degree with that combination or with any of its component parts.”

Hindustan Standard, November 1, 1941.

Neither we nor the country paid any serious attention to their views because despite their “Left” views they had done nothing active nor serious, leave aside “revolutionary”, during the earlier period of the war and were known to be incapable of doing anything more than talking and threatening.

We take our cause and the freedom movement seriously and endeavour to guide our course by a realistic understanding of events. We took time to discuss the new world situation, the majority of our leaders were in jail, the few that were underground were dispersed all over the country, and we suffered all the difficulties of an illegal, hunted organisation.

The result of our discussions and collective opinion was embodied in a resolution of the Polit Bureau of our Party and a booklet by P. C. Joshi, *Forward to Freedom*. They were both published illegally at that time. We shall exhaustively quote from them to convince you that what we are saying about our analysis and policy is not something new,—said today in order to score debating points over you or to save our face—but is what we actually said when we were still underground. We hope they will convince you that you have been more than unfair to us.

Communist War Policy

After studying and thinking over the meaning of this historic turning-point in the war brought about by the entry of the Soviet Union on the one hand and of Japan on the other, we came to the conclusion that it was an entirely new situation, demanding

a new policy, new strategy, new tactics to achieve our aim of national freedom.

We said :

“We are a practical party and in a new situation, it is our task not only to evolve a new form of struggle for it, but **also** to advance new slogans appropriate to the new stage, suiting the new form of our national movement. The key slogan of our Party which guides all our practical political activity is : “MAKE THE INDIAN PEOPLE PLAY A PEOPLE'S ROLE IN THE PEOPLE'S WAR.”

Political Bureau Resolution, December 15, 1941.

We shall see how subsequent events vindicated our calculations and belied yours.

The new situation as we understood it meant that only two alternatives faced the entire world, Fascism or Freedom and we forecast that Fascism was doomed and the front that was rising against it was bound to be triumphant.

But what did we mean by this new characterisation of the war? Let the pamphlet *Forward to Freedom*, our basic document of the new period, issued in February 1942, speak for us. It said :

“On June 22nd (1941), Hitler-Fascism rang its own death-knell. *It was also the death-knell of world imperialism as we have known it so far.* The first salvos fired by the Red Army against the advancing Nazi hordes ushered in a new epoch, the epoch of the struggle for the People's World. This is the meaning of the transformation of 22nd June.”

Forward to Freedom, p. 3.

The majority of you did not believe the victory of the Allies to be assured.

The second feature in the new situation was the entry of a new power in the war, a power of a new type, a people's power, the Soviet Union.

We did not change our policy “for the sake of the Soviet Union” as you imagine, but we saw the new prospect for humanity that opened through the Soviet entry into the war.

First, the certainty of Hitler's defeat through Soviet strength.

Secondly, the guaranteed aid of a big power to the struggling peoples of the world against the imperialist designs of reactionaries in the Allied camp and for the achievement of freedom and democracy by every people. We knew that the Soviet in its own interest as a people's power would successfully fulfil a liberationist role, smash Hitler's dream of world domination and also the Anglo-U.S. dream of restoring the pre-war *status quo*, if the peoples in the Allied camp did their part of the job.

We had faith in the strength of the USSR and we knew it had no selfish aims.

In his own beautiful words Pandit Nehru bemoaned the fate of the Soviet. Some Working Committee members in their talks with Congress workers in which we ourselves were present took it for granted that the Red Army would retreat into Siberia. Others thought that Soviet resistance was all British propaganda.

Not one of you relied on Soviet strength because not one of you *really believed* that the Soviet was a power of a *new* type. Not one of you understood the true significance of the Anglo-Soviet alliance, most of you understood it as Stalin's surrender to Churchill because Stalin's country was in danger. Where is Stalin today and where Churchill? You thought Churchill was on top in 1941-42. What do you see today? It did not happen suddenly. Its seed lay in Socialism, born on Soviet soil. It is the seed you should know better, born out of the same grand old tree of Liberty, under which you yourselves stand.

Birth Of People's Europe

We saw in the entry of the Soviet not only the new source of strength against Fascism and not only the new saboteur of Anglo-American imperialist designs but also the new builder of the peoples' front. During the earlier phase of the war itself the reactionary rulers of Europe had either run away to London or Cairo or surrendered to Hitler. In this new phase we foresaw the certainty of the subjugated peoples of Europe rising against their Fascist enslavers, seeking inspiration from and getting the aid of the Soviet Union.

When we talked of the new regrouping of people's forces, of the new opportunities before every people, of new unity and of the re-emergence of people's camp, most of you thought we were talking big to hide our own unwillingness to fight the British more. If your attitude towards the Soviet was patronising and uncomplimentary your attitude towards the peoples of Europe was that they were doomed to remain under Fascist slavery or return back to Anglo-U.S. hegemony. We will request you to think back and contrast what you thought then with what we thought.

"It is true that most of the ex-Governments of the Nazi-occupied countries have not changed in form. But their alliance with the USSR and the powerful national unity of the people's upsurge in these countries ensure that these or any other governments representing these countries can no more be tools in the hands of Anglo-American Imperialists but will fight for a People's Peace and a People's Europe."

Forward to Freedom, p. 17.

The Polish Government in London, Yugoslavia's King Peter and Mihailovitch, Italy's Badoglio, France's Darlan, everyone had to go. The Anglo-American Imperialists could not save them.

Europe of 1944 is the evidence of our correct understanding of how the forces of world democracy stood ranged and of our faith in them. India of 1945 is the evidence of what you as the foremost leaders of our country did with the forces of Indian democracy and freedom, and of your lack of understanding and faith in the same forces outside our country.

What a tragic contrast! The Kings of European countries like Belgium, Yugoslavia and even Greece have to wait on the wishes of their peoples even to return to their country. In India, you, the leaders of our people have to accept the British Viceroy as 'your leader', as you did at the Simla Conference.

As we have said earlier, we were one with you in seeing in the new situation new and greater danger to our national existence but where we differed from you is that we saw in the new situation a *new and unprecedented opportunity* before our country.

This is how we saw it as early as December 1941 :

"It is the gravest hour in India's history—the dire threat of Fascist aggression against our fair land.

"It is the most glorious opportunity before our national movement—to fight for our national liberation, in a battle for world liberation."

Forward to Freedom, p. 53.

We said clearly that :

"The path of India's liberation lies in taking India's war in India's hands. . . . To fight to win this war is to defend our country and realise our liberation."

Forward to Freedom, p. 62.

We drew attention to the powerful new allies that we had, the Soviet Union and the peoples of China, Britain and America and other United Nations.

"Peoples of the world were never in a stronger position than today. The people of India grow stronger than they ever were by lining up with them. A world-wide people's victory was never nearer than today."

Forward to Freedom, p. 45.

British Imperialism was, we said, in a crisis for it

"stands bankrupt and isolated before the Indian people, even its reactionary supporters forsaking it, even the Liberals disillusioned with its policy. In the situation, as it stands today, the isolation of Imperialism has grown more complete than ever before."

Forward to Freedom, p. 52.

It was this analysis that helped us to formulate clearly our tasks for this period :

"It is the greatest common task that faces all our political parties and all the patriots—how to take the fate of our nation out of imperialist hands, how to meet the grave emergency, how to realise our nation's proud destiny? The Communist Party shares the common anxiety, puts its shoulder behind the common national endeavour when it

declares that the only way out for the Indian people is to hurl India's unity against the Imperialist autocracy."

Forward to Freedom, p. 53.

We summed up the entire task of our people in three simple slogans : SMASH THE STALEMATE, ASSERT NATIONAL UNITY, MOBILISE THE MASSES FOR DEFENCE.

Whether we were right or wrong is a matter of opinion, but who can say that in the new situation we did not think in terms of the freedom of our country? Would we not be justified in saying that if anyone says that we decided our policy on the basis of "the interests of the Soviet Union" he is either ignorant of our policy or a slanderer?

"People's War", Its Meaning

We called it a *transformation* in the situation and not a mere change of degree. We said that the war which was so far an imperialist war now became a people's war because of the changed *regrouping* of forces, changed *prospects* before the world.

In what we called the imperialist phase, the outcome of the war was what we Communists forecast : domination of peoples and it did happen ; for the whole of Europe did go under Fascist domination.

In what we called people's war we foresaw liberation of people's and it did happen ; for Europe has been liberated and also China.

The forces of freedom are certainly stronger today than ever before, the camp of struggling peoples that we saw rising anew in 1941 has become the camp of free peoples in 1945.

We did not of course promise that any automatic liberation would result from the war but only forecast that the degree of liberation of each people would depend on their own activities and the strength and unity of the people's camp (that later began being called the camp of the United Nations).

When we called it a "people's war" we made a sharp difference between the peoples and their rulers.

"The imperialist governments entered into an alliance with the USSR and became a party to the anti-fascist front through imperialist motives, of course,—to escape surrendering to Hitler, to be able to salvage as much of the Empire as possible."

But,

"The imperialist rulers of the world are no more making history. They are being yoked to its chariot. The course is new—the people's war. The actors are new—peoples and nations. It is they who are getting into stride. It is these mighty forces that will shape world events more and more."

Forward to Freedom, p. 24.

You, of course, ignore the significance of the difference that we made because you are so certain that we were only interested in our own country as Soviet agents and nothing else.

When we came to the conclusion that the war was a "people's war," our conclusion was based on the understanding that in the new set-up the people would get the better of their reactionaries and Churchill would not be able to save his stooges. Where today is Darlan in France, where is Badoglio in Italy, where is King Peter in Yugoslavia? And everyone of you has heard the howl of the reactionaries of the world over Eastern Europe and the Balkans.

When we called it a "people's war" for our country too, we made it clear that it did not mean identification with the British Government.

"The Indian people's support to the all-people's war does not lead to servile co-operation or submission to the imperialist government but to a struggle against it for winning democratic rights and establishing a national government. This is how the Indian people can smash the imperialist hindrances to their war-efforts and simultaneously advance their national interest. . . . Not debating with the Foreign Government but the securing of our own National

Unity will enable us to register such a national victory over Imperialism. . . ."

Forward to Freedom, p. 58.

You will thus see that we said exactly the opposite of what you charge us with saying.

Rather than identify ourselves with the British Imperialist Government and its policies, we analysed its policy realistically and exposed its role as sharply as you did, if not more.

We explained the lesson of Malaya and said :

"The loss of Malaya to the Jap fascists is a living condemnation of the Imperialist colonial regime This is how the Imperialist autocracy crumbled to pieces, it was inherent in the very nature of the colonial regime, in the soulless bureaucracy, in the isolated military caste, in the administration being foreign and not national."

Forward to Freedom, p. 36.

Condemning your arrest on the 9th August and the Imperialist repression we said :

"Imperialist arrogance is driving them mad, they cannot give up the greed for our motherland, as their possession. They are, therefore, out to destroy our national strength. They are strangulating and not saving India, sabotaging and not strengthening the Allied cause."

Editorial, People's War, Vol. I, No. 6, August 16, 1942.

Attitude To War Efforts

Since you misunderstood our slogan of "people's war" to mean identification with the British Government, it is no wonder that you take it for granted that so far as war-efforts are concerned, we could not but have tied our people to the chariot of imperialist efforts.

Let us first give you what we thought of the war efforts as conducted by the British bureaucracy.

"The present war-efforts are directed by the Imperialist

Government and they are inevitably inadequate and ineffective. They are based on the coercion of our people. To acquiesce in them in their present bureaucratic framework; and not to seek to transform them would be to strengthen our own slavery, not to mobilise our people for the war but march behind the hated police and revenue officers. They are based on the exploitation of our people and material resources. . . . India's war effort to be effective must be a free and voluntary effort of its entire people and this means the existence of democratic rights and civil liberties. India's effort to be worthy of the Indian nation must be directed and planned by a National Government and not by the present foreign Government."

Forward to Freedom, p. 58.

Let us now give you our policy regarding war efforts :

"Then do we say that our support to the war means supporting the war-efforts as they are? No! That is the attitude of the traitor Roy. *The character of the war has changed but not the character of the war-efforts in our country nor of the government that guides and controls them*, existing war-efforts are directed by a foreign autocracy which instead of mobilising the people fears their mobilisation. . . . We take a positive attitude towards the war efforts. **WE CO-OPERATE WHERE WE CAN, WE RESIST WHERE WE MUST**, we co-operate where it is in the people's interest to do so, we resist where it is demanded by people's interests. *We thus bring the people into action to defend their interests and advance them.*

Forward to Freedom, p. 65.

Let us also recall to you how you yourself defined your attitude to war-effort.

We take the liberty of quoting from the minutes of the Allahabad Working Committee meeting of April 27—May 1, 1942, published as Appendix 1 to the Government publication, *Congress Responsibility for the Disturbances*, (p. 44.).

Pandit Nehru said in the course of discussion

"We do not embarrass the British war-effort because that in itself would mean aid to the invader."

Pandit Pant said

"My attitude today is: We must do our utmost to defend the country and swallow many things. If I can't co-operate with the British, it is because it is not consistent with my dignity."

Non-Co-operation With Japs, Not British

After the failure of the Cripps Mission, Pandit Nehru at a Press Conference on April 12, 1942 said :

"The fundamental factor is not what the British Government do to us or what we do to them. The fundamental question is the peril to India, and what are we going to do about it. Therefore certainly in spite of all that has happened we are not going to embarrass the British war-effort in India or the effort of our American friends who may come here. We want production to go on at full speed ahead."

Gandhi Against Fascism, p. 89.

We trust that you will see the difference and that we do not suffer by comparison.

We would request you to quote to us a single Congress resolution or official directive that said we should not co-operate with war efforts at all or under any circumstances.

On the contrary, clear statements to the effect that no active assistance could be given to the British contained in Gandhiji's draft resolution for the Allahabad meeting of the Working Committee in April-May 1942 were ultimately rejected by the Working Committee as a whole.

We once again take the liberty of quoting from the Government publication, *Congress Responsibility for the Disturbances*.

Gandhiji's draft resolution sent through Miraben to you contained the following paragraph. We italicise the significant parts.

"In such places where the British and Japanese forces are fighting our non-co-operation will be fruitless and unnecessary. *At present our non-co-operation with the British Government is limited.* Were we to offer them complete non-co-operation when they are actually fighting, it would be tantamount to placing our country deliberately in Japanese hands. Therefore not to put any obstacle in the way of the British forces will often be the only way of demonstrating our non-co-operation with the Japanese. *Neither may we assist the British in any active manner.* If we can judge from their recent attitude, the British Government do not need any help from us beyond our non-interference. *They desire our help only as slaves—a position we can never accept.*"

Congress Responsibility for the Disturbances, p. 47.

The relevant part of the Working Committee's draft for the A.I.C.C., finally approved by all the members reads :

"In places wherein the British and the invading forces are fighting, our non-co-operation will be fruitless and unnecessary. Not to put any obstacle in the way of British forces will often be the only way of demonstrating our non-co-operation with the invader. Judging from their attitude the British Government do not need any help from us beyond our non-interference."

The omissions are of crucial significance : whereas Gandhiji's draft envisaged non-co-operation both with the British and the Japs, the Working Committee envisaged it only against the Japs. Even in the August Resolution there is no call to the people that they should not assist the war in any manner.

Let us remind you of the explanation most of you gave when you called for the formation of the People's Volunteer Brigade, that it would co-operate in civil defence with the Government, that it would keep peace among the people, fight panic etc.

We can say with confidence that if you collected figures about the number of political workers arrested by the police for resisting the *forcible* collection of war loans etc. you will find that the Communists outnumber Congressmen, if you ask a number

of peasants whose homesteads, farmlands were saved from being commandeered or who got their due compensation and other facilities you will again find that Communists outnumbered Congressmen in helping them.

Communists Defend People

In the areas directly threatened with Japanese invasion we took the initiative to form all-parties People's Defence Committees and local Congress leaders joined them though some opposed the very move. We hope that you remember Syt. Bardoloi's statement when the Japs menaced Assam. What he appealed to the Government to let him and the Congress do was what we Communists were already doing through all means, open, semi-secret and secret, and what we Communists wanted done by all our fellow-Congressmen.

We not only did not go into but refused to join the National War Front. Through the People's Defence Committees, we of course, kept contact with Government officials.

Up to the time of the food crisis we did not join any official Committee. We formed representative People's Food Committees and kept contact with the Government machinery through them. Later on when the economic crisis worsened we permitted our comrades to join the Advisory Committees on food, cloth etc. You can read the official minutes of these official Committees when Congress Ministries are formed and you will see for yourself whether our comrades served the interests of the British Government or of the Indian people.

The word "war-effort" is a hated word because of the foreign Government and the way it operates. We hardly used the word in our propaganda. But we knew that in war-time all social activity becomes and is technically called war-effort. We judged every single issue in terms of the interests of our people and whatever we thought helped them, we did, and whatever we found hurt them, we fought against.

Co-operation or non-co-operation with the Government was to us secondary ; we went to the Government officials when we found it was necessary to go to get the redress of people's

grievances or to put up people's demands. You will find the word war-efforts used in the *People's War* mostly where we gave stories of bureaucratic bungling and incompetence who sought to hide their sins under the new term of war-effort.

Medieval Outlook Persists

We know the word "people's war" is like a red rag to an average Congressman today who has it dinned into his ears: "The Communists have gone over to the Government, they call it a people's war."

The intellectual digits of a people are derived from their own history. In the history that they know from tradition and textbooks the war is waged by the *Raja*, the *Praja* has nothing to do with it except seize it as an opportunity to rebel if the *Raja* is oppressive. When the *Raja* over us is foreign as today and the Government is engaged in war, to call such a war a people's war seems obvious nonsense to the average man. But would we not call such an outlook medieval, that hinders the understanding of the twentieth century world, its historic forces, the living march of history?

The modern wars that he knows, are of the nineteenth century. And as history is taught in our country yet, these wars were nothing more than vaster and more glorified editions of the early tribal or medieval wars.

"One country led by its own Government fights another, each for its selfish interests.

"The bigger countries seek satellites among smaller countries and try to make more powerful the coalition that is fighting their rival.

"The only just wars are national revolutions."

Such is his understanding and such an understanding suits his own living experience and his burning urge for freedom.

But such an understanding cannot help him to find his bearings in the modern world, in which *Praja* is no more a mere tool of the *Raja*, the people are no more mere cannon-fodder of the Governments but play an independent role and shape world events.

This is also why the Congress in its resolutions has always spoken in terms of world imperialism, world democracy and a world people's struggle for the freedom of all peoples.

Pandit Nehru proposed these resolutions, some of you spoke for them, all of you accepted them, and all of you agreed to their affirmation and reaffirmation. But it appears that these were only words, accepted by Pandit Nehru, acquiesced in by the rest of you. This is why in spite of all your past statements and resolutions, you were reduced to thinking of a world war in these outmoded and medieval terms. And that this is what you have done is clear from the way in which you have formulated the charge against us.

Difference Of Tactics, Not Aims

What is it that you can quarrel with our characterisation of this second phase of the war as a "people's war" except quarrel with the word?

So far as our country is concerned we also saw the imperative need for National Government both for the immediate defence of our country and its final freedom.

In the first number of *People's War* we defined "Our Policy" in the Editorial and we said in regard to National Government:

"We agree with the mass of patriotic opinion that for the successful national defence of our country and to ensure our freedom National Government is a vital necessity, the key-demand of the people."

People's War, Vol. I, No. 1, July 5, 1942.

We thought the same as you did about the great added danger to our present and future fate under the present foreign government.

"The strength of the imperialist rulers is the same in all the colonies: NIL. Instead of being capable of mass mobilisation, they live in mass isolation. Their colonial governments instead of leading the people fear the people.

Their bureaucratic apparatus breaks like a reed under the strain of a modern war and collapses over the very heads of the people they held in subjection, whose very slavery they are too powerless to defend. The defence of the colonial countries cannot be and will not be organised by the imperialist rulers. It is the national movement of the colonial peoples that has to rise to its full stature and take the fate of their country in its own hands."

Forward to Freedom, p. 35.

The only difference that was real and vital was about the method of achieving National Government and we shall take that up later.

Thus so far as our immediate national aim was concerned it was common. Whatever difference there was between us and you was over tactics.

To charge us for characterising the war as a "people's war" is to charge history, and not us.

To charge us for our activities regarding war-efforts is to shoot in the sky, and that too, with eyes firmly closed.

National Defence - Central Task

You could find real fault with our characterisation of the early phase of the war as an imperialist war *if* the Congress had characterised it as a "people's war" though unfortunately its leaders almost acted as if it was. We did not quarrel with you on the character of the war because it would have led to a theoretical discussion or just speculation and we knew that a broad organisation like the Congress could not be as sharp and consistent as our Party. We concentrated the whole discussion on the best tactics to achieve our common aim.

You could similarly find real fault with our characterisation of the second phase of the war as a people's war *if* the Congress had characterised it as an imperialist war, though unfortunately some within it were pulling it that way. If you cared to understand what we meant by the term "people's war" you would have seen that we desired just what you did; and we submit

that the history of the last four years has shown that we were more consistent and realistic, not only in our understanding of the international situation but of the national situation as well.

Some of you argued that the war was not a people's war for our country as long as we were not free.

We argued that the war was a people's war for our country because our freedom could not be won by fighting *against* the war but only *through* our people participating in it, while in all your declarations you yourselves said you wanted to fight the war and realise Indian freedom through it.

What was the practical policy we derived for our own country from our understanding of this war as a people's war? Did this practical policy go against the national aim or Congress policies?

Our greatest emphasis was that the defence of the country was our prime duty and from this we derived all our conclusions. If you re-read your old speeches you will find that the peril to the country and the great duty of defending our motherland was their running theme.

There were a handful of Congressmen who used to throw at us the statement: "India is a British colony."

We used to put them to their heels by asking: "To the British it is their colony, but if you see only this, how are you anything more than British slaves? We talk of India as our motherland, its sacred soil means everything to us."

Therefore we were enthusiastically with you in considering that the achievement of a National Government of National Defence was the central task before all Indians. You have completely blacked this out from your memory. That is why it does not appear in your report.

Is this the way to judge us? Is this the way to understand our differences with the Congress—by ignoring and suppressing the fact of our support to the central demand of the Congress?

National Government - No Surrender

It was our Party alone that argued back with those groups in the Congress like the C.S.P. and Forward Bloc who opposed National Government as a surrender to British Imperialism, by starting from the premise that it was an imperialist war. From what an average Congressman got out of your resolutions and speeches he could not even defend your slogan of National Government. You did not give a clear-cut characterisation of the war; therefore he could not see how, when the Congress stood for immediate and complete independence, it could accept an interim National Government. He could not see how this was not the traditional Liberal "compromise" with Imperialism.

An average Congressman instinctively felt that National Government was the right demand but it was only our agitation that gave it flesh and blood and showed that it was not a "climb down" but a "way forward."

In all your resolutions you posed the demand for National Government for the *effective defence* of India and argued that the British administration could not make it effective. We wholeheartedly agreed with it.

You were not very clear nor consistent on what the Congressmen should do as long as there was no National Government. It is clear enough now that on the basis of your wrong political calculations and wrong understanding of British Imperialist policy in India you thought that the longer you withheld co-operation the sooner National Government would come.

However, from what you left unsaid in the rapidly worsening military situation of that time, the mass of Congressmen argued that as long as there was no National Government nothing could be done; and naturally this only increased the atmosphere of helplessness and bred despair. We argued with them that they were right in thinking that no *effective defence* was possible without National Government but that was no reason why we should let the people gloat over Jap victories and lose their soul, and ourselves sit at home waiting either for the Japs or National Government to come.

In that period up to the Bombay AICC meeting of 1942 we

conducted a mass campaign for anti-Jap resistance and against panic-mongering. Could you say that this was going against Congress resolutions? No—you could not and you did not say so at that time.

We posed the question of what to do in practice thus: We should do whatever we can to help the defence of the country and nothing that will sabotage it. We argued with our fellow Congressmen: let us discuss every single measure on its own merits whether it helps to defend our country or strengthen the British rule over us.

Whenever it was a question of practical work or a specific measure, there were hardly ever any differences. But when the general issue of our attitude to defence measures, in the period when there was as yet no National Government, used to be discussed, differences used to arise.

Orthodox Congressmen used to argue on the old plane of co-operation and non-co-operation with the Government.

Their mental difficulty used to be: if we take a co-operative attitude towards defence measures which are all run by the bureaucracy, how will the British Government be pressed into agreeing to National Government?

We used to answer: in one breath you say that this government cannot defend us and on the other, you leave all defence measures in its hands by doing nothing yourself. There is obviously something wrong with such ideas. You see that the old world is dead but you are not prepared to throw away your own old ideas and think out new ways for the new situation.

British Policy Of Provocation

We used to explain to them how their attitude of passivity no more acted as *pressure* on the British Government in the existing circumstances but directly played into their hands.

How?

The British Imperialist policy at that time was:

(1) Internationally, defame the Congress among the democratic elements as defeatist and pro-fascist, on the basis of the internal differences among the Congress leaders (to which we

shall come later) and thus as an organisation and leadership that could not be trusted to organise the defence of India.

(2) Internally, provoke the Congress workers and the masses in general by refusing National Government and carrying out even the most essential defence measures by repressive and autocratic means, so that the spontaneous resistance to their terror-ways creates the factual evidence for their slander campaign abroad.

There was daily mounting evidence in the very newspaper the Congressman read as to how correct was our reading of British Imperialist policy. And we did convince the more serious among them that their old ways of fighting the British would today only result in playing into the hands of the British.

In open mass meetings this is how we defended whatever practical work we were doing. Congress Socialists and Boseites of course slandered us but they did not matter to us then. They did nothing, held no meetings, only went round gossiping with individuals and slandering us. Neither the Congressmen we knew nor the people among whom we were working thought that we had gone over to the British.

Our Stand - Build Unity

In our agitation for National Government we explained not only how by sitting back we could not win our demand but we also explained what the new factors were that should give us a new faith that we could make the British agree.

(1) First, we explained that the more consistent and sharp the Congress stand became against the Fascist aggressors and for the defence of the country the more would international pressure grow for the establishment of National Government in India.

(2) Secondly, we explained how during the war, consuming anti-British hatred was not confined to the politically awakened but had permeated the entire people, irrespective of party differences. There was obviously something radically wrong with the parties, their leaders and ideas if they could not sink their old differences in the face of the mounting crimes of the British

bureaucrats against our hard-pressed people and in face of the coming threat of Jap aggression.

It was no longer a question of arguing who was right and wrong in the past and who was being silly or insufferable then but the point was to hammer out a national agreement among our major parties behind the central demand of National Government. We forecast that after the slander campaign "Congress can't be trusted," has been beaten back by the world progressives, the next Imperialist slogan to refuse settlement would be, "to whom can we transfer power?" We forecast, and how right we were can be seen today, that the longer our parties thought in terms of unilateral settlement with the British the more would the hopes of all be dashed to the ground.

You will thus see that whatever independent endeavours we were capable of were guided by the desire to see :

firstly, that the national policy we adopted towards the war and defence of our country was unambiguous and just to our people and got for our demand the support of the peoples of the world ;

secondly, that our parties themselves should turn the tables on the British Imperialists who were resisting the formation of an Interim National Government, by forging national unity within our own country.

When we said that national unity was the key to the achievement of National Government, you could charge us with having greater faith in the wisdom of the political leaders of our country than they had in each other. But how could you charge us with serving the British rulers ?

Those were grave days for our country and we considered it a sin to think in terms of parties of the past. We did our best to think in terms of the common interests of all our peoples and of the danger to our great country. Being a younger party we had a more open mind, less prejudices to cast aside and that was why we could see beyond party and sectional differences and gave the call for unity of our entire people in the gravest crisis that had ever faced our country.

In the face of all this, to suppress all mention of our unity policy for the achievement of National Government and to inter-

pret our war policy as identification with the British administration is to black-guard us. Yet this is what you have done.

Your Sub-Committee in its report on our activities states that :

“They (the Communists) had similarly thrown their full weight on the side of the Government, advocating unconditional support of the war effort and dissuading all classes whether peasants, workers or students from countenancing anything that might hinder the war effort or actually embarrass the administration.”

This is something worse than a political slander ; it is suppression of truth, pure and simple.