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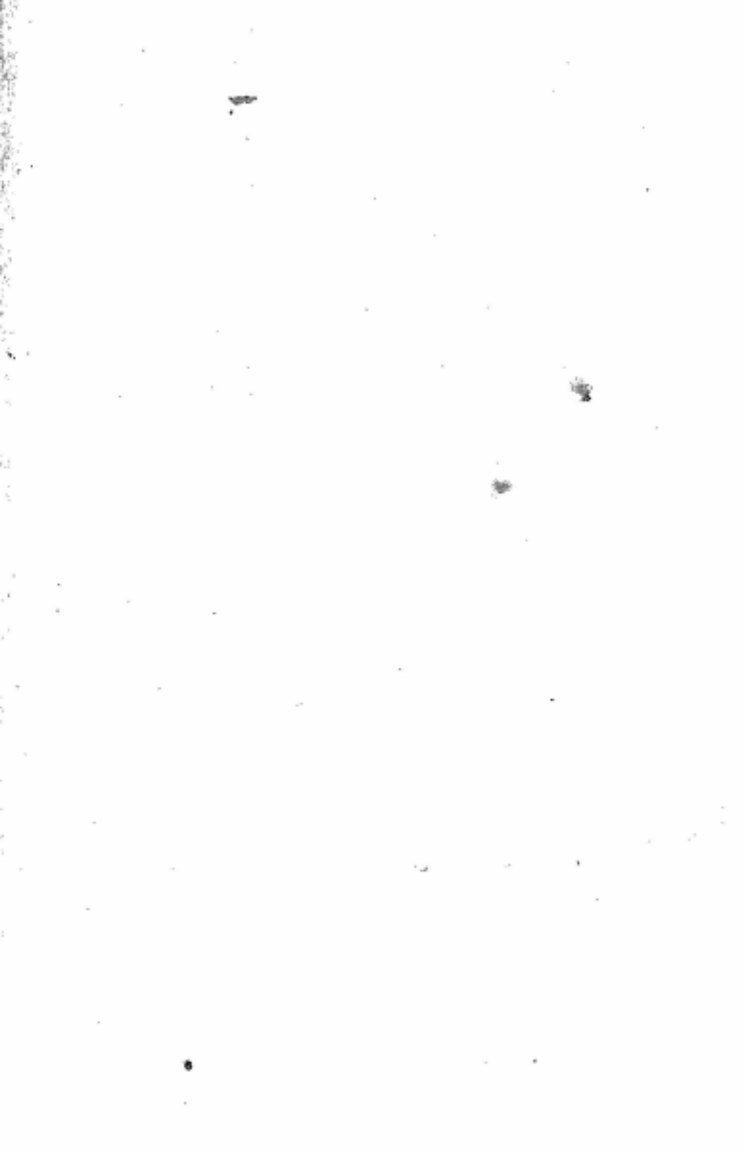
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PEASANTS' AND WORKERS' MOVEMENT IN INDIA  
1905-1929

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO  
CHICAGO, ILL.

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# Peasants' and Workers' Movement in India

1905—1929

76282

by  
*Sukhbir Choudhary*

Foreword by  
*Dr Tara Chand*



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PEOPLE'S  
New Delhi

PUBLISHING  
Ahmedabad

HOUSE  
Bombay

November 1971 (P 12)

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PRIVATE LIMITED, NEW DELHI 55

76282 17.8.88  
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Price: Rs. 30.00

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Printed by D. P. Sinha at the New Age Printing Press, Rani  
Jhansi Road, New Delhi 55, and published by him for the  
People's Publishing House, Rani Jhansi Road, New Delhi 55

## Foreword

A history of the socialist movement in India is important from the point of view of world social development as well as for understanding the course of the struggle for independence in India. It is true that previous to communist revolution in Russia the manifestations of socialist thought in India were sporadic, nevertheless prerevolutionary socialist ideas were directly or indirectly percolating advanced Indian thought. In the nineteenth century the intellectuals were under the spell of British liberalism of Bentham, John Stuart Mill and John Morley. But before the turn of the century, the rise of the Labour Party in England, the writings of such thinkers as Bernard Shaw, H. G. Wells, Sydney Webb and the challenge of the idealists like B. Bosanquet on the one side and the realists on the other, e.g. Bertrand Russell, G. E. Moore, Graham-Wallas and Hobhouse, broke the spell. But just then Indian thought was so deeply dyed in religious revivalism—even in the field of politics—that a materialist philosophy had little chance of acceptance. However as the twentieth century advanced and specially as a result of the first world war which ushered in the great communist revolution the change acquired speed.

One of the factors which contributed powerfully to this process was the advent of Gandhiji in India in 1915. His thought was a curious mixture of many ingredients collected from such diverse sources as Ruskin, Tolstoy and the Bhagavad Gita. But two strands in this combination were important—equality of man and uplift of the masses. Both were basic to socialism, although his spiritual individualism, denunciation of the

factory system and limitation of state activity were opposed to socialist principles.

Next to Gandhiji stood Jawaharlal Nehru as one of the creators of independent India. He was not a systematic or original thinker, but his mind was steeped in socialist ideas and he was powerfully attracted by the socialist movement in Europe. Even before the transference of power he was actively promoting the spread of socialist ideas until he succeeded in inducing a section of the Indian intelligentsia to accept the socialist pattern as the goal of society. As the first Prime Minister of independent India his principles and convictions greatly influenced the functioning of government.

Socialism in general and specially its highly developed form—communism—have played roles of considerable importance, more in influencing Indian thought than yet in moulding Indian practice. Russia which since the October Revolution of 1917 has forged ahead as one of the two superpowers of the world has been increasingly involved in the affairs of India. This involvement began as early as 1920 and during the lifetime of Lenin the main lines of the Russian policy towards India were settled. India too like all other countries of the world reacted to the impact of the new civilisation which grew up in the Soviet land.

The five-year plans, the vast expansion of state controlled industry, the increasing activity of the state in trade, banking, transport, scientific development and cultural advancement are some of the expressions of the spirit of socialism working in the country.

Shri Sukhbir Choudhary who has been studying the nationalist movement in India for some years has produced a useful monograph on this aspect of India's recent history. It is based on research in documents, letters, reports and newspapers bearing on the subject. The choice of a particular subject by a scholar is ordinarily determined by his interests and bent of mind. He is attracted by his theme and lays stress on those of its aspects which give him satisfaction, and he passes lightly over the others. All historical writing suffers from personal

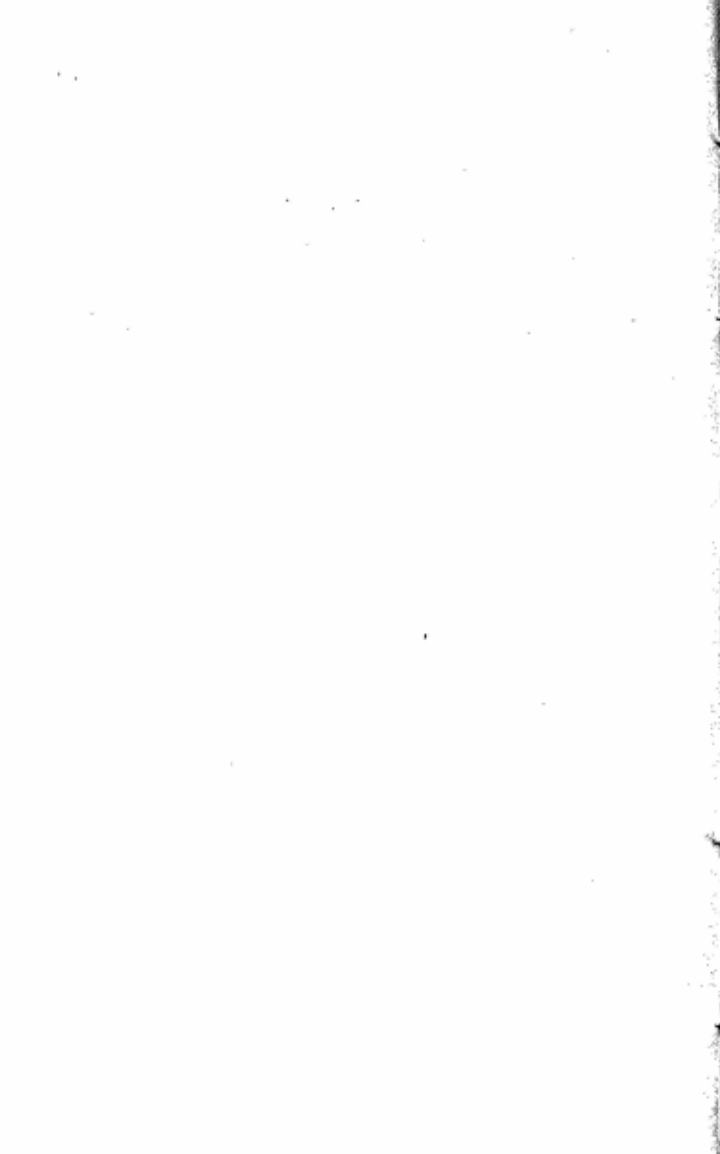
predilection of this kind which, however, imparts to the writing pungency and liveliness.

It is but natural that an utterly impartial, detached and objective history is scarcely attainable. But so long as facts are not turned and twisted, the writer's bias cannot do much harm. Shri Choudhary does not conceal his preferences but that does not seriously detract from the value of his writing.

1 September 1971

TARA CHAND





## Preface

Quite interesting were those circumstances that led me to develop interest in the toiling masses, particularly the peasants of India, although mine was the third generation in the family which had given up agriculture as a profession and source of livelihood. With the joining of government service as post-master by my grandfather our family had for all practical purposes moved to Rajasthan from Uttar Pradesh and had become the permanent inhabitants of Bikaner, a princely state. Yet our ancestral home in a village situated on the periphery of river Jamuna and a tiny piece of land there kept me emotionally attached to the place. During summer vacation I, therefore, frequented the village.

On one such occasion of my return journey in preindependence days from the village a distant uncle of mine requested my father to show him the Birla Mandir, the Kutab Minar and the Red Fort while on his way to Rajasthan. We readily agreed and he accompanied us.

I was almost dazzled when I entered the precincts of New Delhi. It possessed the masculine virility of a modern metropolis and the feminine warmth and charm of a typical capital. With its wide asphalt roads, streets, mighty radiating avenues, well-tended monumental vistas and grand perspectives dominated by the Viceregal Lodge with its white domes and red substructure and circular pillared palace of the then Legislative Council, abundant green spaces and parks, this garden city rather than the Red Fort justified the famous Persian inscription:

*If there is a pavadise on the face of this earth,  
It is here, oh! It is here, oh! It is here!*

We were so much absorbed in sight-seeing that we missed our evening train to Bikaner. We only could, therefore, travel by the morning train. But it turned out to be a blessing in disguise. No sooner did the train start rattling out of the city, it was altogether a different scene. Whatever pleasure I had derived by previous day's sight-seeing appeared to vanish from my mind.

Moving in the train, I glanced over the scene that presented a dismal picture of filth, squalor, sullage and almost total lack of gracious living deprived of the elementary modern amenities. Amidst a few well built houses, most probably owned by the British-created rich landlords and merchants, there were huddled all around squalid barrack structures, thatched hovels and mud-huts. They seemed poised on the road to slip, slide, decay and perish. But they kept going by some strange animal vitality. Industrial belt was conspicuous by its absence. Everything looked rural and backward. Even the small markets presented the confusion of medieval bazaars.

Gurgaon which in the epic age was known as Gurugram and was a noble centre of military training run by Guru Dronacharya of the Mahabharata fame looked desolate with the wrinkles and cracks as on the face of an old man. Rewari, the birth place of Hemu, ruler of Delhi before the advent of Akbar, and the capital of that famous patriot, freedom fighter, Rao Tula Ram, was shorn of all vitality. Narnaul which had once produced the most widely known, most witty genius and Akbar's court jewel, Birbal, appeared intellectually barren. Visited earlier likewise, Karnal, which was once named as Karnatal in the memory of valiant warrior, Karna of the Mahabharata, looked dry and lifeless. On our side the famous "pats"—Baghpat, Sonipat, Panipat, Tilpat, etc., where once the mighty, just Pandavas had walked—were turned into the citadels of those quisling feudal lords who betrayed our motherland in 1857 by shooting the brave patriots like Sambhal Singh. Crushed under their heels the peasants all over the rural side were turned into half-slaves and half-animals.

I was curious to know why it happened to be so? And on my next visit to the village I got the answer from an old grand-

mother in the neighbourhood. Through a folk song sung for the young kids in the family she presented the panorama of India-shaking events, upheavals and turmoils of 1857 when our ancestors from Meerut down to Rewari had fought and heroically conducted the first war of national liberation. Their sad and tragic defeat had resulted in cruel and sharp vengeance on the part of British. "Turn them into grass-cutters, collectors of horse dung" was the instruction of British officials for local population.

I was terribly pained over the behaviour of those Sikh peasant sepoys, the followers of Guru Govind Singh, who were used as mercenaries by the feudal lords and princes allied with the East India Company, to break the Kashmiri Gate at old Delhi in 1857. This feeling was, however, changed into deep appreciation and admiration when some years later I read about the revolutionary role of Sardar Ajit Singh in 1906-7 and the dynamic martyrdom in 1915-16 of Ghadarite sons and daughters of Sikh peasants and other socialist revolutionaries among Sikhs.

It may be recalled that along with other nationalist leaders, S. Ajit Singh had led the agitation against the Colonisation Bill. This bill sought to make peasants into tenants of landowners, take away the rights of inheritance. At the same time, the bill sought to forbid the peasants from cutting trees even for making the wooden plough. All this meant that the land did not belong to the colonisers, the alien regime wanted to impose British and native landlords upon the peasants. Even an autocratic agent of British imperialism, Lieutenant-Governor O'Dwyer, admitted that the bill "placed certain unjustified restrictions" and there were "some (just) reasons" for the agitation against it. A recent biography of Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna by Sohan Singh Josh vividly recalls the intensity of the feeling against the bill and the ultimate resounding success of the peasants under the leadership of S. Ajit Singh and Lala Lajpat Rai. The intelligence men informed that a hundred thousand desperadoes would arise in revolt on their leaders' bidding.

Due to the heroic deeds of Ghadarites the Punjab which was so far known as the land of subedar-majors, maliks, knights,

rais and khan bahadurs now came to be associated with "Ghadar Babas" who with their long white beards looked like wrathful lions as they roamed all over the land preaching and acting for armed revolution. They were inspiring the people to overthrow British imperialism which was called by them a rule of the baton and the bullet.

Within a short time the paper *Ghadar* roused the masses against the British raj and rallied them under the standard of the Ghadar Party. It wrote:

"This is the time to prepare yourselves for mutiny while this war is raging in Europe. Oh, brave people! Hurry up and stop all taxes by mutinying. Wanted: Brave soldiers to stir up *Ghadar* in India. Pay—death; prize—martyrdom; pension—liberty; field of battle—India. Get up, and open your eyes. Accumulate bags of money for the *Ghadar* and proceed to India. Sacrifice your lives to obtain liberty."

The issue of the paper dated 13 January 1914 had advised Indians to go abroad, learn how to make rifles, bring boxes full of them into the Punjab and "rain over the province a sweet shower of guns". It played on every passion which it could excite against the British, preaching "murder" and "revolt" in every sentence.

Among the Ghadarite Sikh peasants the most prominent were Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna, Kartar Singh Sarabha, Harnam Singh Tundelat (the one-armed leader and poet), Baba Gurumukh Singh, Sohan Singh Bhikivind, Sant Wasakha Singh, Dafedar Lachhman Singh, Inder Singh, Balwant Singh "Canadian", Dr Mathura Singh, Kishan Singh Gargaj (Babbar Akali), and a host of others.

Besides being fighters and active workers some of them had dipped deep into the poetry of patriotism. The following lines of a song often sung by S. Kartar Singh (preceptor of Bhagat Singh) to the tinkling of his steel handcuffs like a *khartal* (a simple instrument of music used all over India) in the court of law when the hearing used to start, often echoed and re-echoed in my ears:

“रंग बिच भंग कीता बदरंग साने,  
 लग गया जंग फिट्ठों साड़ी तलवार नं।  
 दुखां बिच जिव फसी, जीवना मुहाल होया,  
 तोड़ नहीं सकवे गुलामी वाली तार नं।  
 उड़इ जान दुख से भुख दे कड़ाके सारे,  
 कदिए जे देश बिचो फिरंगी बदकार नं।”

Even after the pronouncement of death sentence by the judge this young son of a peasant never lost his heart. Rather he often looked hilarious and jubilant. After the sentence when the jailor asked him for filing a petition of clemency, he gave a very bold and satirical answer: “I submit a clemency petition that I should be hanged at the earliest.”

On similar lines another peasant's son, Sardar Bhagat Singh, showed signs of physical improvement after the pronouncement of death sentence. He kissed the ropes on gallows and set a glorious example of dying heroically. His recital of the favourite ghazal “Sarfaroshi ki tamanna” on the eve of death stirred deep emotions of pride and patriotism. We looked upon him as a youth of steadfast character, incorruptible loyalty, scrupulous conscientiousness, invariable unselfishness and never-failing modesty. All these characteristics made him an exemplary revolutionary fighter and won him the admiration of both friends and foes, irrespective of whether they admired or disapproved his political opinions. Moreover, his social philosophy inspired many of us to struggle hard for the socio-economic emancipation of those classes which had been turned into drawers of water and hewers of wood by the contemporary rulers, both foreign and native. It was he who, like many socialists, had said that revolution did not mean merely the cult of the bomb. He repeatedly emphasised that social order must be changed. “Producers and labourers are being robbed by the capitalist exploiters... These terrible inequalities are heading towards world chaos. Society must be organised on a socialistic basis. With this ideology for our inspiration we have given a fair and loud warning... To the altar of this revolution we have brought our youth as incense. Long live revolution!”

However, it took a long time before the writings by indigenous revolutionary socialists could fall into my hands. More so, the contributions of those who in the early twenties had turned out to be fullfledged Marxists and socialists. And I still languished in the ignorance of the aftermath of the British overthrow from India.

Then suddenly and unexpectedly an event took place. One fine morning I had been to our college library counter to borrow some book on history. In the process of returning the earlier borrowed book my eyes suddenly fell on Rahul San-kriyayana's *Soviet Bhoomi* in Hindi, perhaps returned a little earlier by some other reader. I started turning over its pages when the college principal who happened to be there cautioned me in a domineering tone not to waste my valuable time by glancing through such "dangerous books". Partly persuaded and partly sensing the apprehension of unnecessarily antagonising the head of the institution I abandoned the idea of borrowing the book. Nevertheless, something went on ringing in my subconscious mind: Why did the principal prohibit my reading the book? Are its contents explosive like a bomb? Thus I could not resist the temptation of reading that book. Next day I hurried to the library, borrowed the book and deposited it safely in the shop of a betel-seller opposite to my college. Returning home in the evening I brought it with me.

Reading of the book opened before my eyes a vast panorama of human development. Not only it showed how the heroic struggle of the proletariat against the criminal folly of the ruling feudal-cum-bourgeois classes had saved the land of Soviets from class slavery, but it also paved the way for the growth of a new classless civilisation and culture. The brotherhood of man about which all bourgeois revolutions had sung so sweetly but had suffered defeat again and again due to the merciless competition in the bourgeois society was genuinely attempted to be established. And its most glaring illustration was the socio-economic development through systematic planning of those backward nationalities which were terribly crushed under the iron heels of imperialist tsardom. Like bourgeois governments there was no exploitation of national prejudices and wasting

the substance of the peoples in predatory wars. Exploitation of man by man was the new Soviet regime's pet aversion.

Years later I was almost hypnotised when I listened to a BBC programme from London in 1951 as Arnold Toynbee paraphrased what the Soviet Union had been saying so effectively to the people of newly developing countries in the following words:

"Yesterday I (Soviet Union) was an old-fashioned peasant much as you are today. Like you today, I yesterday lived depressed, ignorant, hopeless and tame. I was lying then as you are still, under the heel of a privileged native minority which was itself the creature of the western master of the world.

"But look at me now! See how I have pulled myself up by my bootstraps. And what I did for myself and by myself yesterday, you can do yourselves tomorrow if only you will take my advice and follow my example."

Such accounts or books were quite rare, where princely bureaucracy rules. The old petrified servile and slave state of maharaja had continued to exist. Like the Metternich era on the European continent the liberals and radicals were given contemptuous names and all forms of democratic agitations were prohibited like the Karlsbad decrees in 1819. The intellectuals were outlawed. A fierce campaign of persecution was mounted against them day and night. And all of our younger people fanned a white-hot hatred against these feudal oppressors.

It was, therefore, only after reaching Allahabad and joining the university there for my postgraduate studies, I could see the difference. There was a world of difference in the intellectual climate of an Indian princely state where the life was suffocated, and of Allahabad, the hub of national liberation movement. There was a dynamic effect on my psyche when I could quench my thirst for socialist literature. Still more encouraging was the fact that I was in a city which was sanctified by the heroic deeds of stalwarts like Jawaharlal Nehru, Acharya Narendra Dev, Jayaprakash Narayan, Ram Manohar Lohia, Shaukat Usmani, P. C. Joshi, Firaq Gorakhpuri, poet "Nirala"



and several others. They had followed their goal of socialism through thick and thin. Their indomitable will kept their course pointed unswervingly towards the greatest good of humanity with the certainty of a magnetic compass. Although some of them had later on abandoned the cause of socialism, yet the glamour of their past heroic feats was a perpetual source of inspiration in our times when rank careerism and dreadful shallowness were all too prevalent. In them the man of ideas was indissolubly bound up with the man of action and the two mutually complemented each other. Their exemplary lives produced a new revolutionary credo. It was certainly painful that life-long advocates of socialism, men who brooded over three decades over every comma in socialist writings, disappointed utterly at historical moments when for once they might and should have acted steadfastly and when instead they swung this way and that like quivering weather vanes in the wind.

Adjacent to the university there was the famous Swaraj Bhawan which once used to bustle with new spirit. I did not go to the Sangam for holy dips, but to this mighty building. It was a source of inspiration to me as I knew that builders of modern India used to meet here.

Years rolled on. In the course of my academic career I craved to indulge in preparing a dissertation on the dynamics of Indian nationalism under the able guidance of the renowned historian, Dr Tara Chand. Thus I came across a vast material in the National Archives and other places on the heroic battles of peasants and workers. I was so much fascinated that I went on collecting this material and planned to write a separate book in the course of time.

Today most of those who incessantly fought for socialism and suffering humanity have been forgotten. Alas! With certain exceptions there were no pompous shows to glorify them or solemn processions to bear their remains to the grave. And those who survive live in penury, unknown and unsung. It is, therefore, the humble duty of academicians and scholars to place through their pens with calm judiciousness the laurel wreaths on the lowering brows of the plebeians tortured with

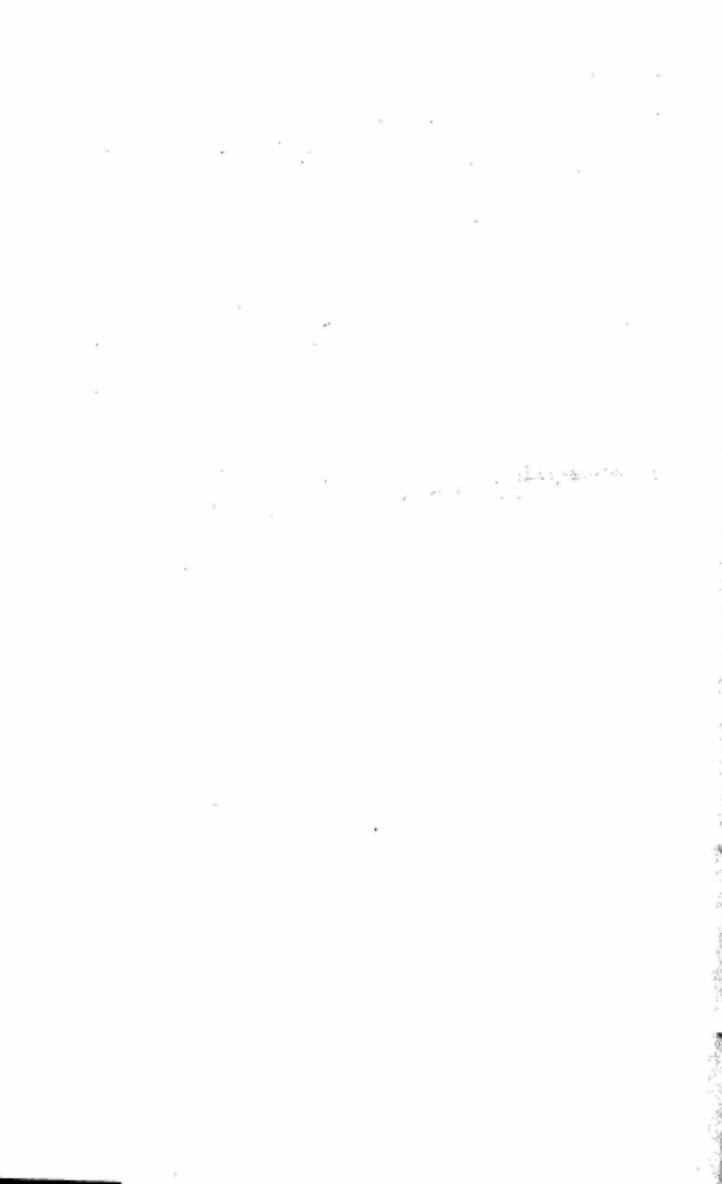
the pangs of hunger, despised by the imperialist bureaucracy, abused as thieves, vandals and galley-slaves by the privileged minority, their wives and children plunged with still greater misery, and the best of their survivors hounded to exile on the sweltering heat of the Andamans.

In spite of all hardships all those survivors who have incessantly fought and are still fighting to establish a socialist society in India deserve our salutation. I make a humble dedication of this volume to all those crusaders of socialism.

Finally, I like to thank Dr Tara Chand who has been kind enough to write a foreword to this book. My thanks are also due to the staff of ICWA library and National Archives research room, who cheerfully made available all reference material and other facilities. I also extend my thanks to other friends, especially Dr B. S. Pavedya, Dr Devendra Kaushik, Jogendra Chopra and D. A. George, whose help and advice in getting this book prepared were invaluable.

*21 October 1971*

SUKHBIR CHOUDHARY



Received free from Gayatri unit, Min. of Education, N. Delhi, Pica-1339

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*Chapter One*

# Early Struggles (1905-1918)

## THE PEASANTRY

Down in the depths of our soul, we, the educated people, have become Anglicised... Our borrowed Anglicism repels our unsophisticated countrymen... Besides we seem to look upon them with contempt. Do we invite them to our assemblies and our conferences? Perhaps we do when we want their signatures to some petition to be submitted before the government; but do we associate with them heartily in any of our endeavours? Do we cooperate with them in deed and truth? Is the peasant a member of any of our committees or conferences? Do we consult his voice in arriving at any of our decisions?... Do we think of our ravaged and depopulated villages? Do we think of the hungry, half-starved, malaria-stricken skeletons who drag out the lingering chain of life in the dim and forgotten recesses of those dreary haunts of disease... Our political agitation is a lifeless and soulless force—a thing without reality and truth... Hence our political agitation is unsubstantial—divorced from all intimate touch with the soul of our people.

[An extract from the Presidential Speech of C. R. Das at the Bengal Provincial Conference held in April 1917, *Deshbandhu Chitta Ranjan*, A Collection of His Speeches, Calcutta, 1926, pp. 9-10, 42-43.]

## INTELLIGENTSIA AND THE MASSES

Before the first world war there hardly existed any political consciousness among the Indian masses. They remained more or less unaware of political bodies like the Indian National

Congress or of the numerous clandestine revolutionary violent activities carried out by the young intelligentsia, fresh from the schools and universities, for the liberation of their country from the political and economic exploitation of the alien regime.<sup>1</sup>

On the eve of the peasants' campaign against the indigo planters in Champaran when Mahatma Gandhi visited that area he found that the Congress was practically unknown in those parts. Even those who had heard the name of the Congress shrank from joining or even mentioning it.<sup>2</sup> And this was practically true about the peasantry of the whole country. Too busy trying to exist they had no time to think about national problems. Far from participating in the national struggles launched under the leadership of the intelligentsia most of the masses remained burdened by the day-to-day problems of their worldly existence.

Nearly nine-tenths of the population was scattered in small villages and almost innumerable hamlets where they followed the same agricultural and pastoral pursuits as their forefathers had done for countless generations and reproduced in modern times immensely ancient conditions of life, which have survived all the vicissitudes of India's political history. The vast majority of them always lived on the borderline of hunger, submissive to the immutable laws of nature and climatic conditions peculiar to India. The census of 1921 gave four categories of people supported by agriculture: the cultivators, farm labourers, plantation workers and rent-receivers with their agents. Their relative numerical strength<sup>3</sup> was as follows:

1. This does not, however, mean that there were no peasant uprisings earlier. In fact, there were peasant uprisings in different regions of India. The most significant of these were: the Santhal insurrection (1855-56), the indigo cultivators' strike (1860), the Bengal peasant uprisings (1875-76) and the Moplah uprisings (1896-96). They were symbols, manifestations of the genuine grievances of the peasantry and working class against the mischievous practices of the feudal lords, moneylenders and the planters in the indigo and the tea-plantation industries.

2. Mahatma Gandhi, *An Autobiography or The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, Ahmedabad, 1938, pp. 303-4.

3. Figures cited in *Communists Challenge Imperialism from the Dock*, Calcutta, National Book Agency Private Ltd., 1967, p. 159.

Peasant cultivators	173 million
Farm labourers	38 million
Plantation workers	2.4 million
Rent-receivers and their agents	10.6 million

These various groups, under the existing system of exploitation, went on simultaneously increasing their number. While on the one hand the number of peasant cultivators and farm labourers grew, the total number of rent-receivers in British India rose from 8.5 million in 1911 to 10.6 million in 1921.<sup>4</sup> The number of landlords also went up from 2,845 thousand in 1911 to 3,727 thousand in 1921.<sup>5</sup>

Overconfident of winning political reforms just by delivering impressive public addresses or holding meetings and seminars, even the intelligentsia never seriously pondered over the programme of organising the Indian peasantry in the rank-and-file of their national struggle. In his address delivered at the Bengal Provincial Conference held in April 1917, Deshbandhu Chitta Ranjan Das mentioned this artificially created overconfidence of the intelligentsia and their isolation from and apathy towards the poor masses of peasants in India. He stated:

"Fancying ourselves invincible in a panoply of learned phrases, we challenge the government to enter into a war of words with us. We fancy that we shall triumph by talk and discussions and so we burden all our endeavours with a load of unnecessary words and formulas. We boast of being educated but how many are we? What room do we occupy in the country? What is our relation to the vast masses of our countrymen? Do they think our thoughts or speak our speech? I am bound to confess that our countrymen have little faith in us."<sup>6</sup>

In his presidential address C. R. Das also complained of the superiority complex of the intelligentsia on the basis of caste, education and wealth. He stated:

4. *Ibid.*

5. *Statistical Abstract for British India 1915, 1932 and Abstract of Tables 1931 Census.*

6. *Deshbandhu Chitta Ranjan, A' Collection of Speeches, Calcutta, 1926, pp. 9-10.*



"Hitherto, all our attempts have ended in huge failure... We are proud of our education, proud of our wealth and proud of our caste, and this threefold pride has so deadened and blinded our senses that, in all our essay and endeavours we leave quite out of account those who are the flesh, blood and backbone of the land. And curiously enough, all this pride of ours springs from utter emptiness and poverty. We are proud of wealth because our wealth stands at zero; and we are proud of education because our education is utterly false and unreal. How will the city-bred babu, who is paid by the month, who can jingle a few rupees in his pocket—how will such a one sit side by side with the 'horny-handed' sons of the soil?... To those who earn their bread with the sweat of their brow—those who in their grinding poverty have kept alive the torch of their ancient culture and ancient polity—those whom our English civilisation and English culture and English law-courts have yet been powerless entirely to corrupt, those whom the oppression of zamindars and mahajans have failed wholly to crush—are, we, a corrupt and effete handful, their betters and superiors?"<sup>7</sup>

On the whole, political organisations like the Indian National Congress remained confined to the small fringe of the educated classes. The masses had very little stake in them. As late as 1918 Choudhri Peeru Singh, a Jat tenant delegate to the Congress session of that year, complained: "Previous to this the gates

7. *Ibid.*, p. 60.

C. R. Das might have sincerely believed in the elevation of the masses. Being a liberal humanitarian he might have been acutely conscious of the poverty of Indian masses. But his colleagues and followers did not stand the test of time. For instance, the Goalpara Tenancy Bill was brought in by the Bengal government in 1927 to regularise the status of tenants and to propose an encroachment on the exploitation of the zamindars, which they enjoyed in virtue of the permanent settlement. The local landlords obviously raised a hue and cry; but what looked curious was that the nationalists of Bengal supported the landlords. The nationalist journal *Forward*, condemned the bill on the ground that "it will destroy the ties of common nationality existing between Bengal and Goalpara" (Cited in *The Masses*, December 1927, p. 178).

of the pandal have been closed to us."<sup>8</sup> In that very session for the first time a resolution demanding redressal of the grievances of the Champaran peasantry and that also on the repeated insistence of Babu Braj Kishore Prasad and Raj Kumar Shukla, two peasant leaders from Bihar, was introduced.<sup>9</sup> Earlier, when Raj Kumar Shukla approached Lokmanya Tilak and Malaviya with the grievances of indigo cultivators, he was told that the immediate question before the Congress was political freedom.<sup>10</sup>

In the last century the nationalist opposition, according to communist sources, was the undisguised supporter of the landlords. They cited the name of R. C. Dutt who, according to their estimation, was a bourgeois economist and successfully exposed the policy of the imperialist government in retarding the growth of Indian industries. He expressed his admiration for the landlords thus:

"They (thoughtful men) have recognised that, apart from the political gain of having influential bodies of men between the alien government and an unrepresented nation of cultivators, the opinion and influence of such men belonging to the country and to the people, lighten the administration, correct its mistakes, resist its arbitrariness and bring it more in touch with the people."<sup>11</sup>

These lines were written in 1903. This apologia for the landlords was characteristic of the nationalist movement.

As against this prevailing mutual indifference of the Indian National Congress and the mass of the peasantry Lord Curzon and his bureaucratic set-up were emphasising that they had done better for the welfare and protection of the peasantry of the country from the rapacity of the landlords, and that the peasants had been in the background of every policy enunciated by them. Lord Curzon stated:

8. *Report of the Proceedings of the Annual Session of the Congress Held in 1918 at Delhi*, Delhi, 1918, p. 118.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

10. D. G. Tendulkar, *Gandhi in Champaran*, Publications Division of Government of India, New Delhi, 1957, p. 24.

11. Cited in *Communists Challenge Imperialism from the Dock*, n. 3, pp. 168-69.

"My eye has always rested upon a large canvas, crowded with untold numbers, the real people of India, as distinct from any class or section of the people... It is the Indian poor, the Indian peasant, the patient, humble, silent millions, the 80 per cent who subsist by agriculture, who know very little of policies, but who profit or suffer by their results, and whom men's eyes, even the eyes of their countrymen, too often forget. He has been in the background of every policy for which I have been responsible, of every surplus of which I have assisted in the disposition. We see him not in the splendour and opulence, nor even in the squalor of great cities; he reads no newspapers, for as a rule he cannot read at all; he has no politics. But he is the bone and sinew of the country; by the sweat of his brow the soil is tilled, from his labour comes one-fourth of the national income, he should be the first and the final object of every viceroy's regard."<sup>12</sup>

Lord Curzon was not the only viceroy claiming credit of being benevolent and sympathetic towards the socio-economic problems of the peasantry. As a matter of fact, the entire bureaucratic machinery kept on claiming such credit. However their claims were not justified. The decreasing opportunities for tours, the camp life and for interviews with Indians, who came to the headquarters, as their fathers came, to pay their respects to the *sahib*, the use of motor-cars which rarely left the high road and the disuse of the languages of the people—these lost them touch with the people. Perhaps the people rarely cared who was their ruler. He came and went and they had never regarded him as their protector. They relied more on providence for their safety and security. The authors of 1917 Reform Scheme admitted:

"The figure of the individual cultivator does not often contact the eye of the government in Simla and Whitehall. It is chiefly in the mass that they deal with him, as a consumer of salt or of piecegoods, or unhappily too often as the victim of scarcity or disease."<sup>13</sup>

12. Lord Curzon in *India, Being a Collection of His Speeches in 1898-1905*, London, Macmillan & Co., 1908, Vol. II, pp. 326-27.

13. *Montagu-Chelmsford Report*, Paragraph 135.

Though the claims of bureaucracy remained unanswered by the Indian National Congress as a whole, yet they made many individuals of the intelligentsia conscious about the mass problems. These members, though microscopic in number, challenged on individual level the bureaucratic claims. Lala Lajpat Rai wrote that Indian intellectuals were really surprised at the presumption of the British bureaucrat in posing as the special friend of the Indian masses as against their own educated countrymen. The experience of the past did not support the claim and there was absolutely no reason to assume that it would be different in the future. All these years the bureaucracy had done nothing for the *ryot* and now they posed as his special friends. Lala Lajpat Rai believed that the *ryot* and the working men in India were being "robbed" by the classes in possession of the means of production and distribution. The bureaucracy took them as mere bricks and stones. The intelligentsia would fully support any scheme which would lead a just and righteous distribution of wealth and land in India and which would ensure the masses their proper place in the body politics.<sup>14</sup>

Challenging the claims of the alien bureaucracy that they were the sole guardians, friends and well-wishers of the masses and that the masses were with them and not with the microscopic minority of intelligentsia Abdul Kasim, a nationalist-minded Muslim delegate to the 1918 session of the Indian National Congress, stated:

14. Lala Lajpat Rai, *The Call to Young India*, Madras, Ganesh & Co., 1920, pp. 86-87, 122.

The same Lala Lajpat Rai, however, made a *volte face* in 1926 at the time of the passing of the Punjab Moneylenders Bill, which was directed towards rationalising usury by making it compulsory for the moneylenders to register themselves with the government. In his journal *People Lalaji* wrote; "If the Bill is passed in its present form and enforced vigorously, the blow aimed at 40,000 moneylenders of the province will hit a more numerous class. The restriction of credit on a vast scale that will be bound to result from an enforcement of the provisions of this measure will hit industry and agriculture alike." *The Masses*, from which this passage is taken, remarked on it that the Lalaji in his anxiety for the already "overflowing pockets" of 40,000 individuals "forgets the rest of the 20 millions who are going deeper into the mire of misery and starvation" (Cited in *The Masses*, June 1926).

"If the masses are with them, I ask them to let them have the privilege of self-determination and let the masses declare that they want a bureaucratic government. If they are so conscious of their own ability they should not hesitate to place themselves at the tribunal of the public opinion and self-determination."<sup>15</sup>

The growth of this consciousness among the intelligentsia undermined the prevailing attitude of apathy and indifference towards the peasants. It also made them realise the stark reality that their struggle against the perpetuation of alien domination would not be realistic or attain a dynamic and revolutionary character and there would not be much of a spirit of self-rule unless the mass of the peasantry and working class, constituting 75 per cent of the population, cooperated with them in all the emergent phases. Besides this, the altruistic and humanitarian reasons also played a role in moulding the outlook of the intelligentsia. At the same time it should not be overlooked that individuals may sometimes rise above selfish interests but classes never. It is not in the nature of an influential class to relinquish its opportunities for exploitation. Likewise the bourgeois intelligentsia also wanted to use the masses to attain political power for itself. Thus the nationalist intellectuals denied the presence of class struggle, not because they did not see that it was existing, but because they wanted to put off the time when this class struggle would assume such a critical form that it would not only overthrow foreign domination but be a serious danger to the indigenous exploiters.

The nationalist bourgeois intellectuals were not in favour of an agrarian revolution. On the other side, they had to extort reforms from British imperialism. For this purpose, "It becomes the more important for it (intelligentsia) to obtain support from the peasantry."<sup>16</sup> Thus, in order to get the active support of the peasantry in Hindi-speaking zones which comparatively lagged behind Bengal and Western India in industrial development, the intelligentsia started championing the

15. *Report of the Thirty-third Session of the Indian National Congress Held at Delhi on 28-31 December, 1918*, p. 115.

16. Colonial Thesis of the Sixth Congress of the Third International.

cause of the bulk of the peasantry not only in their speeches delivered from the public platforms or the annual conferences and meetings of their respective political organisations, but also through their creative writings and poems full of nationalistic fervour. In his *Bharat-Bharati* Maithili Sharan Gupta<sup>17</sup> inserted the following verse:

देख अपने कृषकों को चित्त में आता वही—  
 हा दूध ! क्या जीते हुए आजन्म मरना था उन्हें ?  
 भिक्षुक बनाते, पर विधे ! कृषक न करना था उन्हें ॥...  
 पानी बनाकर रखत का, कृषि कृषक करते हैं यहाँ,  
 फिर भी अभाग्य भूख से दिन-रात मरते हैं वहाँ ।...  
 बरखा रहा रीति अनल, भूतल तथा साँ जल रहा...  
 देसाँ, कृषक शोणित सुखाकर हल तथापि चला रहे ॥...  
 उन कृषक-बन्धुओं की दशा पर नित्य रोती हैं दया,  
 हिम-शाय-दृष्टि-सहिष्णु जिनका रंग काता पड़ गया ।...  
 चित्त को वे दीन जन किस भाँति बहलाया करें ?  
 क्या आँसुओं से ही उसे वे नित्य नहलाया करें ?

The recital of such creative nationalistic poems from public platforms or their publication in a book form or in a journal made them so popular that they were quickly picked up even by the laymen in the street and young students going from the villages to study in the cities of Northern and Central India. On returning home these students recited them in the evening get-togethers of the peasants around their *hookahs*. The intelligent peasants of the region quickly became aware of the fact that far away from their isolated rural life there were emerging certain nationalist forces in the urban areas which were ready to support their long-accumulated claims and grievances against the feudal and bourgeois elements of their area. The impact of these Hindi poems inspiring the Hindi-speaking peasants to struggle for their rights was as strong as that of Bengali literature composed to inspire the Bengal peasants to rise up against the tyranny of the indigo planters in the previous century.

17. Maithili Sharan Gupta, *Bharat-Bharati*, Sabitya Sadan, Chirgaon, 25th ed., pp. 92-97.

## PEASANT STRUGGLES IN PUNJAB

Like Northern and Central India the Punjab was also not an industrially developed area. So unlike the Bengal and Bombay regions, in the Punjab it was the peasants and small landowners who, instead of the working class, were the first to take the initiative in agitating against the oppressive and ruthlessly exploiting system of foreign imperialism. The enhancement in the land tax implemented by Kitchen, a British official, towards the close of 1906, the increase in other land taxation, in irrigation and other payments extorted from the peasants, were bound to cause discontent. The new act limiting the rights of landowners in areas of settlement colonies, particularly the Chenab colony, caused still greater unrest in the Punjab rural area. In addition, there were rumours about a revision of rights to hold landed property, which greatly disturbed both peasants and landowners. All this happened against a background of dire poverty aggravated by thirteen years of almost constant crop failure. The sufferings of the people were further aggravated by an epidemic of plague which, according to official data, caused the death of 65,000 weekly in the province.<sup>18</sup>

A social organisation of Bombay believed that the disorders in the Punjab were caused by the action of the colonialists themselves. It commented:

"In the Punjab it is various government measures, such as Colonisation and Land Alienation Amendment Acts, increased canal rates of the Bari Doab Canal, increased land revenue at Rawalpindi, the difference of policy in prosecuting *The Punjabee* (a popular local paper) and not proceeding against the *Civil and Military Gazette* (an organ of British Civil Service in the Punjab), the severity of the sentence on *The Punjabee*, which are all obviously the causes for a great deal of excitement and unrest."<sup>19</sup>

It is not astonishing that with such widespread dissatisfaction in the Punjab, the most militant elements of the Indian fighters

18. H. W. Navinson, *New Spirit in India*, London, 1908, p. 301.

19. *Times of India*, 25 May 1907, p. 6.

for freedom, the Extremists, should have gained considerable following there. There is evidence that S. Ajit Singh, a leading Punjabi Extremist and uncle of the renowned martyr, S. Bhagat Singh, exercised great hold over the peasants, particularly agricultural labourers. In February 1907 he organised an Indian Patriots' Association which worked mainly for the amelioration of the peasants' grievances.<sup>20</sup>

In April 1907 the smothered exasperation of different sections of the Punjabi people against the predatory policy of the imperialist authorities began to break out in open actions against them. People began to attend meetings of different kinds. On 7 April 1907, for example, 12,000 peasants of Lahore district assembled at a protest meeting in Bari Doab against increased irrigation rates.<sup>21</sup> According to British newspapers, peasants began coming into town to listen to the political agitators. In April 1907, for example, 500 came on a single day to a meeting arranged by S. Ajit Singh. After the meeting they armed themselves with sticks. Ajit Singh told another meeting in Rawalpindi on 21 April:

'Brothers, we are 29 crores, they (the British) are 1½ lakhs. Admitted they have guns, but these can be blown away by the breath of 29 crores and for them we have our fists. I met a Russian once and he said to me: 1½ lakhs are ruling 29 crores! This is preposterous. Government is a great liar and tyrant, do not expect sympathy from it. Its only object is to obtain money.'<sup>22</sup>

Ajit Singh also revealed facts illustrating the increased taxation, the indifference of the authorities to the sufferings of the starving, and called on Indians to unite. Other speakers denounced the increased land taxes, water rates and compulsory labour. A patriotic poem<sup>23</sup> which later became the most famous Punjabi folklore was recited at the gathering calling the people to struggle against the British:

20. *Ibid.*

21. *Ibid.*, 13 April 1907, p. 7.

22. *Confidential Report of the Native-owned Newspapers Published in the Punjab Ending up to 30 April 1907*, p. 81.

23. *Ibid.*



पगड़ी सम्भाल ओ बट्टा, पगड़ी सम्भाल ओये ।  
 लुट लिया माल तेरा हाल बंहाल ओये ॥  
 दू सारी दुनिया दा मालिक तेरी दुनिया खाली ।  
 तेरे घर बिच हनेल पैं गया, लोकां घर दिवाली ॥

A police attempt to intimidate the orators only stirred up anger in the town. The next day two or three thousand came out in a demonstration in Rawalpindi in protest against the police action. The police dispersed the demonstrators but they soon gathered again and were joined by the men from the railway workshops, who downed tools. Despite the repressive measures the unrest in the city continued. On 2 May, troops called out to disperse demonstration of seven or eight thousand met with resistance. The demonstrators defended themselves with sticks and stones.<sup>24</sup> Demonstrations and meetings organised in Lahore, Amritsar and other cities also frequently ended in clashes with the police. According to official sources the number of meetings held in the province from 1 March to 1 May was 28.<sup>25</sup>

Alarmed by the growth of this political consciousness, the Anglo-Indians charged that disloyal Bengal had infected loyal Punjab with the virus of sedition. They jeered the Punjabis for this unwanton act of disloyalty. Quick was the rejoinder from the *Bande Mataram*. Its leader-writer Aurobindo Ghose cheered the Punjabis for their brave fight. He remarked, "Undoubtedly, the new spirit, which has gone out like a mighty fire from Bengal lighting up the whole of India, has found its most favourable ground in the Punjab; but a fire does not burn", he pointed out rightly, "without fuel, and where there is the most revolutionary spirit, there, we can always be sure, has been the most oppression." Highlighting the oppression Aurobindo added that the events in the Punjab were an instructive lesson in the nature of bureaucratic rule. The writer also pointed out that the Punjab had, since 1857, been a quiet, loyal and patient province; whatever burdens had been laid

24. *Ibid.*, 11 May 1907, p. 4.

25. *Ibid.*, 18 May 1907, p. 4.

on it, its people had borne without complaint; whatever oppression might go on, it gave rise to no such clamour and agitation as the least arbitrary act would be met with in Bengal. And how had the bureaucracy treated this loyal and quiet people? What fruit had they reaped from their loyalty, the men who had saved the British empire in 1857? According to Aurobindo it had been "intolerable burdens, insolent treatment, rude oppression".<sup>26</sup>

To redeem themselves from this oppression, said Aurobindo, when the people started passive resistance and confined themselves to sending in a statement of their grievances to the government, they committed no act of violence, they broke no law. But

"The rulers of India know well that if passive resistance is permitted, the artificial fabric of bureaucratic despotism will fall down like the walls of Jericho before mere sound, with the mere breath of a people's revolution. To save the situation, they resorted to the usual device of stifling the voice of the people into silence."<sup>27</sup>

The colonialists were alarmed not so much by the meetings and demonstrations as by the spread of disaffection in army units consisting of Punjabis—a specific feature of the liberation movement, in the Punjab in 1907.<sup>28</sup> Punjab was one of the main centres for recruiting Indian soldiers for the British army, and the unrest in the Punjab weakened a most important instrument of imperialist rule—the armed forces.

The dissatisfaction caused by increased taxes spread to the Indian army units, since the rank-and-file had been drawn from the peasantry. British authorities and possibly the Commander-in-Chief Lord Kitchener were seriously disturbed by the situation. They also had grave apprehensions of mass outbreaks on

26. Haridas Mukherjee & Uma Mukherjee, ed., *Sri Aurobindo and the New Thought in Indian Politics*, A Collection of Writings by Aurobindo, Calcutta, Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1964, pp. 51-52.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

28. According to V. Chirol, the members of Arya Samaj conducted anti-British propaganda among soldiers. (V. Chirol, *Indian Unrest*, London, 1910, p. 117.)

10 May 1907, the fiftieth anniversary of the first war of national independence fought in 1857.<sup>29</sup>

To quell the resurgent forces, the British authorities, apart from their repressive measures, were compelled to make certain concessions. The viceroy did not sign the bill on land colony legislation, which would have given the local authorities wide powers to interfere in peasant affairs and would have enforced stricter regulations in the renting of state land.<sup>30</sup> This somewhat pacified the Punjabi peasants.<sup>31</sup>

The Punjab correspondent of the *Englishman* laid stress on the significance of cancelling the latest land taxation measures if open disturbances in the Indian army units stationed in the Punjab were to be averted. He wrote:

"At the beginning of this year the native officers...urged that unless the provisions of the canal colony legislation were vetoed they could not answer for the loyalty of the native army in the Punjab. The commanding officers confidentially told His Excellency Lord Kitchener that unless the canal colony legislation was vetoed and Lala Lajpat Rai and Ajit Singh arrested they could not answer for the loyalty of the native army in the Punjab."<sup>32</sup>

By threatening to resign, Lord Kitchener secured the arrest of Lajpat Rai and Ajit Singh, and a veto on the land colony legislation.<sup>33</sup>

Another British paper, *The Pioneer*, silenced the anxiety of Indian feudal lords by telling them that the rumours about a revision of their rights were groundless.

In other parts of Northern India British apprehensions of another "Sepoy Mutiny" were very real. In Delhi, for instance, there was considerable opposition in April 1907 to raising municipal taxes. In the words of Keir Hardie, Labour MP, who visited India:

29. From Gokhale's letter to the Editor on the arrest of Lala Lajpat Rai, *Times of India*, 25 May 1907, p. 7.

30. *Times of India*, 1 April 1907, p. 9.

31. *Ibid.*, 15 June 1907, p. 4.

32. *Ibid.*, 14 October 1907, p. 8.

33. *Ibid.*

"As 10 May approached, the agitation against the municipal assessment in Delhi still continuing, the military authorities made up their minds for the worst. The gates of Delhi were strongly guarded by military patrols and no Indian was allowed to pass out or in after dark."<sup>34</sup>

The fear among the British *sahibs* was so great that on 10 May they easily fell into a panic in Delhi.<sup>35</sup>

The British government began to adopt harsh measures against the Punjabis. The bureaucracy also hurriedly resolved to "lop off the tall heads"—a policy which was severely condemned by the *Bande Mataram* on 6 May 1907 as the "policy of the tyrant Tarquin which is always the resort of men without judgment or statesmanship".<sup>36</sup>

Lala Hansraj, one of the most revered of the Punjab leaders, a man grown grey in the quiet and selfless service of his country, was publicly threatened with prosecution and imprisonment as a criminal. In Lahore Lala Lajpat Rai, one of the most prominent leaders of the Indian National Congress, was arrested and deported to Burma without investigation or trial, secretly in a sealed car. His arrest and deportation brought about a fresh wave of indignation not only in the Punjab, but throughout the country.<sup>37</sup> Big protest meetings were held in the South—in Coimbatore (Madras province) and also in Rangoon (Burma).<sup>38</sup> Soon afterwards the colonial police traced and arres-

34. J. K. Hardie, *India, Impressions and Suggestions*, London, 1910, p. 67.

35. According to Keir Hardie, the panic which seized the British in Delhi was caused by the following incident. On the morning of 10 May 1907, one of the contractors tried to cheat the workmen, employed in laying a new tramway, of a portion of their wages "whereupon they set upon him and gave him a good pommelling. A half-drunken Eurasian... saw the fight", and assumed it was a mass riot. He rushed to the European Club reporting that "Delhi had risen". The alarm spread to the British residential sections. The British barricaded their houses over a twelve hour period expecting attack (*Ibid.*, p. 68). As to the municipal tax increases, these were cancelled following widespread protest.

36. Haridas Mukherjee & Uma Mukherjee, n.26, p. 52.

37. *Times of India*, 18 May 1907, pp. 6-7.

38. *Ibid.*, 18 May 1907, p. 7; 25 May, p. 6.

ted Ajit Singh, who was deported without trial to Burma with even greater precautions than in the case of Lala Lajpat Rai. A special ordinance was issued giving officials the right to ban any meeting in the Punjab and East Bengal.<sup>39</sup>

These repressive measures further provoked the people. There followed a phenomenon unprecedented in the history of the Punjab. For the first time the man in the street had risen in revolt for purely political reasons in anger at an attack on purely political leaders. The distinction, which the bureaucracy had striven to draw between the "baboo" class and the people, had in the Punjab ceased to exist. It was possibly the panic at this disquietening phenomenon which hurried the provincial government into, what Aurobindo called, an extraordinary coup d'état. Reviewing and commenting on the situation the Extremist leader wrote:

"The result is that we have a strange companion picture to that dream of a benevolent and angelic Britain—a city (Rawalpindi where near about 45 men were arrested) of unarmed men terrorised by the military, the leaders of the people hurried from their daily avocations to prison, siege-guns pointed at the town, police rifle ready to fire on any group of five men or more to be seen in the street, bail refused to respectable pleaders and barristers from sheer terror of their influence. Look on this picture, then on that (of so-called British benevolence)! And what next? It is too early to say: This much only is certain that a new stage begins in the struggle between democracy and bureaucracy, a new chapter opens in the history of the progress of Indian nationalism."<sup>40</sup>

The *Bande Mataram* continued to express its indignation against the repressive policy of the colonial authorities. The newspaper was particularly very much agitated over the deportation of Lala Lajpat Rai and S. Ajit Singh under Regulation III of 1818 Act, which was at the time of writing the leader by Aurobindo the latest sample of the liberal administration of

39. *Ibid.*, 18 May 1907, p. 6.

40. Haridas Mukherjee & Uma Mukherjee, n. 26, p. 53.

Minto and Morley. Making a critical review of the depressive situation Aurobindo wrote on 11 May 1907:

"The last action of the Minto-Morley government has torn every veil from the situation and the policy of the British rulers. Whatever else may be the result of this vigorous attempt to crush nationalism in the Punjab, it has the merit of clearing the air. We have no farther excuse for mistaking our position or blundering into ineffective policies. The bureaucracy has declared with savage emphasis that it will tolerate a meekly carping loyalism, it will tolerate an effective agitation of prayer, protest and petition, but it will not tolerate the New Spirit. If the Indian harbours aspirations towards freedom, towards independence, towards self-government in his mind, let him crush them back and keep them close locked in his heart; for from English secretary or Anglo-Indian pro-consul, from Conservative or from Liberal they can expect neither concession nor toleration. Indian aspirations and bureaucratic autocracy cannot stall together; one of them must go."<sup>41</sup>

The upsurge of freedom movement in the Punjab was comparatively short but very active. It was only the quick reaction of the authorities, who combined repressive measures against active fighters with concessions to the landowners, that enabled them to avert more drastic mass actions. The events in this part of India were a significant milestone in the rise of the freedom struggle throughout India in 1905-8.

A salient feature of the Punjab disturbance was the joint actions of the urban petty-bourgeoisie and workers against the imperialist rule, and the support given to these actions by some strata of the peasantry in the adjacent rural areas. They were brief and to a considerable extent spontaneous, but nevertheless constituted combined action by representatives of the main classes and strata of Indian society.

For a short while there was a lull in the Punjab movement after the deportation of Lala Lajpat Rai and S. Ajit Singh. But

41. *Ibid.*, pp. 59-60.

it was the lull before the storm—a storm which would have swept away British rule but for the treachery of a Sikh spy.

#### GHADAR MOVEMENT

Outside India in San Francisco (USA) there was being organised another movement, viz, the Ghadar (Rebel) Party, by the revolutionaries from the Punjab. It was founded not by the middle class youth but by Punjabi peasants who had emigrated to the USA to earn money working labourers in farms and factories. The aim of the Ghadar Party was to overthrow the imperialist British rule in India and substitute it with the establishment of a national republic based on freedom and equality.

In a confidential weekly report of the Director of Criminal Intelligence, Government of India, dated 15 June 1915, which was recommended to be burned and not kept on record by recipients other than Head of Provinces, by whom perhaps it might be handed over to the Inspector-General of Police for confidential record, and whose contents were only to be divulged to selected officers at the discretion and on the responsibility of the addressee, we find the text of a letter from one Thakur Singh, originally from a Sikh peasant family but settled in Canton and closely linked with the Ghadar Party, written to another peasant revolutionary, Bhagwan Singh. It was intercepted by the censor at Hongkong. The letter, which was addressed to San Francisco and had been redirected to Manila, was written in November 1914. Its contents are of considerable interest.

Thakur Singh wrote to his friend that he was shortly returning to India and that, as he might never again meet Bhagwan Singh, he was resolved to speak out his mind. As men who returned from abroad to their native villages were placed under surveillance, he intended to proceed straight to the headquarters of the party, where he would remonstrate with the leaders for doing nothing but talking. The writer of the letter suggested that at the end of December each man should go to his village for a few days and rouse the young men. On the birthday of the 10th Guru Govind Singh early in January; the people should

assemble and proceed to destroy the railway lines and cut the telegraph wires. Disclosing his plans he added: "I will clear the district of Ludhiana and then march ahead. After murdering the district officials I will appoint members of the revolutionary party in their place." The outbreak must take place simultaneously in every district in the Punjab. On the preceding night emissaries would be sent to each native regiment to tell them of the approaching revolution. Thakur Singh hoped that when he next wrote it would be to announce that India was independent.<sup>42</sup>

He went on to propound a utopian scheme for the government of independent India. According to his scheme all property would be held in common. Every morning the villagers would assemble for an hour to sing national songs and take instruction in the arts of war. One hour's work in the morning and one in the evening would suffice for the cultivation of the common village land. Money and the police would both be abolished. Why should there be any theft or robbery, borrowing or interest when property was common. The author also revealed that in each province there would be one huge factory for the production of cloth, shoes, umbrellas and other necessities of civilisation. Each village would send its quota of men to work in the factory for a month at a time. Electric cars would run in every village.<sup>43</sup>

There is no doubt of the sincerity of Thakur Singh's revolutionary sentiments, for he wrote that he had obtained six revolvers and three hundred rounds of ammunition; but for a deliverer of his country and a founder of a new utopia, his actual stay in India was undistinguished. He returned to India in the beginning of January and was not at first placed under any restriction, but subsequently he fell under suspicion and was ordered to remain in his native village.<sup>44</sup>

Like Thakur Singh there were other returned emigrant Sikh peasants who made revolutionary attempts to overthrow

42. Home (Pol.) Department, Government of India, June 1915, File No. 349-52, p. 12.

43. *Ibid.*

44. *Ibid.*



the British regime. Particularly since the beginning of June 1915 there had been a revival of activity on the part of these returned emigrants in the Jullundur and Amritsar districts. On the night of 4 June the house of the treasurer of a village bank was raided to collect money for the revolution. As the money belonging to the bank was kept in another house, no property was stolen but a villager was shot dead and another wounded in the leg. The tracks of the revolutionaries were followed and on 7 June four Sikhs were arrested. Two of them proved to be absconders in the so-called Lahore Conspiracy Case, one of them being also wanted in a revolutionary murder in the Hoshiarpur district the previous April.

On the night of 11 June a group of peasant revolutionaries attacked the guard of a canal bridge about two miles from Amritsar. They appeared to have waited until the attention of the sentry was distracted by a passing goods train and then they surprised and overpowered the guard. The sentry was shot dead, one sepoy was severely wounded with an axe and three others received slight wounds. The body of the Naik in charge of the guard was afterwards found in the canal bearing three bullet wounds. The revolutionaries ransacked the tent belonging to the guard and carried off six rifles, seven bayonets and some 240 rounds of ammunition. Some hours later a party of six men with rifles and bayonets were seen passing down the canal. They posed as a patrol in pursuit of dacoits. Later in the day they shot and killed a man who refused to give them his horse. In the evening they crossed into Kapurthala state, shooting a ferryman who refused to assist them. They were followed by the Amritsar police and a party of villagers but were lost sight of in high grass.<sup>45</sup>

On 14 June 1915 the Kapurthala state authorities reported the arrest of four men, two of whom were returned emigrants and the other two were suspected of the murder of Sardar Achar Singh of Jagatpur, Amritsar, on 4 June.<sup>46</sup>

At about this time, the Sind police reported that between 1 and 9 June 1915 no fewer than forty Sindhis returned to

45. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

46. *Ibid.*

Hyderabad from abroad. These men were employees of firms of Sindhi merchants, who carried on business in various parts of the world. The colonial authorities suspected that the members of this class had been contaminated with the doctrines of the Ghadar Party, and arrangements had been made to keep a watch on the movements of these men and action under the Ingress into India Ordinance was to be taken if necessary.<sup>47</sup>

It may incidentally be pointed out that most of the Ghadarites, on return to India, were arrested and the government tried them under the so-called First Lahore Conspiracy Case in 1915. Twenty-four were sentenced to death with confiscation of their landed property, twenty-six were sentenced to transportation for life, others were given deterrent sentences.

One who sympathised and encouraged the Ghadarites was the renowned Urdu poet from Punjab, Lal Chand "Falak". Along with others he was arrested in the middle of April 1915. They were charged with reviling the government and singing "seditious" songs. Five of the persons arrested had been tried by a special tribunal under the Defence of India Act. Lal Chand had been sentenced to transportation for life, two others to transportation for ten years and the remaining two to imprisonment for two years and one year respectively.<sup>48</sup> On his way to the Andamans<sup>49</sup> the poet "Falak" sang a moving verse:

बिन्दुगानी को मिलने से भिन्नकती है फलक।  
फलक को बाद मेरी बाद फलाह जायेगी ॥

This verse indicates that this revolutionary poet had no hope of returning from his transportation for life. But at the same time he was hopeful that freedom fighters' sacrifices would be remembered by posterity.

All these developments encouraged Indian peasants to organise themselves and fight for their rights. What prevented the

47. *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.

48. Home (Pol.) Department, Government of India, June 1917, File No. 438-41, p. 12.

49. In great horror the islands of Andamans were called in those days as "Kala Pani" or "Black Waters" wherefrom there was no hope of return after transportation.

peasants' agrarian disturbances from spreading and uniting into an agrarian revolution was the nonexistence of a nationwide political movement with an agrarian programme. The peasants were just learning to fight their own battles and were still unorganised and not politically conscious enough to take the lead. The nationalist movement, as is known, was led by the bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeoisie or by persons whose sympathies were with these classes. In the absence of a scientific leadership a peasant movement having healthy grievances against the landlords and moneylenders either turned into a communal riot because the warring factions belonged to different communities, or due to its unorganised strength was left to the cruel mercies of the imperialist hangmen who did their job thoroughly. The class interests of the landlords and moneylenders stood poles apart from those of the peasants.

One such important incident is worth mentioning here. Towards the end of February 1915, when the returned Ghadarites from America and other countries were making life miserable for the British rulers, they were cornered by a sudden upsurge of the Muslim peasantry in the Mooltan, Muzaffargarh and Jhang districts of the South-West Punjab. Though the rising had no link with either the Pan-Islamic or the Ghadar movement, except that like them it was fostered by the news published in certain anti-British, anti-imperialist newspapers that the Germans and Turks were speedily marching towards India and that the British regime was on the way to decline and being wiped out.

On the other hand, the majority of these Muslim peasants were heavily in debt to Hindu moneylenders and were overburdened with the high rise of prices and contraction of credit due to the war. There also spread a dangerous epidemic of plague which drove many of the Hindus to the nearby towns. "The peasantry seized this opportunity", writes Michael O'Dwyer, the Lt.-Governor of Punjab, who is infamous for the Amritsar massacre in April 1919, "to pay off old scores. They rose in a body, looted the shops of the Hindus, seized the grain and money, burnt the account-books which recorded their debts

and began a campaign of disorder and looting which spread with alarming rapidity."<sup>50</sup>

Meanwhile it was rumoured that the British had withdrawn from India. To verify it some emissaries were sent to the district headquarters to see if the British flag was flying. It was Sunday and the government offices were closed and the flag hauled down. This provided strength to the belief created out of the rumour that the British had left India. The peasants organised their bands and within a month robbed and looted more than 50 rich Hindu moneylenders. So much so that two of the leaders of the peasant bands posed as the Kaiser and the Crown Prince. Gradually the peasant uprising assumed a communal colour. Inevitably, property was destroyed in large quantity. Some Hindus were also murdered. The other side also suffered casualties in its encounter with the police. The most peculiar thing to be noted is that during the disturbance no official property was looted, no government servant attacked. The Army was, however, sent to control the situation. The government set up special tribunals. The Mooltan Tribunal tried near about 800 out of 4,000 arrested, sentenced some 500 to severe punishments.<sup>51</sup>

#### FIRST WORLD WAR AND PEASANTS

It is true that a large number of people living in the villages joined the British Army when the first world war broke out. They became mercenaries to defend an imperialist structure not because that they were loyal to the system but because of economic and social compulsions. It is also a fact that people subscribed to the war fund. But there is also the other side of the picture which had been kept hidden from public notice so far. Digging the confidential records of the government of that period in the National Archives has resulted in revealing some very interesting developments.

At certain places the villagers were forbidden to subscribe to

50. Michael O'Dwyer, *India As I Knew It*, London, Constable & Co. Ltd., 1925, p. 210.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 211.

the war fund. Writing on 19 May 1917 the district magistrate of Satara in Bombay presidency reported that he had recently had an interview with a number of villagers, who informed him that a party of four members of Tilak's Home Rule League had visited their village, delivered lectures on Home Rule and induced several villagers to sign the roll of the League. The villagers informed the district magistrate that the visitors had advised them not to subscribe to the war loan because government was not for them and they would lose their money and had told them they could much better give the money to Tilak, who was going to England to ask for Home Rule. The British government, they said, would soon come to an end and Home Rule would be established.<sup>52</sup>

At certain places the colonial police and authorities used highhanded measures which created an impression that villagers would be forcibly recruited. When the district magistrate of Dacca visited a village on tour in October 1917, a rumour went round that he was going to take off all able-bodied labourers in his launch. The night before he arrived all the lower class men of the village disappeared and stayed away till he had gone. It was also reported that in another village in the Bakerganj district a drum was kept handy in the house of some influential villagers in order to raise an alarm should any police officer try to enlist recruits. In the Mymensingh district three duffadars were prosecuted for taking bribes for promising to save people from being forcibly recruited for the Labour Corps.<sup>53</sup>

Liakat Husain, the famous Calcutta agitator, made a violent speech at Dacca in the middle of October 1917 in which he is reported to have used most offensive language regarding persons joining the Bengali Regiment and to have said that no one should join until government altered its internment policy. He had been arrested and was prosecuted under rule 23 of the Defence of India (Consolidation) Rules, 1915.<sup>54</sup>

52. Home (Pol.) Department, Government of India, June 1917, File No. 438-41, p. 18.

53. Home (Pol.) Department, Government of India, October 1917, File No. 2, p. 10.

54. *Ibid.*

Those recruited in Gujarat and sent to the Meerut cantonment for training were reported to have deserted.<sup>55</sup>

Enrolment in the Indian Defence Force was quite slow. In Malabar it was estimated that the total number for the district might not ultimately go beyond 250.<sup>56</sup> In Guntur district the collector referred to recruiting being opposed by the local Home Rule politicians but serving as a healthy counterexcitement with many of the younger men. That the same measure of enthusiasm did not prevail everywhere was evident from the fact that in Tanjore many of the youth who were under the influence of Mrs Besant's eloquence, though they had applications to join the forces, either did not appear at all or definitely withdrew, while in South Arcot, nearly half the original applicants had failed to put in a personal appearance in response to the notices sent them. Again in Chingleput one candidate specifically withdrew his application with reference to the internment of Mrs Besant and Messrs Arundale and Wadia, writing that he did not "care to add to the strength of a government that is stupid and mischievous enough to use the powers it has to strike down the best and foremost of us, the most innocent and law-abiding also in the country".<sup>57</sup>

Likewise the volunteering for the Indian Defence Force in the Central Provinces was still not catching on. The Chief Commissioner in his speech at the closing session of the Legislative Council held on 16 October 1917 referred to the poor response made by the people of this province to the call for volunteers, but it was to be feared that no advice would be of any effect, as the people to whom volunteering should have appealed were showing no sign of any desire to come forward, the fact of the matter being that service of the kind required was distasteful to the illiterate classes. Even the entreaties of the extremist leaders fell on deaf ears, when a campaign for enrolment of volunteers was started by the latter.<sup>58</sup>

At certain places even the promises to subscribe to the war

55. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

56. *Ibid.*

57. *Ibid.*

58. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

loan were not fulfilled. A striking discrepancy was reported from South Kanara in Madras Presidency, where it is stated that the actual subscriptions totalled only Rs 1.73 lakhs as against promises to the aggregate amount of Rs 4.27 lakhs.<sup>59</sup>

Recruitment was slack in Alipore, while 120 convicts from the Trichinopoly Central Jail entrained for Bombay.<sup>60</sup>

#### CHAMPARAN STRUGGLE

At about this time Gandhiji returned from South Africa. He made the experiment of noncooperation on a miniature scale by leading the peasant struggles in Champaran (Bihar) and Kheda (Gujarat). No doubt these struggles were carried out in a reformist way. No doubt Gandhiji stuck to his fixed determination to keep the local and circumscribed character of these struggles. It is also a fact that a broadbased agrarian programme was not placed by Gandhiji before the peasants. Still, it has to be recognised that here one comes across, for the first time, the nationalists organising the peasantry as a class against British feudal lords and the imperialist government and carrying out a struggle on their economic demands. All this demonstrated the probability of a broad organised peasant struggle. These demonstrations filled the urban intellectuals with enthusiasm.

The struggle of the peasants in Champaran launched in 1917-18 was a manifestation of peasants' consciousness and thereby of an opposition to the European planters who resorted to illegal and inhuman methods of indigo cultivation at a cost which by no canons of justice could be called an adequate remuneration for the labour done by them. Besides, the struggle also reflected the spirit of revolt against the exactions, oppression and annoyance to which the poor indigo cultivators were exposed at the hands of the factory servants employed by European planters. The peasants claimed that the days had passed when the planters could run an indigo business with great profit by forcible cultivation and low cost labour. In his report sub-

59. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

60. *Ibid.*

mitted for the perusal of Mr Maude, the Chief Secretary to the Government of Bihar, on 12 May 1917, Mahatma Gandhi stated all these grievances of the Champaran peasantry:

"Indigo... may now be defined as an obligation presumed to attach to the ryot's holding...under coercion. It is inconceivable that the ryots would agree to an enormous perpetual increase in their rents against freedom from liability to grow indigo for a temporary period, which freedom they were strenuously fighting to secure and hourly expecting... Under the tinkathia system the ryot has been obliged to give his best land for the landlord's crops; in some cases the land in front of his house has been so used, he has been obliged to give his best time and energy also to it, so that very little time has been left to him for growing his own crops—his means of livelihood... Inadequate wages have been paid to the ryots...and even boys of tender age have been made to work against their will... There can be no doubt that the latter (planters) have inherited a vicious system. They with their trained minds and superior position have rendered it to an exact science, so that the ryots would not only have been unable to raise their heads above water but would have sunk deeper still had not the government granted some protection. But that protection has been meagre and provokingly slow and has often come too late to be appreciated by the ryots."<sup>61</sup>

This report by Gandhiji was severely criticised by the editor of the *Madras Mail*. Defending Gandhiji against the criticism made in that paper, H.S.L. Polak wrote a letter to the editor of the newspaper. In the course of his letter he said:

"You are likely shortly to have a severe shock and your vaunted knowledge will be immensely enlarged when you come to know the contents of the preliminary report just submitted privately by Mr Gandhi to the Bihar government. Had Mr Gandhi been the indiscreet professional agitator

61. *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, The Publications Division, Government of India, 1964, Vol. XIII, p. 385.



that you suggest him to be, India would now be aflame from end to end and an angry demand would be put forth from every platform in the country to put an end to the horror that has disgraced your countrymen and mine for many years in Bihar."<sup>62</sup>

D. G. Tendulkar also wrote:

"The tale of woes of Indian ryots, forced to plant indigo by the British planters, forms one of the blackest chapters in the annals of colonial exploitation. 'Not a chest of indigo reached England without being stained with human blood.' "<sup>63</sup>

Though outwardly the struggle was against the European planters, from within it was also a reflection of their dissatisfaction against the ruling class which had racial ties with the planters. For the sake of the planters the British bureaucracy was alleged to display a strong bias in disposing of their petitions filed against the European planters to get justice. In protest Gandhiji had written:

"I have entered upon my mission in the hope that they as Englishmen born to enjoy the fullest personal liberty and freedom will not fail to rise to their status and will not be grudging the ryots the same measure of liberty and freedom."<sup>64</sup>

The peasants of Champaran were led and organised by the intelligentsia. The most prominent organisers besides Mahatma Gandhi were Dr Rajendra Prasad, Brij Kishore Prasad, Muzhar-ul-Haq and a number of other people belonging to the intelligentsia. Gone were the days when the peasant movements could remain confined to limited and local economic aims or could end in fiasco without achieving any tangible results. No longer could they be characterised now as spasmodic bickerings culminating in generating more confusion and disorder. Neither

62. Home (Pol.) Department, Government of India, 1917, File No. 438-41, p. 4.

63. D. G. Tendulkar, n. 10, p. 1.

64. *Ibid.*, pp. 65-66.

the struggle of the peasant was an isolated phenomenon nor were the intelligentsia disinterested witnesses to the whole show. The realisation of the interdependence of each other paved the way for not leaving the peasantry alone to face the organised oppression of a politically and financially powerful alien feudal community, and finally to suffer the consequences of the agonising episode. Supporting the cause of the peasantry in his presidential address at the annual conference of the Bihar Provincial Congress Committee held on 10 April 1914 Babu Brij Kishore drew the attention of the assembled delegates towards the dichotomy:

"Whatever good the planters might have done, their dealings with the ryots have brought about a serious agrarian situation and they have resulted in a considerable suffering and misery to the poor and defenceless villagers. It is well known that the ryots' allegations against the planters, which have been held by the courts to be generally well-founded, are to the effect that they are bound to execute illegal *sathas* by methods of coercion including the institution of vexatious cases; that fines and cesses are unlawfully realised from them and they are ill-treated if they attempt in the least to refuse compliance with the orders of the planters... I warn the government that there are rocks ahead and they had better look out."

In the same address he urged the provincial government to appoint an enquiry committee composed of official and non-official individuals to investigate the entire problem and thus to redress the grievances of the tenants.<sup>65</sup>

Next year in 1915 the provincial conference of the Bihar Congress Committee passed a resolution demanding an inquiry committee to redress the hardships of the peasantry in Champaran. Nand Kishore Lal, the president of the conference, also referred to the strained relations between the planters and the *ryots*.<sup>66</sup> A few months afterwards Babu Brij Kishore moved a resolution

65. Rajendra Prasad, *Champaran men Mahatma Gandhi*, Delhi, 1955, pp. 63-65.

66. *Ibid.*, pp. 66-67.

in Bihar Legislative Council in May 1915 in which he again urged the authorities concerned to comply with his demand of the appointment of a mixed committee.<sup>67</sup> The contents of this resolution were more or less the same as that moved by him later in the 1916 Congress session at Lucknow. However, the provincial government refused to comply with his request.

At the 1916 Lucknow session of the Indian National Congress the delegates assembled took up the cause of the Champaran peasantry for the first time in its history. They listened to the grievances of the tenants. Raj Kumar Shukla who had borne the brunt of the indigo planters' oppression and who, in the words of Gandhiji, was "filled with a passion to wash away the stain of indigo for the thousands who were suffering",<sup>68</sup> delivered a moving speech at the session. The following resolution was proposed and unanimously carried out on the second day of the session:

"The Congress most respectfully urges on the government the desirability of appointing a mixed committee of officials and non-officials to inquire into the causes of agrarian trouble and the strained relations between the indigo ryots and the European planters in North Bihar and to suggest remedies therefor."<sup>69</sup>

After returning from Lucknow Raj Kumar Shukla wrote the following letter to Mahatma Gandhi on 27 February 1917:

"In a corner of India, the inhabitants of this place (Champaran), who have the proud privilege of being under the comfortably cool shade of British umbrella, are leading their lives like animals suffering from all kinds of miseries."<sup>70</sup>

On 17 January 1917 the Pratap Press of Kanpur printed a leaflet, entitled *Prarthana*.<sup>71</sup> A few months later was organised the actual struggle. Associating themselves with the struggle

67. *Ibid.*, p. 67.

68. *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, Ahmedabad, 1926, p. 494.

69. *Report 1916*, p. 68. Also see Rajendra Prasad, n. 65, p. 80.

70. *Freedom Movement in Bihar*, Government of Bihar, 1957, Vol. I, p. 194.

71. For detailed study see *Ibid.*, pp. 188-91.

the intelligentsia were ready to face all its consequences. In a letter written to the district magistrate of Champaran, W. B. Heycock, on 14 May 1917 Mahatma Gandhi stated emphatically:

"The desire of the planters generally is that my friends and I should not carry on our work. I can only say that nothing but physical force from the government or an absolute guarantee that the admitted or provable wrongs of the ryots are to stop for ever can possibly remove us from the district. What I have seen of the condition of the ryots is sufficient to convince me that if we withdraw at this stage, we would stand condemned before man and God and, what is more important of all, we would never be able to forgive ourselves... The determination to secure freedom for the ryots from the yoke that is wearing them down is inflexible."<sup>72</sup>

Gandhiji, who was acting in this matter entirely in accordance with the advice of the provincial leaders, had no intention of giving up his investigation. In fact he had written for assistance from Bombay. In the Bombay Presidency young men were being asked to volunteer to assist Gandhiji. They were told that they would be paid for the work out of funds placed by patriotic individuals at Gandhiji's disposal. It is said in a confidential report of the Central Intelligence Department that Gandhiji was at one time anxious to extend his investigations to the whole field of relations between the zamindars and their tenants. It is well known that the disabilities of the tenants were by no means confined to the indigo plantations owned by Europeans. But the local politicians of vested interest could not afford to set the local landlords against themselves, and that was the reason why Gandhiji's investigations were so restricted.<sup>73</sup>

72. Cited by Rajendra Prasad, *Satyagraha in Champaran*, Ahmedabad, Navjivan Publishing House, 1949, 2nd ed., p. 201. Also see *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, n. 61, p. 395.

73. Home (Pol.) Department, Government of India, June 1917, File No. 438-41, p. 4.

"The Bihar Labour Enquiry which Gandhiji had been conducting has the full support of the party in Calcutta. It was proposed that Gandhiji should be asked to undertake a similar investigation in connection with

Resuming the study of the struggle, it may safely be stated that no less significant was the contribution of the peasants themselves. Actually, they were the main elements of the movement, for whose sustenance the agitation was organised. In fact they were in the struggle since its very inception in the latter half of the nineteenth century. In the absence of the mitigation of their sufferings to any extent or in any form their smouldering dissatisfaction frequently found expression in violent protest in 1907-8. The peasants at the Sathi Factory and other neighbouring factories stopped the cultivation of indigo and organised an agitation. To quell it 19 persons were convicted in November 1908. Nearly 200 prisoners awaited trial at Motihari under different charges, including assaulting the alien planters, and arson.

On their refusal to pay the excessive revenues other persons were also tortured. Among the methods adopted were setting Dhangars and Doms, the low caste people, on the high caste tenants besides the policemen tying them down and beating them, and putting logs of wood on their chest. In another method of torture the hands were put underneath the leg and tied to the neck, the leg being raised. If the peasants did not pay even then, they were brought to the factories. They were forced to embrace a nim tree and both their hands tied together and then policemen beat them. On such occasions the indigo planter used to be present on the scene. On the other hand, the red ants on the trees would bite the man tied to the tree but he could do nothing as his hands were tied.<sup>74</sup> Still other coercive measures adopted against the tenants were the impounding of their cattle, the stopping of their wells, compelling the Chamars to cease to render their services to the tenants and the forcible taking of thumb impressions. Besides the spasmodic violent activities against the feudal planters they went on filing petition after petition to the governmental autho-

the grievances of the labourers at the collieries in Bengal. Materials in this connection were being collected and as soon as Gandhiji was able to finish his work in Bihar he was to be asked to extend his labours to the Bengal coalfields" (*Ibid.*, p. 8).

74. *Freedom Movement in Bihar*, n. 70, p. 544.

rities in order to get their grievances redressed, e.g. to prevent the exaction of higher rents from them, and to stop the forcible cultivation of indigo without adequate payment for the same and to prevent the forcible execution of the indigo *sathas*.<sup>75</sup>

When their struggle took place in April 1917, the statements of more than 8,000 tenants from about 850 villages in Champaran against 60 factories of the European planters were recorded under the supervision of Mahatma Gandhi. Dr Rajendra Prasad has provided a graphic eyewitness account of the active participation of the peasants:

"The statements of tenants continued to be recorded the whole day. There was such a continuous stream of these tenants that there was not a minute's break between 6.30 a.m. and 6.30 p.m. Many had to stay overnight and still their statements could not be recorded the next day."<sup>76</sup>

The continuous recording of these statements for many days showed the growth of a new political consciousness in the peasantry. The presence of the intelligentsia amidst them generated more and more confidence in the validity of their cause. They became bold enough to defy the authority of the European planters. Fearlessly they complained against Mr Lewis in his presence. They had realised that if they lacked boldness this time in presenting their valid grievances their future would be doomed for ever. Observing this change in the attitude of the peasantry Dr Rajendra Prasad wrote:

"It was an extraordinary thing for Champaran. Who could have said before Mahatmaji's visit that the tenant of Champaran, who used to conceal himself at the very sight of the factory jamadar, who used to suffer all kinds of disgrace and oppression silently for fear of more and more oppression coming if he complained about it, would in this way accuse the factory manager and the subdivisional magistrate in their very faces. We were all much struck by this change."<sup>77</sup>

75. For further study of some of the petitions filed by the tenants see Rajendra Prasad, *Satyagraha in Champaran*, n. 72, pp. 29-31.

76. *Ibid.*, p. 121.

77. *Ibid.*, p. 141.

Mahatma Gandhi himself wrote later in his *Autobiography* about this political awakening: "It was an ocular demonstration to them (governmental authorities) of the fact that their authority was shaken. The people had for the moment lost fear of punishment and yielded obedience to the power of love which their new friend exercised."<sup>78</sup>

The legitimacy of peasants' demands was recognised when the Inquiry Committee composed of official and nonofficial members submitted its recommendation. The outstanding features of the recommendation were that tinkathia was to be abolished, sarahbashi was to be reduced by 20 to 26 per cent in various factories. The tenants were allowed to hold their lands free from an obligation to grow indigo. Proper arrangements to prevent unnecessary litigation between the peasants and the planters were promised by the authorities.

The victory of this peasant movement became a foregone conclusion on the very day when on 29 November 1917 Mr Maude introduced the Champaran Agrarian Bill in the Legislative Council of Bihar and Orissa. During the course of his address to the House Mr Maude stated most emphatically:

"History for fifty years and more has been building up a case for drastic action by government and that the findings of the recent committee... have merely set the keystone in the case for interference. The tinkathia system has outlived its day and must perforce disappear... The sooner it disappears from off the face of the country the better it will be."<sup>79</sup>

The peasant movement reached its final stage of success when the Champaran Agrarian Act was approved and assented to by the Governor-General of India on 1 May 1918.

78. Mahatma Gandhi, n. 2, p. 303.

79. Rajendra Prasad, *Satyagraha in Champaran*, Appendix A, n. 72. For further study see also Rajendra Prasad, *Mahatma Gandhi and Bihar*, Bombay, Hind Kitabs Ltd, 1949; B. B. Misra, *Mahatma Gandhi's Movement in Champaran*, Government of Bihar, Secretariat Press, 1963; and Dr K. K. Datta, *Writings and Speeches of Gandhiji Relating to Bihar, 1917 to 1947*, Government of Bihar, 1960.

The success in the struggle generated a new confidence among the peasants in the invincibility of their power. They began to equate their struggle to a movement against oppression. This political consciousness led them to gradually integrate their struggle with the political movement started by Mahatma Gandhi a few years later. The significance of the contribution made by them for the growth of nationalism in India can be gauged from the following observation made by Dr Rajendra Prasad:

"At that time the Home Rule agitation was at its height in India. When we used to ask Mahatmaji to let Champaran also join that movement, he used to tell us that the work that was being done in Champaran was the work which will be able to establish Home Rule. At that time the country did not perhaps realise the importance of the work nor did we who were there to do. But today when we look back upon the methods of work pursued there and consider the history of the national struggle...then we can see that the great movement of today is only an edition of the work in Champaran on immensely vaster scale."<sup>80</sup>

Appraising the contribution of Champaran struggle to the development of nationalism E. M. S. Namboodiripad writes:

"...despite stiff opposition by the European planters and their protectors in the bureaucracy, Gandhiji and his comrades were able to bring the struggle to a successful conclusion. This, therefore, may be said to be the first dress rehearsal of that type of national struggle which Gandhiji was subsequently to lead on more than one occasion. Here was a movement in which a band of selfless individuals from the middle and upper classes identified themselves with and roused the common people against the powers-that-be in order to secure some well-defined demands."<sup>81</sup>

80. *Ibid.*, pp. vii-ix.

81. E.M.S. Namboodiripad, *The Mahatma and the Ism*, People's Publishing House, 1958, pp. 20-21.



## KHEDA STRUGGLE

The alignment of the intelligentsia and peasantry again manifested itself in March 1919 when the Kheda Satyagraha was launched under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Indulal Yajnik, N. M. Joshi, Shanker Lal Pareekh and several others. Like Champaran, this time again the intelligentsia seized another opportunity to acclaim itself a better champion and more sincere benefactor of the mass of the peasantry than the alien bureaucracy against whose arbitrary assessment of land revenue the movement had commenced. Incidentally, the Kheda campaign compelled the educated public workers to establish contact with the actual life of the peasantry. They learnt to identify themselves with the latter and their capacity for sacrifice increased. While persons like Amrit Lal Thakkar, N. M. Joshi and G. K. Doodhar inquired into the conditions approaching famine owing to a largescale failure of crops, on the nonofficial level, eminent personalities like Vithalbhai Patel raised the issue in the Bombay Legislative Council and waited upon the Governor in deputation more than once.

The Gujarat Sabha submitted petitions and telegrams to the highest governing authorities of the province. In their inquiries and deputations the leaders of the movement emphasised persistently that the peasantry of the locality was fairly justified in demanding the suspension of the revenue assessment for the year according to the rules of the Government Revenue Department which conditioned its nonpayment if the crop was below four annas in case of national calamity or any other such unforeseen devastation. But the officials maintained that the crop could easily be assessed over four annas, and also considered the popular demand for arbitration not justified. On the refusal of the authorities to accept the demand of the peasantry Mahatma Gandhi exhorted the patidars to resort to satyagraha. On the eve of launching their movement more than 2,000 participants solemnly declared in a public pledge:

"...the government has not acceded to our prayer. Therefore, we the undersigned, hereby solemnly declare, that we

shall not of our accord pay to the government the full or the remaining revenue for the year. We shall let the government take whatever legal steps it may think fit, and gladly suffer the consequences of our nonpayment. We shall rather let our lands be forfeited, than that by voluntary payment we should allow our case to be considered false or should compromise our self-respect. Should the government, however, agree to suspend collection of the second instalment of the assessment throughout the district, such amongst us as are in a position to pay will pay up the whole or the balance of the revenue that may be due. The reason why those who are able to pay still withhold payment is that if they pay up, the poorer ryots may in a panic sell their cattle or incur debts to pay their dues and thereby bring suffering upon themselves. In these circumstances, we feel that for the sake of the poor, it is the duty even of those who can afford to pay to withhold payment of their assessment."<sup>82</sup>

In this movement the intelligentsia also played not an insignificant role to "rid the agriculturists of their fear by making them realise that the officials were not the masters but the servants of the people in as much as they received their salaries from the tax payer".<sup>83</sup> In fact they provided an anti-imperialist bias to every struggle that the peasants had to wage in order to free themselves from imperialist impositions and machinations. The countrywide campaign was organised with nationalism as its dynamic and economic pressure.

On pursuing the novel technique of the removal of the onion crop from a field wrongly attached many people were arrested and tried. The inauguration of the trial attracted huge crowds of peasants to the court. After being convicted the satyagrahis were escorted to the jail by the people in procession. "The Kheda Satyagraha marks", wrote Mahatma Gandhi, "the beginning of an awakening among the peasants of Gujarat, the beginning of their true political education... Public life in

82. For text see Gandhi Smarak Nidhi Papers.

83. M. K. Gandhi, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, Ahmedabad, Navjivan Publishing House, 1945, fourth ed., p. 534.

Gujarat became instinct with a new energy and a new vigour. The patidar peasant came to an unforgettable consciousness of high strength. The lesson was indelibly imprinted on the public mind that the salvation of the people depends upon themselves, upon their capacity for suffering and sacrifice."<sup>84</sup>

This active demonstration of political consciousness by the peasantry and the intelligentsia was interpreted by the alien bureaucracy as a designed motive for threatening the stability of the British regime in the war when it was at its critical and climacteric point. The regime threatened to adopt coercive measures to silence the growing consciousness of the peasantry by confiscating the peasants' land. In reply to this arbitrary interpretation of the peasants' motives by the bureaucracy, Mahatma Gandhi wrote on 15 April 1919:

"The commissioner has invited a crisis. And he has made such a fetish of it that he armed himself beforehand with a letter from Lord Willingdon to the effect that even he should not interfere with the commissioner's decision. He brings in the war to defend his position and abjures the ryots and me to desist from our cause at this time of the peril to the empire. But I venture to suggest the commissioner's attitude constitutes a peril far greater than the German peril, and I am serving the empire in trying to deliver it from this peril from within. There is no mistaking the fact that India is waking up from its long sleep. The ryots do not need to be literate to appreciate their rights and their duties. They have but to realise their invulnerable power and no government, however strong, can stand against their will. The Kheda ryots are solving an imperial problem of the first magnitude in India. They will show that it is impossible to govern without their consent. War cannot be permitted to give a licence to the officials to exact obedience to their orders, even though the ryots may consider them to be unreasonable and unjust."<sup>85</sup>

84. *Ibid.*, 538.

85. Text of the letter preserved in Gandhi Smarak Nidhi, New Delhi.

Such an emphatic reply by Mahatma Gandhi on the one hand strengthened the agitation and inspired the peasant satyagrahis to agitate with greater vigour and enthusiasm to redeem their grievances, and on the other hand antagonised the bureaucracy which had remained so far unchallenged by any active anti-bureaucracy demonstration. To counter the surge of the developing consciousness among the mass of peasantry and its unswerving attitude the bureaucracy asserted its previous decision to resort to coercion. The officials auctioned the peasants' cattle and confiscated from their houses whatever movable property they could lay hands on. Notices of fines and penalties were issued to the "seditious" peasants and their standing crops in the fields were attached. Despite these repressive measures the majority of the peasant agitators remained stubborn in their struggle. The movement ended only when the officials accepted the peasants' demands. The agreement arrived at between the officials and the representatives of the peasants laid down that the well-to-do patidars would pay up the rents and the poorer ones would be granted remissions.

The acceptance of the peasants' demands brought a new awakening among the peasantry. The struggle brought home to them that their complete emancipation from injustice and exploitation would not take place so long as their country did not achieve complete independence. The bureaucracy appeared to these people no longer their well-wisher but only an agent of the alien regime.

#### PEASANTS DEMAND SWARAJ

The establishment of the closer alliance between the peasantry and the nationalist-minded intelligentsia and the success achieved in the peasant movements repudiated the theory so far held that only the upper classes, intellectuals and professionals mattered in the growth of nationalism, that the ideals and aspirations of and the endeavours and struggles launched by the mass of peasantry could easily be set aside and ignored. Simultaneously, the mass of the peasantry also came to realise that their struggle against feudal exploitation had better chances

of success if it was organised under the guidance of the nationalist-minded intelligentsia which could channel it on rational lines as it acquired knowledge through the advanced system of modern education. Secondly, the intelligent section of the peasantry also came to realise that the end of the feudal exploitation would not come so long as the alien domination in India would continue. The development of this outlook gradually made this class also the champion of self-rule which was being already advocated by the intelligentsia.

The realisation by the either class of each other's strength and affinity of their interests promoted their further alignment in December 1918 when nearly 700 peasant delegates from around the Delhi area attended the Congress session of that year and collaborated along with the delegates of the intelligentsia in the demand of self-rule. Speaking in Hindi on the same issue Chaudhary Peeru Singh (tenant delegate) stated:

"It is said that only the educated people sat together to demand swaraj. It is not so. We also demand it. I have said 'demand' accidentally, we want to get swaraj, we are not beggars... Our brethren have sacrificed themselves in Europe for which they are being praised all over the world. I am a Jat and a cultivator and a resident of the district which has supplied twenty-one thousand recruits. We are all with Pandit Malaviya. We want that we should manage our own affairs. But you will never get swaraj till you carry the cultivators with you."<sup>86</sup>

### THE WORKING CLASS

In the absence of an all-India organisation uniting all of them into a single entity, the workers did not have much decisive weight in the early phase of the national struggle for independence. Practically speaking, their movement before 1914 was intermittent and scattered and attracted the attention of few people outside those immediately concerned. That is why,

<sup>86</sup>. *Report of the Special Session of the Indian National Congress Held in Delhi, Delhi, 1918*, p. 116.

except for certain groups of the more educated workers, no permanent organisations were set up. R. P. Dutt is correct in pointing out:

"In the pre-1914 period this role of the working class was still in the background; it followed rather than preceded the national movement."<sup>87</sup>

#### PHILANTHROPISTS AND LABOUR

The necessity to extract concessions from the foreign regime led the nationalist-minded intelligentsia to take interest in the welfare of the labour class. There also came forward some philanthropists, humanitarians and other people of social conscience who were deeply moved by the cruelties inflicted on labour. In 1872 P. C. Majumdar had established eight night schools in Bombay for the advantage of the working class. In 1878 the Working Men's Mission was established under the auspices of the Brahmo Samaj. This Mission ran night schools for workers and the depressed classes. It preached practical religion and morality. Sasipada Banerjee founded in the eighties the Baranagar Institute for spreading education and doing social welfare among the jute workers in the suburbs of Calcutta.

On the first Indian Factories Act being enacted in 1881 the intelligentsia protested in Bombay on behalf of the workers against the measure. With this began a new phase of the working class movement which may be called the regulative period. The most prominent amongst the personalities who took special interest in this direction were S. S. Bengalee and N. M. Lokhande who directed their endeavours to ameliorating the deteriorating economic conditions of women and child workers in the cotton mills of Bombay. They were liberals and constitutionalists. They believed in the power of reason. In 1890 Lokhande founded the Bombay Millhands' Association which succeeded in getting for the working class a weekly holiday.

A seamen's club was also formed in 1895 under the auspices of the Rev Father Hopkins and J. Henson, who had been as-

87. R. P. Dutt, *India Today*, People's Publishing House, 1949, p. 374.

sociated with the National Sailors' Union and Firemen's Union of Great Britain and Ireland, respectively. The Association acted more or less like a clearing house for the grievances of the millhands of Bombay. In 1898 Lokhande started a paper called *Dinabandhu* or Friend of the Poor, the first labour journal in India. It should, however, be remembered that the Bombay Millhands' Association was not a labour organisation with the structure and aims of a trade union.

In 1897 came the first labour organisation. The Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants of India and Burma was registered.

Though spasmodic efforts had been made in the past for several decades, they had led to no effectual solution of the workers' problems. One reason for such a state of affairs was the slow growth of a permanent body of industrial labourers solely depending on cash wages. This was partly due to the absence of a smooth growth of industries and partly due to the workers not being accustomed to the discipline of the newly-evolving factory life.<sup>88</sup> Secondly, due to the absence of any literary movement they remained ignorant about the new political or economic developments going on in the world. Thirdly, hard pressed by their economic needs they had little time to ponder over the new political movements. Fourthly, there was lack of radicalism. The workers relied on petitions, memoranda and other bourgeois constitutional methods and believed in working in cooperation with government officials and employees. This was a reflection of the spirit of Victorian liberalism in which they were brought up.<sup>89</sup>

Even the nationalist-minded intelligentsia remained more or less apathetic towards their poverty-stricken conditions and did not attach much significance to their role in the national strug-

88. Whenever the labourers found the discipline of the industrial life irksome, they left their jobs and returned to their rural agricultural life despite the small landholdings possessed by them. Here they were sure of leading independent life despite many economic liabilities involved with their stay in the village. They continued to regard the village as their permanent home.

89. For further study see L. P. Sinha, *The Left-Wing in India*, New Publishers, Muzaffarpur, 1965, pp. 14-18.

gle. Organising the workers on a political level was not considered pragmatic by it. With certain exceptions in no case was it interested in antagonising the industrialist bourgeoisie whose financial support it was seeking to strengthen its own position in its struggle against alien domination.

But the educated middle class was not wholly apathetic or disinterested in the welfare of the workers. In 1905 a section of them in Bengal organised the Working Men's Institution at Calcutta, which took upon itself the task of organising an adult education movement for the workers in the slums of the city and its suburbs. As late as 1911 there was founded in Bombay the Kamgar Hitavardhak Sabha which took upon itself the duty of representing the interests of the workers of the city to the government and mediate in industrial disputes. There were several bodies of this nature in various parts of the country, engaged more with the task of social service rather than setting up labour organisations.

#### THE MOVEMENT GATHERS MOMENTUM

The situation, however, began to change from 1905 onwards when after the partition of Bengal the people became unitedly engaged in a common anti-imperialist struggle. Their struggle against colonial oppression created a general awakening of the broad strata of the Indian population to political realisation. The events following the partition led not only to political and economic consolidation of the bourgeoisie but also that of the working class. This was a period of innumerable although unrelated actions by the labour class, which was one of the most important forces of the freedom struggle during the period of the 1905-8 political awakening. In this crucial period its role was displayed not only by the proletariat working at big industrial centres as Ahmedabad, Bombay and Calcutta but also by those working on railways. Appraising the reasons of this awakening in a recent study a Soviet scholar of Indian history, A. I. Levkovsky, writes:

"In 1905, the discontent of the working class began to find markedly spontaneous expression, particularly in Bombay.



where the cotton-mill owners were intensifying their exploitation of the workers to the utmost. Favourable conditions in the Far Eastern markets, combined with an increase in the home demand for cloth and yarn, led to heightened exploitation. The Bombay capitalists' chief method of securing profits at that time was to increase absolute surplus-value, to lengthen the working day. The installation of electric lighting in the mills made it possible to extend the working day to 14 hours or even more. This naturally led to the rapid deterioration of the workers' health. It was not without reason that at the beginning of 1905 a Bombay capitalist urged his business colleagues not to kill 'the goose which lays the golden egg', but in their own interest to reduce the working day to 12 hours. The Bombay cotton-mill magnates, however, were deaf to this appeal; their main interest lay in profits, which had become enormous. In 1905-6 twenty Bombay mills, with a capital of Rs 27,277,000, made Rs 22,736,000 in profits."<sup>90</sup>

In the middle of September 1905 the *Times of India* launched a campaign to serve the interests of the Lancashire textile industrialists, exposing the ruthless exploitation of workers by the Indian capitalists in Bombay. On 16 September the paper published a series of long articles accusing in the acutest form the owners of the Indian textile industry of rapaciously crushing their proletariat. "To swell your profits", the English manufacturer H. Proctor stated in a meeting of the Bombay Millowners' Association, "You are ready to sink all feelings of humanity and to sweat your millhands to any extent."<sup>91</sup> According to his revelation, at 32 mills out of 79, the working day was for 15 hours.<sup>92</sup> In consequence, the physical tiredness of the workers was 30 per cent to 50 per cent greater than 20 years

90. A. I. Levkovsky, "The Labour Movement and the Development of the Freedom Struggle, 1905-8"; I. M. Reisner and N. M. Goldberg, ed., *Tilak and the Struggle for Indian Freedom*, People's Publishing House, New Delhi, 1966, pp. 416-17.

91. *The Times of India*, 16 September 1905, p. 10.

92. *Ibid.*

earlier<sup>93</sup>; child labour was greatly encouraged; children worked 9 to 14 hours a day and were beaten for flimsy mistakes.<sup>94</sup>

Although the basic motive of limelighting these crude realities of the workers' life was to discredit the Indian textile owners by their British counterparts in order to serve their own selfish interests, it should also not be forgotten that a most "undesired" byproduct of the publication of these facts was that public attention began to be drawn to the impoverished economic status of the workers. All this also provoked the workers to take some concrete steps in order to ameliorate their lot. On 24 September 1905, about 8,000 workers assembled at a meeting organised by the Maratha Aikya Itchchu Sabha. The meeting demanded the shortening of the working day.<sup>95</sup> In the following months the workers' demand for a 12-hour day became somewhat more spread. Towards the beginning of December 1905 the Bombay millowners took a decision to shorten the working day to 13 hours, but it was merely a decision on paper.

It may casually be mentioned here that even before 1905 Lokmanya Tilak, as the leading figure of militants, had shown interest in contacting the working class of Bombay, a predominant section of whom came from Maharashtra. The active interest shown by the militants in a number of campaigns helped to ameliorate the lot of the proletariat. They took steps to control the plague epidemic, discouraged the use of alcoholic drink etc. These measures helped the militants to acquire a considerable following among the Bombay working class.<sup>96</sup>

The activities of the militant nationalists among the labour class people gave impetus to the rise of their national consciousness. Their primary objective was to activate the working class into more energetic agitation against ruthless colonial exploitation. One significant aspect of the militants' political programme was its emphasis on inspiring broad masses of people into the anti-imperialist movement. It should, however, not

93. *Ibid.*

94. *Ibid.*

95. *Ibid.*, 30 November, 1905, p. 10.

96. Valentine Chirol, *Indian Unrest*, n. 28, p. 53.

be forgotten, that in rallying the masses, the militants appealed exclusively to national and religious feelings. A large number of them hailed from Indian petty-bourgeois and bourgeois intellectuals. It is not difficult to conclude that they showed no inclination in inculcating or developing class consciousness among the proletariat or establishing class organisations of the people. Their programme identified itself with the interests of the Indian national bourgeoisie as a whole, struggle against colonialism, but simultaneously afraid of any self-initiated, independent and especially class activities by the masses. The techniques of the militant nationalists were in essence a bourgeois manner of attracting large groups of the people into the independence movement.

It can safely be stated that the proletarian movement in 1905 was not confined to the strikes and clashes by Bombay mill workers only. It spread to different working class sections in various parts of India, especially in Bengal. But it should be remembered that the workers' demands were primarily economic in character.

In the first week of October 1905, railway guards went on strike on the East India Railway.<sup>97</sup> Their number soon rose to 950.<sup>98</sup> The strike manifested a protest against changes in the wage system. The last ten days of October were also the days of a strike, followed by a lockout, in the Government Printing House in Calcutta.<sup>99</sup> And in the second week of November, 200 postmen formed a union, demanded a wage increase and did not turn up on duty.<sup>100</sup>

The biggest strikes of 1906 were conducted in Bengal, particularly in Calcutta.

In April 1906, Bombay postmen demanded higher wages to meet the rising cost of living. In August they went on strike, 500 taking part, but lost the strike.<sup>101</sup> But in October 1906

97. *Times of India*, 7 October 1905, p. 19.

98. *Ibid.*, 14 October 1905, p. 7.

99. *Ibid.*, 28 October 1905, pp. 7-8.

100. *Ibid.*, 11 November 1905, p. 10.

101. *Ibid.*, 18 August 1906, p. 4; 25 August 1906, p. 2.

strikers at the Koh-i-noor Factory in Bombay succeeded in gaining a 10 per cent wage increase.<sup>102</sup>

In East India, the railwaymen became engaged in an active struggle for their rights towards the latter half of 1906. The July strike by groups of railwaymen on the East India Railway reverberated throughout the country. Strikers demanded higher wages, better uniforms, improved housing, etc. But economic demands were not the sole issue of struggle; they also protested against racial apartheid and demanded that the derogatory term "natives" be substituted by the word "Indians". There is also evidence of agitation for a general strike.<sup>103</sup>

The strike movement spread to the most varied categories of the Bengali working class. In the third week of April 2,000 porters at Calcutta factories went on strike and gained a wage increase. In July the workers at a number of Calcutta printing houses came out.<sup>104</sup>

In August the workers at the Clive Jute Mills walked out on a short-term strike, protesting against ill-treatment by the British management and demanding shorter hours. According to the Bengali daily *Bande Mataram*, a paper of militant nationalism, these workers were compelled to work 15 hours a day, "yet no Anglo-Indian journals have raised any clamour for a time limit on European sweaters. That is only necessary, it seems, when the limitation of hours can injure a swadeshi industry."<sup>105</sup>

Two thousand sweepers employed by the Calcutta Corporation struck work the same month. They demanded a wage increase to meet the rising food prices and the strike ended in success.<sup>106</sup>

102. *Indian Factory Labour Commission*, Government of India Press, 1908, Vol. II, p. 152.

103. *Times of India*, 28 July 1906, p. 16.

104. *Ibid.*, 28 April 1906, p. 6; 8 August 1906, p. 5.

105. Cited from *Ibid.*, 18 August 1907, p. 14. It is worth noting that British bourgeoisie in Calcutta rejected government's suggestion to consider the limitation of working hours and control over the child labour. (*Ibid.*, 21 July 1906, p. 9.)

106. *Ibid.*, 25 August 1906, p. 6.

The unrest among the employees of the East India Railway lasted throughout August and September 1906. At Jamalpur station there were serious disturbances when British soldiers opened fire on the striking railwaymen. There was also a partial strike at Kharagpur station on the Bengal-Nagpur Railway.<sup>107</sup>

A strike broke out at the British-owned Hooghli Jute Mills in the second week of December 1906. The employees agitated against the introduction of night shifts and complained of low wages.<sup>108</sup>

Almost all the strikes of this period were related to economic demands. However, as has already been mentioned, a salient feature of the freedom struggle of 1905-8 was the endeavour of the militant nationalists to draw in the workers to participate in it. In this they definitely succeeded in Bengal. In the second half of 1906 the swadeshi and boycott movement made life miserable for the imperialist rulers. The daily *Englishman* appraised the situation as follows:

"Certain Bengal lawyers and others, who have taken a prominent part in preaching a boycott of British goods, are now employing their leisure hours in forming what they are pleased to call trade unions amongst the employees in large concerns managed by Europeans. Particular attention is being paid to the jute mills in and around Calcutta."<sup>109</sup>

This, however, was not confined to the jute industry. According to reports of English newspapers, the July strike on the East India Railway was started by persons who had listened to the orations of swadeshi speakers and read Indian newspapers. A Railwaymen's Union was formed at a meeting of strikers. Bipin Chandra Pal, A. K. Ghosh, Srijit Roy, S. Halder and other Bengal militant nationalists took active interest in its organisation. It will not be a travesty of truth to point out that the difference between the new techniques of the Extremists and those of the Moderates lay in their endeavour to win broader support among the people. It was the Extremists (B. C.

107. *Ibid.*, 1 September 1906, p. 6; 15 September 1906, p. 9.

108. *Ibid.*, 9 December 1906, p. 5.

109. Quoted from *Ibid.*, 28 July 1906, p. 9.

Pal and A. K. Ghosh) who carried on agitation among "our town proletariat and railway staffs".<sup>110</sup>

The more militant representatives of the young national bourgeoisie strove to win and organise, to a certain degree, a section of the working class under the slogans of the anti-imperialism and "Swaraj is our birthright". It is undeniable that the programme of the Extremists was easily comprehensible to the people. It is self-evident from a speech delivered by B. C. Pal, leader of the Bengal Extremists:

"Our ideal is freedom, which means absence of all foreign control...our method is passive resistance, which means an organised determination to refuse to render any voluntary and honorary service to government."<sup>111</sup>

It is indisputable that the Extremists concentrated their struggle against enterprises run by British capital. They did not touch the local bourgeoisie.

#### STRIKES BY RAILWAY EMPLOYEES

The deterioration in the economic conditions of the railway workers and increased pressure by the management brought strong action by the railwaymen in 1907.

The persons employed in big railway workshops in the Parel area of Bombay put up a stiff struggle to attain their rights. Five hundred shop workers struck work on 1 May, another 3,000 joined them. The strike was in reply to the introduction of new, severer techniques of subduing the workers. Duties were resumed only after the management had made certain concessions.<sup>112</sup> It is indicative that when a three-day strike was conducted in January 1908 in these workshops, 8,000 men walked out. The railwaymen demanded a wage increase to meet the

110. *Ibid.*, 22 September 1906, p. 10.

111. *Ibid.*, 22 September 1906, p. 15. Lala Lajpat Rai testifies that the idea of passive resistance originated with Tilak. See D. V. Tamhankar, *Lokamanya Tilak, Father of Indian Unrest and Maker of Modern India*, London, 1956, p. 116.

112. *Times of India*, 11 May 1907, p. 16.

rising cost of living. The strike was called off only after part of the workers' demands had been granted.<sup>113</sup>

It was towards the end of 1907, however, that the biggest strikes took place on the railways in East India.<sup>114</sup> On 18 November engine drivers and railway guards, most of them of European origin, declared a general strike. Reviewing the role of these strikers an eminent Soviet scholar writes:

"Although British and Anglo-Indian railwaymen predominated among the strikers and their demands were purely economic, the strike produced a great impression throughout the country, demonstrating the power of mass action by the proletariat to all strata of Indian society."<sup>115</sup>

For a long time before the strike the railwaymen had been demanding a revision of the fines and penalties system which cut deeply into their wages, better working conditions and, first and foremost, a mileage system of payment instead of the existing time system. In all, the railwaymen presented 43 demands. The strike started at Asansol station and quickly spread to Allahabad and Tundla in the then United Provinces. As a result, practically no trains ran from Calcutta. An attempt to use a locomotive from the neighbouring Bengal-Nagpur Railway to dispatch a train from Asansol, carrying prisoners among whom was also the militant leader B. C. Pal, was frustrated when 200 railwaymen stood on the line and would not let the train pass. A railwaymen's meeting at Howrah station decided to continue the strike and not to dispatch any passenger trains from Howrah. Three hundred freight wagons stood on the lines and the stations were crowded with passengers. By 20 November the strike had completely paralysed the railways in Kanpur and Allahabad. No trains ran on the Howrah-Kalka line. Calcutta factories were short of coal and ships were held

113. *Ibid.*, 25 May 1908, p. 7.

114. It does not, however, mean that in this year the strike movement was confined to the railways. In March 1907, for example, 4,000 workers of the Maneckji Petit Mills, Bombay, went on strike. (*Times of India*, 23 March 1907, p. 5.) But in 1907 strikes on the railways were the most significant.

115. A. I. Levkovsky, n. 90, p. 423.

up in Calcutta port.<sup>116</sup> By 24 November 1,000 empty wagons and 400 loaded with machinery and sugar intended for the inland regions were stranded in the area of Calcutta port. A correspondent of the English newspaper *The Statesman* reported on that day that the strike was complete at Allahabad, Burdwan, Tundla, Rampur, Ambala, Moghalsarai, Kanpur and other stations.<sup>117</sup>

In order to break the strike the colonial authorities dispatched troops and armed police to these stations. From 21 November Howrah was occupied by armed forces, and large contingents of armed soldiers and police were concentrated at other stations, particularly a large number being sent to Asansol. The police were used to terrorise the strikers.

However, to the horror of the imperialist rulers and British bourgeoisie, the Calcutta strike began to spread along the Bengal-Nagpur Railway. On the morning of 24 November the railway guards at Kharagpur struck. The engine drivers were displeased by the efforts to break the strike. Here, however, the strike lasted only 24 hours; a committee representing the Calcutta authorities and employers (the Peace Committee) promised to satisfy the strikers' demands, to withdraw the decision on wage cuts, limit fines and introduce new insurance fund rules.<sup>118</sup> Meanwhile a very definite strike danger arose on the Oudh-Rohilkhand Railway and the Assam-Bengal Railway.<sup>119</sup>

On 24 November the Bengal Chamber of Commerce addressed a special message to the authorities proposing that a Conciliation Board be set up, after the pattern of conciliation boards in Britain, to negotiate a settlement of the conflict. The following day the central authorities gave their approval. On 28 November 1907, the railwaymen agreed to call off the strike and present their demands to the Conciliation Board. Kanpur railwaymen resumed work on the same conditions.<sup>120</sup>

This big strike on the East India Railway thus lasted ten

116. *Times of India*, 23 November 1907, pp. 4, 6.

117. *Ibid.*, 30 November 1907, p. 4.

118. *Ibid.*, 30 November 1907, p. 4.

119. *Ibid.*, 30 November 1907, p. 6; 7 December 1907, p.

120. *Ibid.*, 30 November 1907, pp. 4, 6.





days—18-28 November 1907. During this period normal railway communication was cut off between Calcutta, the residence of the Viceroy, and the rest of India. These developments seriously undermined the prestige of British rule. The people's belief in its might was terribly shaken. Commenting on the contribution of this strike Levkovsky writes:

"The November strike on the East India Railway, although mainly of British and Anglo-Indian railwaymen and for purely economic demands, was not completely isolated from the national-liberation movement. In our opinion, such a strike could take place only under conditions provided by the strengthening of this movement. But the most important thing was that this ten-day strike was tangible demonstration to all strata of Indian society, especially in Eastern India, of the great power of mass proletarian action. The Indian workers showed their sympathy for the strike, and the Calcutta Extremists gave it their support."<sup>121</sup>

The strike of the British and Anglo-Indian drivers and railway guards on the East India Railway was closely linked with the growing discontent among Indian railwaymen and they too began to move. On 21 December 1907, a strike began on the East Bengal Railway. This time it was the Indian engine drivers, firemen and brakemen who struck for higher wages.<sup>122</sup> The strike paralysed the freight trains. The colonialists immediately called for troops. British soldiers were ordered to take the place of the strikers and get the trains moving. The 600 men who had started the strike were discharged. Penalties rained down on the Indian railwaymen. By the beginning of 1908 the strike virtually ended.<sup>123</sup>

The strike movement in 1905-7 became an almost universal and permanent phenomenon with which both the British colonial authorities and the bourgeoisie of India had to reckon very seriously. The militant newspaper *Bande Mataram* wrote in September 1907:

121. A. I. Levkovsky, n. 90, p. 425.

122. *Times of India*, 28 December 1907, p. 10.

123. *Ibid.*, 4 January 1908, p. 7.

"Strikes have now come to be very common. It is very significant that they synchronised with the birth of the swadeshi spirit in the country, and have since then come to stay. The people that have learned to be self-respecting are bound to be some day or another alive to the supreme necessity of freedom for the well-being of a nation. And once they have realised this necessity, the struggle for freedom will cease to be sectional and isolated. It therefore behoves the nationalists to take the strikes in hand and turn them to account."<sup>124</sup>

The militant nationalists regarded the working class as a significant instrument in the struggle for national independence.

The militant activities of Indian proletariat and pressure from Lancashire forced the British regime to study the labour problem. On 17 December 1906, the Textile Factory Labour Committee was set up to study the textile workers' conditions. In its report, submitted on 1 June 1907, it gave a verdict in favour of reducing working hours to 12 a day or 72 a week. The report confirmed the naked exploitation of the working class, and referred particularly to the appalling housing conditions of the workers.<sup>125</sup>

On the other hand, the British bourgeoisie in Bombay and Kanpur was deadly opposed to the recommendation to limit the working hours. The Bombay Millowners' Association had twice adopted decisions on a 12-hour day, but its members evaded carrying them out.<sup>126</sup> The vested interests of both British and Indian bourgeoisie led them to oppose sharply any limitation of working hours.

The intensified strike movement in 1906 and 1907 forced the British government to investigate the conditions of the Indian working class in other industries. An Indian Factory Labour Commission was set up towards the close of 1907.<sup>127</sup>

124. *Ibid.*, 21 September 1907, p. 8.

125. *Report of the Textile Factory Labour Committee, 1906*, London, 1907, p. 45.

126. *Times of India*, 8 June 1907, pp. 11, 15.

127. *Indian Factory Labour Commission*, Government of India Press, 1908, Vol. I, p. 2.

The Indian manufacturers, giving evidence before the commission, clearly displayed their class unity against the proletariat. The overwhelming majority of them were against interference by the authorities and any limitation of hours, insisting that the operatives should work from morning till evening.<sup>128</sup> A prominent Indian bourgeoisie, V. D. Thackersey, who was a member of the commission, expressed this opinion of the Indian capitalists in his minute of dissent.<sup>129</sup> Besides, the President of the Indian Jute Mills' Association (a British East India manufacturers' organisation) also opposed any reduction of working hours.<sup>130</sup> A British factory owner from Agra bluntly declared that although in Britain the trade unions had a say in fixing working hours, he did not wish to see such organisations in India.<sup>131</sup> When it was a matter of exploiting the working class to the maximum extent both the Indian and British bourgeoisie in this country did not show the slightest disagreement.

The Indian workers' demand for limiting the working hours also got some place in the report of the Indian Factory Labour Commission, although little heed was paid to the workers' opinion.<sup>132</sup>

The findings of the commission provided further proof of the rising contradictions between the capitalists and the working class. These contradictions began openly to leave their impact on the stand taken by sections of the big Indian capitalists who were afraid of mass action by the proletariat. They were also apprehensive of its organisational development which threatened to end the ruthless exploitation of the working class. Obviously the Moderates, closely linked as they were with the big capitalists, particularly in Western India and Bengal, showed no inclination in those days to use the working class to extract concessions from the imperialist rulers.

128. *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 157.

129. *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 75-79.

130. *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 244.

131. *Ibid.*, p. 170.

132. For further study see *Ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 28, 156, 218, 270-78 & 400.

## DEVELOPMENTS IN PUNJAB

At the beginning of 1907, the centre of the anti-imperialist struggle shifted temporarily from Bengal to Punjab. No small part in arousing the people's fighting spirit in that part of the country was played by the swadeshi movement, particularly the boycott of imported sugar.

The arrest of the publisher of a newspaper *The Punjabee* on a charge of "sedition" culminated in one of the first outbursts of resentment in the province.<sup>133</sup> The paper had published an article showing resentment against the practice of *begar* (compulsory labour), and illustrated a case when two peasants had died of exhaustion while working for an official.<sup>134</sup> On 22 February 1907, students, lawyers and other townspeople organised a protest demonstration in Lahore against the trial of the owner and publisher of the paper. It was backed by similar demonstrations in a number of other towns and districts far away. A meeting of 3,000, held in Madras, for instance, adopted a resolution of protest against the trial of the publisher. A similar meeting was held in Calcutta.<sup>135</sup>

On 16 April 1907, a huge crowd cheered the defendants and jeered the constables when the convicts were taken from the court-house to the prison. There was a clash with the police and several demonstrators were arrested.<sup>136</sup> Making a critical appraisal and review of the political situation in the Punjab Aurobindo wrote in the *Bande Mataram* on 11 May 1907:

"...the moment the bureaucrats were sure that the fire had caught in the Punjab, they hastened to strike, hoping by the suppression of a few persons to suppress the whole movement. The first blow at *The Punjabee* was a disastrous failure. The second has been delivered with extraordinary precautions to ensure its success. The whole might of the British empire has been summoned to drive it home. The pomp and prestige of its irresistible might, the tramp of its armies and

133. *Times of India*, 2 March 1907, p. 6.

134. H. W. Navinson, n. 18, p. 18.

135. *Times of India*, 2 March 1907, p. 6.

136. H. W. Navinson, n. 18, p. 18.

the terror of its guns, the slow mercilessness of its penal laws and the swift fury of its arbitrary statutes have all been gathered round two small cities, not to put down a formidable rebellion or effect the capture of dangerous military leaders, but to arrest a few respectable and unwarlike pleaders and barristers. Enveloped with a surge of cavalry under the mouths of British seige-guns, these unfortunate individuals, most of whose names were till then hardly known outside their own province, have been hurried to British jails and one eminent pleader whirled out of India with a panic haste. All this pomp and apparatus can evidently have no object but to terrify the *New Spirit* throughout India into quiescence by a display of irresistible power of Britain. It is an emphatic warning from Mr Morley that they will not succer the Indian to aspire to freedom or to work by peaceful self-help and passive resistance for national autonomy."<sup>137</sup>

With an arbitrary use of repressive measures the Punjab government thought that they have buried the national-liberation struggle in the province for ever and its leaders apparently demoralised. But they were wrong. Things were not what they seemed, appearances provided no indication of the inner working. The principle of changing the technique according to circumstances obviously inclined people to seek safety for a budding strength, and chose for it a comparatively safer sphere of activity. But as it was slowly hardened into a position to meet any kind of opposition, the precautions for its security were discarded and an open fight was neither shirked nor thought unessential. The Rawalpindi correspondent of the *London Times* informed his newspaper that the people of the Punjab, far from being intimidated into a compromise or silence into the lot of a serf, had found it essential to organise their opposition on the model of Bengal. "The machinery of government", he wrote, "has for the moment turned the balance of force against the agitators who temporarily foiled, have fallen back upon Bengal to teach them a new lesson in procedure; and the government having proved itself prepared against active measures,

137. Haridas Mukherjee, n. 26, p. 60:

they have now set out to study under the guidance of the subtle Bengali, the more insidious methods of passive resistance practised in Bengal". The merits of passive resistance, added the correspondent, were being canvassed in the army.<sup>138</sup> This account of the correspondent was said to be based on a very considerable amount of documentary evidence collected by the Punjab government. Welcoming the movement and spirit of passive resistance displayed by the Punjabis Aurobindo Ghose wrote in the *Bande Mataram* on 2 September 1907:

"Repression can never crush a force when it is once in operation, it may hold it back for a moment, it may change its direction and mode of manifestation, but to kill it is impossible. Conservation of energy is a law of nature, and she cannot be false to herself in the interests of the British bureaucracy. Energy changes for us, works in subtle and invisible ways, but is never destroyed. The bureaucrats are laying the flattering unction to their soul, that the persecutions have put out the fire in the Punjab, while the fact is that they have only driven it underground. The Punjabis may not throw themselves on the siege-gun to satisfy the idiotic critic of nationalism but the spirit of self-assertion is all the same there, seeking fresh channel of expression."<sup>139</sup>

Encouraging the Punjabis in particular and Indians in general the author gave the following message:

"In this grave crisis of our destinies let not our people lose their fortitude or suffer stupefaction and depression to seize upon and unnerve their souls. The fight in which we are engaged is not like the wars of the old in which when the king or leader fell, the army fled. The king whom we follow to the wars today is our own Motherland, the sacred and imperishable."<sup>140</sup>

138. Cited by Haridas Mukherjee, *Ibid.*, p. 138.

139. *Ibid.*, pp. 138-39.

140. *Ibid.*, p. 61.

## STRIKE IN MADRAS PRESIDENCY

In 1907 Bipin Chandra Pal delivered a series of speeches in Madras. His fiery oration roused the slumbering passions of the people of the city to unprecedented patriotic activities. There took place a tug-of-war between British capital and Indian labour in the Tuticorin Coral Mill in which the latter achieved success. It followed a strike in that mill organised by Chidambaran Pillai, the principal architect of the Swadeshi Steam Navigation Company and his two colleagues, viz Subramania Shiva and Padmanabha Iyengar, on 27-28 February 1908. The colonial authorities retaliated by banning public meetings and demonstrations and by putting the leaders into custody by order of the local magistrate which in its turn resulted in popular explosion at Tinnevely on 13 March 1908.

Hailing this growth of popular awakening the *Bande Mataram* commented that the success of passive resistance at Tuticorin ought to be an encouragement to those who had begun to distrust the power of the new technique which was so eminently suited to the Asian temperament. For passive resistance, the newspaper pointed out, to succeed unity, perseverance and thoroughness were the basic requisites. Because all these requisites existed in Tuticorin, the great struggle fought over the Coral Mill had ended in a great and indeed absolutely sweeping victory for the people. Every demand put forward by the striking labour had been conceded and British capital had had to submit to the humiliation of an unconditional surrender. Eulogising the role of the leaders of the strike the newspaper added:

"Nationalism may well take pride in the gallant leaders who have by their cool and unflinching courage brought about this splendid vindication of nationalist teaching. When men like Chidambaran, Padmanabha and Shiva are ready to undergo exile or imprisonment so that a handful of mill coolies may get justice and easier condition of livelihood, a bond has been created between the educated class and the masses, which is the first great step towards swaraj."

In the course of its comment the *Bande Mataram* compared the victory of the labour at Tuticorin with the struggle in the Transvaal in South Africa carried with the instrumentality of passive resistance against the might of a powerful government. The paper also exhorted Indians to learn the lesson of Tuticorin and Transvaal and not to lose an opportunity of letting their strength grow by practice. It welcomed the Tuticorin strike as a perfect illustration of what an isolated labour revolt should be. It further advised:

"The operatives must act with one will and speak with one voice, never letting the temptation of individual interest or individual relief get the better of the corporate same in which lies the whole strength of a labour combination, and the educated community must give both moral and financial support with an ungrudging and untiring enthusiasm till the victory is won, realising that every victory for Indian labour is a victory for the nation and every defeat a defeat to the movement. The Tuticorin leaders must be given the whole credit for the unequalled skill and courage with which the fight was conducted and still more for the complete realisation of the true inwardness of the nationalist gospel which made them identify the interests of the whole Indian nation with the wrongs and grievances of the labourers in the Coral Mill."<sup>141</sup>

#### TILAK TRIAL AND THE BOMBAY STRIKE

A major event helping the process of revolutionary upsurge in India was the trial and conviction of Lokmanya Tilak (1908), a militant leader of the Indian national liberation struggle. His transportation to Mandalay Jail for trenchantly and courageously condemning British colonial rule and upholding India's right to national self-determination evoked an outburst of popular demonstration all over India. The mass movement reached its climax in July 1908 when the people of Bombay organised a public strike and the Bombay labourers came out

141. *Ibid.*, pp. 286-88.



on a mass political strike.<sup>142</sup> All these labour strikers appeared to echo the sentiments expressed in the militant newspaper *Bande Mataram* on the eve of Tilak's deportation:

"Go Tilak, wherever you may be sent to crush your body. Your example will hover around us all unimprisoned and unexiled. The canker of the chains will not only eat into your limbs but also into every heart of the country to stir it up to its duty. Nearer the God, nearer the fire. He places his good soldiers in the very thick of the battle. You have fulfilled your mission, you have startled the deep slumber of false opinions, you have thrilled a pang of noble shame through callous conscience. And into the next page, if not into your own, you have flashed an epic of nobleness. What else have patriots, heroes and martyrs done?"<sup>143</sup>

Commenting on the arrest of Tilak and the Bombay labour strike on 5 August 1908 in his famous article *Inflammable Material in World Politics* Lenin had said:

"...India of the people is beginning to stand up in defence of her writers and political leaders. The infamous sentence pronounced by the British jackals against the Indian democrat Tilak...—this reprisal against a democrat by the lackeys of the money-bags evoked street demonstrations and a strike in Bombay. In India, too, the proletariat has already developed to conscious political mass struggle and, that being the case, the Russian-style British regime in India is doomed! ... There should be no doubt that the age-old British system of plunder in India, and the present struggle of all these 'progressive' Europeans against... Indian democracy, will steel millions upon hundreds of millions of proletarians throughout Asia, for a struggle against their oppressors... The class-conscious European worker already has comrades

142. For detailed study of the events related to the strike see, n. 90, pp. 528-610.

143. Cited by D. P. Karmarkar, *Bal Gangadhar Tilak*, Bombay, 1956, pp. 185-86.

in Asia, and their number will grow with every passing day and hour."<sup>144</sup>

The Russian Consul in Bombay reported to his government that the sympathy for Tilak was most strongly expressed by the closing of many shops in the cities, by hartals and by street clashes between the police and strikers which occurred "in various cities practically all over India".<sup>145</sup> This was corroborated by the Calcutta correspondent of the *Peterburgskie Vedomosti* who wrote:

"His (Tilak's) arrest has long been expected and has not come as a surprise to Poona. But his popularity in the Western provinces of India appears to be so great that upon receipt of the news of his arrest the shops in Poona and other cities closed and all markets were deserted, without any persuasion. Mohammedans joined in this demonstration. Schools suspended classes... Large Tilak sympathy meetings were held in many cities including Madras."<sup>146</sup>

The Bombay labour strike not only demonstrated the workers' solidarity with the nationalist forces, but also revealed that the Indian working class was already taking an active part in the direction of national progress. It was also a big step forward in their struggles for their own rights. It was a political action of labour as a class. Overcoming the indifference of its backward elements, the Bombay proletariat reflected its mighty protest. Rising above the feeling of caste and religion they set an example for the country.<sup>147</sup> In this connection, highly important evidence of the clandestine activity of Tilak and his followers conducted among the millhands and labour of Bombay is revealed in a confidential message of Sir George Clarke, the then Governor of Bombay, in which he justified the savage prosecution of Tilak, saying that his influence "attained a dan-

144. V. I. Lenin, *The National Liberation Movement in the East*, Moscow, 1957, pp. 14-15.

145. TRFPA, Central Asian Department, 1908, File No. 947, p. 67.

146. *Peterburgskie Vedomosti*, 25 July 1908.

147. See S. A. Dange, *On the Indian Trade Union Movement*, Calcutta, 20-22 May, 1952.

gerous extent" demonstrated by "the disturbances which occurred in Bombay after his conviction, the strike of the millhands and the closing of the cloth, freight and share markets". The Governor pointed out that if Tilak had been allowed more time to mature his plans it was quite probable that he might have succeeded in promoting a general strike, "which is one of the Russian methods advocated by the violent party" (the Tilakite Extremists).<sup>148</sup> There is also the testimony of *The Times* (London) correspondent. He wrote, "A favourite expedient of the Extremists has been to secure such a control over the people employed in great industries as to be able to organise strike riots whenever they wished to bring pressure to bear upon the government."<sup>149</sup> Commenting on this rising working class movement vis-a-vis imperialist repression in his famous article *Inflammable Material in World Politics* Lenin had written:

"The liberal British bourgeoisie...frightened by the rise of revolutionary struggle in India, is more and more frankly and saliently demonstrating how *savage* the most 'civilised' European 'statesmen'—even though they have passed through the highest school of constitutionalism—can be when the masses rise up against capital and the capitalist colonial system, which is a system of slavery, plunder and rapine... In India the native slaves of the 'civilised' British capitalists have precisely in this recent period been causing much unpleasant concern to their 'masters'. There is no end to the violence and plunder which goes under the name of the British system of government of India. Nowhere in the world—with the exception, of course, of Russia—will you find such abject poverty of the masses, and such chronic hunger. The most liberal and radical spokesmen of free Britain, men like John Morley—that authority for Russian and non-Russian Cadets, the luminary of 'progressive' (but actually capital-serving) journalism—become regular Genghis Khans when appointed to govern India and are capable of sanction-

148. Cited by D. V. Tamhankar, *Lokamanya Tilak*, pp. 184-85.

149. Valentine Chirol, n. 28, p. 53.

ing every means of 'pacifying' the population in their charge, right down to flogging political protestants."<sup>150</sup>

### IMPACT OF FIRST WORLD WAR

The outbreak of the first world war gave a new impetus to the working class movement. Indian soldiers mostly from among the masses went to Europe to participate in the war on behalf of the allies. They watched with keen interest the advanced life, including the life of the industrial workers in Europe. On their return home, at the end of the war, they related their personal experiences to their kith and kin, some of whom were professionally employed in the industrial cities of India. These detailed accounts of the advanced life of the workers in Europe brought a new political consciousness in the Indian workers. But, above all, there had occurred the October Revolution of 1917. The victory of the workers over the bourgeoisie of Russia for the first time in the history of the world stirred the Indian workers. It swept the Indian workers and peasants out of their apathy and transforming their movement for national liberation.

The well-known journal *Ghadar* dated 28 March 1917, which was full of news about the Russian revolution, had an interesting paragraph on the probable effect of the revolution on India. The establishment of a republic in Russia, it said, would be very advantageous to Indian revolutionary workers. They would no longer have to flee to Europe or America but would find safe refuge in a free country by merely crossing the frontier. Indian revolutionaries had been the pupils of Russian revolutionaries and Russians like Kropotkin, and Tolstoy had advocated the cause of Indian freedom. It was certain, therefore, that Russia would adopt a friendly attitude towards Indians who were working for liberty. India was now the only unfree country in the world and its oppressors would do well to take warning from the success of the Russian Ghadar movement. A tyrannical government could only maintain itself with the aid of a loyal army. As soon as the teachings of liberty reached the army,

the government was overthrown. Such governments did not fear the pistols or bombs of the revolutionaries. But they did fear the spread of revolutionary doctrines. The lesson which Indians must learn from the Russian revolution was that they must continue without remission to preach Ghadar (rebellion).<sup>151</sup>

A little earlier the postal censor, Calcutta, had intercepted a copy of an Urdu pamphlet entitled *Stories of Russian Revolutionaries* which had been issued by the Ghadar Party in San Francisco. The pamphlet had a preface by Ram Chand Peshawari in which he said that the main cause of India's degradation was that Indians were ignorant of modern thought and progress. In order to bring home the truth of radicalism to the young men of India, the Ghadar Party had adopted this method of publishing in Indian languages accounts of the lives of lovers of the people in Europe and America. If Indians profited by reading this pamphlet, others of a similar nature would be published.<sup>152</sup>

No less significant were the democratic revolutions in Germany, Austria and Turkey which brought new political consciousness for the masses in India. Besides this, the worldwide economic depression following the war further aggravated the crisis and the entailing hardships forced the workers to struggle for their rights, which took the form of strike movements in India. R. P. Dutt observes:

"In the new period of awakening at the close of the first world war, the great strike movement of 1918-21 was the harbinger of the national wave."<sup>153</sup>

The workers who, in the absence of leadership and organisation earlier, were deeply imbued with a passive outlook on life and regarded the return to the village as the only alternative to the endurance of hard conditions in industry now had radically changed. The strikes which were formerly confined on the railways, now became a widespread phenomenon.

151. Home (Pol.) Department, Government of India, June 1917, File No. 438-41, p. 11.

152. *Ibid.*, July 1916, File No. 441-45, p. 6.

153. R. P. Dutt, n. 87, p. 377.

Moreover, there emerged a new section of the intelligentsia led by Gandhiji which was ready to support the cause of the Indian working class partly on altruistic grounds and partly by realising the importance of the decisive role to be played by the Indian proletariat in the national struggle. The way in which Gandhiji led this movement and gradually evolved "Gandhian trade unionism" is of great significance in the evolution of capitalist leadership over the proletarian movement.

#### AHMEDABAD TEXTILE STRIKE

The most significant facet of this collaboration was the strike organised by the textile weavers in Ahmedabad in March 1918 against the withdrawal of the bonus of twelve annas by the millowners. "The labourers pledged themselves at a general meeting not to resume", writes Mahatma Gandhi, "work until either their terms were accepted or the millowners agreed to refer the dispute to arbitration... They attended the meetings in their thousands... They daily paraded the streets of Ahmedabad in peaceful processions, carrying their banner bearing the inscription 'Ek Tek' (keep the pledge)."<sup>154</sup>

For some time the strikers maintained their tempo. But at last they began to show signs of weakness. The attendance at the daily meetings also began to show signs of dwindling and despondency, and disappointment could be traced on the faces of those who did attend the meetings.

While the strike was going on, Gandhiji negotiated with the millowners and called upon them to do justice to the workers. "We have our pledge too", they pointed out. "Our relations with the labourers are those of parents and children. How can we brook the interference of a third party? Where the room for arbitration?"

Twenty days passed but nothing tangible occurred. At last Gandhiji summoned a meeting of the workers on 2 March 1918. He declared there:

"Unless the strikers rally and continue the strike till a settlement is reached or till they leave the mills altogether, I will

154. M. K. Gandhi, n. 83, pp. 522 & 526.

not touch any food... it will be broken only after the strike is settled."<sup>155</sup>

Gandhiji's fast unto death and the workers' pledge culminated in persuading the millowners to agree to submit the dispute to arbitration through which it was amicably settled and the strike came to an end. Commenting on the technique of Gandhian success E. M. S. Namboodiripad wrote years later:

"This was, of course, not the first time that Gandhiji resorted to a fast. This, however, was the first time that he resorted to it in order to check the militancy of the fighting people. It has added significance in that he was using it, not in relation to a movement in which all classes were participants, but in a working class struggle. His success in this experiment was an invaluable lesson for the class of which he was the representative, the bourgeoisie. It showed them that here was a technique of struggle which could at once rally the masses and keep them away from militant actions."<sup>156</sup>

In the same year (1918) a labour union was organised by B. P. Wadia among the textile workers in Madras. Radhakamal Mukerjee was entrusted with the task of investigating the general economic conditions of the workers of a mill who were on strike.

The period succeeding the Ahmedabad weavers' strike was marked for the innumerable strikes organised by the Indian workers in industrial areas like Bombay, Kanpur, Calcutta, Sholapur, Jamshedpur, Madras, etc. In addition to these strikes involving economic issues "workers in Bombay and a number of other industrial towns went on a political strike against the Rowlatt Acts, demonstrating thereby their growing political consciousness. It marked the entry of the working class in the nationalist movement."<sup>157</sup>

The active participation of the proletariat in the demonstrations organised against the Rowlatt Acts made the nationalist-

155. *Ibid.*, pp. 526-27.

156. E.M.S. Namboodiripad, n. 81, p. 22.

157. A. R. Desai, *Social Background of Indian Nationalism*, Popular Book Depot, Bombay, 1954, 2nd ed., p. 185.

minded intelligentsia further realise the revolutionary significance of the role that labour could play in the struggle of nationalism. They propagated for establishing permanent associations for workers to improve their social and economic lot and setting up their own independent trade union organisations. At the thirty-fifth session of the Indian National Congress held at Amritsar in 1919 they had moved and unanimously passed the following resolution:

"This Congress urges its Provincial Committees and other affiliated associations to promote labour unions throughout the country with the view of improving social, economic and political conditions of the labouring classes and securing for them a fair standard of living and a proper place in the body politic of India."<sup>158</sup>

158. *Report of the Annual Session of the Indian National Congress Held at Amritsar in December 1919*, p. 5. For further study see also B. C. Pal, *New Economic Menace to India*, Madras, Ganesh & Co., 1920, pp. 232-35.



## Chapter Two

# Postwar Awakening (1919-1921)

The Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia, over the joint signatures of Lenin and Stalin, proclaimed the equality and sovereignty of the peoples of Russia, and the right of the peoples of Russia to freedom of development... This was indeed an explosive statement and all the peoples of Asia, struggling for freedom, heard it with a new hope... That the Russian revolution quickened the pulse of the peoples of Asia no one would deny. That it also helped to awaken the masses, to create doubts in the minds of thinking people about the validity of many things which they had accepted without question from the West, could not also be doubted. Equally it would be accepted that its general effect was to weaken the hold of the West on the peoples of Asia.

[K. M. Panikkar, *Asia and Western Domination* (London, George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1953) pp. 250 & 253.]

The period following the first world war is of tremendous significance in the awakening of the exploited classes in India. It is during this period that they grew conscious of the power of mass action. The so-called "contentment" of theirs was disturbed in a manner not contemplated by the authors of the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms.<sup>1</sup> Certain political events inside and outside India were primarily responsible for this development.

1. See the *Secret Report on the Noncooperation Movement Submitted to the Home Secretary, Government of India, on 31 January 1920* by L. Birley, Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Home (Pol.) Department, Government of India, File No. 185, 1925, p. 84.

## IMPACT OF THE OCTOBER REVOLUTION

The foremost among such events was the outbreak of the October Revolution of 1917 in Russia. The news of the passage of Lenin's decree on "Land to the Tillers of the Soil" with overwhelming majority on the very first day of the second session of the Second All-Russia Congress of Soviets<sup>2</sup> and the Declaration of the Rights of the People of Russia were also published in the Indian press, and it spread like wild fire everywhere, to all areas, urban and rural. The idea of economic revolt was thus borrowed from abroad, but it soon identified itself with the spirit of nationalism among the masses. An appeal revealing the definite influence of the October Revolution, though based on less familiar grounds than those of that revolution, was the exhortation to emulate Bolshevik Russia. Some examples of this nature may easily be seen in the speeches and newspapers of the postrevolution era in India. The following passage occurs in a speech delivered by one Abdur Razzak Khan in Calcutta in April 1921:

"You all know what has happened in Russia where all the labourers rose up, killed their emperor and divided all his wealth and properties among themselves so that all were there equal and everyone had to earn his livelihood. Such a time has now come for Hindustan."<sup>3</sup>

Early in 1921 the influential Bengali weekly *Bijoli*, run by Barindranath Ghosh, the noted revolutionary, and by his friends of the Jugantar Party, declared in a forthright manner:

"Bolshevik Russia has ended all inequality based on wealth ... Previously three out of every four persons had no education in Russia, now there is hardly anyone who is not educated. Peasants, factory workers, men, women—everybody is trying to acquire knowledge. This is how real men are made."<sup>4</sup>

2. By this decree the landed estates were abolished forthwith without any compensation to the landlords and turned over to the Volost Land Committee and the Uyezd Soviets of Peasants' Deputies.

3. Home (Pol.) Department, n. 1, p. 75.

4. *Bijoli*, Calcutta, 4 March 1921.

In this very year *Dhumketu*, the first communist weekly in Bengali, compared the Bolsheviks to Kalki (an incarnation of the god Vishnu) wielding the sharp sword on behalf of the harassed and long-oppressed people.<sup>5</sup>

A year later, the well-known Bengali nationalist weekly, *Atmasakti*, also wrote:

"The substantial similarity in the conditions of Russia and India bring to our mind the problems of Bolshevism. Like Russia, India too is a predominantly agrarian country. The number of educated persons are about the same in both the countries. Both the countries are strongly religious-minded... The factors that led to the rise of Bolshevism in Russia are also present in India. For those who are suppressed today want their full share of rights from the propertied classes. They cannot be kept down and under any more."<sup>6</sup>

Defining what is *swaraj* a leading Bengali nationalist, Hemanta Sarkar, wrote about the same time, in *Dhumketu*:

"There will be all kinds of freedom in our *swaraj*... The economic equality preached by Karl Marx's socialism... Lenin's Bolshevik concept of enjoying the earth equally by all these shall get their due place in our free constitution."<sup>7</sup>

In Hindi also, about this time, there appeared some books related to the October Revolution. The pioneering step in this direction was taken by the daily newspaper *Pratap* (Kanpur), which, disregarding imperialist propaganda, patronised the revolutionary forces and progressive Hindi writers who were dedicated to the cause of the uplift of the oppressed people of India. Encouraged by the editor of *Pratap*, Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi, there appeared in 1920 a book entitled *Rus ki Rajyakaranti* (the Revolution of Russia) by Rama Shankar Avasthi.

These writings had a tremendous impact on the oppressed classes in India, who acquired confidence that they were not alone in fighting the oppressors, but had the Russian working

5. Home (Pol.) Department, n. 1, p. 75.

6. *Atmasakti*, Calcutta, 12 April 1922.

7. *Dhumketu*, Calcutta, 13 October 1922.

people on their side. The success of the October Revolution put an end to the fatalism which had paralysed the people in India. They now felt confident that since the Russian poor had chased out the feudal lords and the bourgeoisie and had taken over power, they too could do so in their own country.

Besides, there were a considerable number of Indian patriots who secretly visited the Soviet Union. Indian soldiers who had fought in Europe and in the Trans-Caucasus during the war returned with stirring accounts of the October Revolution, and thus facilitated the radical awakening among the masses. In the course of his work of collecting research material in the National Archives of India, the author came across a reference which showed that the Intelligence Bureau of the Government of India secured a copy of a brochure on the Soviet land written by one Maulvi Barakatullah, a prominent Indian revolutionary, after his meeting with Lenin in 1919. Though the author could not get a copy of the brochure in the National Archives, he came across certain quotations from it in a recent article by a Soviet writer. One of these quotations is as follows:

"The dawn of mankind's liberation is appearing on Russia's horizon, the bright sun of that happy day is Ulyanov—Lenin."<sup>8</sup>

8. Reference quoted by V. Fyodorov, "October Revolution: Its Impact on India's Struggle for Independence", *Soviet Land*, New Delhi, July 1967, Vol. XX, No. 13, p. 11.

It may be recalled that speaking of the international importance of Soviet experience in settling up a multinational family of peoples, Lenin emphasised in September 1921: "This is a question of worldwide importance, without any exaggeration. In this matter one should be most exacting. This will have its influence on India, on the East..." (*Ibid.*).

Let us remember that the Leninist attitude of the new Bolshevik Russia on the national question greatly undermined the racist, colonialist conceptions of bifurcating mankind into "higher" and "lower" races, into "civilised" and "uncivilised" peoples. It showed in practice the possibility of independent growth, of all-round economic and cultural development of oppressed people everywhere. The Bolshevik revolution buried once and for all the myth of the "eternal" existence of the colonial system, of the "omnipotence" of die-hards. With the October Revolution there started a new era of the general transition of mankind from imperialism to social progress.

There also appeared in the various regional languages of India books on the life and work of the leader of the October Revolution. On the cover page of *Bolshevik Jadugar—M. Lenin* (Bolshevik Magician—M. Lenin) written by Rama Shankar Avasthi in Hindi in 1921, there appeared just below Lenin's photograph a couplet eulogising his services to oppressed humanity:

यह है लीनिन विश्व विषमता हरने वाला,  
साम्यवाद का सिहनाद सा करने वाला।

("This is Lenin, eliminator of inequality in the universe. He symbolises the victory of communism like the roar of a lion.")

A biography of Lenin was also written in Urdu by a man named Hasan Aziz Bhopali—the earliest work on Lenin that ever appeared in the Urdu language.

The following is a passage from the foreword of the first book published in India on new changes in Russia, *Nicolai Lenin*, by Ganesh and Company, Madras:

"Two mighty men of action they are today: Lenin and Gandhi. Lenin, an ascetic on the throne of Russia—Lenin an idealist—Lenin a practical reformer—in an epoch of religious faith Lenin would have been uttered in Europe as a saint; in both Lenin and Gandhi is the faith of the idealist... The day of Russian independence and the proclamation of Socialist Federal Soviet Republic are events of first rate magnitude which widen the intellectual horizons and moral purview of the humanity. Whatever might be the social and economic excesses which impeded the era of reconstruction, it should be noted that the Russian revolution of 1917 set up a distinct mile-post in all human progress."<sup>9</sup>

9. This material has been collected from the photostat copy of some pages of the first book published in India on the October Revolution by Ganesh & Co., *New Age* (Weekly), New Delhi, 5 November 1967, Vol. XV, No. 45, p. 3.

Utterances of this nature appeared here and there throughout the postwar period and showed how greatly political consciousness had grown among the oppressed classes. Addressing a mass meeting organised in a locality where the poor people lived, a political agitator, J. P. Misser, said: "There are but two persons in the world today, one is Lenin and the other is Gandhi."<sup>10</sup>

#### CONTRIBUTION OF GANDHIJI

Gandhiji's mission to Champaran in 1917 and his organisation of a labour strike in the Ahmedabad textile mills in 1918 were no less significant a contribution to the growth of mass awakening. It may be recalled that the work of Gandhiji had culminated for the first time in the success of the peasantry and the labouring class against their oppressors, viz the English indigo planters and the Indian industrial bourgeoisie. The news of his success had spread like wild fire in urban and rural centres and had reached the exploited masses—Hindus as well as Muslims.

#### NONCOOPERATION

About this very time, when the exploited classes had grown aware of the havoc wrought by British imperialism and by the local and foreign exploiters and landlords, there appeared the noncooperation movement.

It is an undeniable fact that the exploited masses of India not only actively participated in all the boycott programmes of Gandhiji (without whose cooperation the movement would have fizzled out) but also organised their distinctive struggles simultaneously to get their most acute grievances redressed. It will not be out of context to provide the readers with certain stray glimpses of some of these mass struggles.

#### FIRST PHASE OF PEASANTS' MOVEMENT

Although peasant unrest was universal and peasant risings were increasingly frequent at this time, the fury and unrest of

10. Home (Pol.) Department, n. 1, p. 75.

the kisans spent itself in isolated actions of vendatta and violence against individual moneylenders and feudal lords.<sup>11</sup> It was only from the last phase of the first world war onwards that peasant unrest, especially in the form of Champaran and Kheda struggles, advanced at a speed without any previous parallel, and during the noncooperation and Khilafat movements it acquired more and more a radical character. In the annual session of the Indian National Congress at Amritsar in December 1919, the class demands of the peasantry were put forward for the first time for adoption in the national programme. A secret report of the British government recorded that the resolutions submitted by the Kisan Sabha to the Amritsar National Congress in December 1919 were as follows:

- (a) That peasants all over India should be declared the actual owners of the soil they cultivate;
- (b) That peasants should be subjected to tax, but not to rent; and
- (c) That in provinces, where the zamindari tenure prevails, the ownership of lands lent to the tenant should be bought up and given over to the tenants.

Commenting on these demands the Director of the Intelligence Bureau communicated to his superior: "Russian pro-Bolshevik practice, in the matter of division of land, would appeal to him (the Indian peasant) very much."<sup>12</sup>

#### PEASANT MOVEMENT IN RAI BAREILLY AND FYZABAD DISTRICTS IN THE UNITED PROVINCES

The first big centre of the peasant movement was the United Provinces (nowadays known as Uttar Pradesh), where the agrarian situation was truly appalling. The British conquerors had introduced the most oppressive form of the zamindari system. Under the new regulations large tracts of cultivated lands,

11. The widely known peasants' upsurges in the latter half of the nineteenth century were the Santhal rebellion of 1855 and the Deccan riots of 1875.

12. *Bolshevism in India: Report by the Director, Intelligence Bureau, Home Department, Proceedings, January 1921.*

pasture lands, forests and irrigational schemes were permanently declared as the property of landlords. The majority of the cultivators were thus reduced to the status of serfs and tenants without any rights. They were thus left to the mercy of landlords and moneylenders who cruelly exploited them.<sup>13</sup> According to the report of the Royal Commission of Agriculture, there was far more pauperism in the United Provinces than in other Indian provinces. In the postwar years the wages of the agricultural workers fluctuated between 1.5 and 4 annas a day, whereas in the Punjab at that time 12 annas a day was the usual wage.<sup>14</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru concurred with these facts when he wrote:

"The progressive pauperism of the peasantry had been going on for a long time. What had happened to bring matters to a head and rouse up the countryside? Economic conditions, of course, but these conditions were similar all over Oudh... Oudh... was, and is, the land of taluqdars—the "Barons of Oudh" they call themselves—and the zamindari system at its worst flourished there. The exactions of the landlords were becoming unbearable and the number of landless labourers was growing."<sup>15</sup>

Referring to the parasitic class character of these landlords, Nehru said:

13. It is worth noting that the total rural indebtedness of undivided India in 1921 was estimated between Rs 500 crores and Rs 550 crores by a British civilian in the Punjab, M. L. Darling. (See H. D. Malaviya, *Land Reforms in India*, New Delhi, 1954, p. 49.) With the passage of time the amount went on increasing. It amounted to Rs 900 crores in 1930 according to the Central Banking Enquiry Committee Report; the rates of interest then ranged up to 300 per cent. In the United Provinces the total indebtedness up to 1930 was, according to the UP Banking Enquiry Committee Report, Rs 125 crores. In undivided Bengal the extent of rural indebtedness increased from Rs 100 crores in 1930 to Rs 150 crores in 1944-45 according to the *Ishaque Report* of the Government of Bengal. (Cited by Bhowani Sen, *Indian Land System and Land Reforms*, People's Publishing House, Delhi, 1955, pp. 23-24.)

14. *Documents of the Royal Commission on Agriculture in India*, Vol. I, 1935, p. 206 (one anna=6.25 paise now).

15. Jawaharlal Nehru, *An Autobiography*, Allied Publishers, New Delhi, 1962, pp. 52-53.



"The taluqdars and the big zamindars, the lords of the land, the 'natural leaders of the people', as they are proud of calling themselves, had been the spoilt children of the British government, but that government had succeeded, by the special education and upbringing it provided or failed to provide for them, in reducing them, as a class, to a state of complete intellectual inpotence. They did nothing at all for their tenancy such as landlords in other countries have to some little extent often done, and became complete parasites on the land and the people. Their chief activity lay in endeavouring to placate the local officials, without whose favour they could not exist for long, and demanding ceaselessly a protection of their special interests and privileges... They have not even the virtues of an aristocracy. As a class they are physically and intellectually degenerate and have outlived their day; they will continue only so long as an external power like the British government props them up."<sup>16</sup>

In his telegram sent to the Secretary of State for India on 13 January 1921 the Viceroy recognised that the Tenancy Act favouring the interests of the taluqdars admittedly needed amendment and that genuine discontent of the tenants with the working of the existing law was the main reason for the success attained by the noncooperators. He added that the opposition of the taluqdars in the past had made the amendment of Tenancy Law difficult, but that the need for concession had now probably been brought home to them.<sup>17</sup>

Even in the summary report on the peasant disturbances prepared by the Government of India in the light of the information provided by the UP government it was admitted that the "agrarian population...has legitimate grievances. They (government) consider the difficulties of the problem are social and economic rather than political and are considering the amendment of Oudh Rent Act."<sup>18</sup>

16. *Ibid.*, p. 58.

17. *Disturbances in the Rae Bareilly and Fyzabad Districts*, Home (Pol.) Department, Proceedings February 1921, File Nos. 195-216-A, p. 10.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

The fairly broad network of railways and important centres of cotton textile industry and woollen industry in the province could not provide relief by way of alternative employment to the tenants. Deplorable conditions of underemployment and poverty caused starvation, and then there were terrible epidemics which spread like wild fire and turned the province into a permanent breeding-ground of those diseases.<sup>19</sup> The failure of crops culminating in widespread famine in 1920-21 deteriorated the situation further.

Being utterly tired of their economic and social background, the peasants of Rae Bareilly and Fyzabad districts began to think in terms of a rebellion on the pattern of the liberation struggle waged by their predecessors in 1857. Their smouldering fury burnt into flame during the nationwide movement of noncooperation in 1920-21 throughout the country.

In the meantime one Ramchandra who was originally from Maharashtra had drifted to the districts of Oudh. While he wandered about reciting Tulsidas's *Ramayana*, he listened to the grievances of peasants. He possessed remarkable power of organisation. He taught them to assemble periodically for a discussion of their own problems and thus created a feeling of solidarity among them. Off and on big mass gatherings were held, and this produced a sense of power. "Sita Ram" was a traditional and common way of greeting in the area, but he invested it with the significance of a war slogan. "Having organised the peasantry to some extent he made", writes Jawaharlal Nehru, "all manners of promises to them, vague and nebulous but full of hope for them".<sup>20</sup>

At this time Nehru also joined the kisan movement. He paid frequent visits to the villages and watched the kisan movement grow in strength. "The downtrodden kisan began to gain", writes he, "a new confidence in himself and walked straighten with head up. His fear of landlords' agents and the police lessened, and when there was an ejectionment from a hold-

19. For further study see V. V. Balabushevich and A. M. Dyakov, ed., *A Contemporary History of India*, People's Publishing House, New Delhi, 1964, p. 79.

20. Nehru, n. 15, p. 53.

ing no other kisan would make an offer for that land."<sup>21</sup> Though outwardly there appeared a lull, it was a lull before the storm. Nehru's enquiries showed that agrarian upheavals were leading to jacqueries. The peasants of part of Oudh in those days were "desperate and at white heat"<sup>22</sup> and "a mere spark would have lighted a flame".<sup>23</sup>

The foundation-stone of the coming struggle was laid by an ordinary peasant who went up to a taluqdar as he was sitting in his own house in the midst of his well-wishers, and slapped him on the face for being immoral in his conduct towards his wife.<sup>24</sup>

Such physical assaults on the parasitic class of taluqdars led to the growth of a new spirit of defiance among the peasants. They were told to defy British rule itself which had imposed these barons of feudalism on them. This defiance of British rule manifested itself in the form of peasants travelling by train in large numbers without tickets, especially when they had to attend their periodical mass meetings in which sixty to seventy thousand persons used to participate. It was difficult to control them and bring them to book. They openly defied the railway authorities, telling them that the old days were gone.<sup>25</sup>

The crisis came to a head towards the close of 1920, when a few peasant leaders were arrested for some minor offence. They were to be tried in a town called Pratabgarh, but on the occasion of the trial a huge concourse of peasants filled the court compound. Thousands lined the route to the prison where the accused leaders had been lodged. The judicial officer thought it expedient to postpone the trial to the next day. But the crowd went on increasing and besieged the prison, so to speak. The peasant could easily carry on for a few days on a handful of parched gram. Finally the peasant leaders were freed. "For the kisans this was a big triumph", says Nehru, "and they began to think that they could always have their

21. *Ibid.*, p. 57.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 59.

23. *Ibid.*

24. Instance quoted by Nehru, *Ibid.*

25. *Ibid.*

way by weight of numbers alone. To the government this position was intolerable."<sup>26</sup>

In the beginning of January 1921 the peasants revolted en masse against their taluqdars in the south of the Rae Bareilly district. The Deputy Commissioner received reports to the effect that a large crowd of villagers, numbering several thousands, was on the rampage moving from one estate to another in tehsil Dalmau and destroying crops on the *sir* (personal cultivation) land of the taluqdars.

On 2 January 1921, the crops (tilled by the peasants) in the fields of Sardar Nihal Singh, a taluqdar, whose family had acquired these vast landed interests by its dubious role in the First War of National Independence in 1857, were destroyed at Aundu by a large crowd of peasants.<sup>27</sup>

On 3 January 1921, crops owned by another national traitor and taluqdar, Thakur Ram Pratab Singh, were destroyed in the village of Chichauli. The taluqdar estimated the damage at Rs 8,000. On 4 January, another farm at the same place of the same taluqdar was totally despoiled. A godown was forced open and its contents looted, causing a loss of more than Rs 5,000.<sup>28</sup>

On 5 January 1921, a mob of about a thousand peasants attacked one Rup Singh, a henchman of a taluqdar called Thakurain Sheoraj Kunwar, looted his textile merchandise in the Rustampur bazaar, and also took away various other kinds of property, including his gun, from his quarters in the courtyard of the Thakurain. Still another landlord, Tribhuwan Bahadur Singh of Chandanian, was besieged in his house by a mob of about three thousand peasants led by one Baba Janaki Das. Some gold rings and coins are alleged to have been extorted from the taluqdar. Fortunately for him the Deputy Commissioner and the Superintendent of Police arrived there in time accompanied by a harassed landlord, Sardar Nihal Singh, at the nick of time, and rescued him. Three peasant leaders were arrested on the spot.<sup>29</sup>

26. *Ibid.*, p. 60.

27. *Disturbances in Rae Bareilly and Fyzabad Districts*, n. 17, p. 11.

28. *Ibid.*

29. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

On 6 January Sardar Nihal Singh's store and zilladar's office were destroyed by a band of about one hundred men at Anti. A crowd of about one hundred and fifty peasants looted the bazaar at Mau, the property of the Raja of Tiloi. Sar Birpal Singh's store at Khurenti was also looted by about five hundred peasants. At Dih, on the Tiloi estate, the houses of two moneylenders, contemptuously known as Badri Banya and Musammat Durajiya, were looted by a party of about two hundred. The houses of two more moneylenders, Sarju Banya and Mussamat Sadni, were looted in Jagdishpur by a group of about two hundred men.<sup>30</sup> On the same day a large band of peasants planned to attack and loot the bazaar at Munshiganj, about two miles south of Rae Bareilly. The attack at Munshiganj did not materialise as the place was protected by a sufficient number of armed police. But a large mob, about four thousand strong, attacked the Fursatganj bazaar where the subdivisional magistrate was present with armed policemen.

In his confidential report submitted to the Deputy Commissioner of Rae Bareilly, the magistrate said that when he arrived in the bazaar, he found that a mob of three to four hundred men, most of whom were armed with lathis, lances and even axes, had gathered in the centre of the bazaar, shouting, "Mahatma Gandhi ki Jai", "Ram Chandra Maharaj ki Jai", and "Shaukat Ali, Muhammad Ali ki Jai". Some of the leaders of the mob were approached and reasoned with. Their names were Ram Avtar, Ram Narain of village Pura Kalu and Ausan Brahman of village Potni. They complained about the dearth of grain and cloth and about the highhandedness of the taluqdars and zamindars. They said that unless these grievances were redressed, they would "not be satisfied and would not return to their houses and would do all in their power".<sup>31</sup>

In his usual way the officer asked the peasant leaders to address petitions to the Deputy Commissioner. The peasants were not satisfied with this routine reply. In the meantime, they were joined by others who came in their thousands from the

30. *Ibid.*

31. *Ibid.*, 22.

nearby villages. They all rushed into the bazaar, formed themselves into a procession and repeated the slogans already cited. Their number was continually swelling. Commenting on the tension, the subdivisional magistrate wrote:

"I told them to preserve order in the bazaar and retire, but they were so overpowered with excitement that nobody paid any heed to us. Sometimes they said that banias (traders) have made heavy profits, we should avenge ourselves on them. Sometimes they complained about the dearth of the grain and cloth and said that all shopkeepers should at once be ordered to sell cloth at four annas per yard and flour at eight seers per rupee, otherwise they will not be pacified but plunder the people and burn the houses. For about two hours I with some other men continued to reason with the mob but their excitement was growing and their numbers swelling. In my opinion the mob swelled to about eight or ten thousand and rushed into some houses and shops. They broke open the lock and began to plunder and riot. To prevent them from plundering and rioting I with the guard reached at once near the shops. But as soon as we reached there the mob rushed in upon us shouting 'jai', 'jai' and crying, 'Kill them, burn them and take away their guns.' Some persons of the village and of other villages who were with us and tried to reason with the mob were also attacked. They attacked us with brick-bats and lathis, lances and axes and engaged in 'marpit'. Scores of brick-bats and lathis were thrown at us all. One of them threw a piece of wood at me, which missing my head fell on my breast, otherwise I would have been severely hurt. They began to rob a few houses... I ordered the guard to fix their bayonets and to open their cartridge bundles. They had no effect on the crowd; on the contrary they began to make fun of us. Eventually I ordered the guard to fire in the air in order that the mob might disperse. But the mob raised a cry 'Take away their guns; they are but few and can do nothing.'"<sup>32</sup>

32. *Ibid.*, pp. 22-23.

At this time one of the peasants aimed his axe at the sub-divisional magistrate whom he believed to be an obstacle in the execution of their plan. The magistrate immediately ordered the guard to fire. It was reported that four men were killed and two wounded. An additional force of armed police and mounted soldiers was despatched from Lucknow by train on 6 January 1921. Several arrests were made.<sup>33</sup>

Certain further developments took place on 7 January and on the days that followed.<sup>34</sup> Some peasant leaders like Baba Janaki Das had been arrested in connection with the agitation. They had been lodged in the local jail. Being full of the success they had won at Pratabgarh and the tactics that they had then adopted, the *kisans* marched to the town of Rae Bareilly for a mass demonstration. On 7 January they surrounded the jail en masse and demanded the release of the *kisan* leaders. But this time the authorities had made up their minds not to yield. Additional mounted police and the military had been brought. They forcibly drove the peasants back with the butts of their lances across the river. But near Munshiganj the retreating mob was sufficiently enforced and augmented by a peasant procession coming towards the city. The crowd at this time was about ten thousand strong. The crowd again demanded the release of their leaders. But the Deputy Commissioner admonished the crowd and said that their leader Ram Chandra, Baba Janaki Das and Baba Ram Ghulam were not in the Rae Bareilly jail. They had already been transferred to Lucknow, he said, and they would not be released in any case.<sup>35</sup> This attitude of the officer angered the peasants. A bitter scuffle ensued. The police *sowars* opened fire, killing and wounding many and trampling others under the hooves of their horses.<sup>36</sup> The peasants retaliated with stones, *kankars*, and lathis. Several of the mounted police were severely injured and

33. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

34. See the telegram No. 21-F, dated Lucknow, 7 January 1921, from the Chief Secretary to the Government of the United Provinces, Home (Pol.) Department, n. 17, p. 8.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

36. Telegram No. 41-E, dated Lucknow, 9 January 1921, *Ibid.*, 8.

two unhorsed.<sup>37</sup> Nehru, who also reached there in the meantime, provides the following eye-witness account of the situation:

"As I reached the river sounds of firing could be heard from the other side. I was stopped at the bridge... We found that men had been killed in the firing. The kisans had refused to disperse or to go back... They refused to take their orders from men they did not trust. Someone actually suggested to the Magistrate to wait for me a little but he refused. He could not permit an agitator to succeed where he had failed. That is not the way of foreign governments depending on prestige."<sup>38</sup>

Nehru held a meeting of the peasants and tried to remove their fear and lessen their excitement. "It was rather an unusual situation with firing going on their brethren within a stone's throw across a little stream... But the meeting... took away the edge from the kisans' fear", writes Nehru.<sup>39</sup>

In thousands the peasants were arrested and sent to prison, and an officer admonished them to promise good behaviour in future, as the jail, in his words, was an "institution and not a lunatic asylum".<sup>40</sup>

This repression further infuriated the peasants. On 7 January 1921, in addition to the serious disturbances at Munshiganj, cloth merchants at Bawanpur were robbed by a party of about sixty men. The houses of Swayambar Singh and Lalta Prasad were looted by some three hundred men at Bimiaon on the Tiloi estate. Plans had been prepared to loot several important bazaars at Jais and other places. Capperganj bazaar was to be looted on 8 January 1921. But these plans came to nothing because of government vigilance. A deputy magistrate, Nasrulla by name, dispersed several crowds in this way for days together.<sup>41</sup> Alarmed by this peasant revolt, the Chief Secretary to the Gov-

37. *Ibid.*, 9.

38. Nehru, n. 15, pp. 60-61.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 60.

40. Telegram No. 41-E, dated Lucknow, 9 January 1921, n. 17, p. 9.

41. *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.



ernment of the United Provinces, G. B. Lambert, reported to the Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department, 13 January 1921:

"The southern portion of the Rae Bareilly district was in a very disturbed state and rapidly approaching anarchy. Serious crimes amounting to dacoity began to occur in alarming numbers."<sup>42</sup>

Reporting the gravity of the situation, the Commissioner of Lucknow, who formerly served in Rae Bareilly district as Deputy Commissioner, and who had thus personal experience of the district, stated:

"The situation at that time was extremely serious. The ignorant peasantry had been persuaded by perambulating agitators that not only the taluqdars but the British Raj would shortly cease to exist and that under the beneficent rule of Mr Gandhi they would enter on a golden age of prosperity in which they would be able to buy good cloth at 0.4.0 a yard and other necessities of life at similar cheap rates."<sup>43</sup>

A correspondent of *The Pioneer*, in his report on the Rae Bareilly disturbances telegraphed to the London press, said that peasant "Soviets"<sup>44</sup> had been established all over the area controlled by rebel peasants. On reading these accounts, the Secretary of State for India was greatly alarmed. On 12 January, he wired the Viceroy:

"Yesterday's and today's newspapers are full of accounts with scare headlines and terrific posters of agrarian riots in Rae Bareilly and Sultanpur districts beginning apparently from January 4th. It is stated that the trouble is spreading, that civil and police authorities are quite unable to cope with it, that the rioters have a certain amount of justice in their cause, and that the suppression by landowners of "Soviets" among tenants is one of the reasons for disturbances. I am once again wholly without news. Please telegraph an account

42. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

of these incidents. *Clear the line*: what is present situation and what are your anticipations and how far Gandhi is connected with them."<sup>45</sup>

On 13 January 1921, the Viceroy stated in his reply that the agitation which had been carried on amongst villagers had been largely, if not solely, the work of noncooperators, though there was no information to show how far the movement had been directly inspired or controlled by Mahatma Gandhi himself. The Viceroy also anticipated<sup>46</sup> the possibility of similar disturbances breaking out in other parts of Oudh.

On 18 January 1921 the Secretary of State despatched another telegram to the Viceroy, in which he asked the latter to realise the embarrassing position caused by his inability to speak with authority on the events in India or to appraise the extensive danger posed by the movements which had been reported. For example, he added, he had never heard of the existence of the "Soviets" referred to in the report telegraphed by the correspondent of *The Pioneer* and did not know the correct answer to those who were naturally anxious to know more about them.<sup>47</sup>

Meanwhile, according to the telegrams of the Indian News-agency and the Chief Secretary to the Government of the United Provinces, agrarian disturbances involving much damage to property again broke out in the police circles of Baskhari and Jehangirganj in Tanda tehsil of the Fyzabad district on 13 and 14 January 1921.

It may not be inappropriate to recall that the majority of the villages were under zamindars or proprietors. The kisan sabha movement was very well organised in this area. Its principal supporters and adherents were the small tenants or low-caste labourers employed by the Brahmin zamindars. On 12 January 1921 a public meeting was held by kisan sabha in which the low-caste serfs and tenants were persuaded not to work for the old wages for their zamindar employers. They were also exhort-

45. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

46. Telegram No. 36, dated 13 January 1921, from Viceroy to the Secretary of State, Home (Pol.) Department, *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

ed to organise a strike. An attack on the zamindars of Bankara was also urged. They were told that it was the wish of Mahatma Gandhi that they should loot. They willingly and readily consented to carry out this behest, amidst sky-rending slogans of "Mahatma Gandhi ki Jai".<sup>48</sup> They were also told that British raj was coming to an end and Gandhi raj was about to dawn.<sup>49</sup>

The success of this first operation inspired further action. On the following day (13 January), therefore, large bands of tenants, consisting mainly of Chamars, Luniards and Ahirs, assembled and proceeded to loot and plunder "every person of substance".<sup>50</sup> The zamindars could not offer any resistance as the peasant bands came in overwhelming numbers. Each band is believed to have consisted of about five thousand men. For two days—on 13 and 14 January—the looting continued in some thirty villages. In some villages only the grain-stores were looted, whereas in others the looting was thorough. Many of the houses were completely sacked and the zamindars lost almost all their household possessions. Even doors and mill-stones were carried off. In some instances the clothes and ornaments of women were taken away. Even the tutors of landlords' children were plundered. Much of the loot carried away was hidden, burnt or thrown into the wells. In all, the losses were put down at over two lakhs of rupees.

On the first day, the movement was largely directed against particular zamindars, but after that the object was loot, pure and simple. The primary object of looting were houses of zamindars; but bannias (moneylenders), sunars (goldsmiths) and patwaries (village revenue officers), who were considered the henchmen of zamindars, were also not spared. With the passage of every hour the mobs grew in strength, and were followed by crowds of women to carry off the plunder. The armed constabulary led by the Deputy Commissioner and the Superintendent of Police arrived in search of the peasants who had already dispersed after fulfilling their jobs. A few arrests were effected

48. Nehru, n. 15, p. 61.

49. Home (Pol.) Department, No. 17, p. 20.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

at the time of carrying off plunder. Cart-loads of loot were recovered.

According to an official source, in all 346 persons were arrested.<sup>51</sup> Intimidated by the police, some local people assisted them at first in combing jungles in which the peasants, officially described as "dacoits", were believed to have taken refuge. With the arrival of some of the leaders of the kisan sabha, however, the local people withdrew their support to the police in their search for the rebel peasants.

On 19 January 1921 two peasant leaders were assaulted and beaten by a zamindar family whose women-folk had had their clothes stripped off by some hooliagns at the time of plunder. One of the assaulted leaders thereupon addressed a meeting in the bazaar in which he implied that he had been beaten at the instance of the police and summoned a meeting for the next day at Baskhari. The other declared his dharna (intention of sitting) at the thana until the police apologised. The Deputy Commissioner prohibited the meeting fixed for the following day. But the peasants defied the order and on the morning of 20 January 1921 they assembled in large numbers at Baskhari. The police could not disperse them because of their overwhelming number. Large bodies of peasants from nearby Akbarpur also came to attend the meeting. It was obvious that the police could not disperse them. The crowd was generally well behaved and refused to leave except on orders from their leader.

The situation was saved as a result of an offer from the leader to send the people back to their homes in return for an undertaking by the government to inquire into the alleged assault. The result of the inquiry was to be announced at a subsequent meeting to be held at Akbarpur on 27 January 1921. All the same, at the time of the inquiry, there was a hot altercation. The peasant leader lost his temper and struck certain persons who he believed were the cause of his dishonour.

On 27 January 1921 the public meeting was held at Akbar-

51. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

pur as announced. A strong police force was present on the spot to terrorise the peasants.

Shortly afterwards there occurred a riot at the Goshainganj railway station. Two constables deputed to attend a meeting at Baskhari were beaten. Thereupon thirteen persons were arrested. A number of papers belonging to the leader of the kisan sabha were recovered. These were mostly petitions to Mahatma Gandhi relating to agrarian grievances.<sup>52</sup>

On 17 January 1921 the Chief Secretary to the Government of the United Provinces sent the following despatch: "The agrarian position in Oudh is still unsettled. The early revision of the Oudh Rent Act (34 years' old) is necessary."<sup>53</sup>

According to a telegram sent on 24 January 1921 by the Chief Secretary to the Government of the United Provinces to the Home Secretary, serious riots occurred in village Sahgaon, Panchagaon, thana Bachhrawan in Rae Bareilly district, as a result of the agrarian discontent.<sup>54</sup> According to the version of the Deputy Commissioner, the peasants had turned loose the local zamindar's cattle upon his sugarcane field. The police arrived at the spot to disperse the peasants and to defend the landlord. But it was a market day and a large number of peasants had assembled in a meeting to voice their grievances. They were advised by their leaders, Ramavtar and Salik, to bring to an end the obsolete system of zamindari. It would appear that the police present on the spot considered the speeches objectionable and tried to intervene. This resulted in a scuffle. While the police opened fire, the peasants attacked the police with lathis and spears. One constable was killed by a lathi blow which smashed the back of his skull. Some other constables tried to escape, but the crowd chased them. Two of them were beaten down and left for dead with severe wounds in the head and other injuries.<sup>55</sup>

On 29 January 1921 a mob held up a train in order to rescue

52. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

54. *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

a peasant leader who had been arrested.<sup>56</sup>

In order to silence the fury of their masters in London and keep themselves in their good books, the English bureaucrats adopted very severe measures to crush the upsurge. Firstly, they ridiculed its progressive character. Secondly, they tried to demoralise the arrested peasants in various questionable ways. Thirdly, they took severe punitive measures. In fact, official reports for 1919-23 described most of the peasant movements in the United Provinces as the operations of exclusive bands of "dacoits",<sup>57</sup> though the compilers of the reports had to admit that these "dacoits" attacked only the propertied classes like feudal lords and traders, attacked the police, and were generally supported by the agrarian population. The report for 1920 stated that in 1919 there were repeated clashes between the police and "robber bands". Simultaneously it pointed out that the difficulty in combating the "dacoits" was that "it was absolutely impossible to find anybody who would stand witness against them".<sup>58</sup>

In the course of disorders in different parts of the Rae Bareilly district, according to official sources, 1,024 persons were arrested. 108 men alleged to have been active in the Fursatganj disturbance were given severe punishment.<sup>59</sup> A few kisans were put in custody at the police station. The subinspector of police was not present at that time. The kisans reaching there shouted "Gandhiji ki Jai". In the meantime a few high officers reached there and ordered them to shout "Sarkar ki Jai" and "Gandhi ki Chhai" (May destruction attend upon Gandhi). The kisans refused to do so. These officers, therefore, began to insult and humiliate them in different ways. Thereupon an advocate, who had suspended his practice in pursuance of the

56. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

57. It is interesting to remember that one of the kisan leaders, Baha Ram Chulam, was contemptuously characterised as a "registered criminal past". Likewise other leaders were "also really men of bad character in disguise. The garb of a *fakir* is, of course, very commonly adopted by a criminal", thus stated J. C. Faunthorpe, Commissioner, Lucknow Division, in his report sent to the Government of United Provinces on 18 January 1921. (*Ibid.*, p. 30.)

58. *India in 1920*, Government of India, Delhi, 1920, p. 181.

59. *Disturbances in the Rai Bareilly*, n. 17, p. 21.

noncooperation movement, said to the thanedar: "Are you not ashamed of your actions? How ungrateful you are? Your life is only in the hands of God. These men who have been locked up and who are patiently submitting to all your abuses say it is only Gandhi who is withholding them from committing violence. And you abuse him!"<sup>60</sup>

Outside the jail there began a reign of terror for every prominent peasant worker or member of a panchayat. The colonial authorities were determined to crush the peasant upsurge. Hand-spinning on charkha had spread among the peasantry. The charkha had, therefore, become the symbol of revolt. All those who spun got into trouble. The charkhas were burnt down.<sup>61</sup>

As regards the punitive measures, in the daily *Independent* (Allahabad) of 11 and 12 January 1921 there appeared statements such as "troops have been pouring into Rae Bareilly only to exhibit their capacity of shooting well", "casualties inflicted on the unarmed kisans must be appalling", "infliction of reckless violence altogether uncalled for", "190 shots were fired", etc.<sup>62</sup> Commenting in an editorial entitled "The Kisan Crisis" on 11 January 1921 the newspaper continued:

"Surely the military and police could have avoided infliction of reckless violence which is altogether uncalled for. We thought that the government of Sir Harcourt Butler was not much in love with O'Dwyerian carelessness for human lives. But the havoc which was wrought in Rae Bareilly will call for an answer... If the kisan had paid the local bureaucracy in the same coin, in the name of 'peace and safety' it could have inflicted greater atrocities. So far there is no knowing whether the district officer and the machines of militarism will exercise a much needed self-restraint."<sup>63</sup>

60. Home (Pol.) Department, Government of India, File No. 11, 1921, p. 34.

61. Nehru, n. 15, p. 61.

62. *Disturbances in the Rae Bareilly and Fyzabad Districts*, n. 17, p. 1.

63. Home (Pol.) Department, Government of India, File No. 112, 1922, serial nos. 1-8, p. 25.

There appeared another article entitled "New Era in Rae Bareilly" in the same issue?

"Rae Bareilly, which is distinguished for taluqdar tyranny as many other districts in Oudh, has been given a taste of military violence... A few superfluous kisan lives never matter to the unscrupulous men clothed in authority.

"Apparently Mr Shireff thinks that his duty begins and ends by using his uncontrolled power on behalf of the taluqdars of Rae Bareilly. Taluqdar tyranny like the bureaucratic terrorism is bad enough—but when the two combine the mischief becomes rampant."<sup>64</sup>

"The Government of the United Provinces will no doubt consider whether any action is desirable as regards these articles", wrote immediately S. P. O'Donnell, Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department, to G. B. Lambert, Chief Secretary to the Government of the United Provinces.<sup>65</sup> And subsequently the action was taken. Not only its security was forfeited, its editor was also imprisoned.

#### PEASANT MOVEMENT IN SULTANPUR

In the beginning of March 1921, yet another peasant disturbance broke out in Sultanpur, an eastern district of the United Provinces. Not bothering much about the genuine grievances of the peasantry, the colonial authorities embarked upon a policy of repression. Not only were the peasants arrested in large numbers, but they were also maltreated and beaten and harassed in a manner which could by no canons of justice be upheld. Vehemently opposing this attitude of the authorities, *Independent* of Allahabad wrote (editorial) on 6 March 1921:

"It is excessively painful to inform the general public how the government has planned the destruction of the noble and sacred movement of the kisans in this district. Police and zamindars have been backed and encouraged by the government and they work as right and left hands of government's oppression. The oppression is so great that it is

64. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

65. *Disturbances in the Rae Bareilly and Fyzabad Districts*, n. 17, p. 12.



beyond easy description... When a person is arrested, he is very mercilessly beaten until he is senseless or unless he promises to make his statements just as the police desire. (In accordance with the 'plans' of government it is the obvious innuendo.)"<sup>66</sup>

#### FURTHER UPRISING IN RAE BAREILLY

Another disturbance ending in loss of life occurred in the Rae Bareilly district on 20 March 1921. The facts are as follows. Four peasant leaders who had been making inflammatory speeches announced that they would hold a large meeting and make speeches at Karhaiya in the Salon tehsil on 20 March 1921, which was the day of the weekly market. Orders were issued by the authorities prohibiting speeches at the meeting and for arrest of all the four leaders. The subinspector of Salon, accompanied by another subinspector and five armed policemen, went to Karhaiya on 20 March 1921 and arrested Brijpal Singh and Jhanku Singh, two of the four leaders referred to above. In the process of arrest the police were attacked by the assembled peasants who rescued the prisoners in spite of the fact that the police fired on them. The crowd drove back the police who retreated firing and took shelter in a house on one Thakurain Jadunath Kaur. They were besieged by the crowd who tried to break into the house, but were repulsed by the fire of the police. Two of the chasers were killed and five wounded.

In the scuffle one constable succeeded in escaping through a window at the back and went off to Salon. The tehsildar of Salon sent a message by car to the Deputy Commissioner. The latter, accompanied by the Superintendent of Police, some other subordinate officials and 28 armed police, arrived in time to rescue the besieged party which would otherwise have been ultimately overpowered and probably killed. The peasant leaders had in fact openly expressed their intention to raze the house to the ground and kill the constables. The crowd assembled at the spot was several thousand strong. It was ordered to dis-

66. Home (Pol.) Department, n. 63, p. 27.

perse. But nobody moved. In fact the crowd assumed an attitude of defiance. Inflammatory speeches were made by the leaders. There were shouts of "Mahatma Gandhi ki Jai". This went on throughout the night. The leaders were alleged to have told the crowd that Mahatma Gandhi would arrive in the morning. The peasants many of whom were armed with spears under the direction of their leader Brijpal Singh, an exsepoy in the Ninth Bhopal Infantry, posted groups of men all around the house and picketed the roads.

In the meantime a force of one defadar and ten *sowars* of the mounted police which had arrived at the village in the morning was held up on the road. It, however, eventually succeeded in evading the pickets and reached the taluqdar's house. The rebels also used carts to block the road. There was a scuffle when the police pounced upon the peasant assembly and tried to disperse it. Brijpal Singh was arrested in the fray. When the Deputy Commissioner and the Superintendent of Police tried to arrest Jhanku Singh, he struggled and called to the crowd to rescue him. And the crowd made a rush, surrounded the two officers and separated them from the main body of the mounted police. At this a police constable fired and tried to save the lives of the officers. In the confusion that followed, Jhanku Singh managed to break away but was soon recaptured. To defend the leader the mob again attacked the police which opened fire. Some were killed and hundreds were wounded.<sup>67</sup>

According to government sources there occurred another bloody disturbance next day (on 23 March 1921). The Prevention of Seditious Meetings Act was extended to disturbed area.

The Governor in Council reviewed the disturbances and decided to post additional police in the locality and to make the inhabitants pay the cost of maintaining it. He also decided to prosecute the leaders. The use of spears and swords was prohibited in the four districts of Rae Bareilly, Pratabgarh, Fyza-

67. Account based on the telegram sent on 22 March 1921 by the Chief Secretary to the Government of the United Provinces, Home (Pol.) Department, Government of India, Proceedings, March 1921, File Nos. 334-39, pp. 3-4.

bad and Sultanpur for a considerable period.<sup>68</sup>

Giving his approval to these repressive steps of the provincial government, the Home Secretary to the Government of India, C. W. Gwynne remarked on 24 March 1921:

"We must agree. The recommendation is made by the Government of the United Provinces including the ministers and it would be madness to resist them... (though the) result of yesterday's debate (in the Assembly) renders the application of extraordinary laws more difficult than at present, we still could not tell the United Provinces we did not agree with their proposal because the members of the Assembly disliked the policy. The prime duty to maintain law and order cannot be superseded by a resolution of the Assembly."<sup>69</sup>

Detailing all these repressive steps the Government of the United Provinces issued a press communique which was answered by the newspaper *Independent* on 25 March 1921. The style shows that no person other than Jawaharlal Nehru could have written the answer. It remarked:

"The preliminary stages of the inauguration of bureaucratic repression in this district (of Oudh) have already been prominently noticed in your columns towards the fag end of February. Its development since has marked the systematic administration of still stronger, hotter and Napoleonic doses of repression until now it presents a terrible tale of terrorism, harassment and persecution... It has now passed from the domain of conjecture to that of hard reality that Mr Ibbs-ton will leave no stone unturned in strangling the panchayats and throttling the kisan movement."<sup>70</sup>

The repressive measures further provoked the peasantry. On the night of 17-18 April 1921 the Rae Bareilly Collectorate was partially destroyed by fire. To frighten the peasants of Rae

68. See the demiofficial letter from G. B. Lambert, Chief Secretary to the Government of the United Provinces, to the Home Secretary dated 24 March 1921, *Ibid.*, p. 2.

69. Riots in Rae Bareilly District: Application of the Prevention of Seditious Meetings Act, 1911, to the Districts of Pratabgarh, Rae Bareilly, Sultanpur and Fyzabad in the United Provinces; *Ibid.*, p. 1.

70. Home (Pol.) Department, no. 63, p. 27.

Barcilly district a squadron of the 28th Cavalry made a route-march of the week's duration through the south of the district. Dispositions had been made which would place additional armed and mounted police at points where their presence was most needed to display the might of British imperialism. Reserves totalling about 600 men had been concentrated at important strategic centres. Thousands of armed policemen and mounted police had been drawn off from the more secure districts for this purpose.<sup>71</sup>

#### POLITICAL CONFERENCES

Efforts were made to secure a demonstration of cultivators at the meetings of Allahabad district conference held on 10 and 11 May 1921. Peasants from the Oudh taluk attended in large numbers. The function assumed importance from the fact that it was made to coincide with the marriage of Pandit Motilal Nehru's daughter, Swarup Rani (later Mrs Vijaylakshmi Pandit). All the prominent political leaders were present on the occasion and their presence was made the occasion of an ambitious political demonstration. The meetings were fully reported in all sections of the press. The District Commissioner reported, "a great deal of panic on both sides, the city being full of probable arrests (of Ali brothers) and of action by troops, and the Anglo-Indian and Indian Christian community much alarmed about the alleged intention to attack them on the 10th (May 1921)."<sup>72</sup>

According to official sources, one special feature of the conference was the attempt to strengthen the hold of noncooperators on the kisan sabhas, particularly in the Oudh districts which had been proclaimed under the Seditious Meetings Act. The campaign opened with the distribution of a leaflet addressed to cultivators and signed by Pandit Motilal Nehru. In Pratabgarh district they were distributed among peasants by some youths

71. *Report on the Political Situation in India during Fortnight Ending 30 April 1921*, Home (Pol.) Department, Government of India, Proceedings, June 1921, File No. 13, p. 35.

72. Home (Pol.) Department, Government of India, Proceedings, June 1921, File No. 63, p. 13.

who were promptly dealt with under Section 108 of the Criminal Procedure Code. According to local press the young men were criminally assaulted and tortured by the police. This enraged the politically advanced sections of the society. The daily newspaper *Independent* promptly wrote an editorial on 12 May 1921 severely criticising the unwanted behaviour of the police. It said:

"Lord Reading has been denouncing violence, and quite rightly too. We do not want any favour of Lord Reading as Viceroy but he happens to be a bencher of the Middle Temple and we know he is a gentleman who is interested in fair dealing. We believe that he will recoil from the crude violence of an ill-mannered policeman. May we, therefore, present him with the incident which is reported from Sultanpur? It is a piece of sheer bullying and torture to which only a wild animal would resort (God forgive us if we do injustice to dumb animals). It is idle to speak of the wickedness of violence in this province as long as the man who commits violence happens to be a government official. We are convinced of the futility of such procedure. The districts in Oudh have been handed over to the torture. Unspeakable things have been done and more will be done. No discrimination can save men from the violence of government; neither age nor youth nor station will be respected. But we thank all the Gods that the brave lads who have been put to the torture have refused to bend the knee to the torturer or to the tyrant."<sup>73</sup>

Next day Jawaharlal Nehru himself proceeded to distribute the leaflet. But the government did not dare to take any action against him. The leaflet was immediately proscribed. It was followed by attempts to organise a big mass meeting of peasants at Allahabad.

Information of a serious agrarian trouble in a village in the Allahabad district on 22 May 1921 was published in the local newspapers. It resulted in a serious tension between Muslim zamindars and the villagers who were mostly Hindus. The clash did not, however, take a communal colour. The usual causes of

73. Home (Pol.) Department, n. 63, p. 41.

dispute were not confined to the particular village in which the disturbance occurred, but were like an epidemic and common to a number of villages in the vicinity. The Fortnightly Report of the Government of the United Provinces for the second half of May 1921 blamed local noncooperators who, according to officials, "usually hurry to the scenes of such disorders like vultures".<sup>74</sup> Significant of the times was also the widespread nature of the incendiary campaign carried out in the forests of Kumaon and Garhwal. According to a government communique issued on 29 May 1921, 50 to 75 per cent of the forest area was burnt down. Admitting that the damage was serious, the communique held that incendiarism was due to "irresponsible people infected with the noncooperation doctrine". It added that "the grazing interests of the hill zamindars suffer too much from forest fires for it to be likely that they were in any way involved".<sup>75</sup>

The agrarian trouble continued unabated for months together in the United Provinces. "There was a quick response", wrote G. M. Lambert, Chief Secretary to the Government of the United Provinces on 4 June 1921 to C. W. Gwynne, Deputy Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department, "to the agitators' appeal based on special agrarian grievances".<sup>76</sup>

These peasant conferences and movements along with other activities of noncooperation movement played a historic role in undermining British power and prestige. In his telegram dated 13 May 1921 the Chief Secretary to the Government of the United Provinces reported to the Home Department in Delhi that the "situation is steadily deteriorating; confidence in power of government growing less; officers are losing heart; and the belief that lives of Europeans are in danger is growing".<sup>77</sup> On 9 June 1921 the Viceroy telegraphed to the Secretary of State about the United Provinces that there was "little sign of return to settled peace".<sup>78</sup>

74. Home (Pol.) Department, Government of India, Proceedings, June 1921, File No. 46, p. 13.

75. *Ibid.*

76. Home (Pol.) Department, n. 74, p. 14.

77. *Report on the Political Situation in India during the Fortnight Ending 13 May 1921*, n. 72, pp. 1-2.

78. *Report on the Political Situation in India during the Fortnight Ending 31 May 1921*, n. 74, p. 31.

SALIENT FEATURES OF THE PEASANT MOVEMENT IN THE  
UNITED PROVINCES

The peasant movement in the United Provinces had a number of characteristic features. It was the most mature and organised action of the Indian peasantry during this period. Appraising the dynamic character of the movement *The Times* (London) wrote on 6 March 1922:

"Formerly the tenants crushed by requisitions of all kinds were in no condition to effectively express their protest, but in connection with the recent political awakening of the masses they began to put up a fight for their rights."

The class nature of the movement was very clearly defined. Unlike the peasant movements in other provinces, religion was kept completely out of picture.

Heavy exploitation by the landlords and the fact that the majority of the peasants in the United Provinces were Hindus also played a certain role. In the course of the movement caste differences faded into the background. The acknowledged leaders of the peasants in Oudh generally came from the lower castes.

This movement against the feudal barons who were in league with colonialist rulers obviously assumed an anti-imperialist character and on many an occasion got mixed up with the anti-British demonstrations going on in the urban areas. The peasants actively supported the political agitations of the city people, and the latter responded by giving their active support to the peasant movements. Sometimes they even led these movements. It is self-evident from the report submitted on 14 January 1921 by the Deputy Commissioner of Rae Bareilly to the Chief Secretary to the Government of the United Provinces. He stated:

"The noncooperators finding their efforts to stir up trouble among students and the general public unsuccessful had to look round for some more promising field for their operations. They failed to influence the general public and students to any extent, because these had no real grievances.

They had succeeded in stirring up the cultivators of Oudh to a state of considerable excitement, because the cultivators have in many cases considerable grievances against the landlords... What the kisans are interested in is their own condition and in particular *nazrana* and ejectments."<sup>79</sup>

A resolution setting forth their version of the peasant disturbances was issued by the Government of the United Provinces. It alleged that the "local agitators" had exploited the feeling against "coolie labour". It also added that there had been some increase in extremist activity since the return of the Congress delegates from Nagpur. It alleged that school masters, chaukidars and students showed signs of restiveness. With the first two classes the trouble principally was economic. But the students were "being made cat's paw agitators as in other cases", it declared.<sup>80</sup>

The peasant upsurge in the United Provinces, as in other parts of India, merged with the nationwide anti-imperialist struggle, producing a very tense situation throughout the country. The British rulers were compelled to pay considerable attention to these revolts. In a report of the military command responsible for suppressing them, it was admitted that the movement was very serious and "...endangered the basis of the traditional land tenure system and administration".<sup>81</sup> To put an end to the movement the authorities started making concessions to the Oudh tenants. Pretending that they considered the complaints of the peasants against the landlords justified to some extent, the government arranged a special investigation into the collection of rents in Oudh. It enacted the "Rent Act for Oudh, 1921". Under the new Act tenants were recognised as permanent and they received the right of owning the land for life.<sup>82</sup> But the majority of the Oudh peasants were temporary tenants and subtenants. They did not come under this category

79. *Disturbances in the Rae Bareilly and Fyzabad Districts*, n. 17, p. 27.

80. *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20.

81. Quoted by S. N. A. Jafri, *History and State of Landlords and Tenants in the United Provinces*, Allahabad, 1922, p. 181.

82. *Ibid.*



and the landlords continued to exploit them mercilessly and to evict them from the land. Later the authorities had to admit in an official memorandum that the new Act left much to be desired.<sup>83</sup>

By introducing the Act of 1921 the authorities were trying to improve the position of the wealthy tenants. They hoped, on the one hand, to create a new foothold in the villages and on the other, to retard the rapid decline in agriculture. Owing to the half-heartedness of the Act, however, neither of these aims was achieved. The discontent of the peasants grew and the deterioration in agriculture continued.

### THE MOPLAH REVOLT

Towards the beginning of the middle of 1921 there arose a mighty, unprecedented upsurge by the Moplahs in Malabar. For a considerable length of time British rule was completely wiped out from the region and an independent Khilafat kingdom was established. Though the main grievances of the Moplahs were related to agrarian discontent, yet in the absence of a scientific, rational and secular leadership the movement passed into the hands of reactionary, outmoded and orthodox priests and divines. In their traditional, conventional way these divines perverted the dynamic character of the upsurge into a communal strife by forcible conversion of a considerable number of Hindus. The consequences of such short-sighted action could easily be foreseen.<sup>84</sup> Isolated morally from the rest of Hindu India and surrounded on all sides by the overwhelmingly superior and technically better-equipped imperialist forces which blocked all routes of arms supply, the Moplahs could not sustain their resistance for long. The Moplah casualties were quite heavy.<sup>85</sup> More than 3,000 died; several thousand more were wounded.<sup>86</sup> Among the fifty thousand who surrendered there were also the

83. *Memorandum Submitted by the Government of the United Provinces to the Indian Statutory Commission*, London, 1930, p. 77.

84. For further study see author's monograph *Political Background of Indian Nationalism (1919-1931)*, Vol. I.

85. *Ibid.*

86. See the *Life of Nationalities*, Moscow, 1922, No. 1/7, p. 12.

ruler of the Khilafat kingdom<sup>87</sup>, Kunhahmad Haji, and six of his lieutenants. They were shot on 20 January 1921.

Contrary to the principles preached by the noncooperators, the rebels had turned to armed struggle against the imperialists and their henchmen, the landlords. The attitude of the Indian National Congress towards the Moplah revolt was different from that adopted towards the Akali movement. The Congress Working Committee convened a special meeting to discuss the Moplah question and expressed deep sorrow at the violent methods adopted by the insurgents. The committee indicated that the people on the Malabar coast had misunderstood the message of the Congress and the Khilafat Committee, which had called on them to struggle by nonviolent means. Simultaneously the committee pointed out that the government report had exaggerated the harm caused by the Moplah rising and underestimated the cruelty of the authorities, "in the name of peace and order".<sup>88</sup>

The Moplah upsurge, a link in the chain of the anticolonial agitations of the masses during the postwar years, was of very great significance, not for the peasants alone, but for the national liberation movement as a whole. Notwithstanding its drawbacks it magnificently demonstrated the will of the peasantry to struggle for its rights.

#### ROLE OF THE PEASANTRY IN BENGAL

The peasant movement at this period was not confined only to the United Provinces and Malabar. There were struggles in the other provinces too. The first move towards capturing the sympathy of the peasantry on the lines of noncooperation organised by the leaders of the first nationwide anti-British movement may be said to have taken place in February 1921 in Bengal. Even

87. E.M.S. Namboodiripad, *A Short History of the Peasant Movement in Kerala*, Bombay, 1943, p. 7.

88. *The Indian National Congress, 1920-23: A Collection of Resolutions Passed at the Annual Sessions of the National Congress*, Allahabad, AICC, 1924, p. 119. Also see *The Report of the Thirty-sixth Indian National Congress Held at Ahmedabad on 27 and 28 December 1921*, p. 48.

before the Nagpur Congress it had apparently been realised that if success was to be achieved in this direction something more concrete was required to work upon than the wrongs done to the Punjab and the Khilafat, and, accordingly, proposals were made to *ryots* in December 1920 for the formation of national unions for the purchase and sale of all local produce without the agency of middlemen. A raiyat association had been in existence since 1913 and this was probably a move to capture its organisation. Nothing further was done, however, until the launching of the jute boycott campaign in February 1921.

The real motive behind the boycott of jute was undoubtedly the desire to catch the indignation of the *ryot*. It explained to the peasants that the reduction of jute acreage meant more land for raising foodgrains or cotton. In some places the *ryots* were told that this was the wish of the government. In Mymensingh the District Congress Committee went to the length of issuing a pamphlet on growing cotton in place of jute. This scheme was said to have been drawn up in consultation with the Agricultural Department. By these and similar means cultivators in Barisal were made to restrict jute cultivation to one-quarter of the previous year. At Harirampur, in the Dacca district, the area was restricted to a little more than half an acre under threat of social boycott, and the price of jute seed accordingly went down from 2½ to 16 seers a rupee. Whereas at Kaokhali cultivators were still sceptical, the crop was ploughed up by "strike" students. This kind of boycott made considerable progress in April 1921 and in no case was any complaint lodged in the court. The one result of this agitation was to make cultivators think of other methods in which they might improve their position and prepare the way for the no-tax and no-rent movement which afterwards appeared in eastern Bengal.<sup>89</sup> Then finally the Ahmedabad session of the Congress and the Khilafat Committee paved the way for a full civil disobedience movement.

The Intelligence Bureau of the government admitted that the

89. P. C. Bamford, *Histories of Noncooperation and Khilafat Movement*, Home (Pol.) Department, Government of India, File No. 185, 1925, p. 73.

events of the first quarter of 1922 had confirmed the fear that the peasant movement had got beyond the control of the leaders of Bengal. It was clearly known that in the interior the authority of the Bengal national leaders amounted to nothing, and even that of the District Committees was rapidly lost in a "great wave of lawlessness, which swept over" the affected area of eastern and western Bengal.<sup>90</sup> The policy of civil disobedience had never been accepted by the Provincial Congress Committee and the Khilafat Committee, and there was no systematic inauguration of it in any definite area, but the rural areas of the province were clearly drifting towards it. The report of the Intelligence Bureau declared that the spirit of violence and the contempt for authority which had begun to show themselves were not due to the bourgeois leaders but to the masses.<sup>91</sup>

The situation in Tippera had for some time given room for anxiety to the authorities. In this area the rural police had ceased work since November. No taxes were being paid, and no agricultural rents could be collected, whether by the government or by private landlords. Efforts to execute distress warrants and criminal processes were thwarted by assaults on the officers concerned. When armed police was sent to make arrests, the villages were found to be empty. It was remarked by the local intelligence that the agitation was due entirely to Muslims although it was not communal in character. The peasants, according to it, were simply out to assert themselves. A similar situation prevailed in other areas of East Bengal. People had been told that their subscription to the Swarajya Fund would exempt them from all future taxation, and they literally believed it.<sup>92</sup>

#### NO-TAX CAMPAIGN IN GUNTUR

In Guntur district a civil disobedience campaign was engineered by the local noncooperators against the advice of Mahatma Gandhi. The first move in this campaign was the refusal to pay taxes. There was no open violence but village

90. *Ibid.*, 81.

91. *Ibid.*

92. *Ibid.*, 82.

officers in considerable numbers tendered their resignations. Those who showed themselves willing to take their places were intimidated. The government decided to impose punitive measures on a group of eighteen villages in which the movement was most advanced. When the police proved helpless, four armoured cars and a body of Indian Infantry were sent to the district for a show of force. The refusal to pay taxes continued throughout the month of January. Out of a total revenue of Rs 14.75 lakhs, the government could collect hardly Rs 3.5 lakhs. The special staff sent to carry out the processes for revenue recovery met with passive obstruction everywhere, volunteers being at hand in every village to see that they were given no help or information, though there was no active resistance to the service of demands or to the distraint or attachment of property.

In addition to the Paddanandipadu firka, which was the centre of the movement for nonpayment of taxes, there were various isolated villages in Guntur district which had become affected with a general spirit of defiance to British imperialism. The revenue collection in the district up to 28 February 1922 amounted to a mere Rs 32.5 lakhs out of a total demand for the whole year of Rs 58.75 lakhs.<sup>93</sup>

#### FAITH IN GANDHIAN LEADERSHIP SHAKEN

In the course of the peasant movement there occurred certain incidents which led to the shaking of the peasants' faith in Gandhian leadership. As already pointed out, at the behest of some one that it was the wish of Mahatma Gandhi that they should plunder the local landlord's house, the peasants turned violent in Fyzabad district. Later when Jawaharlal Nehru came to know about the episode, he went to the village concerned, called a meeting of the peasants, admonished them for the so-called "shame" which they had brought on their cause and called upon the so-called "guilty" persons to confess publicly by raising their hands.

This sort of strict Gandhian morality was all right for the

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145.

prominent followers of the Mahatma, as they enjoyed considerable influence not only among the general public but also among officials. But it was quite different in the case of the poor peasants. Many of them were contemptuously characterised as habitual criminal offenders or absconders by the bureaucracy. Public confession by about two dozen poor peasants of their guilt in the presence of numerous police officials who were present at the meeting as reporters meant certain trouble for them. As a result of this adventure of Nehru, which he himself later on regretted, a number of poor peasants were exposed to long terms of imprisonment, torture, and what not. For the bureaucracy this was too good a chance to be missed. Full advantage of the occasion was taken by it to crush the agrarian movement in the district concerned. According to Nehru himself, over a thousand arrests were made. He writes: "The district gaol was overcrowded, and the trial went on for the best part of a year. Many died in prison during the trial. Many others received long sentences... Some of them, boys and young men, spending their youth in prison."<sup>94</sup>

As the movement in the United Provinces practised violence and was directed against private property, the National Congress leadership not only refused to support it but adopted a definitely negative attitude. Earlier, in 1921, while discussing this movement, the Congress had in its address to the peasants stressed:

"...that they must not use sticks and knives...must not plunder the estates, the peasants must win the stone-hard hearts of their enemies by their kindness and love. The attempt to achieve their aims by refusing to pay the lawful rent of the landlord or refuse to fulfil their conscription duty to him may be looked upon as an immoral act."<sup>95</sup>

These directives were, of course, quite impressive as far as the trained volunteer corps were concerned. To apply them to persons who had terribly been exploited since their birth by

94. Nehru, n. 15, pp. 61-62.

95. Cited from the preface written by R. Ulyanovsky to the book: *M. K. Gandhi, My Life*, Moscow, 1934, p. 19.

the oppressive economic and social structure imposed by British imperialism was just meaningless. The peasants were no longer in a position to tolerate oppression silently. Their nerves had been strained to such an extent that they were left with no alternative except to do or die, "marta kya na karta". An incident relating to such a psychological case occurred on the eve of the preparations being made by Mahatma Gandhi to inaugurate his civil disobedience campaign at Bardoli.

#### CHAURI CHAURA AND AFTERWARDS

The bazaar at Chauri Chaura (Gorakhpur district of the United Provinces) had been for some time the scene of vigorous picketing. Foreign cloth was totally excluded from sale and the liquor shops had no customers. This was resented and resisted by the local landlord, the owner of the bazaar. On 1 February the local police officer, notorious for his short temper, was alleged to have visited the bazaar with a police force and to have beaten some of the volunteers and peasants engaged in the picketing.

This provocative behaviour of the police officer led all the volunteers of the surrounding villages to assemble at one place on 4 February. They marched in a big crowd to the police station. There the volunteers and peasants, it is said, wanted to know why the subinspector had beaten them, expressed their determination to picket the bazaar that day, and asked the police to prevent them from doing so, if they dared. Some neutrals acted as peace-makers and managed to pacify the angry procession, which then moved on. Some stragglers who stayed behind were roughly handled and abused by the constables. They hit back with brick-bats. A scuffle ensued. The constables opened fire and killed a few. The rest cried out for help.

The main procession then returned in a fury. All the twenty-one constables at the police station, along with the young son of the subinspector were overpowered and both the station and the men in it were set on fire. All of them died. Those who tried to run out of the station were caught, beaten, soaked in kerosene, and hacked to pieces. The mangled bodies were

thrown into the raging fire. In the meantime the railway communication between Chauri Chaura and Gorakhpur were cut off. The centuries-old oppression and humiliation had forced the Chauri Chaura peasants to express their indignation in violence against the administrative apparatus of colonial oppressors. In its appeal issued on 14 March 1923, the Executive Committee of the Communist International appeared to be right in its sarcastic evaluation that the "only crime" of these Indian peasants was "their hunger" because in that unbearable hunger they were forced to contribute too much to the waging of the "war for democracy" during 1914-18.<sup>96</sup>

The news of this violence on a minor scale shocked the bourgeois leaders and resulted in the suspension of the civil disobedience movement.

A close scrutiny of the columns of the journal *Young India* of February 1922 shows clearly the most startling fact that it was Madan Mohan Malaviya and M. R. Jayakar, the two Rasputins of India, that exercised their most unhealthy influence upon Mahatma Gandhi. Like the Russian Rasputin, who was an apostle of archreaction and who proved fatal and detrimental to the growth of a healthy and progressive Russia, both Malaviya and Jayakar presented a very dismal picture of a bloodthirsty India coming up if violent incidents like that of Chauri Chaura were further permitted to occur. Whatever may be the fact, they prevailed upon Mahatma Gandhi and pressed him to suspend the great anti-imperialist movement.<sup>97</sup> And Gandhiji did likewise.

Besides the suspension of the movement the Congress Working Committee at Bardoli took note of the complaints having been brought to their notice that *ryots* were not paying rents

96. J. Degras, ed. by, *The Communist International (1919-1943): Documents*, II, Oxford University Press, 1960, p. 13.

97. In later years both these communalist leaders continued to exercise their evil influence upon Gandhiji. At the time of approval of the Nehru Report, Jayakar and a host of others thwarted all attempts to achieve a timely and pragmatic solution of the communal question. Shortly afterwards at the Second Round Table Conference in 1931, Malaviya blocked the emergence of Gandhiji as the undisputed leader of the Hindus and Muslims.



to the zamindars. The Working Committee advised Congress workers and organisations to inform the *ryots* that such withholding of rents was contrary to the resolutions of the Congress, and that it was injurious to the "best interests of the country". The Working Committee also lost no time in assuring the zamindars that the Congress movements in no way intended to attack their legal rights and, that even where *ryots* had grievances, the committee desired that redress should be brought by mutual consultations and by the usual recourse to arbitrations.<sup>98</sup>

The Bardoli decision had cast a deep gloom over the peasant movement. Whatever might be faith that Gandhiji had reposed in the divine revelations of his inner voice, a large number of villagers could not blindly follow him. To them it became clear that nonviolent noncooperation was not a type of action which would annihilate the imperialist state structure, but one which was meant to pressurise the colonial rulers into coming to an understanding with the Congress.

They pointed out that the much-talked of dislike for violence, however, was nothing but the obvious fear of the bourgeoisie that once the masses enter the sphere of political action with their own technique of struggle, the movement would cross the limits set by it. That is why the Mahatma, who did not hesitate for a moment to call for "twenty recruits from every village" to be offered as cannon fodder in imperialism's bloody war, shuddered at some minor incidents of bloodshed which occurred when the masses joined the sphere of action as an organised political force.

The critics asked why, when the Mahatma himself had no doubt that the police in Chauri Chaura "had given much provocation" and that it was due to this provocation that the mob had set fire to the police station and murdered the constables, he was not prepared to condone this "mob violence". Was it not clear to him, they asked, that once the peasants had been made to revolt and brought into action, such clashes between them and the upholders of colonial rule would be inevitable?

98. Home (Pol.) Department, Government of India, File No. 489, 1922, p. 34.

To try to escape from bloodshed and violence through metaphysical casuistry was the negation of real politik.

It is interesting to recall here that aroused by the call of Gandhiji: young militants like S. A. Dange, E. M. S. Namboodiripad and a host of others joined the anti-imperialist movement and cheerfully had gone to prison. But the debacle of 1922 terribly disappointed them. They said good-bye to Gandhian leadership and organised shortly afterwards a new militant Marxist organisation. Ridiculing the Gandhian technique of independence, S. A. Dange wrote:

"So Gandhism requires a change in human nature or purification, which in due course will destroy the necessity of the present system of life. Destroy vanity, love of show and there will be no necessity to engage wage-earning slaves to produce silks and luxuries. Destroy fear and love of power, wars will stop, and militarisms and governments will melt. Destroy the devil within man and the outside nature of incongruities will die out. Lenin might as well answer to this: 'Destroy the Universe and God himself, who is the cause of all this, and everything will stop; a madman's reasoning; an impossibility.'"<sup>99</sup>

Likewise M. Singaravelu Chettiar was very critical of Gandhiji's attitude. He complained that the Congressmen had not acted up to the Bardoli Resolution of starting a civil disobedience movement. "It has been a disaster", he added, to have postponed the movement after Chauri Chaura. He also regretted that the Congress had failed to take up the workers of India in the cause of swaraj. He concluded his argument by stating: "We have miserably suffered for our errors and mistakes."<sup>100</sup>

Criticising the Bardoli decision, E. M. S. Namboodiripad years later wrote:

"Gandhiji's reaction was characteristic of the man and the movement which he was to lead for nearly three decades.

99. S. A. Dange, *Gandhi vs. Lenin*, Bombay, Liberty Literature Co., 1921, pp. 33-34.

100. *Report of the Gaya Session of the Indian National Congress, 1922*, p. 118.

Far from being inspired by the tremendous response of the masses to his call for noncooperation with the 'satanic government', he was alarmed at the lack of what he called 'that nonviolent and truthful atmosphere which alone can justify mass civil disobedience'.

'He was alarmed at first during the Rowlatt Act agitation when 'I retraced my steps, called it a Himalayan miscalculation, humbled myself before God and man, and stopped not merely mass civil disobedience but even my own, which I knew was intended to be civil and nonviolent.'

'It was, however, not till the Chauri-Chaura incident of 1922 (which he called his 'bitterest humiliation') that he came to realise that the mass civil disobedience, which he had visualised, and for which he was preparing, could often go completely beyond his control. He then decided to suspend the civil disobedience movement.'<sup>101</sup>

The Bardoli Working Committee resolutions suspending every activity of an offensive nature and recommending social work to achieve self-purification and national education chilled the enthusiasm of the whole of the militant wing within the national liberation movement. The *Udaya* (Amraoti) of 21 February 1922 observed:

'The resolutions...have, indeed, sounded the death-knell of the current politics in India... This altered form of the Congress runs counter to the chief aim of the body, viz, devotion to Indian politics... The nation is sure to receive a serious political setback for about quarter of a century. Further, if the noncooperation movement was primarily started to cut off our cooperation with the Britishers and paralyse the existing system of British administration in India, it has now ended in advising the people to promote and emphasise unity among all classes and races (even Europeans and Indians, etc.) and cultivate mutual good will. Thus the movement has now completely eschewed

101. E. M. S. Namboodiripad, *The Mahatma and the Ism*, People's Publishing House, 1958, p. 30.

politics and become one of self-purification. What a conflict between the definitions and scope of noncooperation!"<sup>102</sup>

The *Maharashtra* (Nagpur) of 22 February 1922 observed:

"It is high time for Mahatmaji's friends and admirers to speak out their mind candidly in India's interest."<sup>103</sup>

Papers like *Rajasthan Kesari* (Wardha) became increasingly convinced of the impracticability of the Gandhian programme. In an editorial the paper said:

"...while vehemently condemning the idea of altering the present programme (we believe) that any alterations in the current national programme, especially at a time when the country is passing through a period of storm and stress, will mean nothing but treachery towards those who have already gone to jails in the cause of the country."<sup>104</sup>

Five years later, on the occasion of the Madras session of the Congress, Jawaharlal Nehru, who presided over the meeting of the Republican Congress held in the Congress. pandal on 28 December 1927, complained:

"Since the failure of the noncooperation movement the Congress had been drifting to middle class or Babu politics and was losing the support of the masses...It was important for them to form some kind of an organisation which would keep the National Congress up to the mark and also prepare the country, not only in a republican ideal, but also in a right republican ideal."<sup>105</sup>

After the imprisonment of Gandhiji, a Civil Disobedience Enquiry Committee was established to investigate whether the country was prepared for a fresh struggle or not. The masses were jubilant and expected that a new call would come from the committee to continue the national liberation movement.

102. See n. 89, p. 63.

103. *Ibid.*, 64.

104. *Ibid.*

105. *The Indian Quarterly Register*, Calcutta, Vol. II, July-December 1927.

But they were disappointed when the committee decided not to renew the call. *Rajasthan Kesari*, in its leading article on the report of the committee on 26 November 1922, remarked:

"The committee has by its recommendations not only damped the courage of the country, but has also exhibited that the nation woefully lacks in leaders consistent in their views, conduct and ideals."<sup>106</sup>

#### NEW PEASANT MOVEMENT

The vacillating conduct of the Congress leaders which culminated in the betrayal of the masses led to the growth of independent peasant movements in various parts of the country. For instance, the peasant movement in Oudh produced its own leaders and put forward its own demands which radically differed from those of the Indian National Congress. The new organisation of the Union of Peasants against Landlords became popular and was known as Eka.<sup>107</sup> Its leaders were two peasants, Passi Madari<sup>108</sup> and Sahreb.<sup>109</sup> They both came from the lower castes.

The founding of this organisation considerably strengthened the peasant movement in the United Provinces. The official report of the colonial authorities for 1922-23 stated that although "the number of dacoits (i.e. the revolting peasants) even in 1921 was almost unprecedentedly high, the first six months of 1922 showed nearly double the number of cases reported during the last six months of 1921".<sup>110</sup>

Under the leadership of the Eka union, the peasants put forward demands which were in the interests of wide sections of the rural population—the poorest and the middle tenants and partly of those who owned land. This can be seen from the programme of the union as published in *The Indian Daily*

106. See n. 89, p. 64.

107. *India in 1921*, An Annual Report Exhibiting the Conditions of India, Government of India Press, p. 100.

108. See *The Times*, London, 13 March 1922.

109. *The Life of Nationalities*, Moscow, 1922, No. 14/149, p. 14.

110. *Statement Exhibiting the Conditions of India during the Year 1922-23*, Government of India Press, p. 78.

*News* of 10 March 1922. It called on the peasants to refuse to leave the fields when they were unlawfully appropriated, to pay only the fixed rent, to demand a receipt for every payment, to do no work for the landlords without adequate payments, to use the water from the ponds free of charge, to allow their live-stock to graze in forests and on other lands, etc.<sup>111</sup>

The Eka programme showed that its leadership consisted of representatives of the tenants, but it did not put forward any demands for radical changes in the system of land tenure. This displayed the narrow outlook of its leaders. But the movement went beyond the framework developed by the Eka platform. In February and March 1922 it developed into a vigorous peasant warfare.

At the beginning of 1922, over a hundred peasants in the Hardoi district (north-east of Lucknow) armed themselves with lathis and stones and attacked the houses of the zamindars. The police were called and they opened fire on the peasants. The peasants resisted stubbornly and suffered serious losses. According to *The Times* of London, many were killed. Several days after these events the Eka Union organised meetings in the Bara Banki (east of Lucknow) district. The speakers openly advocated the expulsion of the British and called for the killing of the chief of the district.<sup>112</sup>

The authorities took all steps to localise and suppress the movement. Reinforcements of mechanised infantry were sent to Oudh. Lorryloads of troops and cavalry detachments moved about all over the province. Mass arrests were made and the courts were kept busy from morning till night.

The movement, however, had its weaknesses. The peasant revolts were not united. The Eka movement covered only a few of the Oudh districts. The platform of the peasants was not clearly formulated. It did not go beyond the demand that the arbitrariness of the landlords should be curbed, and it failed to advance the slogan for the abolition of landlordism. The peasants were practically unarmed and could not put up strong

111. See V. Moskal'ov, "The National Revolutionary Movement in India in 1919-1922", *Historical Journal*, Moscow, 1940, No. 2, p. 85.

112. See *The Times*, London, 1 March 1922.

resistance for long against the police who were armed to the teeth. All this made it possible for the government quickly to round up all the leaders and suppress the Eka movement and also crush the peasant movement in other districts of the United Provinces.

### WORKING CLASS MOVEMENT

Although the working class movement in India began in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, its continuous history as an organised movement dates only from the end of the first world war.

With the intensification of the anti-imperialist movement in 1919-21, the strike movement of the labour class also gathered momentum. Parallel with their economic demands, the workers also began to raise the anticolonialist slogan of noncooperation.

Disregarding the opposition of the local reformist trade union leaders and Gandhiji's appeals for nonviolence, the Ahmedabad textile workers launched their militant struggle against the behaviour of the imperialists at Jallianwala Bagh. On 10 April 1919, workers clashed with the police and the Europeans. Some Englishmen and policemen and also a considerable number of workers were wounded. The demonstrators were dispersed only after troops from the fort were called in. But the revolutionary spirit of the masses was not broken. The next day the streets and chowks of Ahmedabad were full of crowds. Government property was set on fire.<sup>113</sup> During those days the slogans used in Ahmedabad were more militant than those in other towns. People wrote on the walls of their houses: "The British rulers are driven out", "The king of England is defeated", "Swaraj is established", "Kill all Europeans" and "Kill them wherever they are".<sup>114</sup> The city was virtually under the control of workers. The train bringing British troops to the city from Bombay was derailed. The telegraph lines con-

113. *Report of the Committee Appointed by the Government of India*, pp. 10 and 12.

114. *A Contemporary History of India*, People's Publishing House, 1964, p. 54.

necting the city with Bombay were damaged. During the night of 12-13 April, troops succeeded in occupying half of the city.

Armed with sticks and stones the workers put up a tough resistance. But they were not properly organised and acted spontaneously. The great political demonstration of Ahmedabad was cruelly suppressed by British troops. The Hunter Commission admitted that twenty-eight people were killed and one hundred and twenty-three wounded in Ahmedabad, including women and children. The commission itself acknowledged that these casualties were possibly an underestimation.<sup>115</sup>

#### SOUND FOOTING

A comparative study of the movement with the record of previous years would show that the strikes were now better organised. Solidarity strikes occurred more frequently and showed that class consciousness was rapidly developing.

During the postwar period there was a temporary boom in industry. To maintain the high level of profits the millowners usually had to make concessions to the proletariat. As a result the majority of the strikes culminated in full or partial success for the strikers. It is not, however, to be forgotten that in order to obstruct the growth of the mass struggle of the workers, the millowners, backed by their colonial masters, often used cruel reprisals against the strikers. There were many cases of unarmed labourers being shot dead.

The Bombay Presidency led in the number of strikes in 1920 and in the number of workers involved. One of the biggest of these strikes was the general strike of Bombay textile workers between 20 January and 6 February 1920. More than 200,000 workers were involved. They demanded increased wages and shorter hours. The employers tried to break the strike by armed force. British troops, called out to crush the strike, opened fire on the workers.<sup>116</sup> This did not, however, break the resistance of the workers, and the employers had finally to surrender and accept their demands. Bonus payments were increased from

115. *Report of the Committee...*, n. 113, p. 14.

116. *The Daily Herald*, 24 March 1920.



20 to 40 per cent of the basic wages and compensations were enhanced for accidents at work. The working hours were also shortened.<sup>117</sup>

At the beginning of 1920 a big strike occurred at the Tata Iron and Steel Company at Jamshedpur. The conditions of the proletariat was quite unsatisfactory. The minimum cost of living here was much higher than in many other parts of the country as neither in the town nor in the suburbs were food products made. The strikers insisted on having a 50 per cent rise in wages, increased compensation for accidents and payment of a lump-sum as grant to the families of deceased workers.

The efforts of the management to stall the demands by protracted negotiations proved futile. On 24 February 1920 the workers called a strike which involved approximately 30,000 workers. The employers were compelled to yield, and only when certain concessions were made was the strike called off.

In the course of a big strike of railwaymen in Jabalpur, at the beginning of 1920, the workers picketed the entrances to all the workshops and hurled stones at the lorries which carried the blacklegs. Troops arrived in the town and opened fire on the strikers killing fifteen and wounding twenty-three.<sup>118</sup> But even these bloody reprisals could not break the strike. The railway authorities were forced to compromise and meet at least some of the demands of the workers.

Mention should also be made of the strike in Ahmedabad on 20 May 1920 involving 30,000 workers; the strike of postal employees in Bombay in September; and the two-month strike of the gas workers in Bombay and Calcutta in October and November 1920. During the first half of 1920 alone, about 200 strikes took place involving more than 1.5 million people.<sup>119</sup>

At the close of 1920 the strike movement grew still stronger and rapidly assumed a political character. Articles in the *Daily Herald* were headlined "The Workers Have Begun Active Mass

117. *Ibid.*, 30 January 1920.

118. *Ibid.*, 24 March 1920.

119. V. Fyodorov, "October Revolution: Its Influence on India's Struggle for Independence", *Soviet Land*, Tass, New Delhi, July 1967, Vol. XX, No. 13, p. 11.

Strikes" and "Coup d'etat in India". This shows that the strikes had spread throughout India. Particularly in Bengal, Bombay and Madras the strikes had acquired a political character. They were related to the noncooperation movement, although the direct cause of the strikes was the extremely hard living conditions of the workers.<sup>120</sup> The newspaper also admitted that the workers were gradually coming round to the idea that mass demonstrations were the best means of achieving their ends.<sup>121</sup>

There had been much labour unrest in 1920, especially in Madras, and in 1921 noncooperation agitators found a promising field in the mass of discontented labourers. Labour leaders like A. Kumaraswami Chetti, A. S. Ramulu, Kalyansundara Mudaliyar (editor of *Navasakti*), E. L. Ayyar, M. Singaravelu Chettiar, and Chakkarai Chettiar organised meetings in the city of Madras and formed unions among the labourers. Even as they supported the labourers in their struggle against their employers, they preached to them that without swaraj labour could never prosper and that the aim of the labour movement was, therefore, the attainment of swaraj. The labourers were further told that they need not be afraid of the police and that numbers were on their side.<sup>122</sup>

"From June to September the mill area was the scene of countless riots", reported the Intelligence Bureau of the government.<sup>123</sup> In Coimbatore V. C. Chidambaram Pillai utilised labourers for picketing liquor shops and threatened employers who fined their men for absence with a strike.<sup>124</sup>

In the course of the strikes the desire of the workers to form their own mass organisations increased. In 1920 trade unions were founded in various branches of industry and there was a marked increase in their number. According to the Bombay Labour Department, there operated ninety-three trade unions with a membership of 120,000 workers in Bombay Presidency in September 1920.<sup>125</sup> It may not be inappropriate to point out

120. *Daily Herald*, 13 October 1920.

121. *Ibid.*

122. P. C. Bamford, n. 89, p. 112.

123. *Ibid.*

124. *Ibid.*, p. 153.

125. *Conditions of the Working Class in India*, from *Documents of the Royal Commission on Labour Problems in India*, Moscow, 1906, p. 38.

that many of these trade unions were formed spontaneously during strikes and broke up after they ended. The leadership of the trade union movement was controlled either by the Indian intelligentsia or the British skilled workers.

These Indian intellectuals were considerably influenced by the October Revolution. Describing the impact of the October Revolution on the upsurge of the revolutionary movement in India, K. M. Panikkar, a well-known Indian diplomat and public figure, noted that "...of the individual events which influenced the political and moral development of India... probably the greatest was the Russian revolution. The capture of power by the proletariat, not only in Moscow but throughout the enormous country stretching out to the border of the Pamirs, made a deep impression on India's youth." On the other hand, owing to the establishment of a workers' government in the Soviet Union, the Indian workers gained, as already pointed out, a new consciousness. The philosophy of the October Revolution made them understand the significance of their organised power.

#### ALL INDIA TRADE UNION CONGRESS FOUNDED

All these developments favoured the establishment of the all-India trade union organisation. The first session of the All India Trade Union Congress was held on 30 October 1920 in Bombay. For the first time the workers attained a purposive existence in Indian politics. Besides the left-minded intellectuals, prominent Indian National Congress leaders and members of the British Labour Party took an active interest in convening the session. Lala Lajpat Rai, one of the prominent leaders of the anti-imperialist movement, presided. In the course of his address he stated:

"It is a unique occasion, the first of its kind even in the history of this ancient country of ours. In her long history extending over thousands of years, India has surely seen many a great gathering in which parts of this vast subcontinent and all classes of its population were represented, gatherings at which were discussed and settled important and nice questions of religion, philosophy, grammar, law and politics, gatherings at which crowns were bestowed, gather-

ings in which foreign scholars and foreign ambassadors and foreign diplomats took part. But history records no instance of an assemblage that was convened solely to consider the interest and welfare of workers not of this city or that, not of this province or that, but of Bharat Varsha as a whole. Even under British rule we have had all-India gatherings of various kinds, political, religious, social, literary, scientific, etc. but never an all-India meeting of the workers of country or one where people assembled to consider the interests and the present and future welfare of the workers as such. This by itself should show, if there was nothing else to remind us of the fact that India of today is very different from anything that the world has seen or known before."<sup>126</sup>

In his address Lalaji also expressed his jubilation over the fact that the Indian proletariat was joining "hands and brains" not only to consolidate its interests, but also to forge a link in the "chain of international brotherhood". He also alleged that in order to avoid the bankruptcy created by the payment of high salaries to the bureaucrats, the government "sweats its lowest service in a way perhaps no other government on the face of the earth does".<sup>127</sup> In his speech he also expressed his indignation over the fact that labour was still treated as a commodity to be sold and purchased in the Indian market.<sup>128</sup> He concluded by exhorting the audience to assist in the process of organising Indian workers, of making them conscious and of educating them in the ways and interests of the common weal.<sup>129</sup>

With the gradual development of industrialisation in prominent cities, the working class tended to develop a new approach, and shed its old religious approach, to social divisions and political struggle. For instance, the industrial population of industrial centres appeared obviously divided into capitalists and labourers rather than into Hindus, Muslims or Parsees. Instead of being considered as members of specific and exclusive castes, their general approach was to consider themselves as members of particular professions, divided into a hierarchy based on in-

126. V. C. Joshi, ed., *Lala Lajpat Rai: Writings and Speeches*, 1920-28, Delhi, Vol. 2, p. 56.

127. *Ibid.*, pp. 58-59. 128. *Ibid.*, p. 61. 129. *Ibid.*, p. 65.

come. It, however, does not mean that the traditional background of religion or caste was totally discarded. It continued to influence the economic approach, which had not yet taken deep root in the mind of the labour class.

With the growth of new consciousness the workers began to struggle for the establishment of a national order guaranteeing the equitable distribution of economic power. In 1921 alone there were organised 396 strikes with a loss of 6,984,426 working hours. The total number of participants in these strikes was more than 600,000.<sup>130</sup> Nearly half of these strikes were successful. Among all these strikes the biggest were those of the railway workers at Lucknow (which involved 5,000 workers) and of the textile workers of Ahmedabad (where 47 plants ceased to work simultaneously).

#### ASSAM COOLIE EXODUS AND THE GURKHA OUTRAGE

Early in May 1921 a serious situation was created in the Assam tea-gardens because of wholesale dismissals in some of the European firms, extremely low wages and the consequent hardship of the labourers. They had recently come to hear about Mahatma Gandhi and of his "supernatural" powers. These simple people recognised in him an *avatar* who had come to deliver the people from their insufferable lot. Their hardship ultimately drove them to follow the programme of the Mahatma, to go back to their village, to spin the charkha, to abjure sin and to lead a simple and pure life. Resolving thus to give up their life of shame and slavery or else to die, thousands left the gardens. A few hundred succeeded in reaching their homes in Madras Presidency. "Others left the gardens with nothing on save a rag tied round their waist, carrying their babes and invalids in their arms or shoulders, and marching on and on foot, over long distances, along railway lines and banks of rivers, with Mahatma Gandhi's name on their lips, bent on searching for their homes anyway... Half-fed, half-naked men and women, with emaciated or dying babes in arms, some just born, and with cholera and fever and abortion dogging their steps, thron-

130. *Industrial Labour in India*, Geneva, 1938, p. 138.

ged the public highways, the railway stations and bazaars."<sup>131</sup> From Karimganj large batches were sent by rail to Chandpur by sympathetic people. At Chandpur they came to a halt. The local people were helpless. They had no money to send them further. The ministers of the Bengal government kept themselves aloof and pleaded that they could not take sides in labour disputes. When some of the labourers tried to cross the river by a steamer, the gangway between the steamer and the receiving flat was removed by the authorities and several men fell into the river. Pandemonium prevailed. With the help of the police, the local subdivisional officer and a representative of the European Tea Association of Assam called Macpherson drove the coolies from the flat to the river-side and from the river-side to the railway station. There too life was not secure. A batch of 50 armed Gurkhas, under orders from the Divisional Commander, started a brutal outrage on the sleeping coolies on the dark platform. With their notorious ferocity, the Gurkhas freely kicked the coolies and used their lathis and rifle butts. Another Jallianwala was repeated in miniature. As C. F. Andrews says:

"I could picture the turmoil and confusion, the crying and weeping on the platform, in the middle of night, under the light of the moon. Women would be dragging their children, here and there separated from their husbands. Children would be driven in one direction and mothers in another, and all the while the blows were being struck to force the people to move on... The so-called dyarchy has been proved up to the hilt to be the old autocracy over again, dressed up in a new garment."<sup>132</sup>

Moved by the atrocities committed by the Gurkhas, Saumyendra Nath Tagore wrote a famous poem entitled "Chandpur":<sup>133</sup>

*With their blood they (government) painted  
The brow of the night as if with vermilion . . .*

131. *Indian Annual Register*, 1921-22, p. 114 (j).

132. *Ibid.*, 144 (m)-(n).

133. Home (Pol.) Department, Government of India, File No. 29/X, 1930, p. 11.

*The paid goondas of the Goondaraj  
 Defeated that night even the evil spirits of the  
 cremation grounds.*

When the people of Chandpur heard about the horror, they organised a hartal in the town for several weeks. All shops were closed, the schools were emptied, courts were boycotted, the servants of the officials, especially of the Europeans, left, and no food was sold to the Europeans. The latter had to secure provisions from Calcutta.<sup>134</sup>

At Comilla the local bar left the courts in a body, schools closed down, domestic servants almost to a man deserted their European masters, the bazaar refused to sell food to government servants, and for a few days the European community lived almost in a state of seige. Similar conditions prevailed at Noakhali and Chittagong and in an incredibly short time the whole of East Bengal was in a ferment. Long afterwards, in the villages of Dacca district, a song used to be sung which described how Sir Henry Wheeler, who went to Chandpur after the occurrence to make an official inquiry, conspired with the Gurkhas to bayonet pregnant women.<sup>135</sup>

Soon the situation was further aggravated by a strike on the Bengal-Assam Railway which rapidly became general, and some time afterwards there occurred the strike on a steamer service at Chandpur which in a few days spread to Goalundo, Barisal and Khulna.<sup>136</sup>

The purely political nature of these strikes was emphasised by J. M. Sen Gupta, the organiser of the railway strike, who informed the Commissioner of the Chittagong Division that he would not order the men back to work unless the government contributed Rs 5,000 towards the repatriation of the coolies as demanded by C. F. Andrews.<sup>137</sup> C. R. Das, who was then conducting the steamer strike from Goalundo, similarly announced that he gloried in the "national character" of the strikes.<sup>138</sup>

134. For further study, see n. 89, p. 144 (p).

135. Home (Pol.) Department, Government of India, File No. 185, 1925, p. 77.

136. *Ibid.*

137. *Ibid.*

138. *Ibid.*

### *Chapter Three*

## Reaching Forward to Marxism (1922-1924)

The penetration into India of Marxism and the creation of the first communist groups were most important for the political life of the country; a new force had appeared, which called for more active struggle against colonial oppression on behalf of the workers' interests. In the place of the Congress demand for Dominion Status as the final goal of the national liberation movement the communists resolutely advanced the demand for complete national independence, calling on the people to join in an active, uncompromising struggle for independence and democracy. They were the first in India to proclaim the slogan demanding the abolition of feudal land ownership. The first stages of the Indian communist movement showed that the working class in the shape of its advance-guard had entered the political arena as an independent force, and this could not fail to influence the later development of the national liberation movement.

[V. V. Balabushevich and A. M. Dyakov, ed., *A Contemporary History of India*, New Delhi, People's Publishing House, 1964, pp. 154-55.]

### ORGANISATION OF COMMUNIST MOVEMENT ABROAD

The suspension of the noncooperation movement had not only national but also international repercussions. Mahatma Gandhi's decision was disapproved not only by a considerable



section of people fighting for national liberation within the country, but also by the Communist International and its leaders who genuinely sympathised with the cause of Indian independence.

It will not be inappropriate here to look back on the political developments which took place in the communist world. It is widely known that the Second Congress of the Communist (Third) International was held in Moscow in 1920, where the famous Theses on National and Colonial Questions was adopted, and the unity of the socialist and the bourgeois-national liberation movements in colonial and dependent countries was proclaimed.

In his speech delivered on the international situation at the opening session of the Congress Lenin had said: "The imperialist war drew the dependent peoples into world history; it is one of our most important tasks to find out how we should set about organising the Soviet movement in the noncapitalist countries."<sup>1</sup> The substance of Lenin's speech was the division of the world into oppressing and oppressed nations; this and the hostility of imperialist countries to Russia and to the Soviet movement determined the world system of state relationships. The differences of opinion in the colonial commission on the question whether the Comintern should or should not support bourgeois-democratic movements in backward countries had been resolved by the verbal expedient of calling them "national-revolutionary", thus distinguishing them from reformist movements which were included to collaborate with the imperialists against local revolutionary movements. Communists could support bourgeois liberation movements in the colonies if they were genuinely revolutionary and were not opposed to the communists organising and training the peasantry and the exploited masses on revolutionary lines.

In the commission, Lenin reported, Quelch of the British Socialist Party had said that the ordinary English worker would regard it as treason to help the dependent peoples to rebel against British rule. Radek replied to this that the British

1. J. Degras, ed., *The Communist International (1919-1943): Documents*, Oxford University Press, 1956, Vol. I, p. 138.

proletariat itself would never be free of the capitalist yoke unless it actively supported the colonial revolutionary movement. The Comintern would judge the British comrades not by their articles in favour of liberation, but by the number of them imprisoned for agitation in Ireland, Egypt or India, and among the troops despatched to suppress rising in these countries. The colonies were the Achilles heel of British imperialism.<sup>2</sup>

The same Congress set up a Central Asiatic Bureau as an instrument for the promotion of revolutionary activities in the countries of the East.

M. N. Roy,<sup>3</sup> who had reached Moscow from Mexico in June 1920, also attended this Congress and advocated the immediate formation of an Indian communist group to work with the British Communist Party in organising revolution among the working class masses throughout the British empire. In pursuit of these schemes, he was sent in November 1920 by the Third International to Turkestan to get into touch with the Indian muhajirs who were then leaving India through the Khyber Pass in connection with the Hijrat agitation. In Afghanistan they came in contact with Maulvi Abdul Rab, an Indian revolutionary, who told them of the Russian revolution. He invited

2. *Ibid.*, 138-39.

It may also be recalled that a set of supplementary theses was written and introduced by M. N. Roy, the Indian delegate, who reminded the Congress of the rapid industrial development of India that had taken place in recent years, which was giving rise to a revolutionary movement among the exploited that was quite independent of the middle-class nationalist movement; this would bring about the downfall of European imperialism, and was therefore of tremendous importance to the European proletariat. He also placed great emphasis on the struggle of the landless peasantry in colonial countries, which provided the mass basis for communist activity. Roy's theses were adopted after being corrected by Lenin, but were rarely referred to afterwards by the Comintern, which took Lenin's theses as a guide to its activities. (*Ibid.*)

3. It is worth remembering that owing to his mistakes in dealing with the communist movement in China in mid-twenties, and on a number of other charges, M. N. Roy was expelled from the Communist International. Later on he left the communist movement altogether and founded what he called the Radical Humanist movement.

them to come to Russia with him.<sup>4</sup> On their arrival at Tashkent they were tumultuously and warmly welcomed by the Turkestan communist leaders as the representatives of a great people who, having groaned under colonial slavery for a century, had at last risen up in a mighty revolt against "barbarous British imperialism".<sup>5</sup> This raised the spirit of these young revolutionaries. They saw with their own eyes that there was no colour bar in the new country. This indeed was a basic cultural revolution. This had a very good impression on the emigrants and raised their hopes of a "genuine comradeship with the Soviet people", recalls with appreciation one of these muhajirs in his memoirs written nearly fifty years later.<sup>6</sup>

An Indian House was established to lodge the emigrants. Roy established his headquarters at Tashkent, founded an Indian Revolutionary Military School and selected a few muhajirs for training as communists who would carry the message of the Russian revolution to India and inspire the Indian masses to undertake heroic action for overthrowing British rule. In due course of time an emigrant Indian Communist Party was founded at Tashkent in October 1920.<sup>7</sup>

4. For further study see S. M. Mehdi, *The Story Behind "Moscow", Tashkent Conspiracy Case*, Delhi, 1967, p. 8. Also see Shaukat Usmani, "Russian Revolution and India", in *Mainstream*, Delhi, 1 July 1967, pp. 13-15.

5. M. N. Roy's *Memoirs*, Allied Publishers, 1964, p. 469.

6. Shaukat Usmani, *Mainstream*, n. 4, p. 14. Also see the third instalment by the same author published in the issue dated 15 July 1967, p. 28, cols. 2-3.

7. In his memoirs recently published in instalments by the *Mainstream* of July 1967 Shaukat Usmani cites 6 November 1920 as the actual date of founding the party. According to the same version the party was formed on 7 November 1920, the third anniversary of the October Revolution. [See the issue dated 8 July, 1967, p. 18, col. 3.]

It may be casually pointed out that the formation of the party at Tashkent was challenged by the delegation of Indian revolutionaries who had come from Berlin to Moscow to attend the Third World Congress of the Communist International. At the time of their hearing by a commission of the Third International the Berlin revolutionaries demanded the dissolution of the Communist Party as the condition for any cooperation between them and M. N. Roy. But the latter did not agree to this proposal because he believed that the Communist Party of India had

In his *Memoirs*, Rafiq Ahmad, who was also a cadre in the Tashkent Military School and was honourably decorated by the Soviet Ambassador in India recently on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the October Revolution, also vividly describes the formation of the new party. Detailing his first contact with M. N. Roy, he writes that Roy had a detailed discussion with the group of muhajirs with which Rafiq Ahmad had gone to Tashkent. He tried to explain to them how India would proceed on the path of revolution. Ahmed adds that although their political knowledge was extremely limited, yet they could follow a good deal, though not all, of what Roy expounded to them. In those days they understood nothing about the Communist Party. However, they decided to work under Roy's leadership. He adds that since the muhajirs of his group joined Roy's group his position in the Communist International in relation to Indian affairs was "somewhat strengthened".<sup>8</sup> It is worth remembering that along with military training, political education was also imparted to the emigrants at the Indian Military School at Tashkent. They were taught to say "Long Live Revolution" rather than "Long Live the Khilafat". The main purpose was to implant in their minds some idea of what a revolution meant. To make them understand how revolution occurs and to transform them into faithful adherents of the revolutionary idea were the primary tasks.<sup>9</sup>

The young Indian revolutionaries, through their personal con-

been formed on the initiative of a number of others who would certainly not agree to the dissolution of the party even if he recommended it. See *Roy's Memoirs*, n. 5, pp. 485 and 490. For further study on the controversy, see also Muzaffar Ahmad, *The Communist Party of India and Its Formation Abroad*, Calcutta, National Book Agency, 1962, pp. 33-34 and 59-67.

8. Cited as "The Story of Rafiq Ahmad's Travels" by Muzaffar Ahmad, n. 7, pp. 28-29.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 68.

In her memoirs the Russian wife of Abani Mukherji recalls that in the evening the young Indians "would congregate in the basement... singing their songs or thinking aloud of the day when they would return to India as victors... I was attached to them and wanted to help." Translated from Russian into English and cited by I. Andronov, "Awakening East", *New Times*, Moscow, 5 April 1967, p. 12.

tact, discovered the new radical forces in Soviet Union to be not only sympathetic towards Indian freedom, but willing to assist them in all possible ways to wage their struggle. The harbinger of October Revolution, Lenin himself took keen interest in the whole project. This entire story is of an everlasting interest, although the British imperialists considered this growing friendship between Indians and Russians nothing less than a crime.

In May 1921, the Third World Congress of the Communist International summoned to Moscow all prominent Indian revolutionaries within reach in order to select a suitable leader to direct work against the Government of India. Roy accordingly left for Moscow and was selected in August 1921 as the most suitable individual to direct operations against British imperialism in India. He was appointed the Political Director of the Eastern Section of the Communist International, which, after the Third Congress, had replaced the Turkestan Bureau of the Communist International.

Before he could accept the new assignment, Roy went back to Tashkent to wind up the Turkestan Bureau of the Communist International and to disband the Indian Military School which had not proved of much use. On his return journey to Moscow he brought with him a band of twenty-two muhajirs who had been converted into a small cadre of conscious revolutionaries, who had been powerfully attracted by communism, and who were keenly desirous of receiving further training in the theory and practice of revolution. Among those who accompanied Roy, mention may be made of Shaukat Usmani and Rafiq Ahmad. Soon afterwards a communist University for the Toilers of the East was founded in Moscow with the approval of Lenin for the purpose of giving an intensive training to the revolutionaries from various Asian countries.

Besides, it was decided that the branches of the Communist International in the imperialist countries must have an active role in the national liberation struggle of the colonial peoples. It was believed that the Communist International would more efficiently practise its programme of assisting the freedom of the

oppressed peoples by calling its branches in the imperialist countries to do their duty.

In the light of these political developments the Communist International planned to establish contact with India by establishing a centre at Berlin. Because of the unfriendly attitude of the Afghan government, nothing much could be done from Central Asia. Roy was put in charge of the work of directing Indian political activities in Berlin.

Roy's first task was to regain contact with India. The techniques he employed for this purpose were:

- (a) The despatch of trained communists to India;
- (b) correspondence by post with his former comrades and revolutionary associates in Bengal; and
- (c) despatch by post of printed communist propaganda literature bearing an address at which any of the recipients interested in communism might get in touch with him.

According to the report of the Intelligence Bureau of the Government of India, Nalini Gupta, one of the revolutionaries who attended the Moscow Conference, a former member of a revolutionary party in Bengal and a trusted collaborator of Roy,<sup>10</sup> was first sent to India with the object of furthering the communist cause and to arrange for the despatch of five hundred youth to Moscow via Germany to train them in the art of manufacturing arms and ammunition.<sup>11</sup> He left Moscow in September 1921, travelled via Berlin and thence as a lascar on board a German vessel which reached Colombo in December 1921. In the beginning of 1922 he made his way secretly to Calcutta. With the help of a friend he met Muzaffar Ahmad, founded a communist group<sup>12</sup> and placed it in his charge. Muzaffar Ahmad,

10. Roy's *Memoirs*, n. 5, p. 490.

11. "History Sheet of Nalini Nath Gupta": Prepared by the Bengal Intelligence Bureau, Internment under Regulation III of 1818 of Nalini Gupta, Home (Pol.) Department, Government of India, File No. 21/1, 1924.

12. The corroborative evidence of the same fact can be traced in a short account of the Communist Party of India prepared by Muzaffar Ahmad who too writes: "in...1921, efforts to build a Communist Party were also undertaken inside India" (Ahmad, n. 7, p. 5). Besides, on 16 November 1922 the *International Press Correspondence* reported a

who was a journalist, and editor of *Navayug*, and who was already interested in the problems of workers and peasants, owed his conversion to Marxism to this visit of Nalini Gupta. The others who collaborated in the formation of the party at Calcutta were Mukunda Lal Sarkar and J. N. Biswas, Professor Hemanta Kumar Sarkar, the local labour leaders.

A very reliable agent of the Bengal Intelligence Department got into touch with Muzaffar Ahmad and it was then learnt that Nalini Gupta had succeeded in persuading Muzaffar to become Roy's representative in Bengal and that Nalini had also persuaded Nazrul Islam to undertake Bolshevik propaganda. It was also ascertained that Nalini had endeavoured to gain as adherents to the communist cause leading Bengal revolutionaries such as Amarendra Chatterji and Bhupen Dutt. These individuals certainly entered into negotiations with him but it would appear that they demanded a large sum of money before finally committing themselves to communism and that their terms were referred by Nalini to Roy. This information is corroborated by and large by letters which passed between Roy and certain persons in India and which later fell into the hands of the police.<sup>13</sup>

The two Tashkent students were sent to India shortly after-

speech by Zinoviev claiming that organised communist parties had been formed in India. On 11 November 1922, speaking before the Colonial Commission of the Communist International, Roy stated that the Central Committee of the Indian Communist Party was established at Bombay with branches at Peshawar, Calcutta, Madras and Allahabad (*Conviction ... in the Bolshevik Conspiracy Case*, Home (Pol.) Department, Government of India, File No. 261, 1924, p. 49). In its second part also the "secret" report of the India Office admitted that though Roy was speaking with an optimism, then somewhat lightly founded, but since amply justified by the growth and activities of the communist groups which then existed in almost every province of India (*Ibid.*).

13. "History Sheet of Nalini Nath Gupta", n. 11, p. 5.

Meanwhile Nalini Gupta's travels between India and Europe continued. In 1923 the Intelligence Bureau of Bengal reported that Nalini was returning to India via Persia and asked that if traced he should be immediately arrested. Subsequently information collected in various parts of India indicated that Nalini had landed at Karachi and had ultimately reached Bengal via Bombay. He was aware that he was wanted by the police and took great care to conceal himself, for no definite information of his whereabouts was available (*Ibid.*, pp. 5-6).

wards via Persia and from Bushire by sea to Bombay. They were most probably assisted by Tampakoff and Hakimoff, two Russian consular officials in Persia, on their way from Moscow. Both of them reached India safely towards the close of 1921, but one of them, Masood Ali Shah, immediately returned home and ceased to take any active interest in politics. The other, Shaukat Usmani, threw himself heart and soul into the communist movement and maintained direct and regular communication with Roy.<sup>14</sup> He organised communist groups in Benares and Kanpur, and subsequently got into touch with communist groups at Bombay, Calcutta and Madras.

#### FIRST COMMUNIST "CONSPIRACY" CASE

But the communists travelling secretly to India towards the end of March 1922 in other batch were caught on the north-western border. It was most probably due to the information provided by one Abdul Qadir Sehrai, who had under instructions of the Central Intelligence Bureau joined the muhajirs leaving India on Hijrat in 1920. Along with others he had also reached Tashkent, had hidden his identity, had won over the favour of Roy family by diplomatic flattery,<sup>15</sup> had joined the Military School and had, even against the wishes of the Indusky Kurs group, accompanied the batch of twenty-two communists taken by Roy to Moscow for special training. Though his bona fides were doubted and challenged by other cadres like Shaukat Usmani and Masood Ali, yet he managed to get Communist Party membership somehow or other. On the other hand he was in constant touch with the agents of British Intelligence in the Soviet Union. On the eve of the departure of the batch back to

14. Shaukat Usmani was a resident of the former princely state of Bikaner in Rajasthan. He originally left India during the *Hijrat* movement of 1920, reached Tashkent, was selected by Roy as a promising recruit and taken to Moscow for intensive training. He attended the conference of Indian revolutionaries held in Moscow in August 1921. When the Meerut "Conspiracy" Case was held, Shaukat Usmani was expelled from the Communist Party of India on the charge of having betrayed weakness.

15. Shaukat Usmani, "India and Russian Revolution", *Mainstream* Delhi, 22 July 1967, p. 20.



India, he leaked the news to the British agents, who in turn informed the Government of India.

After their being hauled up, about ten young Muslim communists—among whom were also remarkable and legendary figures like Rafiq Ahmad and Akbar Khan—were charged under Section 121-A of the Indian Penal Code, which related to the offence of conspiracy with a view to depriving the King Emperor of his sovereignty over India. Except the three approvers all were sentenced to long-term rigorous imprisonment.<sup>16</sup> This is known as the First Communist Peshawar "Conspiracy" Case. Paying tribute to their martyrdom and acknowledging their contribution to Indian nationalism Sajjad Zaheer, in a foreword to a recent comprehensive study on these young revolutionaries, wrote thus:

"Human actions, undertaken in pursuit of noble ideals, shed an ineffable lustre and glory on men. India's liberation struggle against British imperialism abounds in very many incidents wherein men and women have shown exemplary courage, heroism and a spirit of sacrifice for the freedom of their motherland. These shall ever remain in our history as golden example for Indians of the present and later generations... All Indians of my generation, who were school-boys at the time of the noncooperation and Khilafat movements... had heard and were thrilled by the valour and the burning spirit of patriotism shown by those young Indians who migrated from their homeland, and facing innumerable difficulties and hardships trekked through Afghanistan to Soviet Central Asia, with the sole purpose of getting themselves trained and equipped for waging an armed struggle against the British imperialists in India."<sup>17</sup>

Meanwhile, a little earlier, towards the close of 1921, Roy and others prepared a manifesto which was sent to the Ahmedabad session of the Indian National Congress in December 1921. The communists demanded, among other things, complete indepen-

16. For further study see "The Story of Rafiq Ahmad's Travels", n. 7, pp. 48-51.

17. S. M. Mehdi, n. 4.

dence for India, a federal republican set-up, and basic agrarian reforms, including land to the tiller.<sup>18</sup> According to Sir Cecil Kaye, the head of the British Intelligence Service in India, the courier of the communist message had instructions to "contact Gandhi".<sup>19</sup>

Nalini Gupta who had attended the Ahmedabad session returned soon to Moscow to report how the appeal had been received and the influence it had exerted. The report hastened the implementation of the plan of shifting the headquarters of Indian communist revolutionaries to Berlin and establishing permanent connection with Indian nationalists—both bourgeois and otherwise—through correspondence and publication of propaganda literature.

#### AFTERMATH OF CHAURI CHAURA

But the debacle after Chauri Chaura and similar developments in Western Europe prompted Lenin and others to reconsider the approach of collaboration between the Congress and the communists. On the eve of the Third World Congress of the Communist International held in May 1921 M. N. Roy had submitted to Lenin a report about the situation in the colonial countries. Discussing their differences about the revolutionary potentialities of nationalism in the colonies Roy held that the estimation of the role of Gandhiji as objectively revolutionary like that of the great heretics of medieval Europe was precluded by his religious and social ideas, which were positively reactionary. Admitting that as the leader of an anti-imperialist movement Gandhiji could play an objectively revolutionary role, Roy argued that he might also follow the way of the Russian social revolutionaries, who were characterised by Plekhanov as politically revolutionary and socially reactionary. So Roy enquired whether an anti-imperialist movement inspired by reactionary social ideas and burdened with obscurantist religious beliefs could be politically revolutionary.<sup>20</sup> Although Lenin did not

18. For further study see *Roy's Memoirs*, n. 5, p. 540.

19. Cited by I. Andronov, "Awakening East", *New Times*, Moscow, 5 April 1967, p. 12.

20. *Memoirs*, n. 5, p. 500.

show an explicit inclination towards it,<sup>21</sup> nevertheless he saw the force of the argument.

In his thesis *The National Liberation Movement in the East* Lenin cautioned the people to beware of the khans, feudal barons, moulanas and rich bourgeoisie who are associated with the national liberation movement launched against imperialism. The working class and the peasantry should control the movement. According to Roy the Bolshevik leaders also planned a long-term policy which was to be characterised by a purely proletarian movement. They had gradually come round to the thesis of M. N. Roy that the nationalist movement in colonial countries like India was politically immature. It had no revolutionary ideology. No purpose would be served by trying to assist it with arms and money. It must be strengthened by a well-trained revolutionary cadre. The communist University for the Toilers

. 21. It will not be inappropriate to recall here that in an article recently published a Soviet journalist has analysed these political developments on the basis of material collected from contemporary Soviet archives and sources. According to his version Roy was regarded by his contemporary Russian leaders nothing but a "petty-bourgeois extremist". For him the Communist International was not an organisation aiming at the ideological unity of all genuine revolutionary forces, but a military centre, a combat unit. They believed that in the debate on the national question, Roy expressed opinions that could only be described as "infantile leftwing communism". Roy was never cured of that. This was tantamount to self-isolation and could lead only to defeat in colonial countries. Lenin, of course, knew of Roy's plans of organising the Indian Liberation Army or movement. He also knew that the revolutionary storm in Russia had captured the imagination of many Indian patriots and had given rise to utopian dreams of duplicating the Russian events in India. Roy was not the only one to succumb to these adventurist sentiments. In his article the same journalist quotes N. I. Favorsky who was then a Deputy Member of the Revolutionary Military Council of Turkestan Front as well as the member of the Russian Bolshevik Party from July 1917, and was appointed to look after the Indians in Tashkent. According to the Soviet journalist this is the story of Favorsky:

"At one of the Council meetings Roy, speaking for the entire group of Indians in Russia, asked for food, military equipment and assistance in organising military training. Of course, we knew what this entailed. When Roy left the meeting, after putting his case, there were such remarks as "adventurism", "fantastic". That was the first reaction and it was followed by more serious consideration. It was decided to give the Indian comrades all possible support without, however, being involved in

of the East was to be established to gain that purpose.<sup>22</sup> Thus the social basis of the revolutionary movement in the colonial countries was in essence accepted. From here onwards it was recognised that the revolutionary cadre of the anti-imperialist movement for national liberation would come from the toiling masses. If the nationalist movement was allowed to be led by the bourgeoisie, it would only imply transfer of power to the native ruling class. It meant that there would be no real social revolution. One cannot fail to draw attention to the fact that M. N. Roy was already directing some of his comrades in India to adopt and implement the new thesis of dissociating themselves from the bourgeois-democratic nationalists with their slogans of a popular liberation movement and rely solely on what he called as "revolutionary parties", a term he applied to the small scattered terrorist groups in India.

Writing to S. A. Dange from Berlin on 7 September 1922, Roy stated: "A revolutionary mass party was to be organised as a part of the Congress, but this party must be under the control and direction of our own party (Communist Party)".<sup>23</sup> Roy continued his campaign relentlessly. In a letter dated Berlin, 3 October 1922, to Dange, he wrote:

"Our support and cooperation will be with those who are really connected with the working classes and are capable of organising them on really revolutionary lines."<sup>24</sup>

Again in a letter to Dange, dated Moscow, 2 November 1922, Roy said:

"In consonance with the point of view of the Communist International, I make the following propositions:

"The communist nucleus should take a very active part in the formation of a mass party for *revolutionary and national struggle*.

their plan. That too, as far as I know, was the attitude of Moscow." (I. Andronov, "Awakening East", *New Times*, Moscow, 5 April 1967, pp. 10-12.)

22. *Memoirs*, n. 5, p. 537.

23. *Conviction... in the Bolshevik Conspiracy Case*, n. 12, p. 43.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

"I am sure that you know more than I the elements that will go with us in this attempt to revolutionise the national struggle. As far as I know, there are numerous groups and individuals with, more or less, the same point of view as ours. These should be brought together in order to make a united effort."<sup>25</sup>

Writing to Singaravelu from Moscow, in a letter dated 2 November 1922, Roy stated:

"Either the Congress must revolutionise its outlook and have a revolutionary organisation, or a new party must be formed with a programme in accordance with the needs and desires of the majority of the people with a revolutionary objective."<sup>26</sup>

Besides, Roy also continued to send printed communist propaganda literature to India through post. On 1 May 1922 his fortnightly journal *The Vanguard* made its appearance. On 1 December 1922, this paper wrote:

"We have repeatedly said and still say that premature resort to violent tactics may be playing into the hands of the enemy, but it is altogether erroneous to think that there can be such a thing as a nonviolent revolution, no matter how peculiar and abnormal the situation in India may be. . . . The greatness of Mahatma Gandhi is to be found in his ability to discover before any other the potentiality of mass agitation. . . . but he was not capable, nor was he bold enough, to identify himself with the mass movement as soon as it began to assume proportions of revolutionary violence."<sup>27</sup>

Somewhat similar views were expressed by Roy at the Fourth Comintern Congress held in November 1922. He held that bourgeois-nationalist movements in the colonies were objectively revolutionary, but if they were directed only against the foreign bourgeoisie and not against native feudalism they represented not a class struggle but capitalist competition.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

27. *Ibid.*, 42.

"Revolutionary national movements in those countries where millions and millions are pining for national liberation, and which must free themselves economically and politically from imperialism before they can make further progress, will not succeed under the leadership of the bourgeoisie." Leadership would have to be taken over by the Communist Parties when the bourgeoisie deserted and betrayed the national revolution, as they were bound to do. The same argument had been put forward at the meeting of the ECCI in January 1921: the bourgeois nationalists were uncertain and unreliable allies; the Comintern should base its activities in the industrial workers in countries like India.

In General Thesis approved at the (November) 1922 session the Fourth Comintern Congress laid down that the ruling classes among the colonial and semicolonial peoples were unable and unwilling to lead the struggle against imperialism in so far as that struggle assumed the form of a revolutionary mass movement. In all backward countries alien imperialism made the feudal (and in part also semifeudal, semibourgeois) upper class of native society into an instrument for the exercise of its rule.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, utmost support should be given to the national revolutionary movement. The Congress even reprimanded those communists who believed that the communists should not take part in the national struggle but should only defend the class interests of the workers. The resolution of the CI maintained: "The refusal of communists in the colonies to participate in action against imperialist oppression on the pretext of alleged 'defence' of independent class interests is opportunism of worst kind, calculated only to discredit the proletarian revolution in the East."<sup>29</sup>

Shortly before the Gaya Congress Roy despatched to India a printed "Programme for the Indian National Congress" from which the following extracts are taken:

"It is a well known fact that the domination of foreign imperialism had led to the economic ruin, industrial stagnation,

28. J. Degras, n. 1, pp. 382-85.

29. Resolution and Thesis of the Fourth Congress of CI, p. 58.

social degeneration and intellectual backwardness of the people of India...

"Therefore, the Congress must declare in unmistakable terms that its goal is nothing short of a completely Indian National Government...

"The apostles of peaceful and constitutional means are nothing but accomplices of the British in keeping the Indian nation in perpetual enslavement...

"The goal fixed, we must now find the ways and means of reaching it. It goes without saying that a bitter and protracted struggle separates us from the goal we are striving for. The 'civilising' character of British imperialism will be tested by the brutal resistance they will put up against the Indian people. Our immediate task, therefore, is to involve in the struggle all those elements whose welfare demands the realisation of our programme...

"It is a well known fact that intensive economic exploitation has at last exhausted the patience of the Indian masses. This rebelliousness of the masses is solid foundation on which the activities of the National Congress should be based... The inauguration of a campaign of nationwide civil disobedience will precipitate the final stage of our struggle to be crowned inevitably by the conquest of an independent national existence."<sup>30</sup>

Similarly, the Fifth Congress of the CI (1924) postulated three kinds of tasks: (a) formation of Communist Parties with the object of representing the general interest of the proletariat, (b) all-round support of the national revolutionary movement, and (c) within the framework of national movement, the revising and promoting of social movement.<sup>31</sup> Roy continued emphasising his standpoint. This was reflected in a letter dated 21 February 1924 written by him to the British Labour Prime Minister J. Ramsay MacDonald as follows:

"Right Honourable Sir:

"The undersigned is an Indian who believes in the right of

30. *Conciction... in Bolshevik Conspiracy Case*, n. 12, p. 42.

31. *International Press Correspondence*, 7 June 1928.

every people to be free. Since 1905 I participated in the movement whose object is to conquer this right for the Indian nation... I have gone on doing, according to my convictions, my share in the struggle for the freedom of the Indian people.

"Being a socialist, I do not subscribe to the programme of Indian nationalism which bases itself simply on the rivalry and antagonism between native and foreign capital. I hold that India should have an autonomous national government, because without its normal progress the prosperity of her people in general cannot be attained. From this point of view I make common cause with the movement of bourgeois nationalism. But at the same time I am of the opinion that the national government should be made really democratic by the toiling masses. The common people, however, will have very little of political right and economic protection from the national government if they do not prepare from now to defend their class interests. This can be done only if they will participate in the nationalist movement not as a mere adjunct of the native bourgeoisie, but as an independent social factor organised and fighting on the basis of their own distinct political and economic programme. In other words, my activities follow the line of organising the workers and poor peasantry on the basis of their class interests. Our programme places the national movement, not on the basis of racial issue nor of capitalist antagonism, but on the wider basis of the economic interest and social emancipation of the masses of the population."<sup>32</sup>

It will not be inappropriate to recall here that by advocating ideas and programmes of this kind, Roy and his followers earned the epithet of "Bolshevik agents" in addition to a number of other slanderous charges. All freedom-loving people know how freely this epithet was used by British imperialists who started a virulent propaganda against everything connected with Bol-

32. An extract from the text of the *Letter Addressed by M. N. Roy to the British Prime Minister for Permission to Return to India*, Home (Pol.) Department, Government of India, File No. 111, 1924, pp. 2-3.



shevism. The papers published by the progressive-minded people were branded and proscribed in India. But this very technique of Britain had an adverse effect for the colonialist rulers. The more the bad things were uttered against the Bolshevik revolution the more the masses of India attached an opposite meaning to all the calumny, and hugged the October Revolution as their own.

The organisers of the national liberation movement accepted the situation as natural because the rulers in England belonged to diehard class of imperialists, but it was also natural for them to expect that it would be changed under a socialist government in England.

In 1924 for the first time the Labour Party led by MacDonald was elected to power in England. Great hopes were roused in India because shortly before his advent to power MacDonald had issued a pamphlet entitled *Our Policy* in which he had stated that the Labour government would make it its business to see that the rights of the colonial people were properly safeguarded. But these hopes were belied in India when after coming to power, MacDonald showed himself unwilling to carry out his policy. There was widespread dissatisfaction when it was found that the MacDonald government had sanctioned in 1924 the proclamation of a state of emergency in Bengal. The new sanction led to the arrest of numerous revolutionaries in the province. The fury and anger thus aroused by the betrayal of the Labour leader found expression in a speech delivered by one of the prominent Soviet leaders, Zinoviev, at the Thirteenth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, held in Moscow during the second half of May. *Pravda* (Moscow) of 25 May 1924 thus quoted his speech in which he attacked the failure of the British Labour Prime Minister:

"Come now—Mr MacDonald, where are all your promises: Where is the independence of Egypt and where is the autonomy of India? So far we have only heard of fresh executions. Where is the self-determination of Ireland?—so far we can only see the continuation of the policy of Curzons... I want to ask the English communist, Tom Mann, a prominent

worker in the English trade unions and workers' movement who knows MacDonald like 'the sole of his own boot', just these new questions. Has MacDonald at any rate changed just a few of the officials?—what—no, of course not, everything has remained as of the old... We therefore have before us a huge fraud disclosed in all its nakedness."<sup>33</sup>

## COMMUNIST MOVEMENT IN INDIA

### SINGARAVELU AND OTHERS

Undeterred by the debate after Chauri Chaura or the savage repression of the British government, the communist movement grew from strength to strength in India. As a result, Singaravelu Chettiar (Madras) and S. A. Dange (Bombay) who were in the anti-imperialist movement became Marxists. Both these Marxists got into touch with Roy and took an active part in forming communist groups in their respective cities. At Gaya, in December 1922, the Madras labour leader, Singaravelu Chettiar, proclaimed for the first time from the Congress platform that he was a communist. He said:

"Comrades in this hall, fellow workers, peasants of Hindustan, raiyats of Hindustan, I have come to speak on your behalf as a fellow worker. I have come here as a representative of the interest represented by the great order of the communists. I have come to tell you the great message which communism offers to the world workers. Therefore, I come before you and offer the greetings of the workers of the world—of the communists in America, of the communists of Soviet Russia, of the communists of Germany and other world communists who are interested in securing you your liberty—your homes, your food, your clothing... The world communists have pledged to assist the Congress to secure your rights to you. Comrades, all the communists all over the world have the common faith and common demand."<sup>34</sup>

33. *Report of the Speeches Delivered at the 13th Congress of the Russian Communist Party*, Home (Pol.) Department, Government of India, File No. 6/111, 1924, pp. 1-2.

34. For further study see the text of his speech incorporated in the *Report of the Proceedings of the Thirty-seventh Session of the Indian National Congress Held at Gaya, 1922*, pp. 116-17.

In his speech he also said that he stood for complete independence for India, as a necessary prerequisite for establishing a classless society in India.<sup>35</sup>

Before becoming a communist, Singaravelu was, according to the Central Intelligence Bureau, a "noncooperator" and a "labour agitator".<sup>36</sup> He first came to notice as a communist when a letter written by him to Roy in admiration for the latter's communist pamphlets was intercepted in the post. Roy also wrote letters to Singaravelu subsequently asking him to select delegates for a communist conference in Berlin and to attend it himself, if possible.<sup>37</sup> Further he suggested to Singaravelu the capture of the All India Trade Union Congress.<sup>38</sup> Singa-

35. *Ibid.*, 117.

It would not be irrelevant to reveal here that the spade work in the sphere of introducing Marxism to Indian society was done in 1912 when for the first time K. Ramakrishna Pillai, a radical journalist of Trivandrum (Kerala) and the editor of the newspaper *Svadeshabhimani*, published a biography of Karl Marx in the Malayalam language. (E.M.S. Namboodiripad, *The National Question in Kerala*, Bombay, 1952, p. 114.) Of further significance in this regard were the Bolshevik government's achievements in building a new social structure in the former colonial territories of tsarist Russia where the people were rapidly, tremendously and unprecedentedly developing their socio-economic structure within the fraternal family of Soviet people.

Meanwhile the leftist Bengali daily *Naiyug* (New Age) under the editorship of Muzaffar Ahmad and Kazi Nazrul Islam started giving more and more news related to the peasants' and workers' movement. In the United Provinces the *Independent* (Allahabad), whose chief editor was Motilal Nehru, also played a significant role in this direction. Young Jawaharlal Nehru and Rangaswamy Iyer frequently wrote in this newspaper on peasants and workers.

Although these incidents were a pointer they were not sufficient to point out that Marxism—a philosophy advocating the elimination of all forms of exploitation—had come to be favourably known at all levels of the indigenous society. Marxism was still a marginal phenomenon. The broad base of the peasants' and working class movement in the most active period of national activity—1919-22—offered, however, favourable scope for the growth of Marxist ideas in India.

36. *Conviction*... in *Bolshevik Conspiracy Case*, n. 12, p. 46.

37. *Ibid.*

38. Document cited in *Judgment in Bolshevik Conspiracy Case*, Home (Pol.) Department, Government of India, File No. 278, 1925, p. 24.

ravelu himself had been in correspondence with the communist groups in Bombay, Calcutta, Lahore and Gaya.

In January 1923, Singaravelu delivered a revolutionary speech at a private Congress Committee meeting "urging the destruction of capitalism and landlordism".<sup>39</sup>

He also tried to form a central party in Madras which would exercise general control over the communist movement in India. Towards the end of April 1923, he issued a manifesto outlining a programme for this party (Labour and Kishan Party of Hindustan) and circulated it to all communist sympathisers with whom he was in touch. The manifesto was divided into several sections such as "Preamble", "General Principles of the Party", "Action Programme", "Synopsis of Political Demands" and "Provisional Party Scheme of Swaraj".

The preamble was written in general terms of communist theory. It condemned the Congress and Swaraj parties as "capitalist institutions" whose activities could not benefit the labourers and peasants of India, and said that the Indian trade union movement was also doomed owing to its bourgeois leadership. It refused to accept the guidance of foreign agents "mainly drawn from Indian and European intellectuals", who called themselves "Bolshevik Labour leaders", and who were "really either misguided persons" attempting to apply Western methods to the East or government spies. "We have nothing against the labour section of the Bolshevik movement, as the workers of the world should unite to protect their common interests. What we resent is the subjugation of labour to mere intellectuals and spies."<sup>40</sup> The party would affiliate itself to the Labour and Kishan Party of the Congress. The party was prepared to establish an entente for the attainment of independence with any other party or parties in the Congress who would produce a programme acceptable to it. It added:

"It will reserve for future definition its attitude towards the question of private property."<sup>41</sup>

39. *Conviction... in Bolshevik Conspiracy Case*, n. 12, p. 50.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 47.

41. *Ibid.*

After the issue of this pamphlet Singaravelu called on the other communist centres in India to work on the lines indicated and to accept the Madras party as the headquarters and directing authority for the communist movement in India. The Lahore and Bombay communist groups had already agreed to this proposal and Singaravelu was now in a position to exercise general control over what the colonial authorities called "communist intrigue in India".<sup>42</sup> That Singaravelu in forming the Labour and Kishan Party was acting according to Roy's instructions may fairly be presumed from an intercepted letter from Roy, which urged the formation of a legal party of very much the same nature. In one of these letters, Roy had stated:

"All communists and socialists should attempt to form a mass party embracing all the truly revolutionary elements. In order that many available revolutionary elements are not frightened away by the name, our party should have a non-offensive name. We suggested the 'People's Party'. In order that the communists and socialists are not isolated in small sects and can take an active and leading part in the mass struggle, determining its course and destinies by revolutionary and courageous leadership, a legal apparatus to our activities is needed. The 'People's Party' will provide this 'legal apparatus'."<sup>43</sup>

A communication by the Executive Committee of the Communist International to the "First Conference of the Workers' and Peasants' Party of India" was despatched, assuring them of sympathy and support and giving them instructions at considerable length. This document was signed by one V. Kolarov and was dated 14 June 1928.<sup>44</sup>

#### EMERGENCE OF S. A. DANGE AS COMMUNIST LEADER

Dange came to notice as a communist by certain articles which appeared over his signature in Bombay newspapers. Intercepted correspondence showed that he had been in touch

42. *Ibid.*

43. *Ibid.*

44. Cited in *Judgment in Bolshevik Conspiracy Case*, n. 38, p. 24.

with Roy from September 1922 onwards. He owed his conversion to communism to the communist literature from abroad which began to appear in India during 1922. In August 1922 he founded a weekly newspaper, *The Socialist*. The paper took a keen interest in all those issues in which were involved the interests of Asian people and attacked western imperialism. It may be recalled that the Fourth Comintern Congress was held in November 1922. It also discussed the burning problem of freedom of Straits. A number of theses were drafted by the delegations from the Eastern countries in collaboration with members of the ECCI. They were introduced by Ravestey (Holland). The contradictions between Russian and British imperial interests, which, he said, submerged during the first world war when Russia hoping for Constantinople was on the British side, had come again to the surface. The Russian interest in favour of the freedom of the Straits was also in the interest of the international proletariat. "The freedom of the Straits means nothing but that this world traffic centre shall not be dominated by British imperialism." Since tribute from the East was a main source of capital accumulation "the independence of the Eastern world as a whole, the independence of Asia, the independence of the Moslem peoples... means in itself the end of Western imperialism, and pre-eminently of British imperialism", which was the most powerful enemy of all Eastern, and particularly of the Moslem peoples. "The Moslem peoples have it in their power to destroy the bridges which keep the British empire together."<sup>45</sup>

In India Dange's *The Socialist* was also giving expression to identical views. Commenting on 14 October 1922 on the provisional treaty signed between Turkey and Britain in regard to the Straits the paper said:

"The freedom of the Straits is still a riddle; the British navy controlling the Straits under the cover of 'Allied Control' is in no way willing to leave them either to the Turks or the Soviet government of Southern Russia. People over here in India cannot fathom the mysteries of the Straits' freedom

45. J. Degras, n. 1, p. 382.

problem, for the control of the Straits has nothing to do with England's Indian empire. Well, the key to the mysteries is not the defence of India nor pro-Greek tendencies. It is the oil of Mesopotamia and Baku. The House of Rothschilds, representative of British high finance, has great interests in the oil of South-East Russia. Oil is the element that is to govern the future navies of the world. If British naval supremacy is to be maintained, it must control oil of the whole world. The Straits and Constantinople are cards in the Baku oil game. Mesopotamian and Baku interests could have been best linked via Baghdad, Angora, Constantinople. But Angora foiled the game. What will be next step of British high finance? The next move will be hemming in of the Angora state from all sides. British diplomacy will now tighten its hold in Iraq, Arabia, and Western Persia. Military reinforcements will be thrown in this zone with the greatest zeal now in a position of the Southern, South-Eastern and Western frontiers of the Angora state."<sup>46</sup>

Very soon the paper started a constant exposure of British imperialist tactics. In an article contributed to the paper on 3 December 1922 Dr Mani Lal wrote that the predatory civilisation of the West was based on "greed" and the British empire was the most typical example of that civilisation (and not of those noble ideas of humanity and generous enthusiasm, known to Sastri's oratory), and the British Government of India subjected always to the responsibility of London government and the British Parliament (which later in their turn were subject to the votes and vetoes of those who had capital invested in British and colonial enterprises), according to the utterances of their Viceroy in India, was only a branch office of the "Great Scheme", like other parts scattered over the face of the earth. Continuing his comment the author pointed out that "our impotent Congress resolutions till 1919 were received with a laugh under the sleeves by our exploiters". He ridiculed the idea that the Europeans must exploit the dark and weak

46. *Confidential Report on Newspapers Published in the Bombay Presidency*, July-December 1922, Government of India Press, p. 1061.

aces. He concluded by saying, "We are in the coils of a boa constrictor and do not know how to escape... The Vishnu in us must awake."<sup>47</sup>

The paper left no stone unturned to ridicule the British imperialist system. Commenting on the aircraft programme of the Air Ministry of Britain *The Socialist* wrote on 9 September 1922 that a few days back the world "had the pleasure of learning" from Lloyd George that the Air Ministry of Britain was engaged in building 500 airships of the most efficient order, equipped with the "deadliest engines of war". In great sarcasm the paper added that, of course, all this was being done for the defence of Britain. And then it advanced a few suggestions which the "prosaic Air Ministry" or "the distracted Premier" could not be supposed to conceive of. The first suggestion was that the next disarmament conference should be held on the deck of one of these airships. The first biggest airship should be launched on its flight with the Disarmament Diplomats in it. And it should take them to Palestine, Egypt or India dropping a few random bombs here and there in order to "test the engines of war" and to convince the Disarmament Diplomats of the strength of the airships to preserve peace according to their dictates. And then the paper concluded by saying:

"We mean to stop our suggestion here, but somebody whispers in our ears that we should also suggest the Air Ministry to have a truthful nonviolent noncooperation on the airship to discuss with the Disarmament Diplomats the possibilities of introducing the cult of nonviolence or *ahimsa* in Great Britain generally and the engineers of the Air Ministry particularly and convince them of the message of nonviolence to the world!"<sup>48</sup>

In one of the intercepted letters by the Intelligence Bureau, Roy congratulated Dange on the appearance of *The Socialist*. He also sent articles to Dange for publication in this paper. Articles by N. Bukharin and Newbold, a communist member of British Parliament, were also published in it.<sup>49</sup>

47. *Ibid.*, pp. 1198-99.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 929.

49. *Ibid.*, pp. 47 & 50.



Letters from Dange to Roy were also intercepted. According to the Central Intelligence Bureau, Dange asked Roy in these letters to supply him with propaganda materials. He also announced the establishment of a "People's Publicity Service", which was to collect communist literature from Europe and distribute it to newspapers in India. Three numbers of this publicity service were actually produced and were stated to have done a certain amount of propaganda. They consisted mainly of extracts from well-known communist publications in Europe.<sup>50</sup>

According to the Central Intelligence Bureau, in October 1922, a communist delegated by the Third International, named Ashleigh, visited Bombay and handed over to Dange secret papers from Roy containing instructions for building up a communist organisation in India and giving the names of other communists in India.<sup>51</sup>

Dange remained in close touch with the Madras, UP, and the Punjab communists, and promised to join the Labour and Kishan Party of Hindustan which had been launched by Singaravelu from Madras. He also tried to introduce communist sympathisers into the Congress committee in Bombay.<sup>52</sup> He endeavoured to maintain regular correspondence with Roy. But the Director of the Central Intelligence Bureau, Colonel Kaye, reported that Dange was "not very successful owing to measures taken to watch his mail".<sup>53</sup> On the other hand, Roy's correspondence with Dange was also intercepted.

#### COMMUNIST MOVEMENT IN THE PUNJAB

During the days of the noncooperation and Khilafat movements one Shams-ud-Din who was the Publicity Secretary of North-Western Railway Union as well as the editor of the *Railway Union News*, started publishing a daily newspaper *Inqilab* in Lahore. Owing to financial difficulties its publication was closed by the middle of 1922. Soon after, that is in September 1922, one Ghulam Nabi filed a new declaration to the effect

50. *Ibid.*, p. 47.

51. *Ibid.*

52. *Ibid.*, p. 50.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 47.

that he was the editor, owner, printer and publisher of a new biweekly newspaper of the same name *Inqilab*.

By the beginning of 1923 the same newspaper also started publishing a monthly edition.<sup>54</sup> Ghulam Nabi employed his own nephew Ghulam Hussain to edit the monthly edition. The latter, whose name became widely known during the days of the so-called Cawnpore Bolshevik Conspiracy Case, had been Professor of Economics in a Lahore college and subsequently secretary of the North-Western Railway Workers' Union. First he came in touch with Diwan Chaman Lall, who employed him on the staff of his newspaper, *Nation*. As a result of some differences, Ghulam Hussain parted company with Diwan Chaman Lall and subsequently joined as editor of the monthly edition of *Inqilab*. He was a pioneer journalist interested in popularising Marxist thought in North India.

In his statement recorded in Central Jail, Lahore, on 11-14 July 1923, by Khan Bahadur Abdul Majid, Assistant Director, Intelligence Bureau, Home Department, Government of India, Ghulam Hussain testified: "I am a man of labour views and knowing that a labour paper was going to be started by Diwan Chaman Lall, I wanted to have something to do with it... I gave up my professorship because I believed that I was to get billeted on the staff of the *Nation* newspaper."<sup>55</sup> On being asked by the Assistant Director about the purpose behind his publishing and encouraging newspapers of that kind, Ghulam Hussain replied: "Primarily my own inclinations. I agree with most of the views expressed therein."<sup>56</sup> On being further cross-examined by Abdul Majid on 13 July 1923, he remarked: "If by the word Bolshevism is meant labour propaganda, then my answer is in the affirmative... There is some Bolshevism in the newspapers (like *Vanguard*, *Siasat*), but I cannot say whether these papers contained Moscow propaganda... I found in these newspapers an echo of my own ideas, I liked them."<sup>57</sup> In his statement re-

54. Being a losing concern, *Inqilab* was closed down altogether in April 1923.

55. *Conviction... in Bolshevik Conspiracy Case*, n. 12, p. 25.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

corded on 14 July 1923, he reiterated: "I too have a lot of communism in my head."<sup>58</sup>

Gradually the office of *Inqilab* and two small book-shops in Lahore became important centres of communist activities. A series of articles on the political situation in the country were written from the labour point of view and propagated. At the end of December 1922 in the name of one Siddiq an article, "The Royal Road to Deliverance", appeared as a special supplement to *Inqilab*. It was called "Shahra-i-Najat" in Urdu and was an adoption of Roy's programme.

According to the report of the Intelligence Bureau, Ghulam Hussain was turned into a communist in June 1922 during his stay in Kabul (where he was able to secure a job as a teacher) by the communist revolutionaries trained by M. N. Roy at his Tashkent School and who, for the time being, were in Kabul. It is reported that Roy, writing to Dange in December 1922, stated: "I must tell you that the *Inqilab* is our organ and the editor Shams-ud-Din Hassan works with Mohamed Siddiq (according to Intelligence Bureau, this M. Saddiq was none else than Ghulam Hussain), who is a member of our party. He works under the direction of one centre in Kabul, where he came several months ago."<sup>59</sup> It may not be inappropriate to point out that Roy's centre in Kabul was Khushi Mohamed, *alias* Mohamed Ali, Ghulam Hussain's special friend, with whom he had admittedly been in correspondence since Khushi Mohamed left Afghanistan for Berlin. This correspondence continued till as late as August 1923. Some of it was intercepted by the Intelligence Bureau, and its latest catch was a letter from Khushi Mohamed (under the nom de plume of "Aziz") to Fateh Mohamedi, Ghulam Hussain's uncle, announcing the transmission of money for "books" that were wanted by the writer in Berlin.<sup>60</sup>

About this time Roy also wrote a letter to Ghulam Hussain. He had instructed the latter to get in touch with Singaravelu and Dange. The letter was alleged to have been seen and copied

58. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

59. "Notes in the Intelligence Bureau" prepared by Col. Kaye, *Ibid.*, p. 37.

60. *Ibid.*, pp. 37-38.

by the British Intelligence in England and was allowed to go on. It was not intercepted in India, and it reached Ghulam Hussain, who burnt it after reading it.<sup>61</sup>

According to the report of the Intelligence Bureau, soon after receiving the letter from Roy, Ghulam Hussain wrote to Dange saying that he had been "expecting to hear from him". Even earlier in January 1923 Ghulam Hussain had himself written to Dange: "We have got out 'What Do We Want?' 'India's Problem and Its Solution'...and our Urdu translation of 'India in Transition' is in the press."<sup>62</sup>

It is not inappropriate to point out here that these writings of Roy imparted to Indian intellectuals, for the first time, a knowledge of communism and placed before them a definite programme for a socio-economic revolution in India. They had an abiding effect on the intellectual moulding of a large number of youth. The journals, books and other literature published by Roy in Western Europe and in Moscow did not have an easy entry into India. Most of it was proscribed as soon as it was published and prohibited from entering into India under the Sea Customs Act. And yet large quantities were somehow smuggled into India. They came by post openly or disguised as harmless religious tracts and through couriers. Some copies of the journals also reached Indian newspapers from time to time and they reproduced many articles. British censorship was not very efficient and it could not altogether stop the flow of literature that Roy kept producing in big quantities at many places in Europe.

Meanwhile M. N. Roy, according to the Intelligence Bureau, was also in correspondence with Muzaffar Ahmad in regard to the safe arrival of his writings in India. Writing to Ahmad in May 1923, Roy stated: "All my pamphlets have been published in Urdu language. For the past 8 months a daily paper in Urdu is being published. At present it is a monthly paper. You will get all this Urdu literature from Ghulam Hussain of Lahore... He has translated my third pamphlet ('What Do We Want?')

61. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

62. *Ibid.*

and published it since. Please try and see him once. . . ."<sup>63</sup> Thereupon Muzaffar Ahmad wrote to Ghulam Hussain asking him to send copies of *Inqilab* and similar other literature to him. In return, he said, he would send some articles and reports of his own for the paper.<sup>64</sup>

During those days Ghulam Hussain also received some printed material from Singaravelu, who was esteemed very highly by all the Marxists. In the winter of 1922 he got two foolscap pages of printed material, one page entitled as "Hind Panchayat" and the other dealing with the Congress Party. Then again in the beginning of May 1923 he got a similar pamphlet from Singaravelu. This was entitled "Labour and Kishan Party of Hindustan". A part of this pamphlet was headed as the action party of the Congress. This pamphlet was accompanied by certain "party" cards.<sup>65</sup>

On account of the expulsion of the Indian revolutionaries from Kabul, Ghulam Hussain's means of communication with Afghanistan were temporarily suspended and his supply of funds cut off. He, therefore, got into close touch with the down-country communist workers and was very anxious that an all-India communist organisation should be founded without delay.<sup>66</sup>

According to the statement made by Ghulam Hussain to Abdul Majid, a circular was issued from the *Inqilab* office in May 1923. Ghulam Hussain was persuaded by M. A. Khan and Shams-ud-Din to organise a party in India as a set-off against Chaman Lall and the Trade Union Congress. To that end Shams-ud-Din and Ghulam Hussain drew up under their signatures a circular, the purport of which was: "Without entering into useless introduction we would like the undernamed gentlemen to hold a conference on the 30th of June at Lucknow in order to form Dr Mani Lal's Manifesto party."<sup>67</sup> This circular

63. *Ibid.*

64. *Ibid.*, p. 111.

65. *Conciction. . . in Bolshevik Conspiracy Case*, n. 12, p. 30.

66. See "History Sheet of Ghulam Hussain Received from the Punjab Central Investigation Department", *Ibid.*, p. 56.

67. In noting the achievements of this anti-imperialist mass movement led by these early Marxists one cannot fail to draw attention to the fact

was sent to Singaravelu, Dange, Amir-ul-Hassan, and several others in Bombay, *Qaumi Report*, Master Abdur Rahaman, perhaps several more of Dr Mani Lal's party, Secretary, Labour Association, Moradabad, H. A. Malik of the *Mazdur* (Lucknow), Hakim Abdul Gaffar of Larkana, Muzaffar Ahmad, Shaukat Usmani, Biswas and others. There were about thirty persons to whom the circular was sent. According to the report of the

that one encounters certain characters of weak disposition. Soon after his arrest for prosecution in the so-called Cawnpore "Conspiracy" Case, Ghulam Hussain made a statement in the presence of an Intelligence Officer, exposing not only his own revolutionary past but also the political activities of his comrades. On being asked whether he was being guided by M. N. Roy, he remarked without hesitating for the fraction of an instant that he required "no inspiration or guidance" in the expression of his ideas from abroad. He also added that not desirous of having anything to do with M. N. Roy he burnt the letter sent by the latter (*Conciction... in the Bolshevik Conspiracy Case*, n. 12, p. 25). After his arrest Ghulam Hussain also claimed credit in his petition to the government for ceasing activity in March 1923. That is why he was constantly taunted for being indolent by Shams-ud-Din and M. A. Khan. He openly said at the time of cross-examination on 13 July 1923 that "it was never my idea to have a revolutionary organisation" (*Ibid.*, p. 29). He also believed when issuing the circular for the Lucknow meeting that the whole thing would result in a fiasco. In his request to the Government of India for his release, he said: "I am a man of very delicate constitution and still more delicate health. My imprisonment indeed means a prolonged misery not only for myself but also for my family people." In his petition he also undertook not to take part, directly or indirectly, in politics or do anything in the way of writing articles or anything of the kind and coming into contact with persons of an "undesirable kind". He added, "I have no intentions to taking to aggressive politics even after my release... I feel persuaded myself that I have not got any stomach for politics of this kind" (*Ibid.*, p. 33). He believed that his case would be expedited and would get favourable consideration. It really showed that he was frightened. In jail, Ghulam Hussain knew that if, after release, he gave up politics, he would be discredited. He, therefore, planned to issue a manifesto saying that his health had been broken and that he would not take part in politics (*Ibid.*, p. 35). In his confidential remarks, the Home Member, W. M. Hailey stated about him on 14 August 1923 as follows:

"He seems something of a rabbit; and if there is any ground to believe that he did actually get most of his money from his family, and if he will agree to eschew politics and make a statement to this effect, I think we should after a time release him" (*Ibid.*, p. 39).

Intelligence Bureau, the copies of this circular were also sent abroad in April 1923.<sup>68</sup>

The Lucknow meeting could not materialise because on receiving the circular, Singaravelu told the signatories of the circular that he had already organised the "Labour and Kishan Party of Hindustan" and that the objects were the same as enumerated in Dr Mani Lal's manifesto. So all the people named in the circular were called upon to affiliate themselves to Singaravelu's party at Madras.<sup>69</sup>

Ghulam Hussain, therefore, did likewise. On 29 May 1923 a circular letter was sent out signed by Ghulam Hussain, Shams-ud-Din Hassan, and M. A. Khan informing communist supporters that the Lucknow conference had been cancelled and calling on all comrades interested to join the Labour and Kishan Party of Hindustan. Ghulam Hussain started a provincial centre of Singaravelu's Labour and Kishan Party in the Punjab consisting of himself, M. A. Khan who was a wellknown railway labour organiser and Shams-ud-Din Hassan.<sup>70</sup> At the same time Ghulam Hussain also translated the literature of the new party into Urdu and had it printed.

#### ACTIVITIES OF SHAUKAT USMANI

On his return to India Shaukat Usmani subsequently got into touch with the communist groups in Lahore, Bombay, Calcutta and Madras. Meanwhile he had also maintained regular correspondence with Roy. Extracts from this correspondence are quite revealing. Writing to Roy from Bombay on 26 September 1922, he described his plans for establishing close contacts with other communist groups in India and promised to work according to his instructions.<sup>71</sup>

In another letter to Roy, from Benares on 16 October 1922, he stated: "Here in Benares I have caught hold of quite nice

68. *Conviction... in the Bolshevik Conspiracy Case*, n. 12, pp. 28-29.

69. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

70. See the reference (of the letter written by Shams-ud-Din Hassan to Singaravelu on 17 May 1923) incorporated in the "History Sheet of Ghulam Hussain," n. 66, p. 57.

71. *Conviction... in the Bolshevik Conspiracy Case*, n. 12, p. 44.

young intelligentsia students, Hindus as well as Muhammadans with some advanced political views. Provided you keep me constantly supplied with materials, I hope to further the work." In the same letter he condemned the role of British imperialism: "The British, in spite of the Trade Agreement propaganda clause (with the Soviet Union), are still making anti-Bolshevik propaganda, though in an indirect way." To defeat it, he suggested: "To fight with this propaganda we have one way, that is to distribute communist literature among reliable circles and let them bring to a state distinguishing the right from the wrong."<sup>72</sup> He also sent Roy a number of names and addresses (in cipher) which Roy could use for the dissemination of communist literature. The two letters mentioned above were duly acknowledged by Mrs M. N. Roy. From Berlin, in a letter dated 1 December 1922 and addressed to Usmani, Mrs Roy stated that her husband was absent in Moscow attending the Congress of the Third International and that on his return to Berlin he would send detailed instructions. She outlined various suggestions for the safe receipt of communist literature sent from abroad into India.<sup>73</sup>

On 25 December 1922 Roy wrote to Dange about Usmani in the following terms:

"A number of boys who had received their training in Moscow have been sent back to India. They are all members of our party (Communist Party of India). Originally, they were not very suitable material being Khilafat pilgrims on their way to Angora. We got hold of them and could make some of them over...

"They are good boys and have received a fairly Marxian training. One of them, *Shaukat Usmani* writes to me about you and says that he is trying to get into touch with you. He is a good and earnest chap but rather erratic in his ways. I have instructed him to work under your direction and get all our boys in touch with you... one of them can

72. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

73. *Ibid.*, p. 45.



be posted in the harbour of Bombay to organise illegal transportation of literature through the Indian sailors."<sup>74</sup>

Writing to Roy from Kanpur on 1 February 1923, Usmani assured Roy: "Taking a bird's eye view of the movement, I assure you that we shall not have many difficulties in our way."<sup>75</sup> From Calcutta on 8 February 1923 he again wrote: "In accordance with your instructions I am already here in the city. Do please send your instructions. Have seen comrade M. A. (Muzaffar Ahmad) and one other. They, too, are waiting for instructions."<sup>76</sup>

In February 1923, Usmani was in communication with Jawaharlal Nehru who approved a memorandum drawn up by Sampurnanand, and which had been specially commended by *The Advance Guard* for its communist approach.<sup>77</sup>

Meanwhile Usmani continued to correspond with Roy. In a letter to Roy from Calcutta on 15 February 1923, he expressed his belief that the situation (to organise the movement on an all-India basis) should be utilised. He also gave names and addresses of individuals whom he hoped to convert to communism. Among them he referred to two persons. The first one was Muhammad Habib, who was in those days Headmaster of the National Muslim School in Kanpur. Describing his qualifications, he said that he was a sincere enthusiast but an "impatient" man and that he had once cherished and supported terrorism. Some communist literature and the journal *Vanguard*, Usmani added, had turned him towards communism. The second person referred to by him was Sampurnanand, who was before turning into a noncooperator the Principal of Dungar College, Bikaner, and once his own teacher, Usmani said that he was "not a socialist much less a communist". In Usmani's opinion he was nothing more than a "revolutionary nationalist". Usmani, however, expressed the hope that he seemed to be drawing more and more to our lines"

74. *Ibid.*

75. *Ibid.*

76. *Ibid.*

77. *Ibid.* For further study see also Sampurnanand, *Memories and Reflections*, Asfa Publishing House, 1962, pp. 40-41.

and that before long he would become a "great enthusiastic member" of the Communist Party.<sup>78</sup>

On 26 February, 9 March and 19 March 1923, Roy sent letters to Usmani with instructions for organising communist centres in India and for linking up the five communist groups—Bombay, Lahore, UP, Calcutta and Madras. He also desired Usmani to select and despatch delegates to a communist conference to be held in Berlin. He disclosed to him that he was sending him £25. A letter from Roy which accompanied a draft for this amount was subsequently intercepted by the UP police.<sup>79</sup>

Writing from Calcutta on 9 February 1923 to Singaravelu, Usmani said: "I have been directed by Comrade Roy to be in connection with you. When I get assurance of this letter duly reaching you, I shall write in detail." He added: "So far as my surveyance of the whole situation goes, I think this is the right time for striking the final blow in India."<sup>80</sup>

But before he could strike, the colonial authorities who knew of all this correspondence struck—he was arrested. At the time of his arrest a letter was found on his person. Though the address had not yet been written on the envelope, the Intelligence Bureau somehow came to the conclusion that it might have been meant for Shams-ud-Din Hassan of Lahore. The letter said:

"My Dear Comrade:

"I have got some three important letters from R. There is some news in them concerning yourself. R asks you to send your representatives and as many people from your province to attend the conference there as possible. I want to see you. How can that be arranged? Lahore is not a safe place for me to come up there... However, arrange somehow at Kasur or Ferozepore..."<sup>81</sup>

The date of Usmani's arrest was 9 May 1923, so this letter must have been written a day or so before. Meanwhile, on

78. *Ibid.*, p. 43. For further study see also Sampurnanand, n. 77, p. 39.

79. *Ibid.*, p. 88.

80. *Ibid.*

81. "Notes in the Intelligence Bureau", *Ibid.*, p. 37.

10 May 1923, Muzaffar Ahmad wrote to Usmani (this letter was found by the local Intelligence Bureau at Kalanaur, in the search there after Usmani's arrest) expressing the hope that he had received the registered cover which contained two letters, "one from one *friend* and the other from a Lahore comrade". This *friend* was no other than M. N. Roy, who had written to Muzaffar Ahmad on 19 March 1923: "We should try to convene a conference there (Berlin) as soon as possible: at least seven persons should come from different provinces... Singaravelu and the '*Ingilab*' of Lahore must come. Please get into touch with them..."<sup>82</sup> Muzaffar Ahmad was already in touch with Ghulam Hussain and they had exchanged letters in February and March 1923.

#### CONVERSION OF OLD REVOLUTIONARIES TO MARXISM

It should also be remembered that Roy was also particularly keen to reestablish contact with his former colleagues among the revolutionary groups in Bengal. Writing to Muzaffar Ahmad from Berlin on 29 August 1922, he said: "Please introduce my friend [Nalini Gupta] with Amar Chatterji, Upen Bannerji, Jadu Gopal and Sachin Sanyal. If you consider it advisable, also to Suresh Mazumdar and Bepin Ganguli—both of them are my friends."<sup>83</sup> All these individuals were renowned Bengal revolutionaries.

Again writing to Muzaffar Ahmad in a letter dated Berlin, December 1922, Roy said: "Please negotiate with Chatterji and Co. They have required help. A man should be sent to discuss what sort of work they would take up, how they would proceed, and what amount of help they want. Please have a talk about this with Upen Bannerji. Please see if Sishir Ghose likes to come. At least one man could come (to attend the congress at Berlin) on behalf of the Trade Union, such as Sachin Sanyal."<sup>84</sup>

Writing to Muzaffar Ahmad from Berlin on 2 March 1923 Roy referred to the despatching of some amount for Probodh,

82. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

83. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

84. *Ibid.*

a member of a Bengal revolutionary group. Roy went on to say in the same letter: "Glad to hear that you have been negotiating with Probodh. It would be immensely good if they send a man."<sup>85</sup>

All this intercepted correspondence showed that Roy had requested them to work according to his techniques of Marxism.

Writing from Berlin on 29 January 1923 to a member of Bepin Ganguli's revolutionary party in Bengal Roy stated:

"Our object is to make the poor cultivators rebellious against the oppression of the zamindars and the government. We have first to show them how and to what extent they suck our blood. Next it should be pointed out to them that the government and the zamindars are birds of the same feather. So oppression by the zamindars cannot stop until the British government terminates. In this way we have to create disaffection and a rebellious spirit amongst the cultivators all over the country. By means of such propaganda we shall be able to secure the confidence of these people and in time they would obey us in stopping payment of revenue and taxes."<sup>86</sup>

The information obtained by the Bengal Intelligence Bureau proved that Roy's appeals had not been without effect. A section of the discontented petty-bourgeois young men abandoned the Congress altogether and organised terrorist movement, drawing sustenance from a somewhat rudimentary understanding of Marxism. These organisations were particularly active in North-Eastern India and had a network extending from Peshawar in the North-West Frontier Province to Chittagong in undivided Bengal. These immature but militant Marxists did not overlook the lessons of the great emancipation struggle of the 1919-22 period. With the help of their rudimentary knowledge of Marxism, they began to realise that the proletariat and the peasantry were the main and decisive factor in any ensuing struggle for national emancipation. This impression is very well strengthened by a study of the activities of young revolutionaries like

85. *Ibid.*

86. *Ibid.*, pp. 42-43.

Bhagat Singh, Chandra Sekhar, etc. as described by one of their close colleagues, Yashpal, in his Hindi memoirs, *Simhavalokan*, in three parts, and published by the *Viplav* office at Lucknow. Another active member of this group Bejoy Kumar Sinha, who is still alive, also recently testified to the decisive influence of Marxist ideas on the young revolutionaries. He wrote:

"In the twenties from whatever material was available, the revolutionaries got substantial ideas about the fundamentals of scientific socialism and its successful application on the soil of Soviet Union. As I also had joined the ranks of revolutionaries during this period in Kanpur—an industrial town, I soon found myself in this new stream of thought and realised that our party known as Hindustan Republican Association working in UP, Bihar, Punjab and other parts of Northern India was moving towards a socialist goal."<sup>87</sup>

One of the leaders of these pro-Marxist revolutionaries was Sachindra Nath Sanyal, who had been sent to the Andamans as a life-term prisoner in 1915 and subsequently released in general amnesty at the conclusion of the war when the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms were introduced by the government. He had contacts with Roy, who was then in Russia. Sanyal declared the new ideas in the party manifesto—*The Revolutionary*—that was distributed all over India in a single day in 1925. It stated:

"The immediate object of the revolutionary party in the domain of politics is to establish a Federal Republic of the United States of India by an organised and armed revolution... The basic principles of this Republic shall be universal suffrage and the abolition of all systems which make the exploitation of man by man possible. The revolutionary party is not national but international in the sense that its ultimate object is to bring harmony in the world and in this respect it follows the footsteps of the great Indian Rishis of the glorious past and of the Bolshevik Russia in modern age. In the domain of economic and social welfare the party

87. Bejoy Kumar Sinha, "Bhagat Singh & HSRA Heard the Call of October Revolution", *New Age*, New Delhi, 5 November 1967, Vol. XV, No. 15.

will foster the spirit of cooperation in as large a scale as possible instead of private and unorganised business enterprise."<sup>88</sup>

Appreciating the role of these young revolutionary Marxists, Muzaffar Ahmad wrote from Calcutta in one of his letters to Roy: "Another word. There is no fear of our work being hampered by your friends. Moreover we would get much help from them, you have yourself written to have our work done through them as far as possible."<sup>89</sup>

Muzaffar Ahmad himself was doing a lot of work. He was particularly active in receiving and distributing communist literature sent from abroad by Roy. He was also in touch with other communist groups in various parts of India and maintained regular correspondence with Roy. It was through him that Roy sent the passage money for delegates to the Berlin Conference.<sup>90</sup>

In the course of their conversations, Nalini Gupta (an emissary of Roy) asked him to work on old revolutionary lines (which meant that terrorism should be resorted to) to achieve the objective.<sup>91</sup> In one intercepted letter Roy discussed arrangements for the safe despatch and distribution in India of communist literature sent to Muzaffar Ahmad and asked him to select youths for training in Berlin. Muzaffar Ahmad probably sent seven Bengali students to Germany. Two more students reached Germany in 1922-23.

In other intercepted letters Roy gave Muzaffar Ahmad detailed instructions with regard to the work he had asked him to do and placed him in touch with Dange (Bombay) and other communists in India. He warned Muzaffar Ahmad of the despatch to India of one Ashleigh and also of some Moscow-trained students, particularly Shaukat Usmani. He discussed arrangements for sending money to Muzaffar Ahmad, and stated that he had sent some £250 to various addresses in Calcutta, most of which was intended for Muzaffar Ahmad. Three letters

88. *Ibid.*

89. *Conviction... in Bolshevik Conspiracy Case*, n. 12, p. 43.

90. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

91. *Ibid.*, p. 58.

from Muzaffar Ahmad to Roy were intercepted, but there is strong evidence that a number of letters could not be intercepted. In writing to Roy, Muzaffar Ahmad complained of the difficulty he experienced in receiving copies of *The Vanguard*.<sup>92</sup> From Berlin, Roy wrote to Muzaffar Ahmad on 18 February 1923:

"A person from the North-West will come to see you. His name is Usmani. He is our man... A party must be organised now. The salvation of India will not be secured through a handful of orthodox communists. These things will be discussed on your arrival here (Berlin to attend the conference). It will be well if you can bring with you a letter of introduction from any Labour Association."<sup>93</sup>

After reaching Calcutta, Usmani duly informed Roy. Thereupon a letter was written by M. N. Roy to Shaikat Usmani. This letter is of sufficient importance:

"Received your letter from Calcutta, also the article which will be published; but I request you to write more informative things in future.

"In my letter instructing you to go to Calcutta you were told about the work there. To have a conference of those agreeing with our ideas and programme is very important for the future of our work. We know that a favourable atmosphere has been created by our propaganda as well as by the collapse of the noncooperative movement. We must begin the organisation of our party. This must begin with a conference. I want you to see the people in Calcutta who are supposed to agree with us at least partially and convince them of the necessity of the conference. This work has to be done in other provinces. I have already written you to see if some of your people in the UP could be sent. At least 5 or 6 men must come here from the various provinces. M.A. (Muzaffar Ahmad) knows about it all, talk to him if he has not left already. See that he leaves as soon as possible. Some-

92. *Ibid.*, pp. 88-89.

93. Cited in the *Judgment in Bolshevik Conspiracy Case*, n. 38, pp. 25 and 31.

one is to make arrangement for the technical side. Party organisation must be started. The groups in different provinces should be linked in a national organisation. All these things have to be definitely decided in a conference. To send best available delegates is your immediate task. I understand that you cannot do the work satisfactorily without some money. But you never wrote me how to send it to you. Can I send a cheque to this address? Recently I have sent some money to M. A. for the passage of the prospective delegates. Perhaps meanwhile you can use some of it if the delegates do not leave at once. Anyhow I am sending you a small amount to this address to make a trial. But write me where and how to send more. We have five centres to link up:

1. Inquilab group in Lahore
2. Dange group in Bombay
3. Your people in the UP
4. M. A. & Co. in Calcutta
5. Singaravelu group in Madras.

"So you see we have a good framework to build upon. I do not say that all these people are all that is desired: but we will have to work with available material. As soon as you finish Calcutta it will be necessary to visit all the centres. Dange is very good but he has to work under great difficulty. Singaravelu is a fine old man and can be of great use for legal work. In every province a centre for distributing literature must be organised. Some safe addresses are to be found where large bundles of our paper can be sent from England. The distribution must be done in India... I am not writing M. A. because he may have left already. If he is there tell him everything in this letter and ask him if he received the money (£150)... Enclosed is a letter for Dange. Send to some address in Bombay to be delivered personally. You or M. or somebody else must have an acquaintance there. His letters cannot be entrusted to the mail. Have you got the appeal to the Labour Organisation about Chauri Chaura sentence and has anything been done to publish it in Vernacular?



"With greetings to you and M. A.

Roy

"P. S. Try to get in touch with the editor of the 'Student' and see if something can be done to bring a delegation to Congress from the youth of India. Best wishes and greetings.

E. R."<sup>94</sup>

Usmani wrote a letter to Roy on 24 April 1923. This letter for some reason or other was not yet posted when Usmani was arrested. In this letter Usmani complained that the movement "to rally the workers and peasants on our side" was hindered by various "reactionary" influences, which he enumerated. He said that the remedy did not lie in starting one or two newspapers, "which can be easily suppressed under one or another Act" but that "something of greater dimensions is required". "Armed intervention is the last doctor which can save the Indian proletariat from the grave." The letter further on said: "Arouse and assault: you win, Arouse and rest: you lose. This was because of the latter along with some other things that Gandhism failed." He ended the letter with a postscript: "We may as well call this period of reaction, a period of preparation."<sup>95</sup>

On 19 March 1923 Roy wrote a letter to Usmani in which he pleaded for the convening of a conference in Europe of pioneers from all the provinces of India. The conference delegates on their return were to call a national convention. Meanwhile Usmani was instructed to form a nucleus and groups all over the country.<sup>96</sup>

In February 1923 Maulana Abdul Qadir Subhani of Kanpur published a swaraj scheme which exhibited distinct traces of communist influence.<sup>97</sup>

#### COMMUNIST ACTIVITIES IN CENTRAL PROVINCES

There existed also a tentative communist organisation in the Central Provinces. Its chief was S. Satyabhakta, editor of

94. *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

95. Cited as exhibit 44 by the prosecution in Cawnpore Communist Trial; *Judgment in Bolshevik Conspiracy Case*, n. 38, p. 9.

96. Cited, *Ibid.*, p. 12.

97. *Conviction... in Bolshevik Conspiracy Case*, n. 12, p. 44.

*Pravara*. In February 1923 he wrote to Dange saying that he was already a subscriber to some communist newspapers but wanted more. He intended to start a special newspaper for peasants and workers, in which the tenets of Marxism could find frequent expression. By April 1923 he was a regular publisher of communist literature.

At the beginning of July 1923 a communist pamphlet in Hindi published by him was intercepted in the post by the local Intelligence Bureau. From its contents it was obvious that his emphasis was on nationalistic communism. It was entitled "A Message to the Indian Proletariat" and was described as "Proletariat Series No. 1", so that it became evident that there were evidently more to follow.<sup>98</sup> S. Satyabhakta also started a new paper, *Shrama Jivi*, shortly afterwards.<sup>99</sup>

It may not be irrelevant to point out here that from as early as 1922 the *Communist Manifesto* of Marx and Engels and similar Marxist literature were being widely and exhaustively read by progressive-minded intelligentsia in Bombay, Calcutta and other important industrial centres.<sup>100</sup> Though Marxism had not gained large number of adherents, writes Sampurnanand who also interested himself in the study of up-to-date communist literature in those days with the help of Shaukat Usmani, but it had certainly gained in respectability. He adds that many of the falsehoods uttered about it like the canard about the nationalisation of women had been exposed and it had come to be recognised as a body of thought which favoured the destruction of imperialism, the emancipation of nationalities deprived of their freedom, and "bettering" the social, political and economic condition of the poor and the down-trodden.<sup>101</sup>

Guided by the philosophy of Marxism the communists began to take a keen interest in organising trade unions on the

98. A summary of the Secret Report on Communist activities prepared in 1923-24 by P. C. Bamford, Deputy Director, Central Intelligence Bureau, *Conviction... in Bolshevik Conspiracy Case*, n. 12, p. 100.

99. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

100. *New Age* (Monthly), April 1958.

101. Sampurnanand, n. 77, p. 42.

basis of the tactics of revolutionary struggle. The then leaders of trade unions were dubbed as "moderates" and "reformists" and ceaseless endeavours were made to control the trade unions under their hegemony. Various efforts were made between 1922 and 1928 to build some organ of political mass action in which they could exercise the effectiveness of the working class. They were also supported in their efforts by the Communist International, whose Fourth World Congress (1922) sent a telegram to the Lahore session of the All India Trade Union Congress. The message called upon the organisation not to restrict the working class movement to fighting only for "a fair day's wage for a fair day's work" and added: "The economic emancipation of the peasants and workers depends upon the political liberty of the nation."<sup>102</sup> In accordance with the line of international communism, Roy also advised that the task before the Trade Union Congress was not reform but revolution. It was not conservative trade unionism based upon bankrupt theory of "collective bargaining", but revolutionary mass action involving the pauperised peasantry as well as the city and rural wage earners and led by those who wanted to see that India enter upon a period of social progress. He added: "The Trade Union Congress must free itself from the leadership which believes in piecemeal reform."<sup>103</sup>

#### INDIAN COMMUNISTS ABROAD

Meanwhile Indian revolutionaries abroad were also actively engaged in overthrowing British rule in India. In fact during this period Berlin became a very important centre of revolutionaries. In the first part of the "very secret" Indian Office Report sent to the Home Department of the Government of India, and covering the period from 21 November to 10 May 1923, there appears the following significant passage:

"The importance of Berlin as a centre of Indian intrigue has considerably increased in the period under review. The

102. J. Degras, n. 1, pp. 393-94.

103. M. N. Roy, *Political Letters*, Calcutta, 1942, pp. 19-20. For further study also see L. P. Sinha, *The Left-wing in India*, Muzaffarpur, 1965, pp. 113-15.

summary will show a remarkable extension of M. N. Roy's activities, a new Indian Independence Party under Barkatullah has come into existence with Bolshevik assistance, and a number of prominent seditionists, including M. P. Trimal Acharya... Dr Mansur and Muhammad Ali and Obeidullah, who worked for the Bolsheviks in Afghanistan, have come to Berlin from Moscow."<sup>104</sup>

In September 1922, Rashkolnikov, a Soviet government official in the Soviet Embassy in Berlin, applied to Moscow for supplies of Roy's proscribed literature for India.<sup>105</sup>

In November 1922 at Moscow Roy acknowledged Rashkolnikov's assistance with regard to communications.

Roy had also opened branches of the Indian Congress and Indian Labour Party in Berlin on the suggestion of Tival, General Secretary of the Red Trade Unions, who was supervising Roy's work in Berlin on behalf of the Comintern. G. Sokolnikov, Soviet Commissar of Finance, is alleged to have been connected with the grant of a subsidy of £120,000 for Roy's work in 1923.<sup>106</sup> The India Office Report also alleged that Roy's chief aim was "to create a serious labour movement in India".<sup>107</sup> Admitting the fact that Roy had altogether sent to the communists in India very little money, the Report stated: "It is... surprising that he should be able to show such good results" (in organising communists in India).<sup>108</sup> The Report also admitted that Roy's work "was suitably appreciated" by the Congress of the Communist International held in Moscow in October-November 1922. But a call was also made to him for more practical work as distinct from propaganda.<sup>109</sup> The same World Congress also emphasised on the need of anti-imperialist united front. But it also stated that the workers' movement in the colonial and semi-colonial countries must first of all win for

104. *Conviction... in the Bolshevik Conspiracy Case*, n. 12, p. 48.

105. *Ibid.*, p. 49.

106. *Ibid.*, p. 48.

107. *Ibid.*

108. *Ibid.*, p. 49.

109. *Ibid.*

itself the position of an independent revolutionary factor in the anti-imperialist front as a whole.<sup>110</sup>

In January 1923, after consultation in Berlin with leading British communists, it was decided to open an Information Bureau to connect Indian and European labour organisations.<sup>111</sup> A start was made in February 1923 when the Bureau sent a revolutionary Manifesto to Indian newspapers. This was published by *The Nation* (Lahore) under the heading "Down with Imperialism".<sup>112</sup>

On the occasion of the Leipzig Congress of the German Communist Party held from 25 January to 2 February 1923, the German communist leaders, Heckert and Thalheimer, participated in a meeting, organised by Roy and others, in which it was decided to start an organisation called the Indian Labour Bureau.<sup>113</sup> On receiving this news the India Office was alarmed. It believed that the new organisation was "likely to prove mischievous".<sup>114</sup>

Meanwhile one Gop Ballabh Roy was sent as an emissary to Calcutta in September 1922 from Glasgow. Another emissary, Amitava Ghose, who had been working for Roy in France, came to India in December. G. A. K. Lohani was also reported to be on his way to India. Information had been received in the India Office of the way the intended deputation to India sent by the Communist International and led by an Englishman named Charles was to take at the end of 1922. It was also rumoured that in January 1923 an organiser to be nominated by the British Communist Party would arrive in India.<sup>115</sup>

In September four Russian stowaways were detained in Colombo. One of them, named Robin Kantor, escaped to Madras, where he was arrested and sent back to Colombo. While in jail in Madras, he was found converting political prisoners.<sup>116</sup> This

110. J. Degras, n. 1, p. 390.

111. *Conviction... in Bolshevik Conspiracy Case*, n. 12, p. 49.

112. *Ibid.*

113. *Ibid.*

114. *Ibid.*, p. 55.

115. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

116. *Ibid.*

political traffic was, however, not one way. Two young Bengalis named Bhupati Dutt and Jyotindra Mitter arrived in Europe in September and November respectively as emissaries from the Bengal revolutionary group. Nine such emissaries appeared to have come to Berlin since Roy settled there. In January 1923 Muhammad Ashraf, of the National Muslim University, Aligarh, was endeavouring to leave for Germany to get into touch with Roy.<sup>117</sup>

Roy also established contacts with B. C. Banerji of Leeds and Khitish Chattopadhyay of Cambridge. They had both been distributing Roy's communist literature. The former had been in touch with Bridget O'Harte, an Irish communist. An English communist named Murphy spoke to Roy about O'Harte in Moscow, where Roy had taken a programme prepared by him for submission to the Comintern. Ajoy Banerji, who had been working in connection with the Lascar Welfare League, was reported to have asked the British communist leaders Tom Bell and Albert Inkpin to have him sent to Moscow.

British communists like Newbold, Donovan, Impich and others took part in January 1923 in the consultations in Berlin which led to the formation of the Indian Labour Bureau. Efforts were also made to secure the cooperation of Saklatvala, an Indian member of the British Parliament. Saklatvala had also delivered a militant speech in an Indian conference in England and he believed that labour should have a common international policy. Meanwhile Robert Stewart, a British communist, had been trying to win over Indian students at Dundee University. On the other hand, Roy and his emissaries were using a number of accommodation addresses in England.

Political activities in Britain continued. The Lascar Welfare League arranged a tea-party to 100 lascars on 28 January 1923. Communism was preached on one or two other occasions. Ajoy Banerji and Cleetus were, however, not satisfied with the League and wished to start something even more militant.<sup>118</sup>

117. *Ibid.*

118. *Ibid.*, pp. 52-53.

Finally, Ajoy Banerji, Pulin Dinda and J. G. Sen had a discussion with Saklatvala. As a result, a meeting was held on 25 February 1923. The speakers were Saklatvala, George Lansbury and N. Watkins of the Red International Labour Union (RILU). Shortly afterwards a constitution was drawn up with the help of Potter of the RILU for an "Indian Seamen's Association". Apparently, as a compromise, affiliation to the RILU was not insisted on, but a clause was inserted containing a declaration of identity of principle with the RILU. This nominal moderation is probably due to Saklatvala's influence as he evidently did not wish the association to be entirely dominated by the RILU through which he was working. It did not please Ajoy Banerji, but he accepted a place on the Executive Committee with Saklatvala as president and two lascar lodging-house keepers as assistant secretaries. The other members were P. B. Dinda, J. G. Sen and Rajeswaran.<sup>119</sup>

At a meeting on 11 March 1923 it was decided that the RILU should secure a room for meetings and provide literature for distribution all over the world by means of lascars.<sup>120</sup>

On 14 March 1923 the RILU and the ECCI issued a joint statement condemning the passing of the death sentence on 172 persons involved in the Chauri Chaura incident. They called upon the international proletariat not to allow this "imperialist mass murder" to take place without protest. The signatories of the joint appeal laid down that the revolt of the working masses of the colonial countries was powerful element in the revolutionary struggle for the overthrow of the bourgeois dictatorship and the establishment of a new social order. Therefore energetic action must be taken on behalf of "our Indian comrades, who are waging a bloody struggle against the imperialist terror". The signatories also called upon the workers of the world to organise protest meetings and demonstrations which should demand that the condemned men be set free. The signatories also called upon the workers of Britain in particular to take the lead in this affair and demand that the

119. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

120. *Ibid.*

Labour Party should take action in Parliament against "this bloody deed of British imperialism".<sup>121</sup>

At a meeting on 8 April 1923 the title "Oriental International Seamen's Union" was adopted. Leaders like Mackenzie (of the National Seamen's Union who worked secretly for the RILU) and Evans were present. It was announced that the Workers' Welfare League had accepted P. B. Dinda as the union's representative. This union was merely the oriental branch of the RILU Workers' Welfare League of India. It had also accepted an application for affiliation from the Employees' Association, Calcutta, made through Saklatvala, Dr Bhatt being nominated as the Association's representative.<sup>122</sup>

Saklatvala appealed to the League for money for the organisation of Indian seamen.

According to the confession application made on 14 January 1924 by Ghulam Hussain, one of the accused in the Cawnpore Conspiracy Case, there were a few *ex-Komagata Maru* Sikhs who got money from Khushi Mohammad *alias* Muhammad Ali, one of the founders and President of Communist Party of India in Soviet Union, to finance Mota Singh's Babbar Akali movement in India. Money was drawn from Russian Legations in Kabul through the Russian doctor working honorarily in the Chief Afghan Hospital.<sup>123</sup>

In December 1922 an Egyptian named Nasir, a socialist, who possessed a "Red Card", promised to be of help in smuggling *The Advance Guard* from Port Said to India. As regards Japan, in October, one Hugo Espinoza wrote to Roy for money with which to start a business. He discussed Roy's work and mentioned Nalini Gupta's return to Moscow. So far as the United States of America was concerned, Roy appeared to have helped Santokh Singh and Rattan Singh of the Ghadar Party to come to Moscow. They had been trying to get to India with the aid of the Indian Independence Party. Indar Singh of the Ghadar

121. J. Degras, ed., *The Communist International, 1919-1943: Documents*, Oxford University Press, 1960, Vol. II, p. 13.

122. *Conviction... in Bolshevik Conspiracy Case*, n. 12, p. 53.

123. *Ibid.*, p. 119.



Party wrote to Roy on 3 January 1923 from San Francisco promising cooperation whenever needed.<sup>124</sup>

#### ATTEMPT OF ROY TO RETURN HOME

In the meantime through a letter written from Zurich (Switzerland) on 21 February 1924, Roy sought the permission of the British Labour Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald, to return to India in order to organise the freedom movement. He wrote to him that as a socialist and representative of the British people, MacDonald "must agree that it is no crime to claim" the right of self-determination for one's country. He asked whether simple socialist propaganda became "subversive Bolshevik propaganda" as soon as it reached India. Indian socialists and the Indian proletariat, he declared, were entitled to have their international affiliation just as much as any of those who were adherents of the British Labour Party and of the International to which the Prime Minister himself belonged. He added that there might be others who preferred other international proletarian organisations. He also stated that it was a mere question of opinion and that in no country at that time was the socialist movement free from this difference of opinion. Therefore, the fact of his membership of the Communist International, he continued, could not reasonably deprive him of the right of living and working in India, when adherents of the same International were not deprived of identical rights in Britain.<sup>125</sup>

The permission, however, never came.

Meanwhile communist activities to eliminate British rule continued unabated. It is evident from an exchange of views in 1924 in the British Parliament. Sir W. David asked the British Prime Minister in question hour, whether his attention had been called to the terms of a resolution moved by Zinoviev at a session of the Executive of the Third International demanding that an independent democratic republic should be set up in India as soon as the Indian people had "thrown off the British yoke" and

124. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

125. *Letter Addressed by M. N. Roy...* n. 32, pp. 3-4.

pledging support for these revolutionary movements directed towards "overthrow of the British empire".<sup>126</sup> He also asked what action the government proposed to take in the matter. The Prime Minister replied that the information was confined to press references and that until he had official confirmation and had had an opportunity to consider the full text he would "prefer to make no statement upon the question asked."<sup>127</sup>

#### CAWNPORE COMMUNIST TRIAL

All these spirited communist forces—in India as well as abroad—were relentlessly engaged in waging an unflagging struggle against all the distortions imposed on the Indian social structure by the colonial rulers. They were naturally regarded as a real danger to their rule in India by the British imperialists. They were thoroughly frightened. It is evident from the study of a "very secret" report of the India Office and the frequent communications from the Secretary of State for India to the New Delhi government.

While on the one hand the Public Bureau of the India Office was cautioning the Government of India that "Roy's 'foundation' has grown into a framework" and that "money is being spent lavishly on propaganda and sparingly on agents and organisation", the Secretary of State was worried over the "growing danger of communist or quasi-communist propaganda". He was constantly enquiring of the Government of India whether it had armed itself with adequate powers to put it down.<sup>128</sup> In a confidential note, which grew into a large and nebulous essay on the communist "conspiracy" the Home Secretary to the Government of India, J. Crerar, indicated that they had conclusive evidence to the fact that in the course of the previous year "energetic attention" had been "devoted to revolutionary propaganda" in India, that large sums had been spent for the purpose, and that

126. Home (Pol.) Department, Government of India, File No. 29/XI, 1925, p. 1.

127. *Ibid.*

128. See the confidential note dated 2 June 1923 by J. Crerar, Home Secretary to the Government of India, *Conciliation... in Bolshevik Conspiracy Case*, n. 12, p. 1.

the organisation had been greatly improved. He added that the immediate and potential dangers of the communist movement in India, even as an isolated factor, were sufficiently obvious. But there was evidence, he added, of what was still more "dangerous" development in the establishment of contacts between the Bolshevik and communist agencies and other "foci of disorder". On the one hand, he said, there were the representatives of the old Bengali revolutionaries, many of whom were personally close to M. N. Roy and who, since the failure of the noncooperation movement, had been rapidly moving towards a resumption of their former revolutionary programme. On the other, he noted, there were C. R. Das and the extreme left of the Congress Party, who had not concealed their intention to "organise the proletariat" and (as stated in a speech made some time back by Das at Madras) to resort to "direct action". He believed that "between these two groups" Roy's communists occupied a "dangerously convenient tactical position". Any action, he felt, which would have the effect of "discrediting Roy and putting some of his principal agents out of action in the most important centres would, therefore, be particularly opportune and well directed". It would be additionally opportune, he concluded, as corroborating "the recent expose by His Majesty's government of the anti-British activities of the Soviet Republic".<sup>129</sup>

A copy of this note was sent to L. Graham (Private Secretary to the Governor-General), who sought the opinion of the legal department on the prospect of a conviction being obtained, under the ordinary law, of the accused communists on the material available. The case was to be treated as urgent as one of the accused was then in remand which was to terminate very shortly.<sup>130</sup>

Meanwhile the Private Secretary to the Governor-General also contacted Colonel Kaye, Director, Intelligence Bureau, who immediately supplied him with certain judgments passed in the courts of the North-West Frontier Province, including the judgment passed recently in the so-called Peshawar Con-

129. *Ibid.*

130. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

spiracy Case. The earlier case was mainly concerned with the "conspiracy" involving the Samarkand group and was believed to be distinct from the organisation of which Roy was the central figure. In the Peshawar Case the government was concerned with very much the same facts as those which they had to consider in connection with the accused in the so-called Cawnpore Conspiracy Case.<sup>131</sup>

The government also based its case on certain journals published abroad by the communists, like *The Vanguard* and *The Advance Guard*, and on some political pamphlets written by Roy and later supplied by him in an appendix to his letter written to the British Labour Prime Minister in February 1924. Though the Private Secretary to the Governor-General had not yet seen the original documents he remarked on the basis of certain extracts quoted from these documents in the judgments of the courts in the North-West Frontier Province: "...it ought to be possible to establish the purposes of the organisation from its literature, and to secure a finding that it is a conspiracy to upset British rule in India".<sup>132</sup>

One may note here that the court in the Peshawar Conspiracy Case attached great importance to a letter alleged to have been written by Roy to Dange. The government believed this letter to be valuable because it linked up Usmani with Dange and would be of great assistance in prosecuting the five communists. But the Private Secretary to the Governor-General, L. Graham, doubted if prosecution would result in the accused being found guilty as he believed that many of the statements made there could not be proved in the court.<sup>133</sup> So he added in his confidential note: "In these circumstances, we are not in a position to advise whether it will be advisable to prove to the satisfaction of a court that 'R's' <sup>134</sup> organisation is a conspiracy against British rule punishable under section 121-A, to prove that each of

131. *Ibid.*

132. *Ibid.*

133. *Ibid.*

134. The word has been used for Roy's revolutionary organisation in India. Letters alleged to be written by him to his comrades in India constituted the very foundation of the case.

the five persons under consideration was implicated in that conspiracy."<sup>135</sup> Sir Muhammad Shafi, Law Member, concurred with L. Graham, and said in his pungent remarks that the case to his mind was based on secondary evidence, and that in the absence of original documents, it could not be treated as a sound one. He also charged that the learned sessions judge in the Peshawar Conspiracy Case adopted an "extraordinary process of reasoning" by accepting the material of secondary evidence of the contents of these documents produced by the prosecution counsel.<sup>136</sup>

M. Shafi added that "I shall be surprised if this (sessions) judgment is upheld by the Judicial Commissioner even of the North-West Frontier Province". He also said: "To my mind, it is perfectly obvious that if, for any reason, the originals of Roy's letters to his various correspondents in India mentioned in the general statement regarding Roy's previous history and activities, as well as in the particular statements regarding each of the five accused persons now under arrest, cannot be produced in the court or grounds for admissibility of secondary evidence definitely established and Roy's signature proved, it is hopeless to expect conviction of these persons from any court of law at Bombay, Madras, Calcutta, Lucknow or Lahore where, of course, naturally the contemplated trial will have to take place... Unless the Home Department are in a position to (produce the original documents), a prosecution in court would be absolutely futile, and in consequence, resort to action under Regulation III of 1818 would constitute the only remedy."<sup>137</sup>

Another member, B. N. Sharma, agreed with Sir Muhammad Shafi. He objected to moving the law courts because in that case the government would have to expose their agents to danger and impair their usefulness in future and they could not risk a failure.<sup>138</sup> Moreover, he believed that the men sought to be proceeded against were insignificant men, and he was not sure that action against them under the regulation would have any great

135. *Conviction... in the Bolshevik Conspiracy Case*, n. 12. p. 2.

136. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

137. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

138. *Ibid.*

effect. He said that the risk of failure by proceeding against them in a law court was large and that the government would be discredited equally by an exposure of their method and by any disclaimer that they might issue.<sup>139</sup> But the most important reason that Sharma advanced was:

"By proceeding under the regulation we may have arraigned against us the middle classes (as well as labour) who not knowing the reasons would be frightened by our action in resorting to ultra-legal methods and would be moved by the false sympathy and a return of autocracy. My natural instincts and training rebel against the use of the regulation (III of 1818)."<sup>140</sup>

The Member was, however, ready to support the prosecution in case the materials on which the government was asked to proceed could be proved in a court. He believed that by adopting such a course of action the government "would be opening the eyes of... the men who have any stake in the country including in this term the small zamindar and ryotwary profiteer, tradesmen and the intellectuals to the dangers of the movement. We shall thereby... may also reasonably expect their cordial support and cooperation in dealing an effectual blow against revolutionary propaganda."<sup>141</sup>

Commenting on the feasibility of prosecuting the communist leaders C. A. Innes, a Member of Viceroy's Council, reiterated his well-known antipathy towards Bolshevism and remarked emphatically on 7 June 1923:

"There is no reason for doubt that the CID has unearthed a dangerous conspiracy not merely against the British Government in India but against the whole structure of law and order. There also seems no reason for doubt that the five men mentioned in the 'case' are the principal agents in India of conspiracy, and if they are swiftly and suddenly removed, we shall probably disorganise, at any rate for the time being, the whole mechanism of the conspiracy. I quite see the

139. *Ibid.*

140. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

141. *Ibid.*

Hon'ble Sir B. N. Sharma's point of view, but it is doubtful whether legal evidence can be furnished against the five men and in any case action under the IPC would involve long delay and might compromise our informants. It would also make public the methods which the CID has to adopt in unearthing this Bolshevik campaign. *This is the time to strike. The Bolsheviks have been discredited by His Majesty's Government's note to the Soviet government and I think that the balance of advantage lies in swift action under the Regulation III.*"<sup>142</sup>

Another Member, P. B. Blackett, agreed with Innes. Likewise, Rawlinson, the Commander-in-Chief, also agreed that action should be taken at an early date.<sup>143</sup> But A. C. Chatterjee, another Indian Member, disagreed with the abovementioned views. He was inclined to agree with Sharma's views, and doubted whether the imprisonment or deportation of five communists would "nip the conspiracy in the bud". He held that it seemed to him that other "conspiracies" would take their place. He also doubted whether the activities of the five communists and their associates constituted any real danger to the state as to necessitate the employment of the exceptional powers given to the government by the Regulation of 1818.<sup>144</sup>

Meanwhile, the file related to the case was circulated. On 7 June 1923 the Viceroy's Council met and passed an order for action against Shaukat Usmani (of Rajputana), Ghulam Hus-sain (of Punjab) and Muzaffar Ahmad (of Bengal). The Home Department despatched telegrams to the local governments. The warrants were drawn up and issued in accordance with precedents, and attention was drawn to the conditions of internment under the regulation.<sup>145</sup>

On 23 June 1923 J. Crerar, Home Secretary, went to Madras and had an interview with C. P. Ramaswami Ayyar. The latter informed him that he personally had long been of opinion that

142. *Ibid.*, p. 5. Emphasis added.

143. *Ibid.*

144. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

145. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

the development of the communist movement in India was one of the "most serious dangers which we have to face at present" and that it would be "extremely inadvisable and dangerous to omit measures to control it". Particularly Ayyar had on several occasions considered the "desirability or feasibility" of prosecuting Singaravelu. He stated that as soon as possible he would have a conference with the officers of Law Department of the Madras government and would examine very closely the possibility of prosecuting him.

Meanwhile, on 25 June 1923, W. M. Hailey, the Home Member, advised the Punjab government that Ghulam Hussain should be encouraged to make a confession possibly with a view to "forswearing his knavish tricks and getting free of jail". Hailey believed that Ghulam Hussain was the "kind of man who may be willing to sell others. We need make no promises as Ghulam Hussain is seriously alarmed."<sup>146</sup>

On 16 July 1923, A. Montgomerie, Secretary to the Government of Bombay, Home Department, replied from Poona to his counterpart in New Delhi J. C. Crerar's enquiry about the possibility of taking action against S. A. Dange in respect of his activities as "one of the principal agents in India of M. N. Roy".<sup>147</sup> According to Montgomerie's letter, the Bombay government was opposed to the move because sufficient material was not available to ensure his conviction. It first wanted to build up a case before launching a prosecution. The letter read:

"While recognising the grave dangers to be apprehended from the spread of the communist movement in India and while anxious to assist the Government of India in the important object of defeating this dangerous and insidious organisation, His Excellency the Governor-in-Council, after a careful and comprehensive review of the activities of Dange, has come to the conclusions that it would not be expedient at the present moment to take any action against him... Dange's book *Gandhi vs Lenin* and the numbers of his *Socialist* newspaper, which mainly comprise his public activities, have

146. *Ibid.*

147. *Ibid.*, p. 14.



been very carefully examined. There is very little in them that could be called anti-British."

Referring to the contents of Dange's writings the letter continued:

"There is a certain amount of loose talk about foreign domination and the necessity of getting rid of it, but the bulk is devoted to pointing out that India would be no better off if it got rid of the British as a result of the activities of the present political parties, because they themselves are bourgeois and will do nothing for the proletariat. They are the ordinary stock-in-trade of the communist stamp orator—exploitation of the working class, wage slavery, the class war, etc. ad nauseam. The pages of the *Socialist* are little concerned with government and the objective of publication is the capitalist system. There are some objectionable passages in the book *Gandhi vs Lenin*, which, if published separately, might have sufficed for a case, though not a very strong one, under section 124-A, Indian Penal Code, but considered as a whole, government are advised that a court of law would probably take the view that the object of the book was essentially not the overthrow of the government by law established, but of the industrial system."<sup>148</sup>

Pointing out the sources that could help in the prosecution of Dange, the letter continued:

"The only other course open to government to take action against Dange under the ordinary law would be under section 121-A, Indian Penal Code, and that only by connecting him with Roy's criminal conspiracy to bring about a revolution in British India. It would be necessary, in this event, to prove—in the Bombay High Court—that Dange conspired with Roy to overthrow the government established by law in British India. There is nearly one way in which that could be done and that is by putting before the court a full disclosure of all the information in the possession of government about Roy's activities and Dange's connection with Roy

and his emissaries in India, in other words by laying bare the whole of our secret sources of information. That, presumably, is a course which the Government of India will not contemplate."<sup>149</sup>

Besides, the confidential letter opposed the prosecution of Dange on the ground that he was in a way a public man, a member of the Congress organisation and in close touch with many of the leaders of the Das party. Moreover, the Governor-in-Council believed that so far there had been no signs that he was the sort of man whom they really must fear—"the man who will go out to the districts and stir up trouble by preaching the division of land and wealth". "He is a pure doctrinaire", the letter added.<sup>150</sup> Furthermore, the Government of Bombay believed that as they had been regularly intercepting Roy's letters to Dange from abroad, so he was their most fruitful source of information as to Bolshevik activities. Moreover, so long as Dange remained quiescent, he would be a good source of regular and useful information. If he was arrested immediately, the news would also spread abroad and all the letters from abroad addressed to him would stop.<sup>151</sup>

When this letter was sent on 27 July 1923 to Col. Kaye, Director, Intelligence Bureau, for consultation, the latter thought that the views expressed in the letter should be accepted. He had in the meantime collected all the data bearing on the question of the prosecution, under the ordinary law, of the other three internees. He held that in all the three cases, he thought that there was a "strong moral case, but a weak legal one: and this also applies to Dange (and to Singaravelu)". So the Director proposed the alternative that the action should be taken under Regulation III of 1818, which was, of course, as distasteful to the Government of India as to Government of Bombay. Personally, he did not think that Dange's position as "in a way a public man" would make any difference to the reception, by the Indian public, of his internment.

149. *Ibid.*

150. *Ibid.*

151. *Ibid.*

No decision could be taken for the time being in regard to Singaravelu and his chief lieutenant, Velayudhan Pillai, although the Government of Madras was opposed to this attitude of the Government of India which wanted to wait and see what disclosures Ghulam Hussain would make in regard to Dange and Singaravelu. But the Assistant Director of Intelligence Bureau found later that the statement made by Ghulam Hussain was not a "confession".<sup>152</sup> In his opinion Ghulam Hussain was "entirely unreliable".<sup>153</sup> After reading his statement another high official of the government, J. V. B. Harescott, noted in the confidential file that he was not satisfied that Ghulam Hussain had disclosed all he knew about the Bolsheviks and their counterparts in India.<sup>154</sup> Col. Kaye also remarked on 3 August 1923:

"It does not contain anything that strengthens the case against the other Indian communists and in fact, while correcting our information on certain minor points, does not add to what we already know."<sup>155</sup>

The Home Secretary, J. Crerar, noted in his file that Ghulam Hussain was a "copious, but not very competent, liar". He admitted that in its bearing on the case of the other persons implicated, it had added "nothing material".<sup>156</sup>

Meanwhile, the attitude of Col. Kaye had also changed. He began to exert all his influence to persuade the Home Department to hold the trial. Emphasising its importance, he remarked on 3 August 1923:

"Our object, in dealing with these Indian communists, is not so much to punish them as to discredit—and we hope to destroy—Roy's organisation. In furtherance of this object, I would personally welcome the use of the Regulation against Singaravelu and Velayudhan as, indeed, I would also welcome it against Dange: since the latter, by continuing to correspond with Roy, continues to provide him with 'ammunition'."

152. *Ibid.*, p. 33.

153. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

154. *Ibid.*, p. 36.

155. *Ibid.*

156. *Ibid.*, p. 38.

nication' for retaining his influence with the Bolsheviks. As I noted recently, I think, it is reasonable to accept the view of the Government of Bombay as regards Dange, even though I don't agree with Bolsheviks."

Commenting on the position of Singaravelu and his chief lieutenant he stated:

"As I noted recently, I think it is reasonable to accept also the view of the Government of Madras regarding Singaravelu. If this be so, I will add Singaravelu's name in the list of those whose 'legal' case I am examining and that of Velayudhan as well."

Referring to the weak position of the government from the legal point of view, he continued:

"But the examination, while practically certain to disclose no legal case against any of the three present internees—not owing to absence of evidence, but owing to absence of ability to prove that it is 'good' evidence—is, I think, absolutely certain to disclose no legal case against Singaravelu and Velayudhan."

Nevertheless, he added:

"I look upon Singaravelu as a dangerous agitator, who is conducting under the legal cover an admittedly illegal revolutionary programme, with ability; and upon Velayudhan as a subordinate who, if his principal is removed, would be a really efficient substitute for him. I am, therefore, personally of opinion that the use of the Regulation, against both, is desirable and justified, but whatever may be the decision of the Government of India, I would represent that the examination of the legal case against them need not be awaited, not even taken account of, in arriving at that decision."<sup>157</sup>

On receiving these remarks, the Home Secretary, J. Crerar, noted:

"I agree with Colonel Kaye that the proposals of the Madras government should be approved. This will complete the

round-up of the more dangerous members of the group and deprive M. N. Roy of the last (except Dange) of his more important correspondents."<sup>158</sup>

Expressing his views on Dange, the Home Secretary remarked that the warning proposed to be administered to Dange could be more effective after action had been taken in the case of the two communists from Madras. He added: "It is true that something is to be gained by leaving Dange alone under close surveillance as a source of intelligence (by intercepting his correspondence with Roy) but I am more impressed by Director, Intelligence Bureau's view that our main object of discrediting Roy will be better attained by depriving him of tangible evidence to produce to his Bolshevik backers of effective correspondence with India."<sup>159</sup> The Home Member, W. M. Hailey, remarked on 14 August 1923: "We shall have done Roy sufficient harm in this case."<sup>160</sup> As regards Singaravelu, he believed that the government had somewhat prejudiced the case by their delaying with the case for a general prosecution of these people. He noted that the government was not yet ready with the case and that it had only just got the material for reference to the Advocate General on the main question whether a "conspiracy" could be said to have been initiated by Roy. The government could plead, he added, special grounds for taking two of their three detenus under Regulation III; but those grounds did not apply to Singaravelu, and he, being Home Member, could not conscientiously press his case in Council unless he could show either that the Roy "conspiracy" could not be proved or that if it could be proved he could not be connected with it. The Home Member also said that as the Home Secretary was aware, the government might need Regulation III very soon for a "much more dangerous case (of Bengal Revolutionaries), and he did not want to prejudice the case".<sup>161</sup>

On 13 August 1923, the Home Secretary, J. Crerar, first des-

158. *Ibid.*

159. *Ibid.*, p. 39.

160. *Ibid.*

161. *Ibid.*

patched a telegram and then wrote a confidential letter to the Government of Madras:

"Please refer to my telegram... regarding Singaravelu. The reason why the Government of India are unable to arrive at an immediate decision regarding Singaravelu and Velayudhan is as follows:

We have reliable intelligence that the Bengal revolutionaries have taken definite steps to put into effect their revived policy of assassination... several obnoxious police officers as engaging their attentions. It may be necessary, to prevent attempts of this kind, to use the Regulation at a moment's notice on a fairly extensive scale. With this in prospect, and as the Regulation was of course to be resorted to as sparingly as possible, the Government of India would prefer to defer action in Singaravelu's case which is much less urgent than that of the Bengalis, till the situation regarding the latter is more definite.

"Will you kindly explain the position to Mr Aiyar with whom I discussed the case when he was in Simla?"<sup>162</sup>

In the middle of August 1923 the whole case with a number of exhibits centring on M. N. Roy as the main culprit was sent through the Government Solicitor to the Advocate General of Bengal, S. R. Das, to seek his legal opinion regarding the prosecution of the prominent communists. Das stated in his reply on 3 October 1923 that the prosecution case was weak. He pointed out that the evidence disclosed in the statement to the case was "not sufficient" to prove the "existence of a criminal conspiracy". He added that there could be no conspiracy unless two or more persons joined and the evidence disclosed to him implicated only one person. He also postulated that it was very difficult for him to say, on the basis of the evidence placed before him, as to what part of the evidence set out in the statement of the case would be admissible. He also stated: "I am bound to point out that it will be very difficult to prove some of these facts and that a conviction is doubtful."<sup>163</sup>

162. *Ibid.*

163. *Ibid.*, p. 113.

In the light of these comments the Government of India revised the scope of the case. They sought to establish that the Third International was "admittedly" working to bring about a world revolution, that so far as India was concerned the Third International had appointed M. N. Roy (in Berlin) as their "agent" and had instructed him to establish a Communist Party in India with a revolutionary programme, and that the alleged culprits—Shaukat Usmani, Singaravelu, Ghulam Hussain, S. A. Dange and Muzaffar Ahmad—were then working in India as "Roy's agents" and were building up revolutionary communist organisations according to his directions.<sup>164</sup> The government also alleged that "Roy... is definitely out to produce a violent revolution in India and that he regards the overthrow of the present Government of India as an essential preliminary to the introduction of the communist regime which he hopes will follow".<sup>165</sup>

Meanwhile the proposal to transfer the internees to Burma in the event of prosecution being definitely found impracticable was also under the active consideration of the Home Department. "This is likely to have a deterrent effect on other members of the group", wrote the Home Secretary on 4 August 1923.<sup>166</sup> But the Home Member thought that it would not be wise to exile the three detenus before the government had taken a decision for their prosecution.<sup>167</sup>

#### S. A. DANGE ALSO TRAPPED

So far it was not considered advisable to include S. A. Dange and Singaravelu in the list of the accused. But suddenly some political developments took place and made it necessary for the government to decide to proceed with their arrest and prosecution. The Home Member, W. M. Hailey, ordered the preparation of Dange's dossier. This was not only because Dange wrote a militant article, "Our Viewpoint", supporting the manifesto

164. "Appendix I to Notes": *Case for the Use of Regulation III against... Communist Agents in India*, *Ibid.*, p. 41.

165. *Ibid.*, p. 42.

166. *Ibid.*, p. 38.

167. *Ibid.*, p. 39.

of Singaravelu and recommending to the country the militant weapon of "general strike", but also because of certain other political events described in the following paragraphs.

As already pointed out, the Government of Bombay was not interested in including Dange for prosecution merely to show up the conspiracy. They still thought, as indicated in their earlier confidential letter dated 16 July 1923, that Dange was "more useful to us than dangerous".<sup>163</sup> The Secretary to the Government of Bombay, A. Montgomerie, in his confidential letter written on 25 January 1924, indicated that he was confident that if Dange was left alone, something further might come of the negotiations conducted by an Intelligence man of the Bombay government under the false name of Dange (without the knowledge of the latter) with a German sailor who was chiefly instrumental in smuggling communist literature into India. This German sailor, F. Schmidt, was alleged to be in touch with the headquarters of Roy in Berlin and had brought some literature on 20 October 1923 to be handed over personally to Dange. Meanwhile, however, he forgot Dange's residential address. Finding himself helpless and putting his "confidence in the skill of the post office men", he wrote a letter to S. A. Dange. The text of the letter is as follows:

"From: F. Schmidt,  
S. S. Trautenfels  
c/o Graham & Co.

"To: S. A. Dange,  
434, Thakurdwar,  
Bombay No. 2.

Bombay 21st October.

"In case this letter should reach you, will you kindly send me a note? Unfortunately I have lost your address and can't remember your street's name, so I was not able to find your place when trying so one of the last evenings.

"Setting my confidence in the skill of the Post Office men, I hope you will answer immediately giving me your full address and please let me know a convenient hour I can meet



you on a serious matter. For the present it may be sufficient for you that I am to deliver to you some books from Hamburg.

"Awaiting your message,

"I am, Sir,

"Yours sincerely,

Fred Schmidt."<sup>169</sup>

This letter, however, was intercepted by the Bombay Intelligence Bureau in the post office and was sent to the Chief Commissioner of Police, Bombay, who forwarded the same to the Secretary to the Government of Bombay. The latter enclosed a copy of this letter with his confidential letter of 25 January 1924 to the Home Secretary to the Government of India. In this very letter, the Bombay Secretary expressed his desire to his counterpart in New Delhi to let him know his views again before the Government of India definitely decided to take action against Dange. He, however, added that the Government of Bombay would have no objection to the inclusion of Dange among the accused, *provided* there was a "watertight case against him".<sup>170</sup>

On the other hand, the Intelligence Bureau of Bombay did not sit quiet. It sent a CID officer to get in touch with Fred Schmidt, the German sailor mentioned above. This he succeeded in doing, and on the evening of 22 October 1923 he met Schmidt by appointment and took him to a maidan where he introduced him to the Police Inspector in charge of the Bolshevik Branch who was falsely represented to be S. A. Dange. The following conversation was exchanged on the occasion:

"Dange: You come from Roy.

"Schmidt: Yes, I have some packets to be delivered to you.

"Dange: Where is the letter from Roy?

"Schmidt: I have no letter from Roy. I have only the packets with me.

"Dange: How many packets have you and where are they now?

169. *Ibid.*

170. *Ibid.*

"Schmidt: I have three packets concealed in three different parts of the hold of the ship.

"Dange: Have you any introductory letter? I am afraid to accept packets from you.

"Schmidt: I have no introductory letter. You will have to take my word for it.

"Dange: How can I take your word for it? Have you ever brought such packets before?

"Schmidt: About 8 months ago I brought some packets which I delivered to a man at College Square, Calcutta. He had a bookshop. I think it was in March last.

"Dange: What was his name?

"Schmidt: I forget his name, Mr Dange. In fact I forgot your address too."<sup>171</sup>

There was more conversation of the same nature and a further appointment was made for the following evening at docks.

Arrangements were also made with the customs authorities to let the Inspector, Bolshevik Branch, pass in through the dock gates after dark in a taxi and out again on his return. The taxi was halted not far from the steamer and after some parley Schmidt went on board and brought out three parcels wrapped in brown paper and string. As it was thought from the letter written by Schmidt that he might have a personal communication, either verbal or written, from Roy to Dange, negotiations were opened for a further interview.<sup>172</sup>

The Inspector took the parcel straight to the Deputy Commissioner, Special Branch, who opened them and found thirty-six copies of a book by Roy, *What Do We Want?*, and ten copies of another book again by Roy, *India in Transition*.<sup>173</sup>

A subsequent interview was arranged with some difficulty as Schmidt charged the intermediary with having introduced him to a police officer who had been able to pass through the customs gate without examination. At the same time he made to the

171. *Ibid.*

172. *Ibid.*

173. *Ibid.*

intermediary a statement which he might have thought would lead to the ship being searched if his conjecture were correct. Anyhow, the interview ended in Schmidt being allowed to see again the man who had been represented to him to be Dange and in his agreeing to handing over a letter if he were fully satisfied about his identity.<sup>174</sup>

For the next interview which took place on 29 October 1923 elaborate preparations were made by the Bombay Intelligence Bureau. Under the instructions of the latter, the officer personating Dange arranged for quarters in Thakurdwar near the real Dange's former address. These he furnished with copies of *The Socialist* (Dange's journal) and in general gave the place the atmosphere of the hide-out of the editor of that journal. By a fortunate coincidence for the Intelligence Officer, at the street entrance to the stairs leading to the quarters, there was a name board of another tenant whose name was also Dange. There seemed to be little doubt that when Schmidt was brought by the intermediary in a closed carriage to these quarters and found the Inspector, Bolshevik Branch, installed there, his doubts as to the latter's being Dange himself disappeared. To help out matters further, the Inspector showed Schmidt a few envelopes in which he had received communications from M. N. Roy. The contents he said he always destroyed on receipt. After introductory remarks and soft drinks the following conversation took place:

"Schmidt: How is Gandhi movement going on?

"Dange: Gandhi movement is practically broken down now. There are two factions in the party. One party is in favour of entry into Council and the other party is not in favour. The programme of noncooperation movement consisted of boycott of Councils but as the boycott was not successfully carried out some undesirable persons got into the Councils and passed laws and imposed taxes on the people in the name of the public. We are now issuing such leaflets (handing over a leaflet

printed in the Labour Press) requesting people to send right stamp of men to carry tough fight with government in the Councils.

"Schmidt: I have some arms with me. Will you be able to bring them out?

"Dange: No. I cannot bring out the arms. You can bring them here yourself. It is not very risky to bring books because even if the man is caught, the the punishment is slight while it is a different case with arms.

"Schmidt: What work are you doing now?

"Dange: I am carrying on work of labour organisation but we are handicapped for want of funds. There is retrenchment going on everywhere and those who take leading part in unions are sent away at once. The strikes always prove abortive because the men cannot hold out for a longer time on account of poverty.

"Schmidt: It will take years for you to organise labour. Is it possible to get independence by circulating such leaflets?

"Dange: We are copying things from European countries. Ten years ago there was absolutely no organisation of labour. Since the last war several unions were established, but now membership of some of the unions is decreasing.

"Schmidt: You cannot get anything without fight. If you will take assistance of some of the Russian socialists, they will supply you with any amount of money and arms.

"Dange: People are not trained to make use of arms; besides our movement is far behind the other countries' movements.

"Schmidt: I have seen several Indians, Gurkhas, in the trenches during the war. They are all fighting men. Why can you not make any use of them?

"Dange: The military camps are quite separate from the public and no one is allowed to get near them.

About two years ago Mohamed Ali and Shaukat Ali, the Mahomedan leaders, issued an appeal to people stating that it was against their religion to take up service in the military. They were prosecuted by government and sent to jail for 2 years.

"Schmidt: I believe there are several independent states in India? They can fight.

"Dange: The states are under the protection of the government. There is an officer appointed by government to supervise the administration of the state. Besides the rulers of the state think that they are quite happy. They won't get anything more by rising.

"Schmidt: Their happiness is like a bird in a golden cage.

"Dange: Recently the government deposed the ruler of Nabha state in the Punjab because he took part in political agitation.

"Schmidt: I am much disappointed, Mr Dange. You cannot do anything without fight and you can finish off the government within ten minutes. We managed to take truck loads of ammunition from Scotland to Petrograd about two years ago.

"Dange: Where can we keep ammunition in Bombay? Nothing is allowed to go out of the customs without being examined.

"Schmidt: We can manage to send arms through the Frontier, provided you get in touch with the men of the Frontier. Do you know anyone there?

"Dange: Roy knows all our comrades. I am known to Mr Ghulam Husein of the Punjab, Singaravelu of Madras and Muzaffar Ahmad of Calcutta. Do you know any one of them?

"Schmidt: I am sorry I don't know them.

"Dange: When is your steamer leaving Bombay?

"Schmidt: On Thursday next (1 November 1923). We will go to Karachi and thence to Hamburg.

"Dange: You better see someone in Karachi and find out:

the situation there. Whom will you see in Karachi?

"Schmidt: I do not know anyone there.

"Dange: You should attend meetings in Karachi and hear the speeches so that you will know the real situation.

"Schmidt: I do not understand the language or grammar...

"Dange: Do you have Roy's letter?

"Schmidt: (feeling his pockets). I have not the paper with me here today.

"Dange: I can consult my friends on knowing Mr Roy's instructions.

"Schmidt: What use will you make of few arms?

"Dange: I can distribute them amongst my trusted friends and make use of them to terrorise government.

"Schmidt: Will you be able to store large stock of arms in Bombay?

"Dange: No. I cannot do that. There is no place in Bombay where I can keep them.

"Schmidt: My company is making a huge profit but we are paid only two pounds for the trip. The Steamship Co. and government receive their freight and taxes in gold pounds at a higher rate than pre-war days while we are paid in paper marks at lower than pre-war rates of pay. The government is capitalistic and it must be smashed.

"Dange: Do you get food on board the steamer?

"Schmidt: I cannot complain about food."<sup>175</sup>

After the conversation was over, Schmidt went away making an appointment for the following evening which he did not keep.

After this, the intermediary saw him twice. The evening before the ship sailed, a last effort was made to get him to hand over the supposed letter from Roy to Dange. Schmidt was last seen going on board the ship at midnight on 31 October 1923 when he told the intermediary that he had been arrested

175. *Ibid.*, pp. 64-65.

by the police at the dock gates and found in possession of revolvers. He had been taken to a police station and had succeeded on the way in throwing away Roy's letter for Dange.<sup>176</sup>

Without knowing all these intercepting activities of the Bombay Intelligence Bureau, Roy wrote a letter to Dange. It begins, "Our friend, who saw you at Bombay, has come back in time and has related the whole affair. It is unfortunate that he met such a disaster. We counted much upon the success of his mission. But we believe that he did the best that could be done under the circumstances, that is, to transfer his charge to the best person available. And we look upon you as the most suitable for the purpose and just that you have seen that some result is achieved. It is needless to say that presence of some delegates from India will be very welcome and will lead to future welfare of our movement."<sup>177</sup> This letter was intercepted by the CID and kept by them, not sent on to Dange.

These developments were more than enough to convince the Home Department of the Government of India to implicate Dange in the prosecution. In his confidential letter dated 15 January 1924 to A. Montogomerie, Secretary to the Government of Bombay, Home Secretary Crerar mentioned that there appeared good grounds and *sufficient* evidence for supposing that Dange might, simultaneously with others, be proceeded against and that the case was then being examined with this in view. The Home Secretary also believed that the evidence collected clearly showed that Dange had been an important figure in the attempt to overthrow British rule. It was, therefore, futile to believe, as suggested by the Government of Bombay, that it would be advantageous to leave Dange at liberty in order to secure intelligence regarding M. N. Roy's projects through the interception of his post. He added that it was

176. *Ibid.*, p. 65. It may casually be mentioned that Schmidt's ship *S. S. Trautenfels* touched at Karachi on its way to Hamburg, but the Government of Bombay did not think it advisable to make any arrangements for surveillance there, as to do so might destroy the possibility of getting into touch with Schmidt on a future voyage. *Ibid.*

177. Cited as exhibit 5 in *Judgment in Bolshevik Conspiracy Case*, no. 38, pp. 20-21.

possible that even if the convictions were not obtained in all cases the effect of a "public exposure of conspiracy" would be advantageous.<sup>178</sup>

#### SINGARAVELU ALSO IMPLICATED

Crerar wrote a similar letter on the same day to M. E. Couchman, Chief Secretary to the Government of Madras, in order to include the name of Singaravelu Chettiar also in the prosecution. The Government of Madras replied on 23 January 1923 that it had no objection to and "would (rather) welcome" the action to be taken by the Government of India in regard to the communist accused. In addition it also suggested the inclusion of M. P. S. Velayudhan.<sup>179</sup> But the Government of India said that it proposed to drop the name of the latter from the list of those to be prosecuted, as he was believed to have ceased to take an active part in the communist movement and as he had obtained a regular job on the staff of a daily newspaper. The Government of Madras was very disappointed at the decision of the Government of India. In its reply it showed its dissatisfaction, but did not disclose any substantial facts that could be utilised to prosecute Velayudhan.

There is, however, no doubt that the Government of India was very much in favour of prosecuting Singaravelu. His stout declaration at the Gaya Congress about himself being a communist had filled the officials with horror. His diatribe against British imperialism ("Without resorting to national strikes we shall not be able to swerve by an hair's breadth the British domination in India")<sup>180</sup> was symptomatic of the fact that there was little to sustain optimism in keeping militant nationalism subservient to British interests. Singaravelu's open exposure of the abysmal failure of the colonial system to defend and preserve the right of the toiling masses in India had made him an eyesore to British rulers. Moreover, his gift for vituperative

178. *Conviction... in the Bolshevik Conspiracy Case*, n. 12, p. 66.

179. *Ibid.*

180. *Report of the Proceedings of Gaya Congress, 1922*, p. 118.



polemics had thoroughly frightened both foreign and native bourgeoisie. On the occasion of the Gaya Congress he had not only declared war on the then prevalent system of exploitation but also hailed the awakening of the toiling masses by remarking thus:

"Harken, ye bourgeoisie—harken to me—know ye, all India is awakened... The Indian labour can be compared to the Cinderella of the East. They have been assigned to all the bitter things of the world—famine, pestilence, no food—no house—no clothing. Beware ye rich men, beware ye big men and remember all our sorrows. The world is going to the Cinderellas. The change is fast approaching while the Cinderella, the labour of India, is coming up and up. Bourgeoisie—bourgeoisie, remember Cinderella—labour has awakened—it is wide awake and is coming steadily and surely up and up to save the world."<sup>181</sup>

In conclusion, he had boldly proclaimed: "We do not want the accumulation of power in a few or fewer hands. We want power enough to enable us to be fed properly—to be clothed properly and to be housed properly. These are the essentials we want."<sup>182</sup>

This uncompromising technique of struggle, so effectively employed from the Congress rostrum, had frightened the propertied classes and orthodox, middle-class labour leaders who were interested in using the organised labour movement only for their own political ends. Moreover, they were jealous of the growing influence of Singaravelu outside India in communist circles. The mere mention of the word "Bolshevism" made them shudder. In small coteries of labour groups, Singaravelu was, therefore, violently attacked. Attempts were made to defame and discredit him by circulating the concocted rumour that he was growing rich on money received for party work from Soviet Russia and Germany. In a meeting of their henchmen they called upon him to cease sending telegrams to communist lea-

181. *Ibid.*

182. *Ibid.*, p. 117.

ders abroad. What was indifference in the beginning towards his progressive politics later turned into definite hostility.<sup>183</sup>

It is also significant that the editorial columns of *The Hindu* dated 25 August 1923 contained a note saying that the paper would in future refuse to act as a post office for communist propaganda—a function that, it said, it had performed on one or two occasions in the past. It was reported by the Madras Intelligence Bureau that Singaravelu had an interview with the editor of that paper when the latter told him that the note was intended as a challenge to him to declare that he was not in sympathy with the violent methods advocated by Roy and his party.<sup>184</sup> And the government, which watched all these developments very closely and carefully, did not miss the opportunity afforded by it to fish in the troubled waters.

Among other important communists implicated and subsequently arrested were Muzaffar Ahmad (Calcutta), Shaukat Usmani (Kanpur) and Ghulam Hussain (Lahore). They were detained in different prisons without trial under Regulation III of 1818. On 20 December 1923 Nalini Gupta was also arrested and jailed under the same Regulation by Bengal police under telegraphic instructions dated 7 April 1923 from the Home Department of the Government of India. In March 1924, charge-sheets were filed against all the accused in the court of the District Magistrate, Kanpur, on behalf of the Government of India under Section 121-A of the Indian Penal Code, the plaintiff being Col. Kaye, Director of Central Intelligence Bureau. Out of all the eight accused, only four—namely S. A. Dange, Shaukat Usmani, Muzaffar Ahmad and Nalini Gupta—were produced before the court.<sup>185</sup> Since Singaravelu Chettiar

183. See the deniofficial letter dated 4 September 1923 from E. S. Lloyd, Chief Secretary to the Government of Madras, to J. C. Crerar, Home Secretary, Government of India, *Conviction... in the Bolshevik Conspiracy Case*, n. 12, p. 57.

184. *Ibid.*

185. It may be recalled that shortly after his conviction Nalini Gupta was transferred to Alipore Central Jail, where he fell seriously ill. Colonel Connor, the surgeon in charge of Nalini's case, was definitely of the opinion that the convict was not progressing and that he was likely to "go steadily downhill". The surgeon added that his mental outlook had

was confined to bed with illness, he was not brought to the court. He was later released on bail.

Ghulam Hussain, as already pointed out, purchased his release by confessing before the police and begging for mercy. After his release from the Andaman Jail, Ramcharan Lal Sharma was constantly harassed by the police. He, therefore, migrated to the French colony in Pondicherry.<sup>186</sup> So he also could not

an important bearing on his malady. He, therefore, pointed out that if it was within the bounds of possibility to leave him at his liberty, even for some time, it might do much towards saving his life. On the recommendation of J. E. Armstrong, Deputy Inspector General of Police, Intelligence Bureau of Bengal, that if set at liberty, Nalini was physically incapable of "mischief", the Government of India agreed to his release. [For further study see Home (Pol.) Dept., Government of India, File No. 272/1925, pp. 1-9.] It was further reported by the Bengal Intelligence that he also adopted a Muslim name Ghulam Rasul during his revolutionary career (see n. 11). For further study of his career see Muzaffar Ahmad, n. 7, pp. 112-16.

186. Incidentally it may be pointed out that Ramcharan Lal Sharma was considered in official circles as "one of the most dangerous revolutionaries". As a result of the efforts of the Law Member of the Government of Madras, the French Governor of Pondicherry decided to expel the two revolutionaries—Ramcharan Lal Sharma and Khushi Muhammad alias Muhammad Ali alias M. C. Sepassi, an emissary of M. N. Roy sent out from Berlin. The orders of the French government were duly served on Sepassi, and he left Pondicherry by the S.S. *Yang Tse* en route for Djibouti on 25 February 1924. Sharma, however, stayed on in Pondicherry, and it was understood from confidential inquiries made on the spot by the Madras Intelligence that the delay in his departure was due to the fact that the other French colonies had refused to receive him. His continuance, however, in Pondicherry greatly disturbed the colonial authorities. They apprehended that in Pondicherry he could act as an "agent" for the "receipt and dissemination of Bolshevik propaganda". But they could do nothing except to deplore his behaviour. So the Chief Secretary to the Government of Madras suggested that the Government of India should approach the authorities in England and ask them to make diplomatic representations to the French government and effect Sharma's removal to a more distant French colony in the Pacific or to French Guinea. [Home (Pol.) Department, Government of India, File No. 120, 1924, pp. 5-6.]

On reading this confidential letter of the Government of Madras, Colonel Kaye, Director of the Central Intelligence Bureau (who considered Sharma not only a "really dangerous man" but also "thoroughly untrustworthy"), concurred and wrote to the Home Secretary that his removal

be produced before the court. Last, but not the least significant, there was M. N. Roy, who was in Europe. It was, therefore, impossible for the colonial authorities to produce him before the court. So the proceedings could be launched only against the remaining four already mentioned. They were charged in April 1924 with the conspiracy "to wage war against the King-Emperor by means of a violent revolution". It was alleged that

from the Indian subcontinent was "really necessary" (*Ibid.*). On being approached by the Home Department the Governor-General did not agree with the suggestions of the Government of Madras. He believed that as the French Governor of Pondicherry had shown a real disposition to collaborate in matters of this kind, it would be a mistake to appeal over his head to the French authorities. Nevertheless, he suggested to the Governor of Madras to approach again the French Governor of Pondicherry with a view to ascertaining from him where the difficulty of removing Sharma to another French colony lay and asking him whether, if the Governor himself could not remove it, it could be removed by British government (*Ibid.*, pp. 7-8). But it looks as if the French Governor showed no further interest in the issue.

Meanwhile, perhaps on the initiative of the Madras CID, the British Consul at Pondicherry, Captain H. T. Tranchell, sent a confidential despatch on 9 April 1924 to MacDonald, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, London, in reply to a Foreign Office circular relating to the Passport Black List. In his letter the British Consul asked the Foreign Office to add the name of Ramcharan Lal Sharma to the Passport Black List. Detailing his reasons for doing so, he contemptuously wrote: "This man has a bad history; some ancestors were rebels in the Indian Mutiny (1857) and he himself was mixed up with Aurobindo Ghose's bomb movement in Calcutta in 1905 and got 10 years' imprisonment in the Andaman Islands. Since his release he has been a seditionist and came here in 1921 as a political refugee, having made seditious speeches in Northern India. Here he is under close surveillance as he is the local Bolshevik agent of M. N. Roy and his gang, and imports seditious and communist literature." Pointing to the helplessness of the British regime to get him punished, the Consul continued: "He cannot be surrendered to the English for his political crime but if he commits a penal crime here he could be expelled." The Consul added that in the event of his being sent to some other French colony, which was what the Government of India wanted, it would be well for the British consuls in all the French colonies to know of this man's character (*Ibid.*, p. 11). Ramsay MacDonald, the so-called socialist leader, on getting this despatch, immediately and shamelessly directed his secretary to inform the Secretary of State for India that he "would be glad to be informed as to whether His Lordship concurs" in the issue to British consuls and passport control officers in

Communist International, which had a revolutionary aim, was determined to establish its branch in India; that for this purpose it had directed M. N. Roy to establish a Communist Party in India. It was further alleged that India could never secure freedom except by violent means and that to be a nonviolent revolutionary was like a vegetarian tiger.<sup>187</sup>

A lot of argument was exchanged between some of the accused and the defence counsel. The latter would not allow the former to make political statements, since according to them these would not only have resulted in inflicting heavy sentences but paved the way for fresh prosecutions. Two statements, therefore, prepared by S. A. Dange and Shaukat Usmani were torn to pieces. And thus what would have been a historical stand was destroyed by the mistaken advice of sympathetic counsel, thus writes one of the accused in his memoirs recently published.<sup>188</sup>

All the accused, therefore, denied the charges and professed they did not hold the view attributed to them. Dange in particular declared that he differed with Roy on some fundamentals like the use of violence etc. He admitted that he corresponded with Roy but merely for the purpose of getting material for his study and his journalistic writings. The accused claimed the right which had been accorded to communists in other parts of the empire, especially in Great Britain—the right to preach socialism. They averred, they had nothing more than that.<sup>189</sup>

The case was sent up to the sessions court before Judge H. L. Holme, who was a notorious fellow. It was he who had

Europe and Asia of a circular, informing them of the activities of Ramcharan Lal Sharma and instructing them that he should be given no facilities without prior reference to the India Office or to the Government of India (*Ibid.*, p. 10). In his reply Lord Olivier concurred with him on the action suggested (*Ibid.*, p. 12).

187. Summary of charges cited in the *Indian Annual Register*, January-June 1924, Vol. I, p. xviii.

188. Shaukat Usmani, "India and Russian Revolution", *Mainstream*, Delhi, 5 August 1967, Vol. V, No. 49, p. 31.

189. *The Socialist*, Bombay, 24 November 1924.

sentenced 172 people to death by hanging in the famous Chauri Chaura Case.

The trial revealed that there existed no ground at all for the belief that the accused held Marxist views and were trying to build communist groups in India: yet the court sentenced all the accused to four years' rigorous imprisonment.<sup>190</sup> Among those prosecuted was S. A. Dange. Expressing his views on his role in the communist movement the judge said that Dange "was not a sham member but a genuine whole-hearted and enthusiastic member of M. N. Roy conspiracy".<sup>191</sup>

The prosecuted communists were transferred to four different prisons, where iron fetters were put on their necks and feet and they were completely isolated from the outside world.<sup>192</sup> At the close of his address in the Cawnpore Communist Case the defence counsel, Mani Lal,<sup>193</sup> said that Shaukat Usmani had been badly treated in jail and that the marks of his fetters were still on him. Inquiries were made by Ross Alston in the matter and the report of the superintendent of the jail showed that when Usmani arrived at Kanpur, he was wearing link fetters. The fetter marks referred to by Mani Lal were said to be the result of the fetters put on him in Peshawar in May and June 1923. There was, however, a patch of brownish discoloration on one ankle. Mani Lal's statement was published all over India in the Press Association's report of his address.<sup>194</sup>

190. *The Bombay Chronicle*, 21 May 1924.

191. Remarks cited in *Judgment in Bolshevick Conspiracy Case*, n. 38, p. 44.

192. Muzaffar Ahmad, *Communist Party of India: Years of Formation, 1921-1933*, Calcutta, 1959, p. 17.

193. Mani Lal deserves special notice. He was one of the renowned labour agitators, who was expelled first from Fiji and then from New Zealand and finally from Ceylon. On his return to India he was not granted permission to start his legal practice in the High Courts of Madras and Bombay. He, therefore, started practising in the High Court of Bihar and Orissa. It is interesting to remember that he was the original author of a "manifesto" on which Singaravelu's published manifesto was based. Although he had tried to keep himself in the background, yet he was deeply implicated in the propagation of Marxism carried on more openly by others.

194. *Conviction... in Bolshevick Conspiracy Case*, n. 12, p. 77.

Soon after the sentence was pronounced, an Indian Communists' Defence Committee was formed in Bombay. It published an appeal to the Indian public and the Communist Party of Great Britain to open a fund for the purpose of getting the sentence annulled in the Court of Appeals and the right of Indians to found a Communist Party recognised.<sup>195</sup>

According to an Indian newsagency telegram dated 10 November 1924, their lordships, Sir Gumwood Mears and Sir T. O. Piggot, dismissed appeals of four accused communists in Bolshevik Conspiracy Case. Their lordships held that case against appellants was clearly proved against each and documentary evidence filed was genuine.<sup>196</sup>

Commenting on the Kanpur episode, a group of Soviet experts on India in a recent work of theirs write that this first anticommunist trial contrary to the intentions of its organisers played "no small part" in spreading revolutionary ideas among fairly wide circles of the proletariat and the intelligentsia. It focused, the Soviet scholars add, the attention of Indians on the ideals of Marxism, the interest in which was obviously tremendous after the victory of the October Revolution in Russia.<sup>197</sup> This comment is corroborated by a random sketch "A Man Called Lenin" by Sajjad Zaheer, who "read voraciously" the proceedings of the trial in the newspaper. He says that he received at this stage a clearer view of the objectives of the communists in India. Although it was still not an authentic vision, it was nevertheless, in that mood of depression which followed the collapse of the noncooperation movement, a "ray of hope".<sup>198</sup>

In spite of great indignation against the sentence in the Cawnpore communist trial, the colonial authorities were bent upon stamping out the revolutionaries. So there commenced the

195. *The Bombay Chronicle*, 21 June 1924.

196. Home (Pol.) Department, Government of India, File No. 421, 1924, p. 3.

197. V. V. Balahushevich and A. M. Dyakov, eds, *A Contemporary History of India*, People's Publishing House, 1964, p. 155.

198. Sajjad Zaheer, "A Man called Lenin", Anand Gupta, ed., *India and Lenin*, New Delhi, 1960, p. 30.

Kakori Conspiracy Case in 1925, in which a number of revolutionaries newly-converted to Marxism were implicated. While four leaders like Ram Prasad Bismil were sentenced to death by hanging, others like Sanyal were sentenced either to transportation for life or to rigorous imprisonment for periods extending from five to twenty years.

### IMPERIALIST MEASURES TO FOIL ATTEMPTS MADE BY THE INDIAN REVOLUTIONARIES FROM ABROAD

Since the outbreak of the October Revolution in Russia and the declaration made by the Communist International to help in every possible manner the national revolutionary movements in the colonial countries, the imperialist rulers took all possible measures to thwart the effort to eradicate their rule from India. Frederick M. Bailey in his book *Mission to Tashkent* says:

"On the night of October 18, 1919, two strangers met in Kagan, in what was then called Soviet Turkestan. One was Raja Mahendra Pratap, the other was Joseph Kastamuni, an Albanian prisoner-of-war, who, released by the revolution, became an agent of the Tashkent Cheka. Both were in Kagan in transit. Happening to meet in the Russian Hotel, they spent the evening together in the room of the Cheka man, who spoke English fluently. The portraits of Marx and Lenin on the walls, the Red Guard uniform Kastamuni wore, disposed Pratap to frank speech. He told Kastamuni about having seen Lenin in Moscow, confided his hopes that the Russian revolution would hasten the awakening of India. The Cheka man lent an attentive ear, enquired about Pratap's plans, showed the friendliest interest, but in the morning he left the hotel in haste without bidding his new friend goodbye, nevertheless, stealing his name-plate from the door."

This Joseph Kastamuni was neither an Albanian nor a Cheka agent. He was Lieutenant-Colonel Frederick M. Bailey, of the British Intelligence Service.<sup>190</sup>

190. Lieutenant-Colonel Frederick M. Bailey, *Mission to Tashkent*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1946, 222, pp. 226-30.



The political bankruptcy of Bailey and his collaborators is self-evident. But the crimes they committed in the name of their imperial policies were many and not all of them have yet been exposed.

In tracing the fate of India's first envoys to the Soviet leader, Lenin, one finds that their life was often in danger. The very fact of their having met the leader of the October Revolution made them "seditious" in the eyes of British Intelligence. That is why it sent Colonel Bailey to Raja Mahendra Pratap in Kagan. Another of Lenin's visitors, Professor Barakatullah, was shadowed by Bailey's agents when he arrived in Tashkent in the autumn of 1919.

It may casually be mentioned that in October Professor Barakatullah had produced a pamphlet endeavouring to reconcile the divergent principles of Islam and Bolshevism. He appealed to Indians in general, and Muslims in particular, to respond to the "divine" call of liberty, equality and fraternity given by Lenin and the new Soviet state. He further stated that the Soviets considered that Constantinople should remain in Turkish hands and that treaties for the division of Ottoman empire should be burnt. Muhammadans were also urged not to recoil from Soviet Russia, but to "shun the savage wolves of Europe" (P. C. Bamford, *Histories of Noncooperation and Khilafat Movement*, Delhi, Government of India Press, 1925, p. 144).

Bailey makes no secret of the fact that by agreement with the Basmachi he kept skilled intelligence agents south of Tashkent and Kagan to watch over the caravan routes to India and Afghanistan. These specialists, he writes, "acted very well in a difficult and responsible situation". Once they discovered three Red Army men who had stopped for the night on their way and betrayed them to the Basmachi. A similar fate probably threatened Raja Mahendra Pratap and Barakatullah.

It was not only to obstruct the movements of Indian patriots who had established an emigrant government in Kabul that British Intelligence kept the road from Tashkent to Afghanistan under observation. That was also the road travelled by the first

Soviet missions sent to establish diplomatic relations between the Soviet Union and Afghanistan.

The activities of British Intelligence Service were not confined to the attempts to overthrow the Soviet government in Central Asia, but also to win over the King Amanullah of Afghanistan to its side. The main purpose behind all these measures was to close all routes in Afghanistan, through which the Indian revolutionaries trained in Moscow or Tashkent travelled on their way to India to bring revolution. And the British regime succeeded to a greater extent in their objective. Nearly forty years after these political developments M. N. Roy described in his reminiscences that before leaving Moscow in 1920 for Tashkent to train the Indian Muslim *muhajirs* for revolution he had an interview with Lenin. And Lenin warned him that the plan to overthrow British rule in India via Afghanistan was doomed to be a failure because, faced with such a danger, the British government "would bombard Amanullah's citadel with silver and gold bullets". And Lenin, Roy admits, proved right.<sup>200</sup>

It was not long before that the Afghan government categorically refused the Indian revolutionaries in Tashkent to cross Kabul on the way to India. Roy's repeated and insistent appeals to the Afghan consulate in Tashkent were of no avail. Something more than this also took place. Amanullah's government also made the members of the Provisional Indian Government (led by Raja Mahendra Pratap and Barakatullah) understand that their presence in the Afghan capital was no longer welcome. Thereupon the Provisional Government shifted its headquarters to Germany. But the London government was not to leave them at rest even in Berlin, as the subsequent developments show.

#### DEPORTATION OF COMMUNIST REVOLUTIONARIES FROM GERMANY

After imprisoning the communists to long terms in the Cawnpore and Kakori trials, the colonial authorities also somehow manipulated the deportation of Indian revolutionaries from

200. M. N. Roy's *Memoirs*, n. 5, p. 493.

Germany in 1925. Among the deported were Khushi Muhammad and Rahmat Ali Zakaria, who moved to Marseilles at the beginning of May 1925. According to the report of the Punjab Intelligence, both these revolutionaries had been busy in despatching communist literature from Marseilles to India. But a large quantity of this literature was actually intercepted by the customs and the police at Bombay. They were still actively working under the direction of the headquarters of the Indian communists in Berlin.<sup>201</sup> In a confidential letter dated 18 June 1925, H. D. Craik, Chief Secretary to the Government of the Punjab, informed the Home Secretary to the Government of India, H. Tonkinson, that the Governor of the Punjab considered it advisable that one of the two revolutionaries, Rahmat Ali, being a resident of the province, should be interned in jail under the provisions of Regulation III of 1818 on his arrival in India. Necessary formalities should, therefore, be completed in advance to arrest him on his arrival at any Indian port.<sup>202</sup>

The Home Secretary immediately submitted the relevant letter to the Director of the Central Intelligence Bureau, D. Petrie, who advised that considering the clear evidence they possessed of the "determination of the Bolsheviks to promote trouble in India and of their persistent activities directed towards that end", there were ample grounds for arresting Zakaria, who was an "active and dangerous Bolshevik agent". In his note he also added that Zakaria's "freedom of movement should be cut short" as soon as he entered India. Highlighting his apprehension, the Director concluded:

"If he (Zakaria) is allowed to roam about and to get into touch with other agents in this country, it is quite conceivable that he may be able, if only by the delivery of messages by Roy & Co to do more harm than can be readily calculated."<sup>203</sup>

201. *Deportation of Indian Seditious from Germany*, Home (Pol.) Department, Government of India, File No. 263, 1925, p. 1.

202. *Ibid.*

203. It may be recalled that R. A. Zakaria was one of the Lahore College students who left India as a *muhajir* in February 1915 under the

In view of advice and the information provided by the history sheet, the Home Department agreed to apply Regulation III to Rahmat Ali Zakaria on arrival in India and to adopt the

leadership of Fazal Iqbal. He was listed as a Lieutenant-Colonel in the "Army of God" (Silk Letter Case) and, according to a statement of a returned *muhajir*, was appointed Minister for Communications in the Provisional Government of India in Kabul. On 29 October 1920 he wrote a cipher letter from Herat to Maulana Shaukat Ali, in which he stated that he was on his way to Russia in the company of Abdul Hadi, the Afghan Minister to Bokhara. In his letter he also informed Shaukat Ali that on his way to Herat he saw Jamal Pasha, who had been sent to arrange an anti-British alliance between Moscow and Kabul. In conclusion he asked Shaukat Ali to despatch a Khilafat delegation to Kabul immediately (*Ibid.*, p. 5). After his training in the Moscow school, he attended the various Moscow conferences in 1922. On 31 July 1922, he wrote a letter on behalf of the Secretary, "Central Committee of the Hindi Communist Party", introducing Comrade Ali Shah to the communists in Berlin (*Ibid.*). He left Moscow for Persia in September 1922, the object of his journey being to organise the already existing secret means for despatching communist literature to India on a large scale, and then to attempt to enter India if possible (*Ibid.*). He came to the notice of the Central Intelligence Bureau in what is known as the "Hassan" ciphers, the first of which appeared to have been written by him, on 30 June 1923, from Bushire to Nalini Gupta (c/o S. A. Dange, Bombay) who was an expert in the manufacture of bombs and explosives (*Ibid.*, pp. 5-6).

In August 1923 Zakaria was in Teheran, from where he wrote his second cipher letter on 29 August 1923. In September he was at Shiraz, where the third cipher letter, dated 24 September 1923, providing the information that he was proceeding to Teheran, was written.

These cipher letters, in the first two of which Zakaria asked for the despatch of communist emissaries to Persia, were later on used as evidence against Nalini Gupta in the Cawnpore communist trial (*Ibid.*, p. 6).

On 3 December 1923 Zakaria wrote to Roy from Moscow: "Received your letter. I shall start when the arrangements necessary shall be made by the Eastern Department. Voztinsky told me that he has to talk the matter once with others" (*Ibid.*). At the close of 1923 he was reported to have arrived in Berlin and joined Roy. He was one of the persons of the University group in Berlin who were entrusted with the task of translating communist literature into prominent Indian vernaculars.

In June 1924 he was reported to have attended at Moscow a meeting of the members of the Indian Revolutionary Association, where it was debated whether it was desirable to increase the Indian contingent in Moscow (*Ibid.*).

In September 1924, it was reported, in connection with the future location of the headquarters of the Indian Communist Party in Berlin and

procedure followed in dealing with Khushi Muhammad's case.<sup>204</sup>

In a telegram dated 21 June 1925 the Viceroy communicated to the Secretary of State for India that in the event of the return to India of the revolutionaries the Government of India had decided, subject to examination of the expediency of prosecution, to issue warrants under Regulation III of 1818 for their arrest. The revolutionaries included Khushi Muhammed<sup>205</sup>, M. P. Tirumal Acharya<sup>206</sup>, V. N. Chattopadhyaya, Abani Mukherji, Chempakaraman Pillai and Rahmat Ali Zakaria. So far as Roy was concerned, the government also proposed to enforce the warrant issued against him in connection with the Cawnpore communist trial. In the same telegram the Viceroy requested the Secretary of State to inform his government immediately by cable about the departure of the revolutionaries for India.<sup>207</sup>

the removal of all organisational work from Moscow, that with this object in view, such of Daud Khan's pupils as had been detailed for work in Asia had been recalled from Kushk and the Tibet frontier and asked to proceed to Germany. They included Abdullah, Fazal Ilahi and Zakaria and Merv (*Ibid.*).

204. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

205. For further details, see Muzaffar Ahmad, n. 7, p. 82.

206. It may be recalled that when the emigre Communist Party of India was formed at Tashkent the South Indian Tirumal Acharya was one of the extreme champions of the idea of its formation. Along with Abdur Rab of Peshawar, he inspired the *muhajirs* in setting up the party. Even before the formation of the party both these gentlemen used to refer to themselves as communists. And it was after meeting them in Kabul that several young *muhajirs* decided to go to the Soviet Union rather than to Turkey. In Bhupendranath Datta's book (in Bengali) entitled *Unpublished Political History* which came out in April 1953 one comes across the following account about the Acharya: "He returned to India later, and is at present living in Bombay." In his early youth he left for London and, along with V. D. Savarkar, plunged into revolutionary politics. After the first world war, he joined in Paris the Anarchist-Communist Party along with V. Chattopadhyaya, a brother of Mrs Sarojini Naidu. From there he moved to Kabul to assist the Provisional Government set up by Raja Mahendra Pratap.

207. n. 201, p. 14.

## Chapter Four

# Birth of Communist Party (1925-1929)

### ATTEMPTS TO CONTACT INDIA

We cannot improve our conditions until we change this government. Every step that we take is towards changing this government. Therefore, the demon of Bolshevism cannot terrify us. If this is Bolshevism then each individual among us shall...and shall necessarily...be a Bolshevik.

[An extract from the address delivered by Mir Abdul Majid at the Punjab Workers' and Peasants' Party at Lyallpur; Quoted by S. M. Mehdi, *The Story Behind "Moscow-Tashkent Case"*, Delhi, 1967, p. 36.]

### KANPUR COMMUNIST CONFERENCE

All the oppressive measures of the colonial authorities could not deter the communists from emerging as a political force to be reckoned with. On the initiative of one Satyabhakta—who showed interest in the Cawnpore Communist Case proceedings by sitting occasionally in the visitors' gallery—an open communist conference was held in Kanpur in the last week of December 1925. Among others Muzaffar Ahmad,<sup>1</sup> S. V. Ghate,

1. The resumption of political activities upon his release by Muzaffar Ahmad disturbed the mental peace of D. Petrie, Director, Intelligence Bureau, Home Department of Government of India. In his confidential note submitted to the Home Secretary, J. C. Crerar, on 21 January 1926, he said that although Muzaffar Ahmad had been released unconditionally, and he violated no undertaking by taking a prominent part in communist activities, the fact that a man like Muzaffar Ahmad could with impunity

K. N. Joglekar, R. S. Nimbkar and Singaravelu Chettiar attended the conference. Shapurji Saklatvala had been requested in London to preside over this conference. He was reported to have agreed in the beginning, but the British Communist Party did not give him permission. Singaravelu Chettiar (after his recovery from illness he had presented himself at the Kanpur court, but the government did not proceed further with the charges against him, and, in fact, there was not much evidence available against him) was, therefore, elected President. Giving an eye-witness account of this tumultuous event in the history of national liberation movement, Muzaffar Ahmad wrote years later:

"We brought together the communists of various places in the country and constituted for the first time the Central Committee of the Communist Party of India in the Kanpur Conference itself."<sup>2</sup>

resume his old ways almost immediately after his release had created a very bad impression on the loyalist elements who were surprised to see that the old Bolshevik was out of jail in so short a time and was again openly flaunting himself as an active communist. Continuing his note, the Director added: "Under these circumstances, the public can hardly be blamed if they make up their minds that government do not take a serious view of activities of the kind that earned Muzaffar Ahmad and his fellow plotters this punishment. If any such impression were to arise, it would be in every way unfortunate. If it is a fact that Muzaffar Ahmad was released absolutely unconditionally, his speedy return to his old courses points the moral that men of his kidney should never be released except on the strictest conditions of continued good behaviour. If Muzaffar Ahmad is sufficiently restored to health to be able to do what he is reported to be doing, the proper place for him is in jail and it is unfortunate that the conditions of his release preclude us from sending him back there" (Home (Pol.) Department, Government of India, File No. 272, 1925, p. 10).

In another note on 27 January 1926, he added that in this particular case Muzaffar Ahmad had made "us look rather foolish. What is more, he seems to be back in the movement again 'with both feet'" (*Ibid.*, p. 12). But the Home Secretary silenced the controversy by pointing out that there was little chance in this case that the convict, before his release, could be made ready to give an undertaking of not resuming political activities (*Ibid.*, p. 11).

2. Muzaffar Ahmad, *Communist Party of India: Years of Formation, 1921-1933*, Calcutta, National Book Agency, 1959, p. 20.

The Kanpur conference concluded its session with rich tributes to those martyred on the altar of humanity. Singaravelu referred to Rosa Luxemburg as "the noblest of womankind". The death of Lenin, the uncompromising champion of national liberation movement, evoked universal grief. Echoing the sentiments of the delegates present, the president said:

"By his death the world has grown sadder. Here was a man who cared nothing else in the world except the well-being of suffering humanity. Such a man was snatched away by the cruel hand of death at a time, when the great workers' state in Russia needed his advice and guidance. The communist world has lost in him a real benefactor of mankind whose counsels would have immensely benefited them in these trying times... There can be no doubt that the work begun by Lenin... will ultimately benefit mankind and shower happiness and contentment upon human race."<sup>3</sup>

By 1925 most of the communists implicated in the so-called Peshawar Conspiracy Case were set free. After their release Mir Abdul Majid, Gawher Rahman Khan, Firozuddin Mansoor and Habib Ahmad Naseem resumed their activities at Lahore cut short by Ghulam Hussain having severed his connections with the movement. The communist activities in the Punjab also got impetus from the renowned Ghadar Party leader Santokh Singh who reached India via Moscow in 1925. He was a born revolutionary and a tireless organiser. It may be recalled that by 1924 the Ghadar Party in America had come under the influence of the Communist International. It regularly sent delegates to Moscow for being trained in communism, after which they came to India to organise the national liberation movement.

Towards the close of 1925 Fazl Ilahi Qurban, a close lieutenant of M. N. Roy, also returned to India. He could only be arrested in April 1927 when he was sentenced to seven years rigorous imprisonment, but meanwhile he remained very active in the movement.

3. Cited by B. T. Ranadive, "Lenin and the Indian National Movement", in Anand Gupta, ed., *India and Lenin*, New Delhi, 1960, p. 11.



In the absence of Dange who was not released before 1927, the other communists in Bombay like S. V. Ghate, K. N. Joglekar and R. S. Nimbkar kept the flag flying. Likewise in other centres the communists were active.

The Indian communists also gained moral support from abroad.

#### INTERNATIONAL PEASANT COUNCIL

The plenary meeting of the International Peasant Council was held in Moscow on 9 April 1925. Seventy-eight delegates are reported to have been present, representing thirty-eight countries including India. The session closed on 17 April 1925. Kalinin greeted the meeting officially on behalf of the Soviet government. "The chief task of the Peasant International", said Kalinin, "is to explain to the peasantry its true position in the bourgeois society, and its revolutionary role. You have arrived at no small success in this respect. We wish you further success."<sup>4</sup> Several manifestoes had been disseminated under the slogans: "All Power to the Peasants and Workers" and "Immediate Confiscation of All Land".<sup>5</sup>

According to a letter seized by the British police in 1925 and addressed to Arthur MacManus, who was chairman of the British Communist Party up to 1922 (a copy of this letter was sent to Saklatvala, by the Presidium of Krestintern—International Peasant Council), a special section had been formed for the purpose of carrying on work among the "Hindu" peasants.

It was understood as a matter of course that all this activity among the "Hindu" peasants would be carried on through MacManus and Saklatvala. The letter stated that their first task would be to get in touch with all the existing peasant organisations of India, even if the latter held views other than their own as to the general aims and methods of their work among peasants. It further said that they would also like to establish individual contact with leading men in the agra-

4. *Report on the Working of the International Peasant Council of Russia*, Home (Pol.) Department, Government of India, File No. 258, 1925, pp. 4-5.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

rian movement of the "Hindu" people and to get them to collaborate with the International Agrarian Institute in Moscow. It concluded by saying: "We would appreciate very much any concrete information you might furnish us on the prominent personalities in the Hindu agrarian movement and on the literature published." The letter was dated on 25 September 1925.<sup>6</sup>

#### COMMUNIST ACTIVITIES ABROAD

Meanwhile attempts were made abroad to recruit new communists. According to a secret report of the India Office, on the initiative of one Dembitski, who was in charge of the newly organised Information Bureau for Indian Affairs in the Eastern Department of the ECCI, the Baku Section was asked to detail twenty-eight extra disciples to join the Higher Military School of Eastern Studies at Tashkent. The main object of this scheme was the rapid training of revolutionaries to work in India for the spread of Marxist ideas and, if possible, to work in Indian military units.

During July 1926, two persons, Kara Murza and Shirvan Zade were sent to India to do communist propaganda. The former was a Muslim of the Caucasus. He had been connected with the revolutionary movement since 1905. He travelled on a Persian passport under a party pseudonym. The second gentleman was also a Muslim and the son of a Baku barrister. During the October Revolution he had joined the Bolsheviks and had been a member of the Baku Council for Action and Propaganda ever since its foundation. He travelled to India in July 1926 also on a Persian passport. The Baku Council for Action and Propaganda received a communication in November 1926 to the effect that they were in Calcutta and intended starting for Peshawar before Christmas.<sup>7</sup>

6. *Communist Papers: Documents Selected from Those Obtained on the Arrest of Communist Leaders of Great Britain on 14-21 October 1925*, Home (Pol.) Department, Government of India, File No. 232, 1926, p. 104.

7. *Communist Delegates for India*, Home (Pol.) Department, Government of India, File No. 93, 1927, pp. 5-6.

OFFICIAL SPECULATION ABOUT INFILTRATION OF COMMUNISTS  
INTO INDIA

In the meantime the India Office was also under a strange apprehension. They started examining the probability that the then existing regulations of passports provided to Mecca pilgrims from India facilitated the entry of Bolshevik agents into India in the guise of pilgrims returning from the Haj. The India Office believed that the Soviet representative at Jeddah would make every effort to discover and exploit the chance offered to him in this connection. In their confidential letter from Whitehall, dated 28 April 1927, the India Office suggested to A.P. Muddiman, Home Member, that he should consider closely the danger of the entry into India of Bolshevik agents under false names.<sup>8</sup>

In his letter dated 4 August 1926 the British Consul at Jeddah reported that at least two hundred Indian pilgrims travelling to the place had lost their return tickets. Investigation showed that sixty of them had been utilised for the return journey to India by individuals other than those to whom they had been issued. The Consul believed that there was scope for impersonation in other ways if there was collusion. He, therefore, urged that the passports of pilgrims should bear their photographs.<sup>9</sup>

In November 1926 the British Agent at Jeddah wrote at length an official letter to the Director of Intelligence Bureau of the Home Department, Government of India, suggesting the possibility of the Soviet Agency and Consulate General in Jeddah using the *mutauriffs* (tourist agents who arranged for pilgrims the details of their sojourn in the holy land) and their vakils as a channel for sending "subversive propaganda" to India. He also supplied the names of a number of men who were coming to India during that year's Haj. Inter alia, he stated:

"I am personally loath to raise a false alarm, but have never-

8. Home (Pol.) Department, Government of India, File No. 128, 1927, pp. 1-3.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

theless thought that these notes might reasonably be brought to your notice."<sup>10</sup>

With these developments in view, Abdul Majid, Deputy Director, Intelligence Bureau, issued a circular letter to all the detectives of the Criminal Investigation Department in India (copies were also sent to the Criminal Investigation Department in Ceylon and the Inspector General of Police, Singapore) in which it was stated:

"In view of the fact that the Soviet representative, Monsieur Karim Khakimoff, is a well-known intriguer, too much emphasis cannot be laid on the importance of keeping a close but unobtrusive surveillance over the individuals."<sup>11</sup>

The Central Intelligence Bureau also suggested the censorship of correspondence if any of the men, whose names were given, were found flirting with any Indian political agitator.

The result of the inquiries made, however, up to 7 April 1927 was that a systematic scrutiny of the Jeddah mail at Bombay had revealed absolutely no signs of Bolshevik activities.

But M. C. Seton, Deputy Under Secretary of State in the India Office, did not feel satisfied on receiving the information of this nature from the Home Department of the Government of India. Writing again to Haig, the Home Secretary, Seton pointed out the possibility of the entry of "Soviet agents" into India. To reinforce this argument, he quoted the confidential report of the British Consul General in Batavia (No. 100, Secret, dated 25 July 1926) in regard to Soviet activities among pilgrims.<sup>12</sup>

#### IMPERIALIST MEASURES ON THE NORTH-WEST FRONTIER

The British government did not want to leave anything to chance. It took all precautionary measures in order to stamp out any possible anti-imperialist movement organised by the communists in any border region of North-West India or any

10. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

attempt made by the revolutionary elements at Tashkent or Kabul with the assistance of the Soviet government. The so-called Peshawar conspiracy was still fresh in their minds. They, therefore, employed the services of the notorious British spy, Thomas Edward Lawrence, who is known in history for his legendary adventures in the Middle East during the first world war and who subsequently became famous as "Lawrence of Arabia".<sup>13</sup> His employment as a member of the Royal Air Force in 1926 under the pseudonym of Aircraftman Shaw was nothing but a small link in the long chain of British imperialistic stratagems meant for espionage and subversion against the "recalcitrant" and resurgent people of the East. According to a despatch of the Peshawar correspondent of the *Mussalman* (Calcutta), dated 4 December 1928: "Colonel Lawrence, the uncrowned king of Arabia, is evidently moving with his fame... He was first heard of from Lahore, where he was reported to be busy tracking Bolsheviks in the Punjab."<sup>14</sup> On the occasion of the funeral march of the mortal body of Lala Lajpat Rai, a mammoth crowd surrounded a handsome faqir, Karam Shah, who resembled Lawrence. The faqir was jeered at, dragged, bruised and beaten mercilessly. People mistook him for Lawrence.<sup>15</sup> The very name of Lawrence had become an object of scorn and hatred in anti-imperialist circles in India.

The British government was also aware of the fact that Bri-

13. T. E. Lawrence acquired a worldwide notoriety for successfully promoting palace intrigues, for befriending kings and tribal chiefs and for winning over the Arabs to the British side during the first world war. While his adventures were looked upon with high esteem in London circles, he was condemned all the same for serving the imperialist interest of Britain under the guise of being a well-wisher of the Arabs. He was charged with treachery, lying, espionage, forging false documents, etc. About the life and activities of Lawrence, see Suleiman Mousa, *T. E. Lawrence: An Arab View*, translated by Albert Butros, London, 1966; T. E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, London, 1935; Richard Ardington, *Lawrence of Arabia*, London, 1955; R. H. Kierman, *Lawrence of Arabia: The Man and the Motive*, London, 1961; Liddel Hart, *T. E. Lawrence in Arabia and After*, London, 1935, new and enlarged edition.

14. Cited as news items by *The Bombay Chronicle*, Bombay, 10 December 1928.

15. *Ibid.*, 19 November 1928.

tish rule in India would not be secure so long as on the other side of the north-west border, in Afghanistan, there was an unfriendly and hostile regime headed by King Amanullah. In fact the latter had become a thorn in the side of British imperialism since 1919, when he reasserted his country's independence by launching a war against British India as well as by abrogating the unequal treaty of Gandamak signed in 1879 (under the terms of which the foreign relations of Afghanistan were conducted according to the "advice and desire" of the British government in India). On the other hand, the Afghan king also developed intimacy with the newly-established Soviet government headed by Lenin, who welcomed Amanullah's assertion of independence from imperialism. In spite of its feudal character, Lenin took all possible measures to reinforce and stabilise the regime of King Amanullah.

But the British government left no stone unturned to overthrow King Amanullah, for he was also providing shelter to Indian revolutionaries. The most decisive step in this direction was taken, it is said, with the posting of Lawrence in the middle of 1928 at Miranshah, a place on the Indian side near the border of Afghanistan. After a few months, in November 1928, news of the Shinwari revolt on the north-east frontier of Afghanistan hit the headlines of the world press. Apart from Bachchi-Saqao, who led the revolt which culminated in the fall of Amanullah, the name of T. E. Lawrence also figured as the hero of the uprising. All this could not be taken as something surprising or impossible.<sup>16</sup>

The British government took all possible measures to preserve the secrecy of the whole affair of Lawrence's activities on the borderland of Afghanistan. But the situation in which he operated, the confessions that he made in his personal letters, the repercussions of the news of his activities and the debate in the British Parliament form one interesting sequence. A study could certainly help in penetrating at least into the upper crust of the iron-bound secrecy about the role of "Law-

16. For further study see Jawaharlal Nehru, *Glimpses of World History*, Bombay, 1962, p. 810.

rence of Arabia" in fomenting the Afghan revolt as well as in spying over the activities of Indian communists in the north-western region. And the communists and other progressive-minded forces elsewhere were not going to excuse him for his treacherous intrigues. It is self-evident from a news item reported in *The New York Times*, "Colonel T. E. Lawrence was burnt in effigy on Tower-Hill today by a crowd of British communists after speakers had denounced the activities of British imperialism in Afghanistan."<sup>17</sup>

#### COMMUNIST ACTIVITIES IN ENGLAND

On the occasion of the labour strike in England in 1925 a number of prominent communists were arrested. On this occasion the police also seized a number of documents illustrating the activities of organisations affiliated to the Communist International, including the Communist Parties of India and Great Britain. Among the seized documents was also a letter<sup>18</sup> dated 23 June 1925 addressed by the Colonial Department of the Communist Party of Great Britain, pointing out to S. Saklatvala, communist member of the British Parliament, the desirability of his arranging an appointment with some Indian students at Oxford who were returning to India in the course of a few weeks and telling him that they were sending him a memo dealing with the political composition of the Indian Majlis at Oxford in order to help him establish useful contacts.

It is interesting to note that according to the same memo the sixty-six Indians composing the Majlis at Oxford were divided into political categories<sup>19</sup> as follows:

Moderates	....	18
Swarajists	....	11
Socialists	....	5
ICS	....	20
Unclassified	....	12

17. *The New York Times*, New York, 22 January 1929.

18. *Communist Papers*, n. 6, p. 75.

19. *Ibid.*

In the memo students coming under the category of moderates were described as unabashed "empire sycophants".<sup>20</sup> Saklatvala was, therefore, to explore the possibility of converting the swarajists into communists. The socialists were "undoubtedly" considered their "best immediate possibilities".<sup>21</sup> Already the copies of the paper *Vanguard* had been distributed among the socialists and swarajists.<sup>22</sup> So far as the candidates for the Indian Civil Service were concerned, they were dismissed as of no help to the communist cause, because these students were pledged to support the government, and it was, therefore, almost impossible to get much support from them.<sup>23</sup> In the memo it was, however, added: "We can make the attempt later on to get their sympathy, or at least to find out where they stand individually."<sup>24</sup> As for unclassified students in the Majlis, it was stated that they had no political interest, but "here again we must investigate further at the earliest opportunity".<sup>25</sup> At the end was provided the personal details and the characteristics of the 9 Indians who were to leave for India shortly. Among them were Dewan Chaman Lall, G. Goswami, treasurer of the Swaraj Party and a close and intimate friend of C. R. Das, and J. Joshi, secretary of the Jute Workers' Union and the government nominee to the Geneva Labour Convention from India.

According to a *Report of Colonial Activities* prepared by the Colonial Department, Communist Party of Great Britain, to facilitate the development of national liberation work in India, the Colonial Department organised a special Indian group composed of Indian residents in England. The purpose of the group was to concentrate on Indian matters and conduct specialised propaganda among Indians. To this purpose arrangements were made for regular circulation of literature among Indian students and also among Indian seamen. Special sub-

20. *Ibid.*

21. *Ibid.*, p. 76.

22. *Ibid.*

23. *Ibid.*

24. *Ibid.*

25. *Ibid.*



groups were formed among university students and arrangements were made to create interest in Indian matters in the University Socialist Group, which had been formed at Oxford and Cambridge in the early part of 1925. Contact with the seamen was established and maintained by a process of regular weekly meetings at the London dock gates, where an average of 50 to 60 Indians regularly turned up. Special meetings were arranged for seamen in different ports.<sup>26</sup>

Besides, a special representative was sent to India to assist in the organisation of the All-India Trade Union Congress.<sup>27</sup> An unsigned letter dated 26 June 1926 from the Colonial Department, CPGB, gives a brief survey of the progress made in connection with colonial work in India. The letter says:

"I should also mention that a considerable portion of our time spent with these Indians has been devoted to the preparation of a programme specifically compiled for the various groups of workers in the big towns. This programme is now in process of preparation and will cover coal, jute, cotton and railways, the ultimate intention being the combination of these into a 'Workers' Charter', with additional items covering the peasantry. This programme would be used as a rallying centre for the development of a definite labour movement in India."<sup>28</sup>

A Colonial Conference was held at Amsterdam on 11 and 12 July 1925. According to a signed report submitted by R. W. Robson on the proceedings of this conference (which was seized by the British police during their raid of CPGB office) Evelyn Roy said at a meeting that she had met Banerji and Khan in Paris and that it was desirable to form a loose committee of Indians, Egyptians and Irishmen for concerted action against British imperialism. This committee, she said, should not be formally associated with the Communist Party, but that the CPGB should promote it. In her opinion sympathisers at Oxford and elsewhere should be made to join the party openly

26. *Ibid.*, pp. 96-97.

27. For further study, *Ibid.*, p. 96.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 79.

and to take up the fight on their return to India, if necessary even in the law courts, for propaganda purposes. It was ridiculous, she said, not to have them openly connected with the party.<sup>29</sup>

Thereupon Sneevliet of the Dutch Communist Party, who presided over the deliberations of the conference, said that he had to use these nationalist intellectuals for work, not for trials; that there were only a few of them and that they should be handled carefully. In his opinion it was best to work as the British Communist Party was doing secretly. Evelyn Roy disagreed and Sneevliet referred to the experience of the Dutch Communist Party, which had been unable to make use of good comrades because they were known to the authorities, and said that her suggestions were utterly untenable.<sup>30</sup>

Thereupon M. N. Roy stated that he agreed with Sneevliet that some organisation was desirable, but he insisted on the need for organised effort in this work. These sympathisers among the students at Oxford and elsewhere should be prepared to join the Indian Communist Party and establish contact with Roy. He added: "We could not control the work from Britain. Direction was not possible and even harmful." He also pointed out that the British Communist Party should carry on propaganda and organise the movement to the maximum extent possible so as to supply the Indian Bureau with a number of trained workers.<sup>31</sup> Roy also suggested that agitation among Indians was important and should be developed. Once it was developed and groups of sympathisers were established, the Indian Bureau would have reason to exist and should consist of these Indian sympathisers of the party.<sup>32</sup>

In the same conference C. P. Dutt submitted a report on the work done in the Welfare League. Evelyn Roy wanted R. W. Robson to return to England via Paris in order to look after the transport of supplies of literature for work among Indians

29. *Ibid.*, pp. 87-88.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 88.

31. *Ibid.*

32. *Ibid.*

in England.<sup>33</sup> One Upadhyaya was advised to see the comrade in charge of transporting literature in Paris.<sup>34</sup> C. P. Dutt discussed his work in India and reached an understanding with M. N. Roy.<sup>35</sup> Upadhyaya delayed his return as Roy wished to discuss his work with him.<sup>36</sup>

In the same conference was debated the notorious speech of Birkenhead, the Conservative Secretary of State for India, who had stated that he had made a thorough investigation and that he had failed to find even one responsible Indian nationalist who demanded separation from the empire, etc. Roy suggested that some counter-statement should be made and that a manifesto should be drafted repudiating this charge. This manifesto, he said, should be signed by Lall, Joshi, Goswami and Singh, and stated that they represented the large body of intellectuals who were in favour of separation from the British empire. After this, the party was to take up the matter and organise a demonstration. Roy further suggested that the criticism of Col. Wedgwood and the speeches of MacDonald in the House of Commons regarding Indian independence should also be answered in the proposed manifesto.<sup>37</sup>

One Khan alias Ashcroft of the Indian Bureau in London reported that the Bureau had suggested a demonstration against Lord Reading on his impending arrival in London and that he had given three months' notice of this to the CPGB in order to facilitate preparations.<sup>38</sup>

A congress of the Young Communist League of Great Britain was held at Manchester in July 1925. A resolution was adopted on colonial work. Here are some important extracts from it:

"The national revolutionary movements in the colonies were the result of the intolerable conditions of the colonial

33. *Ibid.*

34. *Ibid.*

35. *Ibid.*, pp. 88-89.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 89.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 86.

38. *Ibid.*

workers under the British yoke. The worse sufferings were those endured by the young workers and peasants.

"The national movements must have our support, because from them will spring the proletarian movement that will free the colonies.

"Under the stress of the unbearable misery and exploitation caused by the industrialisation of the crown colonies (India) nationalist movements are springing up, aiming at the freeing of the subject race from the imperialist yoke, and the substitution of the rule of the native bourgeoisie. In the case of native movements (nationalist) against the British imperialists we can give them our full support, as they are the starting points of a proletarian revolutionary movement which would end in the throwing off of all dominions—home and imperialist—by the native proletariat and peasantry.

"We must work to allay the fears and eventually gain the confidence of the masses of colonial slaves by exposing the imperialistic policy of the British Labour leaders, by carrying on in conjunction with the national liberation movements an open defiant struggle for the break-up of the empire, understanding that the only salvation of the white and native masses is the empire's dissolution."<sup>39</sup>

In the same resolution it was suggested that anti-militarist work should be carried on among both white and native troops on the basis of the league programme by exposing the designs of imperialism and by securing fraternisation between white and native troops.

It was also laid down that regular work should be carried on among the "Hindu" and other students studying in that country and also among "Hindu" and other sailors in support of the nationalist movement and its newly-developing left proletarian wing. The YCL resolution concluded with the words: "Eventually the young industrial workers are determined to lead the final revolutionary struggle for the proclaiming of workers'

and peasants' emancipation through the establishment of Soviets."<sup>40</sup>

Besides, in Europe too, a Bureau of Indian Communists was entrusted with supervision of communist activity in India. Close cooperation between the British Communist Party and this Bureau was sought. Literature published from time to time was sent to the Colonial Committee in Britain, who were asked to take the responsibility of circulating this literature first among all Indians in Britain and then to find some method of sending supplies to India. Attempts were also made to put the Indian students in Britain in contact with the European Indian Bureau.

No less significant is the reinforcement of national liberation movement by the arrival of a number of communists from Britain between 1925-28. Some of them, like George Allison, Philip Spratt and Ben Bradley, will be remembered by posterity for their zealous revolutionary fervour and remarkable organising skill. It is beyond doubt that they imparted a new spirit to the movement.<sup>41</sup> They arrived in India partly in pursuance of a fresh orientation in relation to India in the policy of Third International dating back from 1924 with a view to establish direct contact with the communists in India. It was done through the Communist Party of Great Britain which became the organisational link. This change, no doubt, implied a silent criticism of Roy and his technique, though the channel through Roy also continued but only till his departure for China.

### COMMUNIST ACTIVITIES IN INDIA

Incidentally it may be pointed out that one Gopendra Krishna Chakravarty had become a source of perpetual trouble to the Bengal government in 1925-26. He was an old revolution-

40. *Ibid.*, p. 92.

41. For further study see P. Spratt, *Blowing Up India*, London, 1965, p. 29, and L. P. Sinha, *The Left-Wing in India (1919-47)*, Muzaffarpur, New Publishers, 1965, pp. 121-23.

ary.<sup>42</sup> Inspired by the desire to make a fresh attempt to overthrow British rule he left India and reached Hamburg in March 1924 under the name of B. Ghose. He carried with him a letter of introduction from Nalini Gupta to M. N. Roy. From March 1924 until about the beginning of June 1925, Gopendra was mostly in Russia with Roy. On 26 June 1925 he reached Bombay under a false name. He had managed his return passage from Marseilles as a lascar and deserted the ship in Bombay. His purpose in returning to India was to organise the overthrow of the British government on communist lines. After leaving Bombay, he proceeded via Benares to Bengal, where he got in touch with the East Bengal Revolutionary Party. Guided by Marxist ideas and theories of revolution, he planned to send Indian youths abroad to receive training under M. N. Roy.<sup>43</sup>

According to a confidential letter dated 31 March 1926 from the Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal to Haig, the Home Secretary, Gopendra Krishna Chakravarty was quite active in communist work. The Chief Secretary believed that his case was not dissimilar to that of Nalini Gupta. He also alleged that Chakravarty was primarily a "Bolshevist agent" sent by M. N. Roy to India on a definite mission to organise a revolution in India on communist lines. His activities had not been confined to Bengal, he said, but seemed to have been most active and most successful in Bengal. His particular line of work in Bengal had been to attach himself to the Anusilan

42. On the eve of a previous attempt to arrest him a manuscript copy of a revolutionary poem entitled "National Regeneration" was found in his house. The preface to this document runs as follows:

"This book is published to inform the general public of the short sketch of lives of those magnanimous persons of staunch moral character, who have made themselves famous by sacrificing their lives for the cause of downtrodden and oppressed India and for the sake of justice and truth. After reading this, if even one son of India realises the unfortunate condition of the mother country and comes forward determined to remove that, then he must prepare to sacrifice himself for the cause of others." Home (Pol.) Department, Government of India, File No. 111, 1928, p. 4.

43. *Ibid.*, pp. 46-47.

Party and endeavour to organise this in the manner envisaged in M. N. Roy's conception of the communist revolution. He had arranged for the training of several Bengali youths in communist methods and had already managed to despatch two of them to Europe for this purpose. Two more young men who had been charged with a similar mission were frustrated by the Bengal Intelligence in a similar attempt to reach Europe.<sup>44</sup> Gopendra, therefore, was a link between M. N. Roy and the revolutionary party in Bengal. Frightened by the growth of his activities, the Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal stated in this letter:

"...his particular danger to this province lies in the fact that this reorganisation and the opening up to them of connections abroad, for which they may receive funds and possibly arms, is likely to strengthen the terrorist conspiracy without essentially altering its nature and aims, and when it has received this accession of strength it is quite likely to break loose from the communist plans of gradual preparation for worldwide revolution and pursue its particular plans of a terrorist outbreak in Bengal. Apart, therefore, from his Bolshevik activities which, though he has paid particular attention in the last few months to Bengal, are a danger to all India, this government consider him to be a special danger to Bengal."<sup>45</sup>

In the same letter the Chief Secretary also explained the helplessness of his government to take any action against him under the existing law. So he suggested to the central government to prosecute the accused for participation in a Bolshevik conspiracy.<sup>46</sup>

But the Central Intelligence Bureau could not collect sufficient material against this man to justify a criminal prosecution. The Home Secretary, Haig, believed that Gopendra's activities, though potentially dangerous, had not yet become sufficiently definite to bring him within the terms of the Indian

44. *Ibid.*, p. 1.

45. *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

46. *Ibid.*

Penal Code. He, therefore, wrote on 21 April 1926 that it was undesirable to act prematurely.<sup>47</sup>

About a week later on 29 April 1926, it was reported in the press that Gopendra Chakravarty had been arrested by the Bengal police under Regulation III.

#### FRESH INDIAN PUBLICATIONS ON SOVIET RUSSIA

In 1926, a fairly comprehensive book on Soviet Russia came out in Bengali—*Nabya Russia* ("New Russia") by Saroj Acharya. It was first serialised in the Dacca weekly *Banglar Bani* and then published in book form. In a remarkably clear-cut analysis, Acharya wrote:

"The Bolsheviks have entered the field as the champions of the popular forces and they destroyed the bourgeois state apparatus with a great deal of wisdom and extraordinary efficiency... The true reason for the success of the Bolsheviks lies in the fact that they championed the demands and desires of the most powerful class in society... They are wise men who will argue that the idea of communism is noble but it could have been achieved by means other than a revolution, but... it is futile to argue with history."<sup>48</sup>

In 1927 there appeared Shaukat Usmani's travelogue *Peshawar to Moscow: Leaves from an Indian Muhajireen's Diary*. This progressive writing by one of the pioneers of the communist movement in India became a source of thrilling inspiration and adventures for all young revolutionaries in India. But what captured the imagination of a freedom-fighter in India was the following account of a meeting between the Indian Muhajirs and the Bolshevik Consul in Mazari Sharif, northern capital of Afghanistan:

"Heretofore, we had been imagining that the Bolsheviks as the name implied and cartoons appearing in the English papers showed must necessarily be some vulgar, rustic and fearful, people. Our curiosity increased with every step we

47. *Ibid.*, p. 48.

48. *Nabya Russia*, Calcutta, Burman Publishing House, 1926, p. 35.



took toward their consulate. Some of us expected them to be very rude and discourteous beings.

"At length we entered the place of the Bolshevik Consul. A young man of twenty-five greeted us in English and shook hands with us. He was wearing the Bolshevik helmet, long boots and a military uniform. Some of us took him for a page, some took him for a soldier.

"One of us said, 'Sir, we want to see His Excellency the Consul.' He at once replied, 'Comrades, do not say Sir but Comrade. I am the man you seek for. I represent the RSFSR and I greet you on behalf of the workers and peasants of Russia.' We were lost in amazement. How could he be a consul? How could he address the slaves thus. He is a white man like our white masters in India. We could not recover soon from our amazement.

"'Is it a fact or are we dreaming.'

"He: 'Comrades, why should you be thus astonished? Why do you not respond? I say, I greet you in the name of my government, the government of workers and the peasants of Russia.'

"We slowly recovered our senses and replied:

"Sir... No... Comrade, we thank you for your kind courtesy. We did not understand you because we are being treated in quite a different manner by our white masters.'

"Consul: 'Comrades! Your chains are broken now. We are equals. There is one common tie between your people and ours, that we were oppressed and tyrannised by the tsar while you are being oppressed in your own home.'

"The Consul took us in his bungalow-like building and introduced us to several others, young men and girls. They also showed an astoundingly courteous and fraternal attitude. We were entertained to tea, and broached our main topic of going to Russia. He gave us a letter of authority and sent one guide with us.

"We returned jubilant and informed our companions of the permission."<sup>40</sup>

Nehru's visit to the Soviet Union this very year was another event which had a nationwide impact. So far the people had heard of the proletarian revolution only through secondary sources with minor exceptions. Now, for the first time, a politically-oriented and widely known person from among them had personally visited the country. From Moscow, Nehru wrote two letters on 10 and 12 November 1927 to his sister, Vijayalakshmi Pandit. These letters started appearing in *The Tribune* on 13 December 1927. Under the interesting caption "Pt. Jawaharlal in Topsy-Turvy Land", the first letter opens as under: "This is not going to be a letter. I have no time to write a real letter, but still want to send you a few lines from Moscow if only for the sake of the stamp. To give an account of our impressions and experiences even within the 36 hours we have been here, would take a long slice off a day and many sheets of note paper. We are in a topsy-turvy land. All one's old values get upset and life wears a strange aspect here."

The letters seem important, for they reflect the first impressions of Soviet Russia, the world's first communist country, upon the mind of a person who was later to become India's first Prime Minister and the chief architect of Indo-Soviet co-operation and friendship. Besides, they were written at a time when the Soviet Union was celebrating the tenth anniversary of Great October Revolution.

"Everybody is a towarish", Nehru continues, "we have to address the waiter or porter or coolie as 'towarish' and the President of the Soviet Republic had to do the same to the poorest peasant. It seems all right in theory but in practice it takes some getting used to it. Moscow is in some way like any big city, and yet it is so different." Again, "There are very few cars in evidence; private cars there are hardly any, if at all. There are some taxis and there are cars belonging to the various departments of the state. Electric trams and motor buses run, but most of the peoples seem to walk. The shops though containing beautiful Russian made goods are poor in comparison with shops elsewhere." Nehru, nevertheless, qualified his statement as follows:

"But the spirit of equality is rampant and pride in the revolution. We arrived a day too late and missed the great celebration. There was a grand parade of the army and a march-past of a million and a half people in front of Lenin's tomb. It might have been a sight worth seeing. Then there was an aeroplane display. The aeroplanes are referred to here by everybody as the Russian answer to Chamberlain."

Commenting on the progress achieved by the Soviet Union, Nehru notes: "The electrification of the country is proceeding very rapidly and already there are dozens of very big power stations scattered all over." Referring to the life of workers he says:

"The industrial workers are, of course, far better organised than the peasants. They have their trade union halls everywhere where frequent lectures are given—fine reading rooms, most of which are the old palaces of the nobility now converted into the workers' clubs or peasants' houses. There can be no doubt that the condition of the peasantry and the workers in Russia in spite of the general poverty and low wages is far superior to what is seen elsewhere. What is more, their moral stature has improved and they look forward with hope and confidence to the future."

In so far as Nehru's thoughts about the Soviet Union are concerned, there is, of course, nothing new in these letters. Immediately after his return from Moscow in 1927, he talked at length about the Soviet Union at student gatherings, youth conferences and other public meetings and wrote articles about various aspects of the Soviet system in journals like *The Hindu* and *Young India*, which later he compiled in a book published early in 1929 under the title *Soviet Russia: Some Random Sketches and Impressions*. The impressions contained in these letters were more fully assimilated and enlarged upon by him in the book. A first-hand account of the success of socialism in a semi-Asian country through various five-year plans appeared to the Indian masses as the harbinger of the hope of freedom from their own colonial and semicolonial status.

Progressive Indians in quest of a perfect solution to the pro-

blems of grinding poverty and utter backwardness in the country looked upon the achievement of the Soviet Union with hope. They read in it a new message, a call for a new dispensation, a promise of a better future. They had now a model to look up to in the establishment of an order in which there would be equal opportunities for all realising the best in them. They felt that a social structure in which the relationships of all human beings would be more equitably and harmoniously adjusted was being ushered in. There thus appeared to be a hope of lasting human regeneration. In his book Nehru had written:

"No one can deny the fascination of this strange Eurasian country of the hammer and sickle, where workers and peasants sit on the thrones of the mighty and upset the best-laid schemes of mice and men... A group of men did not flinch at the mightiest of obstacles, and, in the midst of war and rebellion, with a cruel death and disaster continually facing them, sat down to evolve a socialist order out of the chaos that surrounded them... And history shows us... how the 'sister nations' (Western imperialist nations) have, instead of giving sympathy and goodwill, ceaselessly sought to hamper and destroy the new Russia... But Russia has survived because she had the 'voices of humanity' with her."<sup>50</sup>

For Indians such accounts were like a magic formula. Whenever and wherever Nehru went all over the country to meet his people he was almost invariably asked to speak on Soviet Russia. All this led Indians to take a keen interest in those vast forces in Russia which had overthrown the old order of things and substituted for it a new one and where even the old values of human life had been thrown overboard and an entirely new set of values had been adopted. People were stirred very much when they read of the practical manifestation of this radical change of outlook of the Russian people. They were overwhelmed with joy particularly when they read that in the city of Tabriz in Persia, when the Soviet Ambassador first arrived

50. Jawaharlal Nehru, *Soviet Russia*... , Bombay, Chetna, 1928, pp. xii, 2, 37-38.

he called the populace together and on behalf of the Russian government and people tendered a formal apology for the sins of the tsars. The Soviet "Wazir Muhtar" Bravin became one of the most popular individuals in Tehran. On 31 January 1918 he wired to Leningrad: "Tehran is literally shaken by an explosion of universal joy. I am left not a minute to spare by the endless deputations and individual callers. Even in the streets I am met with applause."<sup>51</sup>

"Russia goes to the East as equal, not as the conqueror or a race-proud superior" was the general impression left upon the mind of the people. "Is it any wonder that she is welcomed?", asked Jawaharlal Nehru.<sup>52</sup> In the words of Nehru, Indians were watching the new Soviet system with passionate hope and the longing to "follow in her path".<sup>53</sup> The diehard bureaucrats were scandalised at the enthusiasm that Nehru displayed and one of the better known among them, John Coatman, who was in charge of preparing the annual reports of Indian administration, blurted forth, with ignorant prejudice, in one of his studies: "Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru has now one secret ambition which is to rival Lenin or Stalin in the history of communism... It seems, however, that history will write him down as a pinchbeck Lenin."<sup>54</sup> In fact the bureaucracy was so afraid of the struggles launched by the peasantry and the proletariat

51. Cited by I. Andronov, "Awakening East", *New Times*, Moscow, 1 March 1967, No. 9, p. 13, col. 1.

52. J. S. Bright, ed., *Important Speeches of Jawaharlal Nehru*, New Delhi, 1946, p. 66.

53. Jawaharlal Nehru, n. 50, p. 1.

Motilal Nehru, who along with Jawaharlal Nehru and others, had also gone to Moscow, appears to have been equally impressed by the Soviet achievements. It is important to mention that during the debate in the Legislative Assembly over the Public Safety Bill in 1928, he ridiculed the idea of communism being painted as a spectre over India and praised the achievements of the Soviets in the field of education. See K. M. Panikkar and A. Pershad, ed., *Voice of Freedom*, Bombay, 1961.

It is worth mentioning also that in his presidential address to the Calcutta Congress in 1928, he warned that fate was "close upon our heels already in the garb of socialism and will devour both complete independence and dominion status if you let it approach nearer" (*ibid.*).

54. J. Coatman, *The Years of Destiny*, London, 1932, pp. 95-96.

that any intellectual who led such struggles was immediately dubbed a Bolshevik and the bogey of Bolshevism was raised. Even Vallabhbhai Patel, who led the Bardoli struggle, a man who can by no stretch of imagination be called a socialist, was magnified into an Indian Lenin though all his knowledge of Lenin was derived from Nehru's little book, *Soviet Russia*. He himself confessed that he was entirely ignorant of the Soviet organisation and Soviet methods.<sup>55</sup>

Undaunted by the hostile attitude of the bureaucracy, the intelligentsia continued to popularise socialism. In his address delivered at the Bengal Provincial Conference on 30 March 1929 Subhas Chandra Bose tried to give an indigenous setting to socialism when he quoted Swami Vivekananda's fiery words:

"Let a new India emerge through the plough of the cultivators, through the baskets of the fishermen, cobblers and mehtars, through the workshop and from the huts and bazaars."<sup>56</sup>

It would be incorrect however to think that there were no critics of the Russian revolution among nationalists. Here is an excerpt from Mahendra Chandra Roy, who stated contemptuously:

"The name of the Bolshevik mass-monster is proletariat. It has no fixed principle in life... Hence Bolshevism on the one hand wants to trample all conscience and personal sense of value under its feet; on the other, it seeks to destroy all social values too."<sup>57</sup>

The friends of the Soviets were no less prompt. In less than a month came the smashing rejoinder to this anti-Soviet tirade from Sibram Chakravarty:

"In society, one section clears the road, others obstruct. This leads to conflict. This is class war—there is no escape from this. The struggle does not end, so long as the road is not ended. But those who are against the onward march,

55. *Indian Annual Register*, January-June 1929, Vol. I, pp. 386-87.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 375.

57. *Atmasakti*, Calcutta, 26 April 1929.

must give way—that has always been the case. Those who will march along that path after this, shall march in serried ranks, there will be no more class conflict then. That is why the Lenin of today is militant, he thunders: 'Attack'. But the Lenin of tomorrow shall only sing the song of love and life."<sup>58</sup>

Another article in the *Atmasakti* eloquently refuted the allegation that the communists were responsible for class conflict and yet sharply pointed out the inevitability of such a conflict in the following memorable words:

"Those who turn their attention towards the ninety-nine per cent, those who think about them, those who wish to defend their interest, they do not desire class war; they desire complete emancipation. Class war inevitably breaks out because of the dogged greed of the selfish one per cent."<sup>59</sup>

About this time there was launched the salt satyagraha by Indians. When they were busy in their struggle, Tagore was touring the Soviet Union. Indian journals like the *Modern Review* published the account given by Tagore of the Soviet system in *Izvestia*, in which he was reported to have said, "His heart rejoices and dreams that some day his country may be admitted to the blessings and emancipation of spirit such as the Soviet people enjoy."<sup>60</sup>

This, again, encouraged Indians to fight for their national liberation still more steadfastly.

#### PEASANTS' AND WORKERS' PARTIES

The period 1926-28 was characterised by certain significant developments. The communists organised a number of workers' and peasants' parties in four major provinces of India, namely, Bengal, Bombay, the United Provinces and the Punjab.<sup>61</sup>

58. *Ibid.*, 17 May 1929.

59. *Ibid.*, 26 July 1929.

60. *Modern Review*, Calcutta, July-December 1930, Vol. 48, p. 581.

61. *A Call to Action*, Calcutta, 1928, p. 50.

A series of peasants' conferences were organised by leftwing nationalists and communists in Bengal, and in these conferences the demand for the abolition of landlordism and for the distribution of land to the tiller was formulated. This culminated in a provincial peasants' conference at Bogra in North Bengal in 1925. After much deliberation, this conference gave birth to a political party called "Bharatiya Jatiya Mahasamiti Sramik-Praja-Swaraj-Sampraday" (The Worker-Peasant-Independence Wing of the Indian National Congress). It brought out a weekly journal in Bengali, the *Langal* (The Plough) with the famous poet Nazrul Islam at the helm. The famous poem of Nazrul Islam, "Samyabadi", was printed under different subheadings in the first issue of this journal. Early in 1926, *Langal* reprinted in full the manifesto of the new party, which, in part, ran as follows:

*"Constitution:*

"1. Name: The name of this party shall be The Worker-Peasant-Independence Wing of the Indian National Congress.

"2. Aim: The aim of this party shall be to strive for the attainment of swaraj, that is, complete independence for India based on equality in social, economic and political spheres for men as well as women.

"3. Means: To attain this objective, the use of the collective force of unarmed mass movement shall be deemed the best means.

"4. Membership: Any member of the Indian National Congress who approves of the aims, objects, rules and regulations of the party which includes in its programme the pledge to fight for the interest of workers and peasants may also remain its member."<sup>62</sup>

Among the founders were communists, procommunists as well as noncommunist leftwing nationalists. In February 1926 another conference was held at Krishnanagar, where the name

62. *Langal*, 7 January 1926.



of the party was further changed to Peasants' and Workers' Party (Krishak-o-Sramik Dal).<sup>63</sup> Naresh Chandra Sen Gupta, a prominent intellectual, was elected its president, another prominent intellectual called Atul Chandra Gupta became the vice-president, and the veteran Swarajist peasant leader, Hemanta Kumar Sarkar, became its general secretary. The name of its paper was changed from *Lungal* to *Ganavane* (People's Voice) because the *Lungal* symbolised only the peasantry. But, in fact, the paper was the mouthpiece of the toiling masses. Muzaffar Ahmad, just released from gaol on grounds of health, was appointed its new editor. Since 1918 he had been actively associated with journalism. Before joining the editorial staff of the evening daily *Navyug* in 1920, he had also been associated for some time with the journal *Muslim Jagat*.

The new party was organised on the basis of the former Labour Swaraj Party, which had been working with the National Congress since its inception in November 1925.<sup>64</sup> It reflected the growing discontent of the broad masses with the policy of the National Congress leaders, and in the declaration published at its inception the Labour Swaraj Party declared that since all other means of attaining independence had proved futile, it would strive to achieve swaraj and the country's salvation by organising the workers and peasants, since they constituted 80 per cent of the population and could wrest freedom from the propertied classes with their own forces and in their own interests.<sup>65</sup>

It had no strong contacts with the workers and was unable to organise such large revolutionary trade unions in Bengal as the Workers' and Peasants' Party in Bombay had been able to.

63. It would not be irrelevant to point out that the word "peasants" appeared before "workers" because of the preponderance of peasants in the conference. But in a subsequent gathering it was renamed Workers' and Peasants' Party.

64. Prior to the formation of the Labour Swaraj Party, there was a Peasants' and Workers' Party in Mymensingh. It later became a branch of the Bengal Workers' and Peasants' Party.

65. *Workers' and Peasants' Party of Bengal, Report of the Executive Committee 1927-1928*, Calcutta, 1928.

In Bengal, a host of organisations such as the Association of the Bengal Jute Workers, the Union of Bengal Glass Workers, the Bengal Sweepers' Union and the Union of Dacca Textile Workers accepted the leadership of the Bengal Workers' and Peasants' Party. The party tried to organise branches in rural areas as well and it had closer contacts than other similar parties with the representatives of the leftwing bourgeois nationalists.

The second conference of the Bengal Workers' and Peasants' Party was held in February 1927, and adopted the party's immediate and ultimate aims.<sup>66</sup>

The programme said that it was now vitally essential to create a political party of the working class, the peasantry and the lower sections of the middle class and that the Workers' and Peasants' Party very well met this requirement. It was stressed that the aim of the party was the establishment of a Federal Republic, where the means of production, distribution and exchange would be in the hands of the people and used in the interests of society.

It also stressed that the main condition required to achieve these demands was that the country should be liberated from British imperialism and that to realise this aim the party was prepared to work in cooperation with other parties in India.

Criticising the National Congress for ignoring the interests of the working people, the programme pointed out that the Workers' and Peasants' Party would work to get the National Congress devote its attention to the demands of the working class, the peasantry and the lower sections of the middle class.

The Workers' and Peasants' Party in Bombay was founded in March 1927 with S. S. Mirajkar as its secretary, on the basis of a Congress labour group which had existed there since 1925. The party published its own journal, the *Kranti*, a weekly in the Marathi language. This party had a fairly strong workers'

66. It may be pointed out that although the Communist Party of India was not illegal, it was difficult to work under its name openly. So the communists used to implement their programme through the Workers' and Peasants' Party. The manifestoes of this party were all drafted by the Central Committee of the Communist Party.

section and it is obvious that the communists had a predominant influence in it.

The Bombay Workers' and Peasants' Party launched its activities by publishing the comprehensive resolution which it had put forward at a meeting of the All-India Congress Committee in May 1927.<sup>67</sup> The resolution expressed the party's point of view on the current tasks of the national liberation movement. The following is a brief summary:

(a) The National Congress and its leaders as at present constituted represent the interests of the Indian propertied classes. The bulk of the Indian population is not in sympathy with the work of the Congress.

(b) In the interests of the overwhelming majority of the people it is necessary to liberate the Congress from the "fetters of class interests" and to set before it the task of winning national liberation. The achievement of this aim will be first step on the road to complete liberation of the masses from exploitation and oppression.

(c) The aim of the National Congress should be complete national independence and the establishment of swaraj based on universal suffrage.

(d) The Congress should affirm that "civil disobedience" and "direct action" are the only effective weapons with which the Indian people will put an end to their state of subjugation.

(e) "Direct action" and "civil disobedience" can be successfully used only if there is a general broad awakening of the masses.

(f) To ensure the earliest awakening of the masses, the Congress should immediately adopt a programme of action aimed at improving the conditions of the working people.

The resolution also contained the Congress programme of action in relation to the peasantry and the working class.

The resolution shows that on some problems of the national liberation movement the party adopted a more definite stand

<sup>67</sup> *The Bombay Chronicle*, 18 and 20 May 1927.

than the Bengal Workers' and Peasants' Party. Its attitude towards the National Congress was also more clearly defined. It considered that its aim was not to set itself in opposition to the Congress but to make it more democratic and transform it into an all-India organ for the achievement of independence.

It must be noted, however, that although it wanted the Congress to adopt a programme which served the interests of the working masses, it did not put forward in its resolution the demand for the abolition of private landownership by the big landlords.

But in spite of the vagueness of several propositions contained in the resolution and the omission of many issues of significance, the fact that it was published and discussed at the session of the All-India Congress Committee highlights the unification of the democratic forces.

Gradually communist influence increased in the Bombay Workers' and Peasants' Party and this left its mark on the character of its subsequent work. The party led a number of large economic and political demonstrations of the working class. In Bombay and a number of towns in the Bombay Presidency it helped in the process of organising revolutionary trade unions, including the Girni Kamgar Union, the big union of Bombay textile workers, well known in India and abroad. For many years, it was the leading trade union of India's revolutionary workers. These unions and the Workers' and Peasants' Party led the heroic class battles of the Bombay workers.

In the Punjab the Workers' and Peasants Party emerged through the amalgamation of the various groups of workers and peasants of Amritsar and Lahore. The Amritsar group had worked chiefly among the peasants. Since 1926 it had had a monthly organ of its own *Kirti*, edited by Sohan Singh Josh, in the Punjabi language. The Lahore group had worked primarily among the youth, the railwaymen and the textile workers of Dhariwal. For some six months, it had its own weekly paper, *Mehnatkash*, in Urdu. In 1927 the Amritsar and Lahore groups united to form the Punjab Kirti Kisan Party. *Kirti* became the party organ and was published in Urdu and Punjabi.

During these years this party also had its own weekly publication in Urdu, *Mazdoor Kisan*.

Former members of the Ghadar Party did a great deal in helping to found the Punjab Kirti Kisan Party.

At a date later than in the provinces already mentioned a Workers' and Peasants' Party was formed in the United Provinces, with Puran Chandra Joshi as secretary.

The organisational principles of the workers' and peasants' parties were not always the same. The Bombay Workers' and Peasants' Party was based on individual membership and consisted of only a few hundred members, although the party's influence, as already mentioned, was considerable. The Bengal Workers' and Peasants' Party was based on both individual membership and group affiliations. A number of peasant unions and trade unions were affiliated as groups to the party. In 1928 the Bengal party had one hundred and twenty-five individual members and a considerable number of group affiliations representing approximately 10,000 working people.<sup>68</sup>

In the circumstances prevailing in India in those days it was a great achievement for the communists to have established active workers' and peasants' parties in an attempt to win more and more recognition among the broad masses both outside and inside the Congress. These parties organised the masses in their active struggle not only to make India "Britishless" but also press the demands of the working class and peasantry. All this had its effect on the development of the national liberation movement.

It is the belief of some of the Soviet experts in the modern history of India that the workers' and peasants' parties were very largely influenced by national reformism. They were, in effect, petty-bourgeois parties, and some members who were leftwing nationalists often determined policy and practical work. This is seen in several of their programme documents (especially at the early stage), which, as shown above, contained vague formulations and sometimes even evaded urgent problems.<sup>69</sup>

68. *Workers' and Peasants' Party of Bengal*, n. 65 p. 3.

69. Balabushevich and Dyakov, ed., *A Contemporary History of India*, People's Publishing House, 1964, p. 162.

The workers' and peasants' parties were formed in India on the basis of an understanding between the working class and the peasantry. The result was that in them there was naturally no consistent working class or Communist Party leadership. This finally led to their becoming, in effect, and at a definite stage, a hindrance to the further development of the working class movement. This happened in spite of the fact that they had played an important role in initiating the revolutionary movement.

Nevertheless, the work of the workers' and peasants' parties at this period was most important for the subsequent development of the national liberation movement, in strengthening the position of the working people and in increasing its role in the movement.

Incidentally it must be mentioned that towards the end of 1928 an all-India conference of the various workers' and peasants' parties was held in Calcutta and on this occasion the All-India Workers' and Peasants' Party was formed. In his presidential address delivered at the inauguration of the AIWPP, Sardar Sohan Singh Josh remarked as follows:

"All empires have proved to be a curse everywhere... India will get freedom only when the British interests are cleared away bag and baggage... India can attain true liberty only through revolution and not by framing constitutions... All people who believe in revolution and class struggle should join our party... The Bolsheviks of Russia have shown us the way. It will be an act of ingratitude on our part to forget their help. We are thankful to them."<sup>70</sup>

These words must be read in the context of the tribute paid to the growth of the workers' and peasants' movement a little earlier, on 25 July 1928, by Bukharin, who had said: "We are now on the eve of a growing communist movement in India, the chief stronghold of imperialism—the empire of the British King."<sup>71</sup>

70. Cited by K. L. Gauba, *Famous & Historic Trials*, Lahore, Lian Press, 1946, pp. 6-7.

71. An extract from *International Press Correspondence*, Vol. 8, No. 39.

## LABOUR STRIKES

Backed by such progressive forces as the workers' and peasants' parties with slogans "Land to the Tiller" and "Abolish Feudalism and Capitalism" against their immediate oppressors, the movement to make India "Britishless" gathered momentum.<sup>72</sup> There was seen an emergence of challenging militant voices within trade union and peasant movements.

For the new concept of freedom implicitly carried within it the elements of a really revolutionary programme of mass organisation and mass action. If this new movement was really determined to shift the centre of sovereignty from the narrow apex of the British crown to the millions of India, they could not but devise a new programme shifting the centre of responsibility and initiative from the middle and lower middle classes to the masses toiling in the fields, factories and workshops. Mahatma Gandhi's programme of noncooperation was well calculated to hypnotise the small peasants, petty merchants and bourgeois shopkeepers. But if the millions meant to dedicate themselves in a desperate and uncompromising struggle to uproot not only foreign domination but also indigenous social organisation, they had no choice but to take over the leadership of the new movement themselves. The new programme could thus take only two forms. The millions of peasants and tenants could engage in a no-tax and no-rent campaign. The workers in the factories and workshops, in the mines and on the plantations could be led in a general strike against both foreign and local exploiters.

The new programme could not remain a matter of mere theory. It began with the rejection of the leadership of the petty-bourgeois, unemployed lawyers who had honoured the movement with their patronage, and resolved, in cooperation with all leftist forces, to fight their own struggles against their

Cited by Longford James, Prosecution Counsel in Meerut Conspiracy Case in his opening address, Home (Pol.) Department, Government of India, File No. 10/XIX, 1929, p. 20.

72. For further study see R. Palme Dutt, *India Today*, Bombay, People's Publishing House, 1949, pp. 374-85; Balabushevich and Dyakov, n. 69, pp. 140-45.

class enemy under a proletarian leadership. The slogan, *Lal Bawta ki Jai* ("Long Live the Red Flag"), replaced that of *Vande Mataram* so dear to the Indian people. For the first time in 1926, May Day was celebrated. The slogan, "Workers of the World, Unite!", was raised in the various Indian languages, and the Red Flag began to be hoisted along with the nationalist tricolour. International revolutionary songs were translated into our languages and the workers composed some of their own in which references to "fat bourgeoisie" and "the workers' blood" predominated. At its 1927 session the AITUC congratulated the USSR on having celebrated the 10th anniversary of the first workers' republic in spite of imperialist conspiracy to break it.<sup>73</sup>

The year 1928 witnessed phenomenal strikes by workers. The first ever general strike occurred in the textile mills of Bombay during the year and was carried on for an uninterrupted period of nearly six months. The bloody terrorism of the government was met by the unparalleled militancy and heroic valour of the workers themselves. They were forced by the combined attacks of millowners and government to organise their own citizen army for self-defence. Ultimately the determined resistance of the strikers compelled their bosses and the government alike to negotiate with them and appoint a committee for inquiring into their legitimate grievances. When the strike ended on 5 October 1928 the *Kranti* of 13 October 1928 wrote the following leader: "Remember that the strike is not ended but it is only suspended. Although we go to the mills, we do so boiling with rage. There is no peace until capitalism is overthrown."<sup>74</sup> Another of its issues took cudgels against the trial and conviction of the accused workers in connection with the murder of one, Mr Daver, a mill official:

"If a man excited by the fire of joolum (injustice) were to do any unlawful act, then he is not responsible for it, but capitalism which does this joolum and brings mountains of

73. Cited by K. B. Panikkar, *An Outline of the History of the AITUC*, New Delhi, 1959, pp. 5-6.

74. Cited by Ahmad Mukhtar, *Trade Unionism and Labour Disputes in India*, Lucknow, 1935, p. 215.



unhappiness should be hanged. But how can capitalism be hanged by the court of the capitalists? The law throughout the world is the law of capitalism. The workman can't be happy unless and until capitalism is killed and the ownership of factories and agriculture is in the hands of labour."<sup>75</sup>

Similar stand was taken by another labour paper *Spark* which was started at about this time by M. G. Desai. Spratt and Bradley also pleaded in favour of militant change. In a speech delivered in April 1927, Spratt interpreted the existing socio-political situation as follows:

"The embers of mass discontent are lying dormant beneath the structure of Indian society and biding their time to blaze forth into a mighty conflagration. Revolution of a dual character—social and political—is in store for India. To make it successful the workers and the peasants need to be arrayed under the banner of communism, and organised under the lines of trade union."<sup>76</sup>

Lester Hutchinson, an English journalist who had, after the arrests in connection with the Meerut Conspiracy Case, taken on the editorship of the *New Spark*, a labour paper, alleges that during the textile strikes of Bombay in 1928, when the strikers, being hardpressed by want and oppression, sent a deputation to Gandhiji to solicit his moral and material support, he only rebuked them. He went so far as to call on the wives of the strikers to refuse to have anything to do with their husbands until they went back to work. It was a reply which the mill-owners very much appreciated but which led the workers to regard the Mahatma as a "strike-breaker".<sup>77</sup> At this critical juncture in their life, the workers appeared to say to Gandhiji:

"We know, by heart and soul, you are not against us, the exploited. Nevertheless, you, may be unconsciously, are striving to liberate India from British imperialism for the native

75. *Ibid.*

76. *National Herald*, Lucknow, 25 April 1927.

77. Lester Hutchinson, *Conspiracy at Meerut*, London, George Allen & Unwin, 1935, pp. 106-7.

bourgeoisie only. But we detest this native oppressor too. We detest his fat sleek body, clothed in spotless white homespun with a Gandhi cap on his head and nationalist patriotic slogans on his lips, living in luxury on the sweated labour of his fellow-countrymen. We believe that the hatred of the bourgeoisie is the beginning of virtue. That is why we are struggling against him. We will liberate India from him in due course for our poor class of workers and peasants. Gandhiji, we owe a debt of gratitude to you for leading our compatriots' movement on the occasion of the Ahmedabad textile strike and thereby awakening us from medieval dormancy to struggle against backwardness and reaction. Now we have become conscious of the historical inevitability of our role in the growth of human civilisation. We can now undogmatically use our own technique—which may not be necessarily that adopted by you—for our political and social emancipation."<sup>78</sup>

The Bombay labour strikes had set a precedent. A general strike not only in one city but all over the country had now perceptibly been brought within the range of practical politics as an effective instrument of the labour's fight for independence.<sup>79</sup> There were railway strikes at Kharagpur and Lillooah and jute strikes on both banks of the river Hooghly.<sup>80</sup> On 5 April 1929 the *International Press Correspondence* wrote:

78. Gandhiji, it appears, had no leanings towards the independent political role of the Indian working class. His approach towards it appears to have remained paternalistic to the last, as displayed by his organisation of trade union activity in Ahmedabad based on labour-capital collaboration.

79. For further study, see the Annual Report by the General Secretary of the Indian National Congress submitted at the Lahore Session. *Report of the 41st Session of the Indian National Congress*, Lahore, 1930, pp. ix-x.

80. At the time of these Howrah strikes a telegram "Thirty thousand strikers out for 51 days, relief urgently required. Please send through bank..." was addressed by Mitra (Secretary, East Indian Railway Union), Spratt and Muzaffar Ahmad to Moscow for monetary help for the Lillooah strikers. The Government of India requested the Bengal Government to withhold the communication. But, meanwhile, the telegram had been published in *The Statesman*. So the fact of the appeal was automatically telegraphed as an item of news to Moscow and thereby the

"The soil of India is rising in flames under the feet of British imperialism. The flow of the strike wave surpasses the highest tide of the labour movement in the earliest phase of the revolution 1921. The rapidly growing leftwing unions enjoy the fighting support of broad masses. Thousands of workers in Bombay and Calcutta are marching and demonstrating under the banner of struggle for the Soviets.

"Down with British imperialism, the plunderer and hangman of India.

"Down with the British and Indian reformist flunkies, the agents of imperialism.

"Long live the revolutionary struggle of the workers and peasants of India.

"Long live independent and liberated India.

"Long live the Indian Soviet Republic."<sup>81</sup>

All these developments made the British imperialists panicky. In fact, large-scale strikes took place, paralysing various industries for months at a time. There occurred as many as 203 strikes involving some 505,000 workers.<sup>82</sup> *The Statesman*, the mouthpiece of British capital in India, frenziedly wrote:

"That the Moscow school is actively at work in industrial India is beyond question. The Bengal strike leaders, Indians and otherwise, are avowed communists and have lately had considerably success... Moscow must be fought."<sup>83</sup>

The very next day came the nationalist retort, in the shape of an editorial in *Atmasakti*. It said:

"We have no objection to *Statesman's* war against Moscow from its Chowringhee office...but the capitalists, by their ruthless actions have turned one state into a communist one.

appeal was transmitted. Home (Pol.) Department, Government of India, File No. 18/IV, 1928, pp. 1-4.

81. *Extracts from the International Press Correspondence*, Vol. 9, No. 17. Cited by Langford James, n. 71, p. 20.

82. *Labour Gazette*, Bombay, August 1928.

83. *The Statesman*, Calcutta, 31 May 1928.

But even this has not taught them any lesson. By their stupid actions they are about to create in all parts of the globe many communist states. They alone shall be responsible for this."<sup>84</sup>

In December 1928, the historic session of the Indian National Congress was held in Calcutta. The jute workers were then on strike. A 25,000-strong workers' procession led by the communists marched up to the gate of the Congress session. National leaders came out of the pandal and addressed the workers, promising to champion their demands from the national platform. The workers, in turn, passed a resolution declaring complete independence for India to be their immediate goal.

#### BARDOLI STRUGGLE

A wave of peasant discontent swept over the whole of India during 1928. The thrice-oppressed tenants had been kept down all these years by the duplicity of the government. But the periodical revisions of revenue settlement carried out served to rouse the peasantry in the whole area of Gujarat as in many other provinces.

The political consciousness of the peasantry was most magnificently manifested in the Bardoli struggle. The upper-class intelligentsia which was most active in politics in those days, of course, led the struggle. Its prominent leader was, besides Gandhiji, Sardar Patel who originally belonged to a middle-class peasant family. A detailed study of the struggle has already been made by Pattabhi Sitaramayya in the official history of the Congress, and Mahadev Desai in *The Story of Bardoli*.

In defiance of the advice rendered by the Parliamentary Committee appointed to examine the working of the Government of India Act, 1919, and also in contravention to the recommendations of the Legislative Council of the Bombay Presidency in 1924, the Government of Bombay decided in 1927 to raise the rate of the land tax nominally by 22 per cent, and in some exceptional cases by over 60 per cent. In Bardoli, a tehsil

84. *Atmasakti*, Calcutta, 1 June 1928.

where Gandhiji wanted to make an experiment of his mass civil disobedience in 1922, the peasants alleged that the increase in the tax rate on the recommendation of the carelessly compiled official report was unwarranted and unjustified. On the failure of all the customary, legal and constitutional methods to get their grievances redressed<sup>85</sup> the peasantry decided to organise a no-tax campaign. Signatures of the peasants were collected and a pledge was taken that taxes would not be paid. In a very largely attended conference of the peasants at Bardoli on 12 February 1927, Sardar Patel exhorted:

"Fight if you feel that you must resist oppression and injustice. Do not take the plunge lightly. If you miserably fall, you will fall not to rise again for several years, but if you succeed you will have done much to lay the foundations of swaraj... The mightiest tyrant must bend if people are determined not to put up with suffering. The question to-day is not of a few lakhs of rupees, but...of self-respect; it is one of the fundamental principles of government—no taxation without representation."<sup>86</sup>

The entire campaign was conducted by nonviolent means. But certain foreign and Indian observers of the campaign allege that though the Indian bourgeoisie was much interested in seeking the cooperation of the masses in the national liberation movement, it was fully conscious and naturally afraid of the fact that if the movement was not kept nonviolent, it might be used by the masses not only against foreign but also against indigenous oppressors. Thus the movement might go beyond the limits considered safe by this national democratic class. Gandhiji, who was equally keen to get the cooperation of the upper classes, also deprecated the idea of class struggle surcharged with revolutionary fervour.<sup>87</sup> Without entering into this controversy

85. For a detailed study, see *Young India: 1927-28: A Collection of Writings and Speeches*, Madras, S. Ganesh, 1935, pp. 1005-9.

86. *Ibid.*, pp. 1008-9. For further study, see A. M. Khan, *Leader by Merit*, Lahore, 1946, pp. 61-72.

87. *Novoishala istoria Indii*, Moscow, Institut Vostokovedeniia, Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1959, p. 97. Also see E. M. S. Namboodiripad, *The Mahatma and the Ism*, New Delhi, 1958, pp. 28-31 and M. N. Roy,

it can, however, positively be said that the peasants in Bardoli were determined to assert themselves for their rights. To intensify the campaign public meetings were held and processions organised in which both men and women participated amidst the loud singing of the satyagraha songs. Volunteers demonstrated before government offices.

Unlike some other peasants' struggles such as the Moplah uprising, which resulted in communal dissensions, the Bardoli struggle created a good deal of national consciousness all over the country. Seven members of the Bombay Legislative Council, 63 patels and 11 talatis tendered their resignations in protest against bureaucratic oppression. Vithalbhai J. Patel, President of the Legislative Assembly, despatched a letter to the Viceroy threatening to resign and participate in the movement actively if the government refused to relent. In another letter addressed to Gandhiji, he announced a monthly donation of Rs 1,000 so long as the campaign lasted. People from Maharashtra, Sind and other provinces sent messages to Gandhiji expressing their desire to participate in the movement. People from all over the country donated over Rs 1,50,000 to the satyagraha fund to prosecute the campaign. The Labour Union of Ahmedabad sent its contribution of Rs 500. The union issued one-anna tickets, and the millworkers, who were watching the whole struggle with keen interest day after day, enthusiastically purchased the tickets. Another notable contribution was made by the students of the Gurukul, Supa, who denied themselves milk and ghee for some days, engaged in physical labour and sent their contribution of Rs 65 to the fund. The students of Gurukul Kangri, Hardwar, also contributed their share. In a letter to Mahatma Gandhi, sending a contribution of Rs 250, a friend of Gandhiji from Gurukul Kangri said that they had celebrated the Bardoli Day in a befitting manner. The Brahmacharis in the Gurukul earned Rs 50 by manual labour for two days, by repairing portions damaged by the cyclone, cutting down trees, etc. The Gurukul workers collected from among themselves Rs 200. This

*India in Transition*, Geneva, 1922, p. 206. See also the resolution of the 1928 meeting of the Comintern, *VIth Meeting, Comintern, Proceedings Verbatim*, p. 63.

contribution, it would be interesting to note, included Re 1 from a cook.<sup>88</sup> Yet another contribution amounting to Rs 2,443-8-0 came from the peasants of Chorasi in Gujarat.<sup>89</sup>

When the movement was at its full height, Gandhiji appealed to the people to observe 12 June 1928 as Bardoli Day throughout India. He advised the people to suspend their business and devote the whole day to the collection of funds for the satyagrahi sufferers and other participants actively engaged in the struggle. He appealed to the people to hold mass meetings where resolutions should be passed supporting the demands of the satyagrahis and condemning the coercive measures of the government. And the people responded by holding public meetings all over the country.<sup>90</sup> As a result of this public pressure the Bombay government was at last obliged to come to terms with the peasants of Bardoli.

#### IMPERIALISTS AND THEIR LOCAL ALLIES FRIGHTENED

As the national liberation movement progressed through the activities of the All-India Trade Union Congress and the kisan sabhas, the feudal, and to some extent the bourgeois, classes sided more and more with the imperialist order. As the British were afraid of a violent mass uprising, they tried their best to placate the propertied classes on the one hand and to break the growing militancy of the proletarian movement on the other. Their aim was to prevent united action on the part of the proletariat and the leftwing of the Congress under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Bose.

A secret circular letter<sup>91</sup> dated 21 February 1929 of the Government of India noted that *"the decision of future policy appears to be almost entirely with young men, notably Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Babu Subhas Chandra Bose. There is a tendency for political and communist revolutionaries to join*

88. *Young India*, n. 85, pp. 1046-47.

89. *Ibid.*, p. 1047.

90. *Ibid.*, p. 1039. For further study, see Mahadev Desai, *The Story of Bardoli*, Ahmedabad, 1929, pp. 93-95 and 223.

91. Cited by B. R. Nanda, *The Nehrus, Motilal and Jawaharlal*, London, George Allen & Unwin, 1962, p. 310.

*hands, and Pandit Jawaharlal, an extreme nationalist, who is at the same time genuinely attracted by some of the communist doctrines, stands almost at the meeting point... The situation contains serious potentialities of danger.*"<sup>92</sup>

The bureaucrats were bent upon suppressing the leftwing nationalists led by Nehru and Bose. No palpable evidence is required here than to quote the following letter of worried Motilal Nehru to Gandhiji:

"Hailey (Governor of UP) will come back in March and I expect he will inaugurate a reign of terror soon after his return to UP. His first move will be against Jawahar for whom he has expressed the highest admiration to those who were likely to be communicative to me. 'It is such men that make history', he said to one of these... The great success of the Simon boycott demonstrations in the UP has entirely upset him and he is sure to have his vengeance. The Congress activities will only add fuel to the flame... Hailey is only another name for O'Dwyer. He is a firm believer in 'martial law and no damned nonsense!' He will strengthen his hands in England and let go all the furies he commands. It is the easiest thing in the world to take a thoroughly straight and earnest patriot like Jawahar. All that need be done (and I am almost sure will be done) is to get some flunkey zamindar and taluqdar to oppress his tenantry beyond endurance. The one man they will appeal to is Jawahar and no power on earth will restrain him from answering the call of duty. The government knows it and will profit by it and Jawahar will walk into their parlour. You can easily understand what this will mean to me but will it do any good to the country? Perhaps some, but in my opinion out of all proportion to the price. This I quite say apart from the personal aspect."<sup>93</sup>

92. Emphasis added.

93. The text of the letter is preserved in the library of the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi, New Delhi. It has also been cited by Pyare Lal, "An Uncrowned King", S. P. Chabiani & Preet Chabiani, ed., *Moti Lal Nehru: Essays and Reflections on His Life and Times*, Delhi, S. Chand & Co., 1961, pp. 37-38.



And Gandhiji solved the problem by nominating the younger Nehru to the Congress presidentship for the Lahore session. The Mahatma also gave a character certificate to Jawahar Lal. After praising him for his unsurpassed patriotism, bravery and passion Gandhiji qualified him, "An adherent of discipline, he has proved in deeds the capability to submit to decisions with which he is not in agreement. He is modest and practical enough not to run to extremes. In his hands the nation is perfectly safe." Nobody can dispute that from here onwards Nehru was certainly disciplined, particularly in the sense that he always yielded to the Mahatma on questions of policy and action, often against his better judgement.<sup>94</sup> Thus the Nehru-Bose partnership towards which all progressive forces of the younger generation were looking for a new lead and with great hopes was broken up.

The militant socialists alleged that without understanding the inner meaning of the Mahatma's strategy the left felt jubilant over Nehru's selection for the presidentship of the Lahore session. What the Mahatma had in mind came out,

94. Jawaharlal Nehru had begun to express his differences with Gandhiji particularly since the passage of the Independence Resolution at Madras in 1927 on the initiative of the former. Gandhiji believed that Nehru was going too fast. Nevertheless, he was shrewd and skilful enough to tame the young Nehru through a letter written from the Sabarmati Ashram on 17 January 1928: "The differences between you and me appear to me to be so vast and radical that there seems to be no meeting ground between us. I can't conceal from you my grief that I should lose a comrade so valiant, so faithful, so able, and so honest as you have always been... We have long become members of the same family." (See Jawaharlal Nehru, *A Bunch of Old Letters*, Calcutta, Asia Publishing House, 1958, p. 57.) Gandhiji also rendered another explanation for restraining what he deemed impetuosity. Referring to steam "which becomes a mighty power only when it allows itself to be imprisoned in a strong little reservoir and produces tremendous motion", he added: "Even so have the youth of the country of their free will to allow their inexhaustible energy to be imprisoned, controlled, and set free in strictly measured and required qualities." (See Tendulkar, *Mahatma*, Bombay, 1952, Vol. 2, pp. 489-90.) Thus the Mahatma took the step to ensure that the leftist movement, with its motive set towards socialism, was brought effectively within the framework of his control, and the younger Nehru was fully restrained by his leader's strategy.

however, when in October 1929—two months before the expiry of Calcutta ultimatum—Lord Irwin made a declaration on "the goal of Dominion Status" to be reached in some unspecified future, and in response, Gandhiji, along with Mrs Besant, the two Nehrus, Sir T. B. Saprú and some others, signed what is known as the "Delhi Manifesto" offering co-operation "to evolve a scheme for a Dominion constitution suitable to India's needs". Afterwards, the younger Nehru was to call this action "wrong and dangerous", but he was, he confessed, "talked into signing", and then "calmed by a soothing letter from Gandhiji". It appeared not only a surprising but an exasperating incident to the leftist forces in India, particularly when it took place in the context of the heroism of Bhagat Singh and the self-immolation in prison by Jatin Das. There was confusion and consternation in national politics.

Only a few days after Nehru's election as Congress President there occurred another incident which divided the leftwing leaders of the Congress and labour leaders who had succeeded in launching a phenomenal strike involving nearly 75,000 workers on the GIP Railway. Beginning on 4 February 1930 the strike had spread within a few days to areas as far apart as Bombay and Bhopal, Nagpur and Jhansi. The trouble had indeed been brewing for a fairly long time. The subordinate employees of the railway, and particularly its Indian section, had been given a most unjust treatment by the management. Before the strike actually began, the political implications of the strike were clearly explained to the public. In the course of an appeal to Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, who was President of both the Indian National Congress and the All-India Trade Union Congress, to lead the strike on all the Indian railways in sympathy with the employees of the GIP Railway, the union of the railway workers stated its case in the following terms:

"The men of the GIP are fighting not only to improve their condition, but they are fighting for the right to organise the ranks. They are fighting for their country. The economic struggle of the Indian workers cannot be separated from their political struggle. The fundamental causes of

their unbearable condition lie in the domination of foreign imperialism. We address you and say that if you call yourself socialist, republican, etc., sincerely stand for an immediate general strike on all Indian railways."<sup>95</sup>

The general strike had been anticipated long before by the Calcutta correspondent of the (London) *Times* and had been dreaded by him far more than the threatened campaign of civil disobedience. The idea of a general strike had also been brought up in the Lahore Congress by Subhas Bose though it was summarily turned down by Gandhiji and his servile majority. The critics felt that by the beginning of 1930 Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru—the erstwhile leader of the leftwing—had been won over to the compromising creed of Mahatma Gandhi by the simple expedient of making him the Congress President. No wonder then that the young Nehru rejected the appeal of the leftist forces in the following terms:

"I agree with you that all industrial struggles are ultimately of the nature of political struggles... I am not sure, however, how far this point of view is understood by the average striker... You are aware that I have taken a number of responsibilities myself... Under the circumstances it surprises me that you should expect me to forget all my responsibilities."<sup>96</sup>

It is apparent that the stand taken by Nehru was not much appreciated. Had not the young President of the Indian National Congress assumed the honour and the responsibility of the presidency of the All-India Trade Union Congress too? Was it not then his duty in his dual capacity as President of both Congresses to lead a general strike on the railway—a strike such as served in 1905 as a sort of dress rehearsal for the October Revolution of 1917? "To plead, therefore, the threatened campaign of civil disobedience an excuse for giving a go-by to

95. Cited by Indulal K. Yajnik, *Gandhi As I Knew Him*, Delhi, Danish-Mahal, 1943, p. 480.

96. *Ibid.*, p. 481.

the labour struggle was fatuous and absurd", commented Indulal K. Yajnik.<sup>97</sup>

#### IMPERIALIST CONSPIRACY AT MEERUT

Once that they had managed by devious means to isolate influential, leftist-oriented Congressmen from the leftist movement, the British autocratic administration pounced upon the communists and their sympathisers in March 1929 in order to stamp them out. The extraordinary manifestation of the new offensive culminated in an attempt to impose a draconian legislation, namely, the Public Safety Bill, in the Assembly on 21 March 1929 and the arrest of important communists and their sympathisers in nearly every province on the night of 20 March 1929.

On the basis of warrants issued by the District Magistrate of Meerut, thorough searches were carried out for hours together, not only in various parts of India but also in various localities of the same city. Not only did the police seize and carry away books, papers and pamphlets, but they confiscated even the signboards of the workers' and peasants' parties and of numerous trade union organisations.

Among those arrested there were people who enjoyed considerable public prestige not only for being communists but also by virtue of their positions in the top bodies of the Indian National Congress too. R. S. Nimbkar, a communist, had been elected secretary of the Bombay Provincial Congress Committee. Communists were on the All-India Congress Committee too. There was considerable communist influence also behind the formation of the renowned youth organisation in the Punjab, the Naujawan Bharat Sabha.

The number of persons accused at the Magistrate's court was thirty-two. They were charged with depriving the British Emperor of the sovereignty of India.<sup>98</sup> And the people within and

97. *Ibid.*

98. To prove the charge a strange kind of evidence was adduced by the prosecution. Exhibits included articles on Lenin written by people

without India were startled to read that the accused did not refute the charge at any time in the course of the trial. In fact one of them, Joglekar, said to the court: "I make no secret of it that if and when objective forces do reopen, I shall not hesitate to strike the blow that will lay all the forces of capitalism and imperialism completely prostrate."<sup>99</sup> Another accused, Nimbkar, averred in explicit terms: "When we are trying to set up an entirely new system of laws, we cannot be expected to pay very much respect to the existing one."<sup>100</sup> It is a usual tradition for individuals facing trial on charges of criminal offence to attempt to evade conviction through every probable loophole in the framework of law, and if they make any statement in court, their aim is generally to prove false the allegations levelled against them. The communists in this case acted in an altogether different manner. The statements they delivered, day after day in the court, foredoomed all the chances of their being let off. Through their statements they sought to establish the existence of an unbending anti-imperialist movement drawing its sustenance from an ideology that preached the elimination of all forms of exploitation. That these statements could be used against them and even resulted in long, severe sentences mattered little to them. The accused believed that it would serve their cause if they turned the Sessions Court into a propaganda platform by delivering political statements and exposing the dark deeds of foreign imperialism. It was, therefore, decided that besides statements to be delivered in their individual capacity, the accused communists should make general statement.<sup>101</sup> Challenging British imperialism, the signatories proclaimed:

from abroad but found in possession of the accused. The argument advanced was: Who else but a conspirator and revolutionary could keep such articles in his possession? Needless to say orations delivered by the accused on Lenin in observance of Lenin Day figured prominently among the exhibits.

99. Cited by K. L. Gauba, n. 70, p. 16.

100. *Ibid.*

101. This general statement has recently been published by the National Book Agency of Calcutta in a book entitled *Communists Challenge Imperialism from the Dock*, Calcutta, 1967.

"The forces of revolution gather and strengthen underground, to burst out when the situation is ripe, and overthrow the bourgeois state. The same will inevitably be the development in India. In spite of any measures of spying and terrorism which the imperialist government may adopt, the revolutionary movement, led by the Communist Party of India, will find means to evade them and carry out its work.

"The end of our revolutionary preparation and organisation will then be the violent overthrow of the present state, the organ of the imperialist dictatorship, the complete destruction of the imperialist power, and the establishment of the workers' and peasants' power. It will be done by force. We definitely contemplate and prepare for the use of force to attain our object, the national revolution, and to consolidate it. Any proposal to achieve the revolution or maintain its gains without the use of force is in our view an absurdity, and can only be a deceitful trick to hamper the progress of revolution."<sup>102</sup>

Distinguishing communist violence from that used by imperialism, the signatories of the general statement continued:

"We openly declare that we shall have to use violence, the violence of the mass revolutionary movement. But in contrast to imperialist violence, an ocean which has engulfed the whole world for generations, our violence can be but a drop. As opposed to imperialist violence, which, while imperialism lasts, is permanent, our violence is temporary. As opposed to imperialist violence, which is used to maintain an obsolete, barbarous, exploiting system, our violence is progressive and will be used to attain the next great step forward in the march of the human race. This is our justification of violence."<sup>103</sup>

The above statement revealed that the accused leaders of the Indian proletariat and peasantry behaved in a manner which displayed that although the Indian labour and peasant movement was still at the preliminary stage of organisation, it

102. *Ibid.*, pp. 278-80.

103. *Ibid.*, p. 281.

had acquired a full consciousness of its destiny and a sense of dignity about its role. The speeches of the communist and labour leaders may safely be counted as the most valuable documents of the Indian working class movement.

The trial went on for a very long period of over four years and a half. It commenced in the court of the Committing Magistrate on a complaint filed on 15 March 1929. R. L. Yorke, specially appointed as Sessions Judge to try this case, delivered his judgment on 16 January 1933, in two printed volumes, covering 676 pages of folio size. Some idea of the gigantic scale on which the case was conducted can be gauged from the following extract from the judgment of the Allahabad High Court: "The trial has become somewhat notorious on account of its unprecedented duration." Even the long-drawn-out case of Sacco-Vanzetti was not so prolonged. But the most startling aspect of the trial was that it was conducted under the auspices of a Labour government led by Ramsay MacDonald, which accepted "full responsibility".<sup>104</sup>

The trial cost the government over thirty lakhs of rupees.<sup>105</sup> The government had engaged the services of Langford James and J. P. Mitra of the Calcutta High Court. The former was getting 80 guineas per day and the latter 5 guineas per day for the entire period of the trial. It may be pointed out in this connection that in the Calcutta High Court a guinea has the constant value of Rs 17. These fees were to be paid whether the court was in session or not, and irrespective of holidays. Besides, the government paid for their quarters and for various other amenities. The lawyers received a number of allowances under various heads. According to an estimate made by the accused at that time, Langford James used to get a total sum of Rs 34,000 a month.<sup>106</sup> The Sessions Judge inflicted long and rigorous imprisonment on most of the accused. Three were acquitted and one died while the judgment was being written.<sup>107</sup>

104. For further study see R. Palme Dutt, n. 72, p. 391.

105. Kailash Nath Katju, *The Days I Remember*, Calcutta, 1961, p. 363.

106. Muzaffar Ahmad in "Introduction", n. 101, p. v.

107. For further study, *Ibid.*, pp. x & xi.

Protests against the convictions came from the Red International Labour Union and the All India Trade Union Congress, the workers' and peasants' parties and the Naujawan Bharat Sabha. The Indian National Congress also joined in expressing indignation at the convictions. Public agitation for the annulment of conviction was carried on not only in India but also abroad. 16 February 1933 was observed the Meerut Prisoners' Day.<sup>108</sup>

Commenting on the trial, Harold J. Laski said: "The Meerut trial is a grim incident in the history of British India. Government which acts in this fashion indicts itself. It acts on fear, it operates by terror, it is incapable of that magnanimity which is the condition for the exercise of justifiable power."<sup>109</sup>

It is pertinent to recall here that Professor Laski told Kailash Nath Katju (who had in the capacity of defence counsel moved the appeal of the accused in the High Court and had gone to London with a brief from one of his clients in another case) in England that when he had been in the United States of America, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who had invited him to dinner, had raised the subject of the Meerut communist case and had enquired why the case was being so prolonged. Professor Laski authorised Katju to use this information in his argument before the court.<sup>110</sup> Katju, who never had any love for the communists, writes in his memoirs: "The proceedings...proved so dramatic...as to capture public imagination throughout India."<sup>111</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru called the trial "a blow against the whole working class".<sup>112</sup>

The trial attracted the attention of the whole world. It was not merely workers all over the world who carried on an agitation against the trial and the conviction. Even intellectuals

108. *Advance*, 17-27 January 1933; *Bombay Chronicle*, 16 and 17 February 1933.

109. Cited in the preface to Lester Hutchinson, n. 77, pp. 7-8.

110. Fact cited by Muzaffar Ahmad in his "Introduction", n. 101, p. xiii.

111. Katju, n. 105, p. 357.

112. *Ibid.*



like Romain Rolland and Professor Einstein raised their voices in protest against the imperialist conspiracy.<sup>113</sup>

The Meerut trial actually ended on 3 August 1933, when the Allahabad High Court delivered its judgment. The sentences passed by the Sessions Court were reduced considerably and unexpectedly. A possible explanation for the reduction of the sentences is provided by Professor Michael Brecher of Canada who writes: "The sentences were reduced later, under the pressure of the British Trade Union Congress and others."<sup>114</sup>

On the other hand, the bureaucratic circles were jubilant over the results achieved in the trial. In their secret report of 1935, entitled *India and Communism*, prepared by the Central Intelligence Bureau of the Home Department of the Government of India the following extract appears:

"The removal of the thirty leading communist agitators from the political arena was immediately followed by a marked improvement in the industrial situation. There can be no doubt whatsoever that the arrests...placed the authorities in a commanding position and created a vacuum in the leadership of the [trade union] movement which was filled with very inferior materials."

Sharp came the retort from one of the accused communists nearly thirty-two years later on reading the above surmise:

"The Central Bureau of Intelligence may smack its lips in self-approbation as much it likes, but the truth is: the Meerut Conspiracy Case turned out to be a political defeat for the British government in India and a victory for the Indian communists. The way the communists broadcast their ideology from the court-room at government's expense has few parallels in history. Their removal from the field of actual movement far from creating a vacuum gave them, on the contrary, the opportunity of establishing through pro-

113. Cited by Muzaffar Ahmad, n. 101, p. xiv.

114. Michael Brecher, *Nehru: A Political Biography*, London, Oxford University Press, 1959, p. 136.

paganda the Communist Party on firm foundations in India."<sup>115</sup>

It will not be irrelevant to point out here that after the Kakori conspiracy trial a group of young revolutionaries again tried to raise the standard of revolt against British imperialism. Though this group was not directly associated with the Communist Party of India, it was, nevertheless, in close touch with some communists. In Lahore there was Bhagat Singh, who worked in close association with Majid, Kedarnath Sehgal and Sohan Singh Josh, the chief organisers of the communist movement in the Punjab. Bhagat Singh was also on the editorial staff of *Kirti* headed by Josh. In Kanpur, Ajoy Kumar Ghosh, who later became the General Secretary of the Communist Party of India, was already engaged in active work although he had not yet formally joined the Communist Party of India. Then there were persons like Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi, Chander Shekhar Azad, Radha Mohan Gokulji, Yashpal and Bejoy Kumar Sinha, who supported the socialist cause through their writings and public activities.

It was at this time that Shaukat Usmani, who was leaving for a Comintern meeting, requested Bejoy Kumar Sinha and some other comrades at Kanpur to go along with him as representatives of the revolutionary party to seek Moscow's aid for their programme. Sinha consulted Bhagat Singh and it was decided that the time was not yet opportune. They said that they would follow Usmani only after their party had arranged some militant programme of action. They were convinced that action was necessary to carry effectively the message of revolutionary socialism to the minds of the masses in a speedy and militant process. They felt that the country in general had to be awakened for an assault on British imperialism. In the words of Ajoy Ghosh:

"The question in what manner the fight for freedom and socialism was to be waged, armed action by individuals and

115. Muzaffar Ahmad, n. 101, pp. xiv & xv. For further study see also *Statement Exhibiting... India During the Year 1929-30*, Delhi, Government of India Press, p. 10.

groups was to remain our immediate task. Nothing else, we held, could smash constitutionalists' illusions, nothing else could free the country from the grip in which fear held it. When the stagnant calm was broken by a series of hammer blows delivered by us at selected points and on suitable occasions, against the most hated officials of the government, and mass movement unleashed, we could link ourselves with that movement, act as its armed detachment and give it a socialist direction... And we looked upon ourselves as men who by their example would create the basis for the rise of a new leadership. Socialism for us was an ideal, the principle to guide us to rebuild society after the capture of power."<sup>116</sup>

It was in furtherance of this policy that bombs were thrown in the Assembly in April 1929 as a protest against the Trades Disputes Bill and the Public Safety Bill, both antilabour measures. A HSRA pamphlet was also dropped on this occasion. It declared: "It is easy to kill individuals but you cannot kill ideas. Bourbons and tsars fell while revolutions marched triumphantly ahead." In the course of the trial that ensued, Bhagat Singh raised the slogan of "Long Live Revolution". The government banned it but the nation defiantly took it up as the new battle-cry to express its urges and aspirations.

In order to pursue their militant objectives and to create terror in the hearts of the ruling circles, an attempt was made by young revolutionaries to bombard and derail the special train carrying Lord Irwin, Viceroy of India, near New Delhi. The attempt failed, and it was vehemently criticised by Gandhiji, who could not approve of the methods and ideas upheld by the young revolutionaries. But they replied by widely circulating a pamphlet, *Philosophy of Bomb*. They said:

"The revolutionaries believe that the deliverance of their country will come through revolution. The revolution, they are constantly working and hoping for, will not only express itself in the form of an armed conflict between the foreign

116. Ajoy Ghosh, *Bhagat Singh and his Comrades*, People's Publishing House, p. 4.

government and its supporters and the people, it will also usher in a new social order. The revolution will ring the death knell of capitalism and class distinctions and privileges. It will bring joy and prosperity to the starving millions who are seething today under the terrible yoke of both foreign and Indian exploitation. It will bring the nation into its own. It will give birth to a new state—new social order. Above all, it will establish the dictatorship of the proletariat and will forever banish social parasites from the seat of political power... Here in India as in other countries in the past, terrorism will develop into the revolution and the revolution into independence—social, political and economic...

"We take this opportunity to appeal to our countrymen—to the youth, to the workers and peasants, to the revolutionary intelligentsia—to come forward and join us in carrying aloft the banner of freedom. Let us establish a new order of society in which political and economic exploitation will be an impossibility... Let cowards fall back and cringe for compromise and peace. We ask not for mercy and we give no quarter to such a thing. Ours is a war to the end, to victory or death. Long live revolution."<sup>117</sup>

It is an undeniable fact that all progressives in the national liberation movement of those days lived up to the highest standards of the people's movement and set an example to the entire nation. They tried to attract the attention of reputed scholars and intellectuals who unhesitatingly pay rich tributes to their gallant sacrifices even today. "Our people fought and bled for their freedom", writes Mohit Sen in his recent appraisal of the Indian freedom movement:

"While this struggle had its specific features, it also partook of features common to all great revolutionary and liberation movements. It was the mighty river of freedom into which many tributaries converged. Its heritage is the common pos-

117. Text of the pamphlet quoted by Yashpal, *Simhavakhan*, Lucknow, 1951, Vol. II, pp. 143-48.

session of all who love India and its people. Above all, it confirmed the great truth enunciated by Marxism that without deep, militant mass struggles, whether armed or unarmed, no people can win through to liberation."<sup>118</sup>

118. Mohit Sen, "Freedom Struggle and Dawn of Independence", *New Age*, New Delhi, 14 February 1965, Vol. XII, p. 6.

## Conclusion

In the period preceding the first world war hardly there was witnessed any political consciousness among the peasants and workers with minor exceptions. They remained more or less unaware of political institutions like the Indian National Congress or of the numerous other underground revolutionary activities carried out by the young intelligentsia for national liberation. Even those who heard of them shrank from joining their ranks or even mentioning them. It was because of the fact that most of them remained burdened with their own problems of mundane existence. The vast majority of them had always lived on the borderline of misery and misfortune. Starvation had raised itself almost to the level of social institution among them. Intricating augmentation of wealth and power had all along been confined to classes of property and foreign imperialist rulers. Somehow or other if they rose in revolt or organised strikes and demonstrations, their action could at best acquire a spasmodic character or it was tied to the bandwagon of petty-bourgeois movement. At worst it degenerated into communal frenzy and bloodshed.

Then there occurred the world famous October Revolution in tsarist Russia in 1917. It was not a bolt from the blue but a well-planned armed action by the vanguard of workers and peasants. The news of the revolution spread like wild fire in India. The passage of Lenin's decree on "Land to the tiller of the soil" with overwhelming majority on the very first day of the second session of the Second All-Russia Congress of Soviets was eagerly picked up as their own slogan by the peasants in

India. The workers too were tremendously awakened by the feats of their counterparts in Soviet Union.

At about this time there also emerged on the Indian political scene Mahatma Gandhi. Although ideologically he was amazingly backward, yet like Lenin he was an awakener of whole of rural and urban people. In the process of launching first the Champaran and Kheda peasants' struggles and later on the nationwide noncooperation movement, he shook up millions. Dressed like a peasant he despised soft pedalling of life. In his half-naked dress he came to be counted more than any glittering prince or rich lawyer. To the mass of common people he appeared as the unparalleled, unchallenged spokesman of their misery and misfortune. Wherever he went, even the poorest of the poor felt that he was a bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh. To shake the poverty-stricken, lazy and demoralised mass of people out of their stupor and static existence he gave them the message of fearlessness. He exhorted them to straighten their backs and march forward undaunted. He instilled courage and confidence, pride and manliness in them through his appeals. Impressed thus the ordinary peasant and worker did not hesitate to raise the slogan of swaraj in the face of the English oppressor and fight for their right against the feudal and bourgeois classes. The sleeping leviathan—the Indian masses—was thus roused from its stupor. Not only a new unionism caught fresh wind in its sail, the heroic fight of peasants at Rae Bareilly, Sultanpur, Malabar, etc. further paved the way for the emergence of a new socialist India.

However, the debacle that culminated in the suspension of non-cooperation movement after the Chauri Chaura incident greatly disappointed a large number of active political workers. In great anguish surcharged with anger they challenged: "Is it the way to wipe out tears from every eye?" Their faith in Gandhian leadership was shaken to an alarming proportion. To try to escape, they held, from bloodshed and violence through metaphysical casuistry was the negation of real politik. The Bardoli decision had cast a deep gloom particularly over the peasants. To them it looked as though nonviolent noncooperation was not a type

of action which would annihilate the imperialist state structure, but one which was meant to pressurise the colonial rulers into coming to an understanding with the Congress. They were quite emphatic in pointing out that the much-talked of dislike for violence was nothing but the obvious apprehension of the feudal and bourgeois elements that once the masses enter the sphere of action with their own technique of struggle, the movement would cross the limits set by them to preserve their own socio-economic interests.

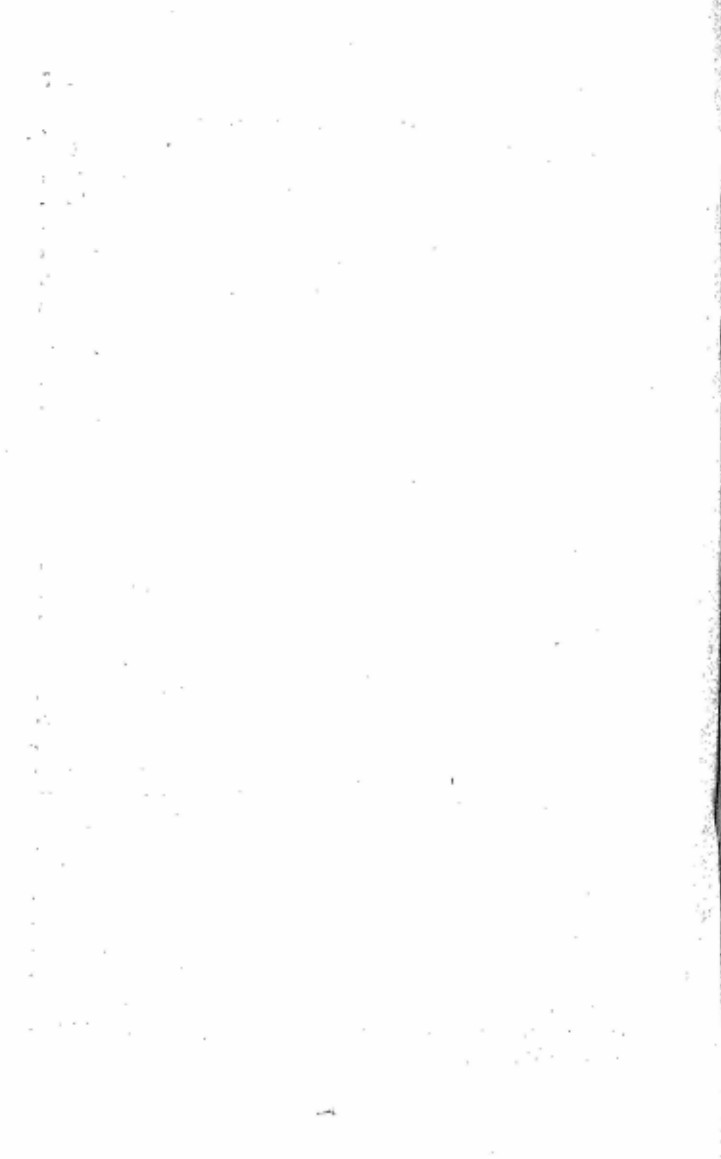
Development of this fresh approach in national politics led to the parting of company between Congressmen and those young persons whose thinking was radicalised by the politics of Marxism. Because of the fact that Marxism was still a marginal phenomenon in Indian politics, its adherents were scattered all over the country in regional groups without formulating a direct link with each other on national level.

The appearance of Marxism and the establishment of first communist groups (ultimately culminating in the foundation of CPI) were highly significant for the politicalisation of the country. A new force had emerged which exhorted for more vigorous struggle against the oppression of foreign imperialism and its indigenous allies. Hardships and sufferings gone through the various so-called conspiracy trials by the elements constituting this new force are a testimony of selfless dedication to human emancipation. Taking lightly all the sorrows the new force raised incessantly the demand for complete independence, haranguing the masses to join in an active, uncompromising struggle for independence and democracy. This kind of radicalisation considerably influenced the Indian National Congress to demand complete independence rather than dominion status. On the other hand, the Communist International also directed the Indian communists to support bourgeois liberation movements if they were genuinely revolutionary, and did not believe in the patchwork of reformist collaborators with imperialists as against such local revolutionary elements who were organising and training the peasantry and working class on revolutionary lines.

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# Appendices

## I. PEASANT MOVEMENT

### **DEMI-OFFICIAL LETTER REGARDING FYZABAD PEASANTS' MOVEMENT FROM COLONEL W. D. WAGHORN, PRESIDENT OF THE UP LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY, TO SIR GEORGE BARNES, MEMBER OF VICEROY'S COUNCIL, DELHI ON 14 JANUARY 1921**

I quote below copy of a confidential D. O. Letter which I have just received from Mr Harvey, Agent of the Oudh and Rohilkhand Railway:

"Trouble has arisen at Fyzabad—outside trouble. I have received information that 200 (2,000 the telegram says) men **travelling without tickets** in 9-Up were turned out; they then sat on the rails in front of the train and with difficulty, and with the aid of the Commissioner, Deputy Commissioner and police they were removed, the train being delayed 4½ hours. This trouble, I understand, is part of noncooperation and is connected more or less with the Rae Bareilly business of which no doubt you have seen details in the papers.

"I write to let you know that this is beginning. . .

"A kisan (cultivators') mass meeting is to be held at Unchahar on the 15th which is now proscribed by the civil authorities; possibly there may be trouble on that date."

(Disturbances in Rae Bareilly and Fyzabad District, Home (Pol.) Department, Government of India, Proceedings, February 1921, File Nos. 195-216-A, p. 2.)

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**Publisher's Note:** Discrepancies in spelling, punctuation as well as in proper names have been corrected as far as possible to conform with those given in the text.

**TEXT OF A RESOLUTION PASSED ON BEHALF OF THE PRESIDUM  
OF THE INTERNATIONAL PEASANTS' COUNCIL, ON 8 AUGUST 1925,  
ON THE DEMISE OF THE SWARAJIST LEADER, C. R. DAS :**

To: The Central Committee  
of the Swaraj Party  
Calcutta, Allahabad (India)

Dear Comrades and Brothers,

The Presidium of Krestintern (Peasants' International) having learned of the great loss sustained by the liberation movement of the Indian people in the demise of the founder and chairman of your party, C. R. Das, are tendering their profound condolence to you and to the large masses of the people in India whose voices are voiced by you.

The Krestintern, which unites the organised peasantry of 39 countries, on behalf of millions of peasants throughout the world, declares the cause of the founder and leader of your party for the creation of favourable conditions for the political, economic and cultural development of the 100 million mass of the people of India—for which, regardless of severe bereavement, your party is continuing to struggle—to be also the cause of Krestintern.

The Krestintern welcomes the decision of your Congress at Faridpur regarding the need of immediately proceeding to the organisation of the largest masses of the Indian peasants for the fight in the Swarajist cause.

Bowing our heads in sorrow over the loss of your leader, we pledge, on behalf of the organised peasantry throughout the world, our support in every way to the measures undertaken by you for the attainment of your ultimate goal.

We are convinced that the joint efforts of your party and the world's peasantry, whose spokesmen is the Krestintern, will bring about the realisation of those tasks for which your never-to-be forgotten leader has fought so devotedly, through the whole of his lifetime.

The Presidium of the Krestintern requests the Central Committee of the Swarajist Party to tender to the large masses of Indian peasants the ardent fraternal greetings and the appeal to join the ranks of your party, under the banner of Krestintern, for the fight for a better future for the Indian people in alliance with the toilers throughout the world.

At the sorrowful moment through which you are passing you may be assured of complete support on the part of Krestintern and the peasantry of the world over.

(Communist Papers : Documents selected from those obtained on the arrest of the communist leaders in Great Britain on 14-21 October 1925, Home (Pol.) Department, Government of India, File No. 232, 1926, pp. 93-4.)

## 2. COMMUNIST MOVEMENT

**EXTRACT FROM THE CONFIDENTIAL REPORT ABOUT INDIAN COMMUNISTS' ACTIVITIES ABROAD, SENT BY THE INDIA OFFICE TO THE HOME DEPARTMENT OF THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA COVERING THE PERIOD FROM 21 NOVEMBER 1922 TO 10 MAY 1923**

**Agents and Emissaries**

In October two agents, Ali Agha and Mirza Hussain (probably false names) left Ispahan with the intention of making their way to India.

Two agents have been mentioned in correspondence, under the pseudonyms of Afzal and Akram, as in India. The former was in India in October but no trace has been obtained of the latter and they have not been identified.

In December Roy wrote that four of the Moscow-trained Indians were in India. He possibly meant Usmani, Afzal, Akram and Shafiq (who bailed to Afghanistan and has proved a disappointment to Roy).

In January Akbar Shah alias Salim of Peshawar was under observation in India to which he had made his way through Afghanistan some months previously.

In September he had left a letter for Usmani, at some place in India, discussing a suggestion that he (Akbar Shah) should give an undertaking to government and settle down quietly for some time in India.

In January Gauhar Rahman alias Aziz of Hazara was in the Khyber Agency and had evidently applied for permission to return to India.

We have the names of 24 Indians who received training at Tashkent or Moscow. Of these—

- |                                    |  |
|------------------------------------|--|
| (1) Habib Ahmad of Shahjahanpur    |  |
| (2) Feroz Uddin of Lahore          |  |
| (3) Rafiq Ahmad of Bhopal          | Were arrested in November 1922,                                |
| (4) Abdul Majid of Lahore          | on their arrival in India via the                              |
| (5) Abdul Kadir Sahrai of Peshawar | Pamirs.  |
| (6) Sultan Muhammad of Haripur     |  |
| (7) Fida Ali Khan of Peshawar      |  |
| (8) Akbar Shah of Peshawar         | Is under surveillance in India.                                |
| (9) Gauhar Rahman of Hazara        | Probably under surveillance in India.                          |
| (10) M. S. Usmani of Bikaner       | Has been in India for over a year. Arrested about 11 May 1923. |
| (11) Master Abdul Hamid of Lahore  |  |
| (12) Said Raz of Delhi             | Were left behind in Pamirs.                                    |

- |                                   |  |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| (13) Fazl Ilahi Malik of Lahore   | Last reported in Moscow.                           |
| (14) Abdullah of Sialkot          |  |
| (15) Rahmat Ali Zakaria           | Last reported to have left Moscow for Persia.      |
| (16) Abdul Qayam of Peshwar       | In service in Tashkent.                            |
| (17) Abdul Aziz                   | Last reported with Obeidullah; probably in Moscow. |
| (18) Ali Shah of United Provinces | Probably under arrest in Moscow.                   |
| (19) Ghulam Ahmad Khan of Hazara  | Left Tashkent for India in the summer of 1922.     |
| (20) Abdul Majid of Kohat         | Last reported in Bokhara.                          |
| (21) Abdul Rahim Anwar of Lahore  | Dead.  |
| (22) Abdul Waris                  | Reported in Moscow in October 1922.                |
| (23) Ismail of Jullundur          | No information.                                    |
| (24) Shafiq Ahmad of Lahore       | Last reported in Afghanistan.                      |

It is possible that "Afzal" and "Akram" for whom search is being made in India are numbers 19 and 23 above.

(Home (Pol.) Department, Government of India, File No. 261, 1924, pp. 51-53.)

\* \* \*

### ARREST OF MUZAFFAR AHMAD, SHAUKAT USMANI AND GHULAM HUSSAIN

Telegram No. 1309-D, dated Simla, 9 June 1923

From

The Secretary to the Government of India  
Home Department

To

The Chief Commissioner of the North West Province  
The Chief Secretary to the Government of the Punjab  
The Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal

Clear the line. In consequence of information received by the Government of India relating to the activities of communist propagandists in India, particularly the agents and correspondents of M. N. Roy, the Governor-General-in-Council has decided that the following persons:

- (i) Maula Baksh alias Shaikat Usmani, son of Baha-ud-din Patnwar, Rajput

- (ii) Ghulam Hussain, son of Fazal Ahmad, caste Khilji, Pathan; and
- (iii) Muzaffar Ahmad

be confined in the **Peshawar District Jail, Central Jail, Lahore, Alipore Central Jail**, in accordance with the provisions of Regulation III, of 1818. The necessary warrant directed to the Superintendents of the above jails being despatched by registered post; and it is requested that it may be executed with the least possible delay. (Unless in the opinion of the Bengal government there are any reasons rendering postponement of action necessary or advisable in which case kindly advise by clear the line —To Bengal only.)

Please acknowledge receipt of this telegram, and subsequently of the warrant by telegram and report action taken.

Addressed North-West Frontier Province, Punjab and Bengal, repeated to all other local governments and administrations.

(A separate communication is being sent regarding Singaravelu and Dange to Madras and Bombay.)

\* \* \*

No. 1309-D, dated Simla, 9 June 1923

From

The Secretary to the Government of India,  
Home Department

To

The Chief Commissioner of the North-West Frontier Province,  
The Chief Secretary to the Government of the Punjab,  
The Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal.

In continuation of the Home Department telegram No. 1309 dated the 9th June 1923, I am directed to enclose a warrant under Regulation III of 1818 for the detention of **Shaukat Usmani, Ghulam Hussain, Muzaffar Ahmad**.

2. The Regulation requires that suitable provision should be made for the support of every state prisoner according to his rank in life and to his wants and those of his family. I am to request that the Government of India may be favoured as soon as possible with the recommendations of the Governor-in-Council in this connection and as to the officer who should be designated to report in accordance with Section 4 of the Regulation. The attention of the officer in charge of the **Peshawar District Jail, Lahore Central Jail, Alipore Central Jail** should be drawn to sections 3, 5, 6 and 7 of the Regulation.

**Warrant**

To

The Superintendent,  
Peshawar District Jail,  
Peshawar

Whereas the Governor-General-in-Council, for good and sufficient reasons, has seen fit to determine that Maula Baksh alias Shaukat Usmani, son of Baha-ud-din, shall be placed under personal restraint at the Peshawar District Jail, you are hereby required and commanded, in pursuance of that determination, to receive the person above-named into your custody, and to deal with him in conformity to the orders of the Governor-General-in-Council and the provisions of Regulation III of 1818.

By order of the Governor-General-in-Council

J. Crerar

Secretary to the Government of India

Home Department:  
Simla, the 9th June 1923.

**Warrant**

To

The Superintendent,  
Lahore Central Jail  
Lahore

Whereas the Governor-General-in-Council, for good and sufficient reasons, has seen fit to determine that Ghulam Hussain, alias Siddiqui, son of Fazal Ahmad, shall be placed under personal restraint at the Lahore Central Jail, Lahore, you are hereby required and commanded, in pursuance of that determination, to receive the person above-named into your custody, and to deal with him in conformity to the orders of the Governor-General-in-Council and the provisions of Regulation III of 1818.

By order of the Governor-General-in-Council

J. Crerar

Secretary to the Government of India

Home Department:  
Simla, the 9th June 1923.

## Warrant

To

The Superintendent,  
Alipore Central Jail  
Calcutta

Whereas the Governor-General-in-Council, for good and sufficient reasons, has seen fit to determine that Muzaffar Ahmad, son of late Munshi Manzour Ali, shall be placed under personal restraint at the Alipore Central Jail, Calcutta, you are hereby required and commanded, in pursuance of that determination, to receive the person above-named into your custody, and to deal with him in conformity to the orders of the Governor-General-in-Council and the provisions of Regulation III of 1818.

By order of the Governor-General-in-Council

J. Crerar

Secretary to the Government of India

Home Department:

Simla, the 9th June 1923.

\* \* \*

No. 1304, Simla, dated 11 June 1923

From

The Secretary to the Government of India  
Home Department

To

E. S. Lloyd, Esq., I.C.S.  
Chief Secretary to the Government of Madras

A. Montgomerie, Esq., I.C.S.  
Chief Secretary to the Government of Bombay

With reference to my secret telegram No. 1309-D.Political dated the 9th June 1923, I am to forward for the information of the Government of Madras/Bombay the marginally noted papers.

1. Case prepared by Director, Intelligence Bureau, Details of case against Singaravelu for Madras and Dange for Bombay.

2. Home Secretary's case of 2nd June 1923.

A consideration of the facts summarised in these papers and of the information contained in the India Office very secret report on Indian communists, a copy of which was sent to you has led the Government of India to the decision that prompt and definite steps must be taken to counter M. N. Roy's organisation and propaganda and to terminate the activities of his principal agents and correspondents, and warrants have accordingly issued for the arrest and confinement under Regulation III of



1818 of Usmani, Muzaffar Ahmad and Ghulam Hussain. The question of the practicability and expedience of proceeding against any or all of them on charges under the Indian Penal Code will be separately examined.

2. The cases of Singaravelu and Dange are in some respects different from those of the three persons above-named. Their activities are of a more public character and it is possible that action could successfully be taken under the ordinary law and this course, if it can be undertaken without too seriously compromising our sources of information, presents obvious advantages. I am accordingly to request that the case of Singaravelu/Dange may be carefully examined with this object in view and that the conclusions of the Government of Madras/Bombay may be intimated to the Government of India as expeditiously as possible. The Director, Intelligence Bureau, has been instructed to give any assistance and information at his command that may be required for the purpose. The Government of India are confident that they will obtain the fullest measure of cooperation from the Government of Madras/Bombay in the important object of defeating this dangerous and insidious organisation.

3. I am to request that the contents and accompaniments of this letter may be treated as secret. This would not however preclude any consultation with the law officers of government that may be deemed necessary.

### 3. CAWNPORE COMMUNIST TRIAL

#### DRAFT OF COMPLAINT PREPARED BY THE GOVERNMENT COUNSEL

That there was in India an organisation, the headquarters of which were in Europe, the objects of which were to deprive the King of the sovereignty of British India and to overawe, by means of criminal force, the Government of India, and also to bring into hatred and contempt and to excite disaffection towards the government established by law in British India.

2. That the said organisation was controlled by an Indian who called himself Manabendra Nath Roy and whose headquarters were in Berlin from which place, as well as from other places, he corresponded with various members of the organisation who resided in India.

3. That, with a view of furthering the aforesaid objects, the said Manabendra Nath Roy communicated, by means of letters, with certain of His Majesty's subjects who resided in India and also introduced into British India newspapers, circulars and pamphlets.

4. That amongst those who were members of the aforesaid organisation in India were:

Shaukat Usmani  
Muzaffar Ahmad  
S. A. Dange  
M. Singaravelu Chettiar  
(M. P. S. Velayudhan)  
Ghulam Hussain  
(Shamsuddin Hassan)  
Nalini Gupta  
R. C. L. Sharma

5. That the persons mentioned in the preceding paragraph conspired together with the objects stated above and, in furtherance of the said objects, communicated with the said Manabendra Nath Roy and with one another and were parties to the introduction into India of the newspapers, circulars and pamphlets mentioned above.

6. That, as the said Manabendra Nath Roy is residing outside of India, and the said R. C. L. Sharma is residing in Pandicherry, they cannot be brought before this court.

7. That, of the other mentioned accused, the following four (two) are residing at the places mentioned in the annexure to this complaint S. A. Dange, Mr Singaravelu Chettiar, (M. P. S. Velayudhan, Shamsuddin Hassan) and the remaining four, who have been interned under Regulation III of 1818, will be found at the places mentioned in the said annexure.

8. That the above-mentioned Shaukat Usmani was arrested on the 9th May 1923 at Cawnpore and that when arrested he had in his possession letters which he had written in Cawnpore in furtherance of the said conspiracy as well as letters which he had received from other members of the conspiracy and written with the aforesaid object.

9. That the above-mentioned accused have committed offences under sections 121A and 124A (read with 120A) of the Indian Penal Code within the jurisdiction of this court.

10. It is prayed that this court will inquire into the above charges.

(Home (Pol.) Department, Government of India, File No. 261, 1924, pp. 66-67, cols. 1 and 2.)

\* \* \*

**THE COMPLAINT OF LIEUTENANT COLONEL C. KAYE, DIRECTOR,  
INTELLIGENCE BUREAU, HOME DEPARTMENT, GOVERNMENT OF  
INDIA**

King Emperor  
versus

1. Manabendra Nath Roy.
2. Maula Baksh alias Shaukat Usmani, son of Baha-ud-Din.
3. Muzaffar Ahmad, son of Munshi Manzoor Ali, deceased.
4. Ghulam Hussain, son of Fazal Ahmad.

5. Nalini Bhusan Das Gupta, son of Kali Prasanna Das Gupta, deceased.
6. Ram Charan Lal Sharma, now residing in Pondicherry, French India.
7. Shripad Amrit Dange, residing at 434 Thakurdwar, Bombay.
8. Mylapore Singaravelu Chettiar, residing at 23 South Beach, Triplicane, Madras.

1. That there exists in Europe a revolutionary organisation known as the Communist International.

2. That a section of the said organisation, acting under the name of "The Executive Committee of the Third, Communist International", had, as one of its objects, the formation of affiliated organisations in Eastern countries.

3. That some time in the year 1921 the said section determined to establish a branch organisation in British India which was to be placed under the control of a person who called himself Manabendra Nath Roy, who, it is believed, was at that time residing at Berlin.

4. That one of the objects of the branch organisation to be established as aforesaid was to deprive the King-Emperor of his sovereignty of British India.

5. That in pursuance of the said determination the said Manabendra Nath Roy and the accused already named, who resided at different centres in and without British India, communicated with each other, and with others, and entered into a conspiracy to establish the said branch organisation throughout British India with the aforesaid object, that is to say, to deprive the King-Emperor of the sovereignty of British India.

6. That with a view to furthering the aforesaid object it was decided to make use of an Association of Workers and Peasants or a "People's Party" under the leadership of the above-named accused and others.

7. That the said Association was to be under the guidance and support of the said revolutionary organisation, the said Communist International, so that the same might be used as an instrument for securing "the complete separation of India from Imperialistic Britain" "by a violent revolution", and so to deprive the King-Emperor of the sovereignty of British India.

8. That to gain the ultimate cooperation of the said Association of Workers and Peasants or the "People's Party" in carrying out the aforesaid object, and economic programme of such a character as to attract both peasants and workers was to be advocated, thus effecting what the said Manabendra Nath Roy described as an organisation which would have a legal as well as an illegal object.

9. That as a further means of ultimately attaining the same object, it was also decided to make an attempt to secure the control of the Indian National Congress.

10. That as a yet further means of attaining the said object the said Manabendra Nath Roy and the accused, as well as others, introduced into and circulated in British India newspapers, pamphlets and circulars of a revolutionary character.

11. That the said conspiracy was to be financed by the said revolutionary organisation in Russia, namely, the said Third, Communist International, through the said Manabendra Nath Roy.

12. That the agreement constituting the said conspiracy was arrived at by means, *inter alia* of letters written by the accused to each other and to the said Manabendra Nath Roy from various places in British India, one of which said places was Cawnpore by reason of which this court has jurisdiction to take cognisance of the case.

13. That as the said Manabendra Nath Roy is residing outside India he cannot be brought before the court.

14. That as the said Ram Charan Lal Sharma is residing outside British India he cannot be brought before the court.

15. That the accused Shripad Amrit Dange and Mylapore Singaravelu Chettiar are residing respectively at Bombay and Madras and the other accused have been interned under Regulation III of 1818 and are now at the respective places mentioned below against their names:

Maula Baksh alias Shaukat Usmani at Peshawar,

Ghulam Hussain at Lahore,

Muzaffar Ahmed at Calcutta,

Nalini Bhusan Das Gupta at Calcutta.

16. That the above-named accused have committed an offence under section 121-A of the Indian Penal Code and within the jurisdiction of this court.

It is prayed that the court will inquire into the above-named offence. Whereas,

1. Manabendra Nath Roy

2. Maula Baksh alias Shaukat Usmani, son of Beha-ud-din

3. Muzaffar Ahmad, son of Munshi Manzoor Ali, deceased

4. Ghulam Hussain, son of Fazal Ahmad

5. Nalini Bhusan Das Gupta, son of Kali Prasanna Das Gupta, deceased

6. Ram Charan Lal Sharma, now residing in Pondicherry

7. Shripad Amrit Dange, residing at 434 Thakurdwar, Bombay

8. Mylapore Singaravelu Chettiar, residing at 23 South Beach, Triplicane, Madras

have entered into a conspiracy to establish throughout British India a Branch of a revolutionary organisation known as the Communist International with the object of depriving the King of the sovereignty of British India and thereby committed an offence punishable under section 121-A of the Indian Penal Code. Now, therefore, the Governor-General-in-Council in pursuance of the provisions of section 196 of the code of

Criminal Procedure, 1898, orders Lieut. Colonel C. Kaye, Director of Intelligence Bureau, Home Department, Government of India, to file a complaint against the said persons in respect of the said offence in the court of the District Magistrate, Cawnpore.

Dated this 27th day of February 1924.

J. Crerar.

Secretary to the Government of India.

(Home (Pol.) Department, Government of India, File No. 261, 1924, pp. 81-82, cols. 1-2.)

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# **AN OFFICIAL DOCUMENT RELATED TO THE PROSECUTION OF M. SINGARAVELU CHETTIAR AND M. P. S. VELAYUDHAN**

Telegram P. No. 291-S., dated Madras, the 30th June 1923

From

The Chief Secretary to  
the Government of Madras

To

The Secretary to  
the Government of India,  
Home Department

Reference Home Department letter no. D. 1304, dated the 11th June. Singaravelu Chetti. Government of Madras have carefully considered all his recent utterances and have come to the conclusion that none of them afford certainty or even likelihood of conviction under the ordinary law. Even before the receipt of your letter the local government had decided that communist propaganda was particularly dangerous and in view of Ray's recent letter describing programme and real designs of party they consider that action should be taken immediately against Singaravelu and his chief lieutenant, Velayudhan Pillai under Regulation II of 1819. They propose, therefore, with the approval of the Government of India, to issue the following warrant for the arrest of the two men, and subsequently publish the same in a communique. Draft Order:

"Whereas the Governor-in-Council has during the past few months become aware of the dangerous activity of M. Singaravelu and M. P. S. Velayudhan, carried out in constant communication with revolutionary and communist parties in Europe through M. N. Roy, and whereas assistance, both financial and otherwise, has been rendered or promised to be rendered to the said two persons Singaravelu and Velayudhan for the purpose of starting organisations and doing propaganda work with a view to subvert present order of society and to constitute what has been termed a proletarian republic in India, and whereas the said Singaravelu and Velayudhan have become and are members of party in India formed with the aforesaid object, and whereas according to latest manifesto of the party issued by M. N. Roy, the members thereof consider themselves justified in employing violent means to secure the aforesaid ends, and whereas moreover

the fomenting of class disputes and labour disturbances is declared to be one of the means to achieve the aforesaid result, and whereas other persons belonging to this party, namely, Shaukat Usmani, Muzaffar Ahmad and Ghulam Hussain, have been proceeded against by the Government of India under Regulation III of 1818 and whereas the Governor-in-Council, for the above and other good and sufficient reasons which it is not in the public interest to publish, has seen fit to determine that the said... (name) shall be placed under personal restraint at... (place), you are hereby required to receive the person above-named into your custody and to deal with him in conformity with the orders of the Governor-in-Council and the provisions of Regulation II of 1819."

It is requested that the approval of the Government of India may be communicated by telegram.

\* \* \*

#### SOME OF THE CONFIDENTIAL REMARKS OF THE DIRECTOR OF INTELLIGENCE BUREAU

Our case against Singaravelu is substantially the same as this—omitting documents that we are not in a position to prove, identically the same. There would therefore be no advantage in sending it on to Mr Ross Alston.

Evidently the Madras government did not on consideration take the view that the Madras CID supposed that they were taking. The Madras CID letter to me said "We recently submitted complete cases of Singaravelu Chetti and M. P. S. Velayudhan to the Madras government and these cases are being sent to the Government of India today" (28 February) "with the views of the Hon'ble the Law Member. I have therefore been asked to request you to await the receipt of these files before cases are definitely launched, as the Hon'ble the Law Member is very strongly opposed to any action being taken against these men under the ordinary law but is of opinion that they should be dealt with under Regulation III of 1818 (sic—The Madras Regulation is a different one, of course).

With all due deference, I feel constrained to say that I am very emphatically of the same opinion as the Hon'ble Member. If there is a trial, it will advertise our methods of work and lines of communication and be an insuperable handicap to future work: in fact, we should have to start afresh. If Regulation III of 1818 is used, Velayudhan can be put away as well as Singaravelu, and I think this is very desirable step.

Evidently the Madras government did not accept the view of the Law Member. I think the belief that a trial would "advertise the Madras CID's methods of work" is unduly pessimistic. I see no reason why it should and have written to the DIG giving him my suggestions as to how this can be avoided; not in the case of Singaravelu, against whom interception orders were obtained, so that there is nothing to conceal; but in the case of R. C. L. Sharma, where documents were "obtained"

from Pondicherry. Sharma is marked for early deportation; and Velayudhan has announced his resignation from the Labour and Kishan Party, owing to his having obtained a job on a newspaper—though he says he intends to continue giving benevolent assistance in his spare time. Velayudhan was the chief go-between with Sharma; and with the latter out of the hunt, his activities as such are likely to be circumscribed in future, prosecution or no prosecution.

As Secretary is aware, arrangements have been made for Singaravelu's arrest (probably achieved, by this time) and for the case to proceed.

[Home (Pol.) Department, Government of India, File No. 261, 1924, p. 71, cols. 1-2.]

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### HISTORY SHEET OF NALINI GUPTA PREPARED BY THE BENGAL INTELLIGENCE

Nalini Bhushan Das Gupta is the son of the late Kali Prasanna Das Gupta of village Beldakha, police station Jhalakati, district Bakarganj and is aged about 28 years (1924).

2. He first came to notice in 1914 when his statement was recorded in June of that year in connection with the enquiries made into the Rajabazar Bomb Case. This statement showed that he visited England in 1911/12 and Japan in 1913. On his return he resided in 1913, in a mess at 71/1 Sitaram Ghosh Street, owned by the ex-deportee Sachindra Prasad Bose, and there became acquainted with Sasanka alias Amrita Hazra (subsequently convicted in the Rajabazar Bomb Case). He said that on one occasion he had seen in Sasanka's room at Rajabazar a leather bag containing about 20 revolvers. Nalini admitted taking part in Flood Relief Operations at Burdwan and Midnapur where he met Rash Behari Basu, the absconder in the Delhi Bomb Case and other members of the Dacca Anushilan Samiti working under Makhhan Sen (ex-detenu).

3. Nalini shortly afterwards left for Europe and the following information furnished by the Director, Intelligence Bureau, gives an account of his activities to the end of 1921:

"In 1915 Gupta returned to England (London) from Bombay and studied as an engineering student at the City Guilds College. He failed in his examination and not having sufficient money to continue his studies took a position in a munition factory at Glasgow which he had to resign on account of his health. Later he worked with Vickers and in other munition factories and holds certificate to this effect. He is said to be an expert aeronautical mechanic and to have been employed as an inspector in this connection by the British government. During the early part of his stay in England he was in receipt of an allowance from his brother in India. The brother wanted him to go home and settle down. On Nalini's refusal the allowance was discontinued. On several occasions in England he is known to have openly boasted of being an anar-

chist and declared that he was sent out of India on account of his connection with the anarchist group in that country. In the summer of 1920 Gupta was in great financial difficulties and was helped by his associates and according to one report received financial assistance from Rabindra Nath Tagore. In October 1920 he was granted a British passport for the purpose of journeying to Switzerland. He also applied for a visa for Germany with the declared object of studying engineering which was refused. While in London Gupta had made the acquaintance of Madame Tata-kova, a Russian Bolshevik, who promised him letters of introduction to people in Moscow likely to be of use to him. Nalini Gupta arrived in Zurich early in November 1920 and at once got into touch with B. N. Das Gupta, with whom there is nothing to show that he had had any previous acquaintance. At the end of the year he left Switzerland for Berlin, where, probably through B. N. Das Gupta's introduction, he established connection with Chattopadhyaya and was admitted as a member of the Berlin Party. He spent some time in Berlin in hospital and underwent an operation on his leg owing to a slight deformity. He subsequently took part in the meetings of the Berlin Indians and left for Moscow at the beginning of May to attend the Conference between Chattopadhyaya's party and the Soviets. In Moscow he declared that he belonged to a "terrorist" organisation and that he had been sent from India to ask for help for young Indian revolutionaries. He had no knowledge of communism or politics, though he understood active revolution... One of the points emphasised by the Soviets was that Chattopadhyaya's party was out of touch with the situation in India. They suggested that Nalini Gupta should be sent back to India to recruit young Indian revolutionaries, especially those who were absconders. These men would be sent to Russia and trained in communism. In consequence, it is reported, before leaving Moscow with the rest of the Berlin Party, Nalini Gupta was given £ 290 for his journey to India and expenses. He was also given a letter to the Soviet representative in Berlin asking the latter to give Nalini Gupta every assistance for his journey to India and if possible to send a small quantity of arms with him to India. Nalini Gupta duly returned to Berlin about September and it is reported, with the assistance of the German Seamen's Union, he was to be smuggled to India as sailor on a ship."

4. Early in January 1922 the Director, Intelligence Bureau, received information that Nalini had passed through Dhanuskadi en route to Calcutta during the week ending December 24th, 1921. Simultaneously an officer of this department reported that he had received information of the arrival in Calcutta of a Nalini Babu and that the individual had been stopping in the "Arya Nibash" hotel but had left for Jalpaiguri. Jalpaiguri, it may be mentioned here, is the native place of Biren Das Gupta referred to in paragraph 3. Enquiries made at the "Arya Nibash" showed that one Nalini Sarkar had stopped there but had left ostensibly



for Burdwan. Early in the following month information was received from an entirely different direction that an Indian, who had gone some years ago to England to be trained as a mechanical engineer and had been employed by the British government during the war, had gone to Berlin where he got into touch with the Bolsheviks, had been sent, secretly through Belgium, to India with a considerable sum of money and was in Calcutta in December 1921. It was further reported that he had lived at the "Arya Nilbash", that his name was Nalini but he was going under the name of Ghulam Rasul and that he was slightly lame. Information independently obtained by this department showed that one Nalini Babu who was living at 59/1 Upper Circular Road was visiting the Clyde Engineering Works in Corporation Place. On a watch being maintained a slightly lame person was seen at both these places.

5. The accuracy of the foregoing information has now been amply demonstrated by Nalini himself. In his statement, a copy of which is attached, he admits that he was employed under the Munitions Board in England, in the howitzer and tool-making departments of Messrs Beardmore and Sons and in the aeroplane department under Messrs Vickers and Co; that M. N. Roy and Abani Mukherji had been provided by the Soviet government with one million gold roubles, 13 wagonfuls of arms and ammunition and six aeroplanes with which they were proceeding to Chitral to organise a revolution in India and that on his (Nalini's) arrival in Calcutta he had resided at the "Arya Nilbash" hotel, occasionally at 59 Upper Circular Road, and that he had visited 39 Harrison Road and the Clyde Engineering Works.

6. In March 1922 information was received by this department through an individual in direct touch with Nalini that he had come to India with the object of furthering Bolshevik propaganda and to arrange for the despatch of 500 youths to Moscow via Germany to train them in the art of manufacturing arms and ammunition. It was further reported that Nalini's Muhammadan name was Ghulam Rasul and that he had left India for Germany in the "City of Baghdad" as a member of the crew. The last portion of this information was proved correct as at the end of March Nalini was arrested at Colombo by the local police. On being questioned he stated that on payment of Rs 300 to the serang he was taken on as a member of the crew but that as he was given very hard work he deserted the ship. He further told the officer who interviewed him that he had been to Germany previously, was well acquainted with M. N. Roy, Viren Chatterji, Bhupen Datta and Biren Das Gupta and that while in Calcutta he had stopped at 39 Harrison Road. He also stated that he had wired to a Muhammadan friend of his in Calcutta for funds. This latter item was corroborated by information received here in April 1922 to the effect that Muzaffar Ahmad (state prisoner) had sent money to Nalini by TMO. This money apparently misled Nalini as from subsequent information received it appears that one

Jatin Mitra was sent with money to Nalini by Muzaffar Ahmad. Jatin Mitra, it may be mentioned here, arrived at Colombo on the 3rd April 1922 and was met at Talaimanner station by Nalini and on being questioned by the train police stated that he was on his way to Europe but he actually returned to India on the 8th April.

7. During the period that Nalini Gupta was in Calcutta very little information was obtained here regarding his activities with respect to Bolshevism, but after his departure a very reliable agent of this department got into touch with Muzaffar Ahmad and it was then learnt that Nalini Gupta had succeeded in persuading Muzaffar to become Roy's representative in Bengal and that Nalini had also persuaded Nazrul Islam to undertake Bolshevik propaganda. It was also ascertained that Nalini had endeavoured to gain as adherents to the Bolshevik cause the leading Bengal revolutionists including Amarendra Chatterji and Bhupen Dutt. These individuals certainly entered into negotiations with him but it would appear that they demanded a large sum of money before finally committing themselves to Bolshevism and that their terms were referred by Nalini to Roy. This information was corroborated in its main features by letters passing between Roy and persons in India, which were seen by the police.

8. Muzaffar Ahmad on his arrest in May 1923 stated that he first met Nalini in a shop in Amherst Street and that in the course of conversation Nalini had desired a private interview. This interview took place at Muzaffar's house in Taltolla Lane when Nalini gave him to understand that he was a Bolshevik representative. Muzaffar further stated that Nalini stopped with him for a few days and then left for Germany via Ceylon. From the latter place he received a letter from Nalini asking for Rs 400 and he persuaded Jatin Mitra to go to Colombo where he met Nalini and helped him financially.

An extract from Muzaffar's statement is attached.

9. Subsequent information received showed that Nalini left Colombo for London via Marseilles on the 8th April by a French steamer and his presence in Europe was shortly afterwards ascertained by the Director, Intelligence Bureau.

In April 1923 the Intelligence Bureau reported that Nalini was returning to India via Persia and asked that if traced he should be immediately arrested. Subsequent information collected in various parts of India indicated that Nalini had landed at Karachi and had ultimately reached Bengal via Bombay. It was clear however that he was aware that he was wanted by the police and was taking great care to conceal himself for no definite information of his whereabouts could be obtained.

In December 1923 however it was learnt that he was in Calcutta and on the 20th of that month he was arrested as a result of a watch maintained on a house visited by a relation of his. He did not attempt to

conceal his identity and has made a self-incriminating confession admitting that he was the emissary of the Bolshevik agent M. N. Roy.

A copy of this statement is attached together with a copy of his statement recorded in 1914.

Sd/- J. E.

Deputy Inspector General of Police,  
Intelligence Branch, CID.

Calcutta, the 8th January 1924.

\* \* \*

**EXTRACTS FROM THE STATEMENT OF MUZAFFAR AHMAD  
RECORDED ON 23RD AND 24TH MAY 1923**

When myself and Maulvie Kutubuddin Ahmed floated a limited company called the National Journals, Ltd., towards the latter end of 1921 one Abdul Hafez Sharifabadi, whom I came to know previously in connection with the Bangiya Mussalman Sahitya Samity, undertook to sell shares on behalf of our company. We employed him as our agent on a fixed commission, but he failed to secure any purchasers although he held out high hopes to us. We had finally to go in for liquidation as we could not sell sufficient number of shares. While Abdul Hafez was working for us he introduced me to a certain shop in Amherst Street, near Mirzapur Square, called Ganguly and Co., which dealt in repairing of old machinery parts. Hafez used to frequent this shop and when I passed that way I also used to step in and had friendly chats with the members of the shop. Hafez carried on for some time as a broker for sale of houses and a number of his associates who were also brokers used to collect in this shop and among them was a friend or relation of Nalini Gupta whose name I do not know. In fact I know the names of none of the inmates of this shop, excepting Hafez. Hafez took me to this place and introduced me to the inmates saying that they would all sell shares of our company.

Then one day towards the latter end of 1921 (December) while I was passing that way I visited the shop. Hafez was not there. One gentleman in European clothes was seated in the shop and he was introduced to me as a practical (mechanical) engineer by one of the inmates of the said shop. I subsequently learnt that his name was Nalini Gupta (identifies his photo). I was introduced to Gupta as the late (sic) editor of the vernacular paper **Nabajuga**. From conversation with him I learnt that he had been to England and that he worked there first as an apprentice in an automobile factory and subsequently on the outbreak of the war his services were requisitioned by the military authorities and he worked in an ammunition factory for about four years in London. He also enquired whether I was a follower of Gandhi but I replied in the negative. He then asked me if he could meet me privately as he wanted to have talk

with me and I gave him my address as 4/3/C, Taltolah Lane, where I was then putting up.

A day or two after this he paid me a visit at the above address. I was alone in my room as Kazi Nazrul Islam who was my room-mate had then gone to Comilla. Nalini Gupta held a private talk with me in course of which he said that when the war was over he went to Germany and from there went to Russia. He then came back to Germany and from there he was coming to India as a representative of the Communist International on a definite mission. On enquiring about his mission I was told that it was the intention of the Communist International to see that people's government was established in every country and they would be prepared to render necessary help to any country in their attempt to establish a people's government. On enquiring about the nature of help proposed to be rendered I was told that the Communist International would give advice and render monetary help in the matter and that the Communist International was receiving funds for this purpose from Soviet Russia and other countries. I also enquired of Gupta as to their programme of work etc., but he could not give any clear idea of the same as he appeared to have no clear conception of the matter himself. He then told me that he would send me a programme and literature on the subject on his return to Germany and further informed me that perhaps it would be necessary when work was started in India for some of its representatives to visit Berlin and have a conference there with the representatives of the Communist International. I also enquired as to the state of affairs in Russia and about the working on the different departments of Soviet Russia but he could not give me any clear idea and from his talk I could gather that he had a very crude knowledge of their affairs.

As to the programme of work to be adopted in India, I could gather from him that his idea was that work on old revolutionary lines should be continued and that terrorism should be resorted to achieve the object.

Nalini Gupta kept visiting me at this address, off and on, during the month of January 1922. Then towards the end of January 1922 or beginning of February 1922, Nalini Gupta came and proposed to me one day that as he was finding difficulty about accommodation he would like to put up with me for a few days prior to his departure for Germany. I agreed to do so and put him up in my room in Kazi Nazrul's vacant seat. Nalini never gave me his Calcutta address but I learnt that he was living somewhere in Upper Circular Road. Before Nalini Gupta moved to my quarters, one Jatin Mitter, a graduate and a son of a Police Inspector of Dacca, accompanied Gupta to my place on two or three occasions. I learnt from Gupta that he intended going to Germany to learn some industry and that he had already secured a passport for the purpose (identifies his photo). After introduction with Jatin I learnt from him

that he had collected about Rs 600 to defray his travelling and other incidental expenses.

Nalini Gupta then left for Germany via Colombo after staying with me for four or five days. Before he left he told me that he had come in a French steamer via Colombo, having been helped by a member of the Communist Party who held a responsible post in the ship and that he came without any passport and that he was trying to get away in a similar manner. Then after about 10 days I received a letter from him from Colombo in which he informed me that he was in a fix as his plan for getting away would not be of any avail and that as he had spent all the money he had, he would be practically stranded there unless I sent him immediately Rs 400. This letter came to my Bright Street address 10/1 where I had moved the day after Nalini Gupta's departure.

I then sent information to Jatin Mitter through Anilbaran Dass (I am not quite sure about the name), a Barisal or Dacca youth who was a friend of Jatin's and who accompanied Jatin to my place on one or two occasions. This youth is of very tender age and has one of his front teeth broken and so far as I know he has since left for Germany. He was putting up in some mess in Mirzapur Street. I accidentally met him in Mirzapur Street and asked him to send Jatin to me. I heard that Jatin was then living with his brother-in-law in some shop and used to take his meals in the St. Paul's College Hostel.

Jatin Mitter subsequently saw me at 10/1, Bright Street. I explained to him the circumstances of Nalini Gupta and requested him to go to Colombo and help Nalini and assured him that if the money advanced was not recouped by Nalini afterwards then I would do the same myself. Jatin reluctantly accepted my proposal and he left the next day for Colombo with a sum of Rs 600. He returned after about a fortnight and informed me that Nalini Gupta was arrested by the Colombo police on suspicion but he (Nalini Gupta) managed to give them a bluff by showing his certificates that he was an engineer and that he served in an ammunition factory in England during the war. That the Colombo police subsequently gave him a passport in order to get rid of him. He further told me that he had lent him about Rs. 600.

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**STATEMENT OF NALINI KUMAR GUPTA, SON OF LATE KALI PRASAD GUPTA OF VILLAGE BELDAKHA, POLICE STATION JHALAKATI, DISTRICT BAKARGANJ**

I

In November 1911 I left for England by B.I. Steamer "Ismailia" as a clerk. I visited London, Hamburg and Antwerp and returned to Calcutta via Rangoon in July 1912.

I stayed in Calcutta and resided with Babu Sachindra Prasad Bose at 71/1, Sitaram Ghosh Street.

I left for Japan in April 1913 by B.I. steamer "Dilwara" and returned in July 1913.

On my return from Japan I rejoined the mess of Babu Sachindra Prasad Bose at 71/1 Sitaram Ghose Street (number since altered).

While living at 71/1 Sitaram Ghose Street I came to know Sasanka. He used to visit a member of the mess named Heramba Chandra Majumdar who was sharing a room with me. Heramba is the son of Monindra Kumar Majumdar of Bajitpur. Monindra's brother-in-law is Upendra Narain Chaudhuri, zamindar of Goluckpur, Mymensingh. Heramba told me that after the Barroh dacoity Sasanka took shelter at Goluckpur. There was a theft of fire-arms at Goluckpur and Sasanka and his friends were suspected. Sasanka was, therefore, obliged to leave Goluckpur. Monindra Majumdar brought him to Bajitpur and put him up either with himself or with Satis Chandra Choudhuri. From Bajitpur Sasanka came to Calcutta. Upendra Narain Chaudhuri has a house at Kutchigahata, Baranagore. Monindra Majumdar sometimes lives there. It is opposite a school. On several occasions Sasanka's friends came and lived in that house. Sasanka took the key from Heramba, Heramba keeps the key when Monindra is not there.

On one occasion Sasanka kept a bag containing revolvers in a room of the Baranagore house, padlocked the door and brought away the key. Later on Heramba called on Sasanka and told him that his father was angry with him for allowing him to keep the bag in the house. Sasanka said he would go at night and bring away the bag. The conversation was in my presence. Four or three days later, I accompanied Heramba to Sasanka's place at Rajabazar. Heramba asked for the key which Sasanka had brought away. Sasanka gave him a key. That day I saw a leather bag in Sasanka's room. I opened the bag while sitting there. It was full of revolvers. There were some twenty revolvers. This was shortly before the Durga Puja.

Heramba is a student of the Ripon College. He appeared at the last IA examination. He moved from Sitaram Ghose Street to a mess in the building of the "Bengalee" office. He has gone home. The Baranagore house is now occupied by Nagen Majumdar, brother of Monindra Majumdar.

## II

I took part in the flood relief work both in Burdwan and Contal. I went to Burdwan as a member of the central organisation of Babu Kristo Kumar Mitter. Sasanka sent a party to Burdwan. He himself went there but did not stay long. His party and the Amherst Row party worked in conjunction with Makhan Sen's party at Jamalpur, Kalna, Chakdighi, Subaida and other places. I met Rash Behari Bose for the first time at Kalna. He was taking *sherbut* at a stationery shop. Sasanka visited the

place when Rash Behari was there but he did not stay. One day Makhan Sen handed over Rs 100 to Rash Behari and asked him to deliver it to Srish Ghose at Subalda. Rash Behari had a bike with him. Srish Ghose had a party of his own at Subalda. The Hatkohola party went there. Srish did not like it and there was a quarrel.

Nirmal Kanta Rai was in Makhan Sen's party. One day some maps were missing from the camp at Burdwan. Makhan Sen took Nirmal to task for it and gave him a violent slap. Nirmal did not utter a word. There was a discussion in the camp about it. Some members said that Makhan had no right to assault Nirmal, while others said that Makhan's position being next to that of Pulin Das he was entitled to punish a member. Everybody obeyed Makhan. The only person who quarrelled with him was Rabindra.

From Burdwan I went to Contai where I joined Makhan Sen's party. Aswini Kumar Rai was captain of Satish Bose's party which was known as the Vidyasagar party. We were all at Kalinagore.

Satish Bose himself went to Kalinagore. He used to talk to me about Sasanka. Aswini Rai is a friend of Sasanka. I have seen Sasanka visiting Aswini's mess in Upper Circular Road.

There were discussions about politics in the Kalinagore camp now and then. One day Nagen Dutt and Jadab talked to me about the reconstruction of the Anushilan Samiti with district and village branches. They asked me to think out plans. Nagen Dutt belongs to Satish Bose's samiti. He is a lathi player. Jadab is a student of the Medical College. He is also a lathi player.

Himanshu Bose was with us. He is the late A. M. Bose's son and a barrister. He worked very hard. He used to talk about the work done by the late P. Mitter. One day he asked me if I could loot the paddy of the zamindar of Choumukhi if he gave me men. I agreed. But the plan was not carried into execution. He used to talk about political dacoities. One day he explained to me what precautions are taken by political dacoits when they retreat.

Other members who used to take part in political discussion were Hira Lal Rai of Magura National School, brother of Aswini, Phani Bose, brother of Satish Bose, Sanyasi Ch. Dutt, Kangali of Khulna, who is a snake-catcher and Sasanka Bardhan.

Makhan Sen's party included a Bhawanipore boy who had a revolver with him. This boy was in the Hari Sabha camp in December. He used to keep the revolver in a heap of straw. One day another member of the party named Dinesh, who belongs to Barisal, spoke to me about it. I did not see it myself. Suren Ghose who lives in the Wilkin Press building was the captain of the party.

(Recorded by S. K. Mahapatra, Calcutta, 12 June 1914.)

## III

On the 16th July last I came to Calcutta from Madras with the object of concealing my presence as I heard from Dange while at Bombay towards the end of June (1923) that the police were after me. On my arrival at Calcutta I went to my old friend Dr T. N. Roy of 38/2 Wellington Square. He was surprised to see me and enquired what I was doing and that Muzaffar had been arrested. He took me to task for wasting my time in travelling about like this and advised me to take up some work. I told him that as I was suffering from appendicitis I could not do any work and wanted him to treat me and give me temporary shelter. He reluctantly agreed to treat me and give me temporary shelter. I was under his treatment for about a week and was staying in the consulting room. I used to arrange for my own fooding from the National Hotel. Dr T. N. Roy then objected to my putting up in his consulting room as he found it inconvenient to receive his patients there and so I removed to the dharamsala (pilgrims' resthouse) at Kalighat where I put up for a couple of days but the people in charge there objected to my staying longer.

I then left Calcutta for Daulatpur with the object of visiting my elder brother's wife (daughter of Debendra Nath Sen) in the village of Paljogam but I subsequently changed my mind and went over to Lakkhipasha by steamer which plies between Khulna and Narail. At Lakkhipasha I used to put up in Bengalee sweetmeat-seller's shop close to the station and passed there about a fortnight, representing myself to be a canvasser.

I then came back to Khulna and from there to Bangoon where I spent about 4 hours at the railway station.

I then came back to Calcutta and went straight to the Beliaghata station and entrained for Diamond Harbour. At Diamond Harbour I spent about a week, lived in different Bengalee hotels in the bazar and at night used to sleep on the riverbank.

I came back to Calcutta again and began taking my meals at the Islamia Hotel in Wellesley Street where I represented myself to be a Mahomedan. I took my meals off and on at the hotel for about 10 days and at night I used to sleep inside railway carriage on the Beliaghata railway siding.

On the day I arrived in Calcutta from Madras I had a sum of Rs 212 with me and I was meeting all my expenses from this sum.

I then left for Asansol via Naihati and Bandel junction. At Asansol I looked for some job under Messrs Burn and Co., in their Tile and Pottery Works and saw some Bengalee babus in the office. I told the babus that I was a Kayastha by caste and a native of Faridpur and my name was Aswini Kumar Datta, and I wanted situation as a clerk. The babus told me that they would see what they could do for me and asked me to put up temporarily in the local Harisava. I spent a night



there and the next morning I went round the bazar trying to get employment as a domestic servant but failed to secure any nor could the babus in Burns get me any job.

I then left the same evening with the object of proceeding to Benares but subsequently got off at Gaya. I was travelling third without a ticket but was not detected. I spent a night at Gaya in the third class passengers' shed and then went on a visit to the temple at Bodh Gaya about seven miles from Gaya which distance I walked. I put up at the pilgrims' resthouse there for about five days and took my meals in the bazar.

I then took the Grand Trunk Road with the object of proceeding further west and walked 16 miles and reached a small town called Sarghati. I passed the night there on the road as there was no railway station and the next morning I proceeded on foot along Grand Trunk Road and by evening I reached a small village called Sewgunj where there is a dak bungalow. I spent the night on the road but could get no food.

The next morning I visited the Surya Deb Temple in a place called Darbhanga. I had a quarrel with the upcountry priest in charge as I refused to give him any pice. I then put up in a shop in the bazar where I met several upcountrymen who had come from Benares. I spent two days there and then returned via the same route along Grand Trunk Road to Gaya with the ultimate object of returning to Calcutta and escape abroad in some foreign going vessel by either bribing the butler or the chief officer.

I caught the train at Gaya and arrived in Calcutta about the first part of November last. I then walked up to Ramkrishnapur and engaged a small room there on Rs 3 in the coolie lines, representing myself to be a millhand. I stayed there for about 3 days but as I got fever owing to the dampness of the room I crossed over to Calcutta in a boat, alighted at the Outram Ghat and through the maidan I reached Theatre Road and via Theatre Road I went up to the Islamia Hotel in Wellesley Street where I took my meals. I then spent about three weeks sleeping inside railway carriages on the siding at Beliaghata and taking my meals in different hotels at Sealdah station, Upper Circular Road, New Market and other places.

At the time I had a sum of rupees hundred in my possession and was trying to find cheap lodging in some obscure locality on the other side of the railway line (Sealdah) in order to avoid the notice of the police. During the time I also used to visit the Kidderpur docks and the Calcutta jetties with the object of bribing any steward of a vessel and getting away as a saloon boy or in any other capacity in the butler's staff, without having to sign on or produce a "nalli", but I failed to do so.

I remember I approached the Goanese steward of SS the "City of Baroda" which was lying at the Calcutta jetties, about 4 weeks ago, and requested him to take me along as a saloon boy. He enquired if I had any money with me and I told him that I had none but he could take all my pay as the hush money and I would work for nothing if he would take me along. He was, however, unwilling to take the risk. I also approached some sailors of English vessels for the same purpose but they refused to help me. I tried the vessels of the following lines: BSN Co, City Line and Anchor Brocklebank Line, but failed.

While I was thus looking out for some lodgings I accidentally met a boy named Akhil Roy one day about 3 weeks ago, near the railway over-bridge in Manicktola Main Road, who told me that he was a travelling agent and hailed from Noakhali. He enquired about my name, caste and country address. I told him that I was a Kayastha, and hailed from Barisal and that my name was Prabodh Biswas and that I had recently come from my native country looking for employment. He told me that two of them were living in some rooms in a pucca house in that locality but that the rent of Rs. 12 could be shared between us three if I chose to live with them. Akhil then took me to the house at No. 21 Kankurgachea 2nd Lane where he pointed out the room to me. Annada was then present there. I agreed to live with them and brought my suitcase containing my clothes and my bedding consisting of a black check blanket and a pillow which I had purchased secondhand at Bombay, from the "left luggage" at the Howrah station. I always travelled in European clothes in third class European compartment on the railways in India and always left my luggage behind in the "left luggage" room in railway stations. At Howrah station I gave my name to the attendants in charge as "De Souza" and "Asannullah Khan" on two different occasions. I also did this once at Sealdah station but I do not remember what name I gave there.

On removing to the aforesaid quarters I used to cook my own meals. Akhil and Annada cooked separately. Akhil Roy was not living here regularly but used to come and put up here occasionally but Annada was a regular tenant here. Besides Akhil, Nihar used to come there occasionally but he did not put up here. I never asked Annada as to his occupation but from a book belonging to him I found out that he was a student of the Bengal Technical Institute. Annada however never asked me anything and I used to avoid them as much as possible for fear of exposure.

I used to go out early in the morning and return late at night, sometimes as late as 11 p.m. I used to go to Kidderpur to try and find means of getting away to Europe clandestinely and sometimes took my midday meals with Indian crew on board sea-going vessels—representing myself to be a Mahomedan. I also looked for job in the RSN Co and

IGSN Co but never approached any assistants or **Barasahibs**. I used to make enquiries generally at the gate office.

Day before yesterday I went to the Kidderpur docks to try for some new vessels but found that the old vessels were there. On my way back I took tea in a Mahomedan tea shop in Free School Street and then reached my quarters at about 10-20 p.m. I spent the night without any meals and in the morning I felt very tired and so I did not leave early as I had been doing all along. At about 9.30 a.m. I went out to buy some cigarettes and betels when I noticed a man whom I suspected to be a CID officer, shadowing me and I was subsequently arrested. When I left my quarters Annada was in the room; he was taking his bath.

I saw Akhil last about four days ago; prior to this he was putting up there for about 5 or 6 days continually. I saw Nihar visiting Akhil at about this time. I cannot say where Nihar lives.

I had a balance of Rs 15 (one ten rupee note and five one rupee notes) and some odd annas in a purse of black imitation leather (made in Germany) which I left inside my coat pocket which was left hanging on a wire in the room when I went to purchase betels and cigarettes but I found the same missing when we entered the room breaking open the padlock at the time of the search.

As I was running short of funds I twice wrote to Roy from Calcutta to send me money and asked him to send it to Kiran Roy's address at Bombay but I have not heard anything about it since.

(Recorded by B. B. Mukherji, Inspector of Special Branch,  
21 December 1923.)

#### IV

I am aged about 28 years. I am unmarried. My father died when I was a child of one year. I was brought up by my uncle Kali Kishore Das Gupta. Owing to straitened circumstances I had to give up my studies in 1910 while I was a student of the 4th class of the Kirtipasha H. E. School. I then came to Calcutta in search of employment and lived with my cousin Rashik Lal Sen Gupta who was a Land Acquisition Deputy Collector in Howrah (EIR). I could not secure any employment in Calcutta. Then I managed to form acquaintance with a ghat-butler of the British India Steam Navigation Company and through him secured the post of a saloon boy in a ship going to England and left for England in March 1911. I don't remember the name of the ghat-butler or the ship.

In April 1911, I reached London and deserted the ship. After some difficulty I got an apprenticeship in the Windsor Motor Company at Hammersmith, London, on a salary of 16 shillings per week. I worked there for 2 years and learnt motor mechanism. During this period I also used to attend Battersea Polytechnic Institute and studied electrical and mechanical engineering. As I found it very difficult to go on with my studies along with the service I gave up my appointment and I came

away to India in July 1913 to see whether I could secure any pecuniary assistance from any rich men to prosecute my studies. This time also I managed about my passage by working as a saloon boy in the ship by which I came.

On reaching Calcutta I took up my residence in the Calcutta Boarding which was then situated on the second floor of the Ghosh and Son's jewellery shop opposite Sir Nil Ratan Sarkar's house on Harrison Road. Then I worked for some time in the Burdwan flood relief committee and in connection with the relief work I came to be acquainted with Raja Mani Lal Singh of Chakdighi (Burdwan). I narrated my history to the Raja who promised to introduce me to some big men who might bear my educational expenses in England. With introductory letters from the Raja I saw Maharaja Sir Manindra Ch. Nandi, Lalit Mohan Singh Ray (father-in-law of Raja Mani Lal), Babu Atal Kumar Sen of No. 1 Rajendra Sen Lane, Kansaripara and Babu Sri Krishna Mahapatra of the Calcutta police. They gave me small amounts of 15 or 20 rupees but no one held out any promise for my educational expenses. I then secured the post of cashier in the "Bharat Sangit Samaj" of Rs 30 per month with the help of Babu Atal Kumar Sen and worked there for one and half months.

(Recorded by Prafulla Kumar Biswas, Inspector of Police, IB,  
21 December 1923.)

V

In continuation of the statement I began yesterday (21 December 1923) I state the following. As I have already stated I went to England in March 1911 and returned to Calcutta in 1913—about 3 months before the Burdwan flood. I was in Calcutta only for a few days and having secured the help of one Elahi, butler employed in SS "Dilwara", I sailed with him as his clerk for Japan. I returned to Calcutta by the same steamer without landing anywhere. The trip took us about 3 months. I then took up residence at 35 Sitaram Ghose Street, a private mess occupied mostly by Brahmas. I remember the names of the following boarders: Sachindra Bose (son-in-law of Babu Krishna Kumar Mitter), Birendra Maitra, Professor J. L. Banerji (he is practising as a vakil in the High Court) and Heramba Kumar Mojumdar of Faridpur district.

Sasanka Hazra who was later convicted in the Rajabazar Bomb Case used to visit Heramba at this address. I got acquainted with Sasanka but had no occasion to know about his secrets if any. Subsequently when I was employed on flood relief work in Contai I came into contact with a batch of volunteers who, I understood, were members of the Anushilan Samiti and were connected with Sasanka. I expressed all that I had come to know about them to Babu Sri Krishna Mahapatra to whom I was introduced by Raja Mani Lal Singh.

I sailed for England for the 2nd time probably in 1914. I remember, it was about 3 months after the declaration of war in Europe. I travelled

in the capacity of saloon boy in SS the "Morvada". I managed this through the help of one of the butlers. The steamer anchored at a station near Tilbury where I deserted and went to Miss Williams at Highgate, London N. I got to know her when she was a passenger in the "Morvada". I referred to her for a living but her help proved of no avail. Later I attracted sympathy of one M. E. E. Thornton who got me appointed under the London General Omnibus Co. My services were subsequently placed under the Munitions Board and I was employed in the Vendervale Electrical Works. From there I was sent to Glasgow where I worked under Alexander Stephens, ship-builders. My health having failed here my services were placed under W. Beardmore and Sons at Parkhead under whom I served in the howitzer and tool-making departments for about 1 year. After that I was employed under the Vickers Ltd at Crayford, Kent, and served under them in the aeroplane department for about 3 years in Surrey and other districts.

I was thrown out of employment shortly after the declaration of the armistice in 1918. In 1919, I managed to secure an appointment under Van Crane and Co at Manchester through the patronage of Miss Williams. Having served here for about 9 months I left England and came away to the continent in 1920.

During the period I was in England I never came into touch with any anti-British or communist organisation. When in London I occasionally visited the Northbrook Society at 21 Cromwell Road which is a rendezvous of the Indian students in London. I noticed them indulging in Indian topics. Bitter reflections were often made by most of them on the action of the British government in India in connection with the arrests in India. Among them I observed that one Dara Gurdut Singh was rabidly anti-British. Later, when in Berlin, I came to know that Dara Gurdut Singh was in touch with Chattopadhyaya's party.

Having left London on the 6th of October 1920 I visited Paris and Zurich and arrived in Berlin on the 16th of October. At Berlin I met Dr Surendra Nath Dhar, D.Sc. (since deceased) whom I knew when in England. With a view to putting me in touch with the local Bengalis, Surendra introduced me to Bhupendra. Bhupen was surprised to hear that I knew nothing about him except that he was connected with the **Jugantar** paper in Bengal. He expected that I have read many of his articles in the current periodicals which unfortunately I hadn't. Bhupen later introduced me to Virendra Chatterji, commonly known as Chattopadhyaya, who was the head of the organisation known as the Indian Information Bureau in Berlin, of which Bhupendra Dutta was the President.

I was also introduced by Bhupen to the following other members of the organisation: Birendra Das Gupta who was the agent of the Bureau in Zurich where he was running a business known as the Indo-Swiss Trading Co; Abdul Wahed (of Berlin), agent of the Bureau in Rome;

Khankojé (native of Bombay) the Secretary of the Bureau in Berlin; and Lohani (of Pabna district) who was Khankojé's assistant. Other members were Nayak (Punjabi), proprietor of a laundry in Berlin, Latta (Punjabi) and Sudeo Singh (Punjabi), both confectioners, Sattar and Jabbar—two brothers, who were merchants, Kaul (Marathi Brahmin), also a merchant, and Prabhakar—since deceased.

There were also a large number of Punjabis, mostly Mahomedans, in the party. The aim of the party, what I was able to make out at the time, was to foment unrest in India through communist organisations. The party was backed by the German government during the war and I learnt that they had been financed for the above purpose to the extent of 4 million gold marks by that government.

(Recorded by S. C. Majumdar, Dy. S. P., IB,  
22 December 1923.)

## VI

While in Berlin I gathered the following account of the past activities of the Indian revolutionaries present there. The party which passed under the nomencature, Indian Information Bureau, was the remnant of the anti-British organisation that was started in Germany during the war through the efforts of Hardoyal Singh of the Ghadar Party. I was told that Hardoyal visited Dr Proffer of the German War Office in Berlin and offered the services of the Indian malcontents in fomenting revolution in India, provided they were supplied with arms and funds. The offer having been accepted Hardoyal gradually brought into Germany Viren Chatterji, Bhupen Dutta and the other Indians I have named yesterday.

Several batches as detailed below were then formed and sent with necessary funds to different countries in Europe for propaganda work among the Indian soldiers present there with a view to spreading disaffection among them. Wahed, Dr Mansoor, Dr Hafiz, Birendra Das Gupta and others went to Turkey. Viren however returned shortly after and joined Acharya, Sudeo Singh, Latta, Nayak and others who went to the Suez Canal. Bhupen Dutta went to Greece but had to come away due to private reasons. Chattopadhyaya moved about in Switzerland, Sweden and Italy. On one occasion he smuggled into Switzerland a quantity of bombs for passing them on to the Swiss-Italian anarchists with a view to disturbing the Swiss neutrality with their help. On arrival in Zurich Chattopadhyaya however found himself placed in a very unfavourable position which led him to throw away the bombs in a lake. Those bombs were later recovered accidentally by fishermen and were found to be of German make. Subsequently it was discovered that the bombs were manufactured by Dr Hafiz and thereby Chattopadhyaya's plot was exposed.

After return from Greece Bhupen Dutta was sent to Switzerland where he made over an amount of 20 thousand Swiss gold francs for propaganda among the Indian army in England. Funds for the use of the In-

dian revolutionists in America were sent to Chandrakanta Chokrabarti. On the termination of the war, Dr Hafiz joined service under the Austrian government as munitions expert. In 1921 he was appointed in the same function by the Afghan Ambassador for service under the Afghan government.

I also heard that Barakatullah, Mahendra Pratap and Abdul Rauf had also participated with the others in the anti-British propaganda. Mahendra Pratap is said to have been favoured with an interview by the Kaiser himself and to have been provided by him with a writ recognising the Indian Republic. The aforesaid individuals and Acharya went to Moscow from Berlin in 1919 and interviewed Lenin. From there all the four are said to have proceeded to Afghanistan and to have inaugurated there a provisional Indian Republican Government. They offered the N. W. Frontier Provinces to the Amir of Afghanistan and N. E. Frontier countries and Bhutan to Nepal and arranged to send an expedition into India through Tibet. All these however ended in fiasco.

After my arrival in October 1920 I lived in Berlin for about 7 months passing most of my time in hospital where I underwent surgical operation on my left leg to cure my born lameness. At this time, with the help of Bhupendra Dutta and others, I was appointed as mechanical engineer under the Russian government by Victor Kapp—the Russian Ambassador in Berlin. I left Berlin for Moscow on the 3rd of May 1921 in company with Lohani. I again fell ill in Moscow and joined hospital at Kremlin. After my arrival the following persons went there in different batches: Chattopadhyaya, Bhupendra Dutta, Birendra Das Gupta, Wahed, Khankojé, Agnes Smedley (wife of Chattopadhyaya) and Heramba Gupta alias Lopez who had come to Berlin from Mexico.

(Recorded by S. C. Majumdar, Dy. S.P., IB,  
23 December 1923.)

## VII

In Moscow I met Acharya and Abdul Rauf who had already returned there from Afghanistan. Abani Mukherji and M. N. Roy alias Narendra Bhattacharya came to Moscow from Tashkent, one after the other, within a fortnight after my arrival.

I first put up at the De Lux, an international hotel, and later joined hospital at Kremlin. While in hospital I was introduced to Abani by Bhupendra Dutta. One day when I was talking to Abani, Agnes Smedley sent for me and advised me not to associate with Abani who, she said, was a British spy. I did not however pay any heed to her warning. It was through Abani that I got acquainted with M. N. Roy at the De Lux. I had already heard about M. N. Roy from Bhupendra Dutta and others in Berlin. I was told that Roy was a dishonest person who had monopolised the support of the Communist International in Moscow and was in charge of their propaganda in India. At that time I understood that

the party of Chattopadhyaya was greatly jealous of Roy and wanted to discredit him before the Comintern with a view to obtaining for themselves the support of the Moscow communists.

When all the above were present in Moscow a conference of the Indians was convened at my instance, for the purpose of bringing about a compromise between Chattopadhyaya's and Roy's parties. The meeting, however, ended in a fight between Abani Mukherji and Khankaja creating the gulf between them wider than ever.

The sittings of the Congress of the Third International began in Moscow in July 1921, about 10 days after the above incident. Due to the influence of M. N. Roy the Indians who belonged to Chattopadhyaya's party were not given the necessary delegates mandate to attend the Congress. The Indians who were admitted were M. N. Roy, his secretary Shafiq (formerly a student at Aligarh) and Abani Mukherji with his wife Rosa (a Russian jewess). In view of the treaty negotiations which were in progress at the time nothing was openly discussed in the Congress with regard to India. The Soviet government was virtually under the control of the Communist Party as almost all the high officials viz., Lenin, Trotsky, Zinoviev, Chicherin, Radek, Bukharin, Bela Kun and others were members of the Central Committee of the Communist Party in Moscow which formed the headquarters organisation of the Third International.

An institution known as the Oriental Communist Institution (University for the Tillers of the East) was started at Moscow at the time when I was there. The school at Tashkent where Indians were being imparted military training was abolished in consequence of the treaty. Of the students there fifteen were brought to Moscow and another fifteen were sent back to India. In the Moscow lot were Abdul Kaium, said to be the son of a police officer of Lahore, Masud Ali Shah, commonly known as Ali Shah, Usmani (since arrested in India), Salim, Goraman and Subdar. I am unable to remember the names of the rest. All these persons were up-country Mahomedans who formerly belonged to the Aligarh college. I met them in Moscow where they held a conference which was attended by M. N. Roy, Abani Mukherji and myself. In this meeting only matters relating to the grievances of the students were discussed and report drafted for submission to the Rector of the University. There was no discussion on politics. The following were the main subjects in the syllabus of the University—economics, history of different revolutions, journalism and oratory for the communistic propaganda.

I used to visit M. N. Roy daily without the notice of the Chattopadhyaya's party. Roy gave me a book entitled "History of Revolution" to enable me to acquire theoretical knowledge. I however returned the book and expressed that I was inclined to do practical work. I gathered the following account of M. N. Roy's past activities in Russia. He was a member of the Turk Mission which was sent by the Soviet government



to Turkestan in the beginning of 1920. After that, on requisition made by M. N. Roy, he is said to have been provided by the Soviet government with one million gold roubles, 13 wagonfuls of arms and ammunition and six aeroplanes for the purpose of creating disturbances in India. With these M. N. Roy and Abani Mukherji accompanied by their wives and some Afridis and Russians proceeded to Tashkent. Their plans were to go to Chitral and organise there for the purpose of bringing about a revolution in India. They were however not permitted by the Amir of Afghanistan to enter his territories. They therefore halted in Tashkent where they later opened a school for imparting military training to Indians as I have stated above. The money was subsequently taken away by the Soviet Mission that visited Afghanistan on a later date. Roy had sent one Muhammad Ali with 40 thousand Afghan rupees with the mission with instructions to proceed to India from Afghanistan. This individual was arrested by the Afghan government with the money but was subsequently released on the intervention of the Soviet government.

After living in Moscow for about 3 months I made up my mind to return to India. Roy then offered to me that in case I succeeded on my return to India to induce some suitable persons of the working class to attend the congress of the Third International in Moscow as delegates from India, I would be provided by the Comintern with sufficient funds for propaganda work in India. I accepted the offer. M. N. Roy was not in a position at the time to help me pecuniary having no control over the funds of the party as upto then it was not decided which of the factional parties of Indians the Comintern would employ for their work in India.

I left Moscow in August 1921 with £ 200 which I obtained from the Soviet government as my pay and passage money. I was known to government as a nationalist (having described myself as such in the "auket") and not as communist. The German Consul refused me a visa at Ravel but this was subsequently granted through the intervention of the local British Consul. I arrived in Berlin and stayed there about a month, Biren Das Gupta, Chattopadhyaya, Bhupen Dutta and others having returned there in the meantime. On this occasion I got acquainted with Ismail Din of the Indische-Deutsche Gesellschaft, GMBH, a firm at Leipzig, and also a student of chemistry there. I had already converted the 200 pounds into marks but the value of the same went down subsequently. I left the amount with Ismail Din and took a loan of 75 pounds for my travelling expenses. I left instructions with Ismail Din to send me the balance to India as soon as the marks had regained their normal value. Ismail Din directed me to see his brother Ismail Macky at the place of A. H. Ismail near the Grand Hotel in Calcutta, to whom Ismail Din also promised to write about me. Ismail Din's elder brother, Ismail Kosim, who is in Berlin is a friend of Birendra Das Gupta.

Leaving Berlin in the middle of September 1921 I came to Marseilles by train. Here I got my passport renewed by the British Consul and sailed for India by the "Aukor", a French Line steamer. In Colombo I had to join hospital to undergo a surgical operation there. After 6 weeks I came away to Calcutta via Dhanuskodi. I arrived on 23rd December 1921 and put up at the Adarsha Arya Nilas at Sealdah. I looked for Ismail Din's brother and after some difficulty found him at 24 Chowringhee Road. After I had informed him about my connection with Ismail Din and told him that I was in dearth of funds he on the first day only advised me to wire to Din but on the second day advanced Rs 50 and asked me to have my dinner at his place daily if necessary. I also looked for Dr T. N. Roy, one of my old acquaintances in Glasgow, who I knew was practising in Calcutta. I discovered him at 38-2 Wellington Square and from him ascertained the address of the mother of Himangshu Nath Roy alias Golap. Golap was a matric student in Glasgow when I was there and subsequently I lived with him in London when he was studying for the Bar there.

(Recorded by S. C. Majumdar, Dy S.P., IB,  
24 December 1923.)

### VIII

I met Jatin Mitra accidentally at Amherst Street about a week after my arrival. He was one of my old acquaintances whom I came to know when I was in Calcutta after my return from England for the first time. He was then a college student living at 7 Pratap Chatterji Lane. I understood Jatin was contemplating to go to Europe. He asked me to meet him at the place of G. Bose, hair-oil manufacturer, at Harrison Road. I visited Golap's mother at 59 Upper Circular Road and through her kindness I used to put up there occasionally.

I had also a chance of meeting with one Haran Chandra Das of Bel-dakhan, a co-villager of mine, at Mirzapur Street and learnt that he was working as a broker in Calcutta living at Mirzapur Street near the crossing of Balthakkhana Road. I met him again two days after, when he informed me that he could get some Mahomedan capitalists if I was ready to open a manufacturing concern. He told me that I could meet those Mahomedans in a shop at Amherst Street opposite the Mirzapur Square and made an appointment to introduce me to them. I in company with Jatin Mitra went accordingly but failing to meet Haran proceeded to the shop. While near the place I was accosted by a Mahomedan whose name I later learnt as Hafiz. He enquired if I was coming from Haran Babu and my reply being in the affirmative he told me that he was expecting me there. There were 4 or 5 others in the shop. After some conversation during which Hafiz assured me that there was no reason for me to worry about financiers he started talking bitterly against the English and enquired if I could prepare bombs for them. I however ex-

plained to Hafiz the futility of taking recourse to violent methods at the present stage and endeavoured to impress him with the necessity of educating and organising the masses. A short time after, Hafiz, accompanied by a Hindu youth, aged about 30 years, dark complexion, short stature, wearing specs, took me to a house on the western side of the Upper Circular road near the Pares Nath Temple. Continuing our conversation I informed Hafiz about the prospects of getting funds if he would go to Moscow and get into direct touch with the party. Jatin did not accompany us to the latter place.

About a week after the above meeting Hafiz went to me at 59 Upper Circular Road with Haran and took me to a house at Taltola. Here I met two others whom I later knew as Muzaffar Ahmad and Nazrul Islam. The latter was dressed in "gerua" clothes. I was here almost for the whole day talking to Muzaffar and Nazrul about the prospects if they were willing to go to Moscow as delegates to the congress of the Third International and work for the Communist Party. Muzaffar expressed his readiness to comply.

After this I went to my native village to see my people and also visited Bhola. I was away for about 13 days. On my return I accompanied Jatin Mitra to Goalunda and interviewed his maternal uncle—an employee in the local Cooly Depot, over the proposal of Jatin's going to Europe.

In the statement with regard to my activities and associates since my return in December 1921 I had deliberately kept back some names and particulars. But I have now made up my mind to make further statement without reservation.

On the very night after my arrival in Calcutta from Colombo I visited 39 Harrison Road expecting to meet there one Rash Behari Das who was brought up in our house in his early days. I found him away to Delhi where he was employed in the Accounts Department. I however met here one Jiten Roy, an employee in some insurance office. Jiten was also one of my old acquaintances. Later I took Jiten into confidence and requested him to introduce me to Amar Chatterji which he promised to do. He, however, never kept up his promise though he took an advance of Rs 20 from me on that account.

I was directed by M. N. Roy to see Amar Chatterji and persuade him to join the Communist Party and help in their propaganda in India. Roy was not however much confident of gaining the support of his old associates. During the period I was in Bengal on that occasion I had not had any chance of corresponding with Roy as he was living at the time in Moscow. There was no suggestion of starting any paper like the *Vanguard* for propaganda work in India at the time I left Moscow.

At 39 Harrison Road I also got acquainted with one Ramesh Das Gupta. Though he was a co-villager of mine, I did not know him before

as he lived most of his time in his maternal uncle's house at Banaripara in Barisal, where his brother is now practising as a Kabiraj. His father has relinquished worldly connections and is at present a "sannyasi". I got intimate with Ramesh but had not taken him into my confidence by disclosing to him my real mission until a short time before I left. Ramesh having expressed sympathy with the communistic propaganda and eagerness to go to Europe I advised him to collect some funds.

Besides the above I met the following other persons in Calcutta on the occasion of that visit. I interviewed Sukumar Chakrabarti at the "Samabay" buildings where he was employed under the Clyde Engineering Co. Sukumar was my old acquaintance. I also saw Khirode Babu, the proprietor of the firm, as I was requested to do so by his relation Surhid Roy alias Haboo who was a student of metallurgy at Zurich. I picked up his acquaintance in Berlin where I found him associating with M. N. Roy's as well as Chattopadhyaya's party. He is suspected by the latter to be in the pay of the British government. I also met Surhid's brother in Calcutta under peculiar circumstances, though Surhid had never mentioned anything to me about him. One day when I was passing by the Bowbazar Street I was accosted by a young boy who claimed to know me as Nalini Babu and asked me to see S. K. Roy's brother Ramdoyal Roy at the Nepal Border Timber Yard at Bowbazar. I met Ramdoyal on the following day and understood that Surhid had written to him about me. I was favoured by Ramdoyal with a loan of Rs 100 which I have not repaid yet. I also met Babu Atul Kumar Sen of the Sangit Samaj and Raja Mani Lal Singh who are my old patrons. I used to visit T. N. Roy frequently for medical treatment. At his place I picked up the acquaintance of one Ajay Sen Gupta, a cousin of Mr S. C. Sen Gupta, American dentist, who lives in the same premises where T. N. Roy occupies a room. I found Ajay knowing a good deal about persons like Mati Lal Roy of Chandernagore and others and admirers of periodicals like the **Prabartak** and the **Atmasakti**.

One day I asked him if he could help me in obtaining an interview with Amar Chatterji. Ajay agreed but later informed me that Amar Babu was not inclined to meet me. Ajay however introduced me at his own place with one Bhupendra Nath Datta whom Ajay described as a very important leader of the revolutionary party. Bhupen first wanted to see credentials if I had any but I had none to produce. He told me that negotiations with government were in progress for gaining permission for Narendra Bhattacharji to return to India. After some conversation during which he drave at sounding my reliability he left. He again visited me at the same place on the following day. I brought him away to Muzaffar's place at Taltola where after he had some discussion over the matter he agreed to help in the communist propaganda in Bengal provided funds were forthcoming. I informed him

about the possibilities on that score and promised to report all about the conditions to Roy on my return.

On the same day I sailed again for Europe in a cargo boat the "Baroda" in which I secured admittance surreptitiously with the help of a Boarding Master at Kidderpore, who was a co-villager of Muzaffar Ahmad. This individual secured the help of the serang of the boat paying him Rs 100.

(Recorded by S. C. Majumdar, Dy S.P., IB; 26 December 1923.)

## IX

In Calcutta I took loans of Rs 100 from Ramdoyal Roy and Rs 300 in three instalments from Ismail Makey. Of this amount only about Rs 100 was left with me when I left. Two days after our departure from Kidderpore I was asked to do crew's work on the boat which I refused. The matter was eventually referred to the Chief Officer to whom I showed my passport and informed that I had paid my passage money of Rs 100 to the serang. On arrival at Colombo I was instructed by the Chief Officer to leave the boat stealthily which I did. I had only about 80 rupees left with me when I left. I put up at the Tower View Hotel. While there I was sent for by the DIG of police to whom I gave an account of myself and the manner in which I had gone there. He kept me under observation. In the meantime I wrote to Muzaffar Ahmad at 10/1 Bright Street informing him how I was stranded at Colombo and asking him to send Jatin Mitra with money. Jatin arrived there after about a fortnight. He brought only Rs 560 which was not sufficient to cover the travelling expenses of the two of us. Jatin however decided in my favour and lent me Rs 400 keeping the balance to return to Calcutta. Four days after Jatin's arrival I left Colombo by the "Anrelebon" having reported my departure to the DIG. I arrived Marseilles in April 1922 and Berlin on 2nd May.

In Berlin I learnt from my friend Miss Sophia Selfert of No. 1 Welsbach Strass that one Khan who came from America had enquired about me. I rang up Khan at the address he had left with Sophia and learnt that he was Surendra Kar. I had heard about this man and knew that M. N. Roy had asked him to come to Berlin and sent him 500 dollars in America. Under Surendra's directions I met him in a restaurant from where he took me to Kurfurstpaen Hotel where I met M. N. Roy and his wife Evelyn alias Santi Devi. I reported to Roy all about my experience in Bengal and about Bhupen Datta and Muzaffar Ahmad, recommending the latter to be placed in charge of the propaganda in Bengal. I also informed him about my borrowing money in Calcutta and from Jatin Mitra in Colombo and requested him to pay them off immediately. On this occasion I learnt from Roy that he has started a paper entitled—the **Vanguard**—for the dissemination of communistic doc-

trine in India. Being asked to give some addresses in Bengal where the **Vanguard** could be sent I supplied Roy with the following addresses:

- (1) Muzaffar Ahmad, 10-1 Bright Street.
- (2) T. N. Roy, 38-2, Wellington Square.
- (3) K. B. Roy, New India Assurance Co, Bombay. I knew this man when he was a student in Glasgow and had told about him to Jatin Mitra and Ramesh Das Gupta.
- (4) Jiten Roy of 39 Harrison Road.
- (5) Umesh Ch. Das Gupta (my cousin), Beldakhan, Dt. Barisal.

M. N. Roy had also collected a large number of addresses from the Indian students in Berlin and other places in Germany. After the war the number of such students has swollen to an unprecedented extent.

The chief representative of the Comintern in Berlin is one Miss Lousie. The important persons among the local communists are Thalheimer, Heckert, Dalhem and others whose names I am unable to remember now. M. N. Roy has the support and patronage of all the above persons. The **Vanguard** was originally printed in Hamburg but now it is printed in Berlin.

After my return I learnt that Ali Shah, Usmani, Shafiq, Salim, Gorman and 7 others, all up-country Mahomedans, had been sent out to India by different routes. Among them I met only Ali Shah who returned to Berlin from India via Persia and Moscow after I was there. I learnt from him that he visited Bengal and other parts of India and got into touch with several Congress leaders and labour agitators. I was told that Usmani had got into touch with the labour leaders in Bombay and had also visited Bengal and some of the rest were organising in the Punjab. Shafiq was reported to have gone to Afghanistan from India.

I was in Berlin on this occasion for about 4 months having lived in M. N. Roy's hotel for the last 10 days of my sojourn. I met there Yarmen, an Australian, and James and Ashleigh, two Englishmen, whom Roy was arranging to send out to India. Ashleigh started for India on or about 28th of August 1922 with instructions to interview Dange in Bombay, Singaravelu in Madras and Amar Chatterji in Calcutta. He was told nothing about Muzaffar.

I left Berlin on the 2nd of September 1922 to come to India with orders from Roy to make my headquarters in Bombay for the purpose of receiving and circulating the **Vanguard**, copies of which Roy had arranged to smuggle into India with the help of the Dutch and the German sailors most of whom were communists.

I received 125 pounds as my passage money and came as far as Genoa in Italy but failed to get a visa from the British Consul. I therefore returned to Berlin and reported to Roy. I was then ordered to proceed via Moscow and Persia which according to reports was the safest route. I left Berlin by steamer and arrived in Moscow on the 3rd October via Petrograd. I interviewed Tivel, the secretary of the Comintern for

the Middle East, and handed over the letter I was given by Roy. I was detained in Moscow up to the middle of December 1922 and in the meantime learnt from a letter from Roy that Jatin Mitra had arrived in Berlin.

Roy himself arrived in Moscow shortly before the congress of the Third International which began on the 5th of November. The Indians who attended the Congress are myself, Ali Shah, M. N. Roy and two delegates who came from India and belonged to the Ghadar Party. The name of one of them is Anup Singh, a man of rather short stature and ordinary build and aged about 32 years. His companion was older and taller than he and rather well built. These two persons held private conferences with Roy, Tivel and Safarov, the General Secretary of the Comintern for the East. I noticed these two individuals writing long reports on the work done in the Punjab for the information of the Comintern. I understood from Tivel that the Comintern had concentrated their attention on the Punjab as they believe success in India depended on the help from the Punjab. Delegates from different places delivered speeches in the congress detailing the progress made in connection with the communist propaganda in their respective countries. Roy reported that after two years of hard labour satisfactory progress had been made in Bombay, Madras and the Punjab while in Bengal the conditions are on the way towards improvement. Zinoviev remarked that Roy's reports are rather tantalising and that he wanted to see practical results. Zinoviev is the President of the Comintern while Kolarov, a Bulgarian, was the president of that congress.

During the sittings of the congress there was conference of the delegates from the East. In this meeting the ways of mutual cooperation in furtherance of the common object was discussed. Among the points agreed upon was the organisation in transport department, sending out missions for propaganda work and dissemination of the communist doctrine through literature.

Among other Indians present in Moscow was one P. N. Datta alias Daud Ali who was in possession of a Persian passport. He is a member of the Communist Party and has been appointed professor of Bengali literature at Petrograd.

I have no doubt that the Comintern is not depending only on M. N. Roy for their propaganda in India but have other Indians in their pay for the work. I learnt on this occasion in Moscow that Lohani and Khankojé were also furnished with funds to proceed to India, the former to work in Bengal and the latter amongst the members of the Ghadar party in the Punjab. Khankojé never came but Lohani started for India but I don't know if he had actually come here. Besides the Communist International there is another organisation known as Profintern which body is allied to the Comintern and also supported by the Soviet government. My information is that this body is patronising Abani Mukherji.

I left Moscow on the 16th December 1922 with 150 pounds in British currency notes that I was provided with by Comintern and I was told by Tivel that instructions have been issued for my help along the Persian route to India. I came to Baku by train and crossed over to Angely by steamer and from there went to Teheran by the motor service. Failing to meet the local Russian Ambassador I interviewed his secretary Waldin and was introduced by him to an Indian named Hussain who was said to have been the local representative of the Comintern. I also learnt that instructions were received there from the headquarters to render me necessary help. I was granted an interview by the Ambassador Sumaleskry and understood that he was organising a Communist Party of his own for running propaganda in India with the help of Indian and Persian Mahomedans.

I had to wait at Teheran for about a month before I could catch the mail caravan to come to Kum from where I travelled on to Ispahan in about 4 days. I was detained at Ispahan for about a fortnight after which I got a cart to travel to Shiroj. While en route I was attacked by bandits and was severely hurt on my left arm and robbed of my box containing clothes and loose coins. I was left in possession of only 50 pounds English notes which I had in the pocket of my trousers. I arrived Shiroj on the 11th day and put up there with a photographer for whom I had a letter of introduction from Hussain. A few days after my arrival Hussain himself came there with the Soviet mission which was proceeding to Bushire. Hussain went away with the mission promising to send help which he did not. I lived at Shiroj for about a month after which I travelled by mule caravan to Bushire arriving there on the 6th day.

At Bushire I met Hussain who provided me with some money and gave me a cipher key, typed on a piece of cloth, with instructions to use the same when corresponding with him. I have destroyed the key which was arranged in the following system. Each vowel, consonant and their different combinations represented by arithmetical figures composed of 3 digits for each, for instance: a—321, b—103, ba—433, be—199, bi—881, bo—004, bu—732, ca—031 and so on. Some common words were also represented by similar figures.

I was in Bushire for about a month after which I travelled to Karachi by steamer for 7 days arriving in June 1923. I managed to disembark without ticket and later approached the butler and the clerk for a ticket for Bombay and paid them the actual price for it. There was mutual satisfaction, I for escaping the necessity of showing the passport, and they for being able to pocket the money. At Karachi I managed to land on the plea of sight-seeing. During the journey I picked up the acquaintance of one Brahmachari who was returning from Mesopotamia and was on his way to Bombay. I did not take him into my confidence. From Karachi I came to Bombay by train.



I have already given an account of my movements after my arrival to another officer on the 21st instant. I had however kept back a good deal which I am now ready to disclose. I cannot possibly go into details today for want of time but they are concisely as follows. After leaving Bombay I interviewed Singaravelu in Madras and understood from him that Abani Mukherji has come to India and visited him and that M. N. Roy has been sending the **Vanguard** and correspondence through one Sharma who is in Pondicherry. In Calcutta I was visited by Upendra Banerji and Bhupendra Dutta at 38-2 Wellington Square where they were brought by Ajoy Sen Gupta. I lived for a long time in the house of Prof. Meghnad Saha in Calcutta. The address where I lived immediately before my arrest was known to Ramesh Das Gupta who visited me there under my request. I will give details with regard to the above in my next statement.

(Recorded by S. C. Majumdar, Dy. S. P., IB, 27 December 1923.)

# X

I landed at Karachi on 9 June 1923 and reached Bombay on 12 June 1923 via Hyderabad (Sind), Marwar and Ahmedabad. In Bombay I put up in the Shahjehan Hotel for 4 days and in the house of Kiran Behari Roy for one day. I became acquainted with Kiran Behari Roy in London while he was a student there. From Bombay I wrote a letter to Ismail Din, 6 Bismarck Strasse, Leipzig, intimating my arrival in India. Another letter addressed to M. N. Roy was enclosed with that letter in which I requested Roy to send money for me to the address of Kiran Behari Roy, New India Assurance Company, Bombay. I told Kiran's brother Khitish Roy about my mission. I told Kiran and Khitish that my letters and money-orders from abroad would come to their address and I requested them to keep them in deposit for me. During my stay in Bombay I met Dange. Dange told me that he had been hauled up by the Commissioner of Police who had disclosed to him all the post-box addresses of M. N. Roy in Berlin. I enquired from him whether he (Commissioner) had also given out the new post-box address No. 54, viz. "Miss Mary Taylor, Post-box 54, Berlin W. 15" and he said that that address had also come to the knowledge of the police. He said that he had received no intimation from M. N. Roy about my prospective arrival. He further said that he had heard from the Commissioner that the police officers were trying to arrest me. While coming out, Dange told his friends that I might be a spy. I saw some Bengalis in Bombay. I did not talk to them. I learnt from Khitish Roy that they were doing button business in Bombay. I further learnt from Khitish that they belonged to the "Dacca Party". I cannot give the names of those Bengalis. Since my arrival in India, I have received no letters or money-orders through Kiran Behari Roy. While travelling by the steamer from Bushire to Karachi I formed acquaintance of one Brahmachari who was coming from Baghdad. Brahmachari suspected me to be a Bengali but I did not give out my identity to him. I requested Brahmachari to arrange for lodging

for me in Bombay. I don't know whether he arranged for a lodging. I accidentally met him in Bombay, but he did not say anything about it.

I went to Madras from Bombay and put up there in the YMCA by giving my name as Mr Das of Calcutta. A European gentleman was living there at the time. I heard from him that just before my arrival a man giving himself out as a diamond merchant from England had been living there. He had English passport and he came to Madras via Rotterdam and Colombo. The European gentleman suspected him to be a Bolshevik agent as he could understand him from his tongue to be a man from the Continent although he had said that he was a Englishman. I thought he was a man from our party and I searched for him but could not meet him. I learnt that he had gone to Calcutta. I lived in the YMCA for 4 days.

Then I found out the house of Singaravelu at 22 South Beach, Madras with the help of a man of the Madras Congress office and put up with him for 5 days. Singaravelu asked me whether I possessed any credential. I said I did not possess any, but I know the contents of his letter to M. N. Roy which I saw in Moscow. I learnt from Singaravelu that Abani Mukherji had come to India in November 1922 and put up in his house for about a month. Abani took Rs 50 from him. Singaravelu said that he had organised a Communist Party in India of which work is going on in the Punjab, Bombay, Bengal and Madras. He showed me a file of correspondence containing letters from the workers of different provinces. He also showed me a "Party Book" containing the names of the members. I don't remember the names of the members of the other provinces, but I remember to have seen the names of (1) Sharma of Pondicherry and (2) R. C. Chowdhuri of Bhowanipur, Calcutta. Singaravelu said that Sharma was in charge of arranging for post-boxes through which communications between different sections of his party in different places are carried on. Singaravelu said that he was in regular correspondence with M. N. Roy and that he had received the last letter from him about a month before my arrival. He told me to make my correspondence with M. N. Roy through Sharma. He requested me to join his party. He said that he had heard from Abani Mukherji that M. N. Roy had been misappropriating large sums of money but if I forsake him he would be discredited and his activities would come to an end.

I did not agree to join Singaravelu's party and I told him that I did not know whether M. N. Roy was misappropriating any money. I learnt from Singaravelu that Abani Mukherji had sailed back for Europe some time before my arrival and Singaravelu had arranged to provide him with a mandate from Madras to attend the next congress of the Comintern. He further told me that R. C. Chowdhuri of Calcutta was recruited by Abani and he had also sent another man from Bengal to Singaravelu to take his instructions. Singaravelu did not give me the name of that man. He said that he had learnt from Abani that the Bengal party had been given £3,000 by the Comintern and asked me whether I knew

anything about it. I said that I had no knowledge on the subject. Singaravelu said that Abani promised to send him some money but he did not. He asked me whether I could give him Rs 200 to make a tour throughout India to well establish his party. I promised to pay him but I have not paid him anything yet.

I came to Calcutta from Madras in the latter part of July 1923. From the station I went direct to 39 Harrison Road and met Ramesh Ch. Das Gupta there. I learnt from Ramesh that Muzaffar had been arrested by the police. I enquired from him whether Dr T. N. Roy was in Calcutta and having been informed that he was here, I went to his place at 38/2 Wellington Square. Ramesh accompanied me and on the way he told me that Abani Mukherji had come to Calcutta some time ago and sent for him through Sisir Ghosh. Sisir told Ramesh that Abani was ready to pay him Rs 50 per month if Ramesh would give up his service and also sever his connections with me (Nalini). Ramesh said that he had not accepted Abani's offer, neither did he meet him. Ramesh said that he did not know the exact whereabouts of Abani but he heard that he was in Calcutta. He said that Sisir Ghosh knew Abani's address. Ramesh further told me that he suspected that he was being shadowed by some men. I then told Ramesh to leave my company and I went to 38/2 Wellington Square.

I lived in Dr T. N. Roy's place for 11 days as a patient as I was suffering from rheumatism at the time. During the course of my stay there I met Ajoy Ch. Sen who informed me that he had seen Abani Mukherji in Calcutta about a month ago. Ajoy told me that Abani was spreading bad rumours against me. I asked Ajoy whether he could give me the address of Abani. He said that Abani was living in some swadeshi cloth shop but he did not give me the address. I requested Ajoy to go to Bhupendra Datta, and tell him about my arrival in Calcutta and request him to arrange a shelter for me. Ajoy went but could not meet Bhupendra Datta. He, however, saw Jadu Gopal who told him that they were afraid of their lives and they could not see me.

At my request Ajoy again went to Amar Chatterji, Amar also did not come to see me but sent Upendra Banerji to me. Upendra saw me and said that they looked upon me with suspicion as they had heard many things against me from Abani. He asked me whether I had anything to say against Abani. I said I had none. He asked me what I intended to do. I said I would go up-country in a few days. He said Naren (meaning M. N. Roy) was so foolish that he wrote letters openly and the contents of the same became known to everybody. He advised me to make up our quarrels with Abani Mukherji's party and work harmoniously in Germany. Two days after Upendra's visit to me Bhupendra Datta came to me. He accused me of wasting money on personal comforts. In this connection there was an exchange of hot words between us and Bhupendra left me saying that he would come to me again after-

wards. Dr T. N. Roy was not in Calcutta at the time. He went to mofussil to attend a professional call.

I searched for Mr Meghnad Saha whom I knew in London, and having found out his address from the Science College met him at his house at 3/2 Brindaban Mallick Lane. I told him that I had no shelter in Calcutta and he consented to put me up in his house. I lived there till the middle of September last, when Dr Saha having been transferred to Allahabad I had to leave his house. During my stay in Dr Saha's house I wrote two letters to M. N. Roy. I also wrote a letter to Roy from Madras. In these letters I asked for money and informed Roy about Abani Mukherji's activities in India and also about the arrest of Muzaffar and Shaukat Usmani. None of my friends knew that I was staying with Dr Saha.

After having left Dr Saha's house I went to Diamond Harbour with a view to seeing whether I could manage to get away from India by a ship. I put up there for a day in a hotel owned by a woman. I then came back to Calcutta and proceeded to Raniganj, where I tried to secure a job in the tile factory of Messrs Burn and Co. I lived there in the Hari Sava for two days. After that I went to Gaya and halted at the railway station for one day. From there I walked up to Sarghati and stopped in a shop for the night. From there I proceeded to Sewganj and halted in the bazar. Next day I went to see the temple of the Sungod at Darbhanga. I had a mind to go to Bombay on foot as I had no money with me. Finding that it was impossible to walk such a great distance I came back to Calcutta via Gaya by train. From Gaya I also visited Bodh Gaya.

I already made a statement about my doings in Calcutta after my return from Gaya which is correct. In that statement I did not mention the following facts. About 10 days before my arrest I went to Ramesh Ch. Das Gupta at his present address No. 48 Harrison Road (I got this address from Ramesh on the day I arrived in Calcutta from Madras), but I could not find him. I learnt that he had gone to Jessore where he had started a poultry business. About five days before my arrest I went to Ramesh's place again and met him and took him to my residence at 21 Kankurgachi 2nd Lane. I told Ramesh that I apprehended that I would be arrested soon and I asked him whether he could lend me money to meet my passage expenses to Bombay. Ramesh said that he had no money at that time.

At my request Ramesh came to see me on the next day and we met near the railway line. I told him that I did not see any prospect of success of my mission. Ramesh asked me whether my room-mates were likely to give me up. I told him that they did not know anything about me. Ramesh then went away saying that he was going to Nowapara, Jessore, on the next day and he asked me to write there. Two or three days later I was arrested by some police officers. At the time of the

search of the Kankurgachi house I claimed the leather box to be mine, which was subsequently taken into custody by the police. The leather box actually belongs to one of the two boys who lived in the room. The contents of the box, except the trousers, belong to the boys.

I have forgotten to mention above that I heard from Singaravelu at Madras that Abani had told him that a Mahomedan emissary would visit him shortly. Abani left his own photo with him and told him that if any Mahomedan came to him and showed a similar photo he should take him into his confidence. I think Lohani was meant by Abani. One Khitish Chatterji, who was a student in England and is a friend of Abani Mukherji, came to see M. N. Roy in Berlin at the time of my last visit to Germany. I heard from M. N. Roy that Khitish Chatterji was in charge of the communistic propaganda work among the Indian students in England. Khitish's Calcutta address is probably Sukea Street. The following two Bengali students also belong to Chattopadhyaya's party in Germany: (1) Kanai Lal Ganguli of Sankar Math who first organised the Hindustan Association and was its secretary for some time, (2) Ashit Kumar Sen of East Bengal, a student in Berlin. Arabinda Bose of East Bengal, a good worker, now in Chemnitz, belongs to M. N. Roy's party.

(Recorded by Prafulla Kumar Biswas, Inspector of Police, IB, Bengal, 29 December 1923.)

## XI

At the time of the last congress of the Communist International which I attended, it was decided in a secret conference that a Bengali student in Germany who was not marked by the police should be sent to India to recruit members from amongst the young men of Bengal and send them out to Germany for training. I did not know if anyone has actually been sent from Germany on this mission. But I subsequently heard that Arabinda Bose would soon be sent to India to further the cause of the Communist Party. It was also settled in the aforesaid conference that some European members of the party should be deputed to carry on propaganda work in India as no suitable Indians were forthcoming. I think James (an Englishman) and Yarman (an Australian) may come to India for this purpose among others.

When I was in Germany on the last occasion, I happened to meet in Hamburg 5 or 6 Mahomedan sailors of a BISN Co's vessel. They were residents of Calcutta. I saw them purchasing some pistols, revolvers, electric torches, etc. I asked them how they would be able to take them to India as the customs officers were sure to catch them. They told me in reply that they had a bandobust with the customs officers in Calcutta that they would not search the boxes of the sailors who would pay them Rs 5 per head. They said that while in the ship they would keep those articles concealed in their boxes which had double bottoms and secret holds. They further said that they had an agent in Calcutta

through whom they would sell those articles at very high prices. Revolvers, pistols, etc. are very cheap in Germany and Belgium. Triangular shaped automatic pistols can be had at Rs 15 in Belgium, 25 cartridges to fit in such pistols would cost there about Rs 24. The sailors said that the revolvers or pistols which they purchased, there at Rs 15 or so, would fetch them Rs 50 in Calcutta. The smuggling of arms is generally carried on by the sailors of cargo boats which stop at German and Belgian ports for a long time. I have also heard that German sailors smuggle arms into India but I have no definite knowledge about them. As smuggling is going on for a long time I think there are large number of arms and ammunitions with some people in Calcutta. I might discover them if I get an opportunity to mix with the sailors.

When I came to India from Germany last time I was asked by M. N. Roy to see his cousin Abinash Bhattacharji who was the leader of a party in Bengal, but I did not see him. M. N. Roy used to talk to me about one "Santi" who was his particular friend and worked with him in northern Bengal. Santi is reputed to be a good shot. I did not see him at the time of my last visit to India. Ram Chandra Bhattacharya who is now in Germany gave me an introductory letter to a friend of his named Biju and Bijay Bose, grandson of Nalinaksha Bose of Burdwan. I paid a short visit to Bijay at Burdwan just after my arrival in Calcutta at that time. I did not see him any more after that. When I was introduced to Hafiz in Calcutta he told me that he would take me to an educated Bengali youth of Calcutta who had been reading M.A., but gave up his studies in pursuance of the noncooperation movement. Hafiz did not tell me his name.

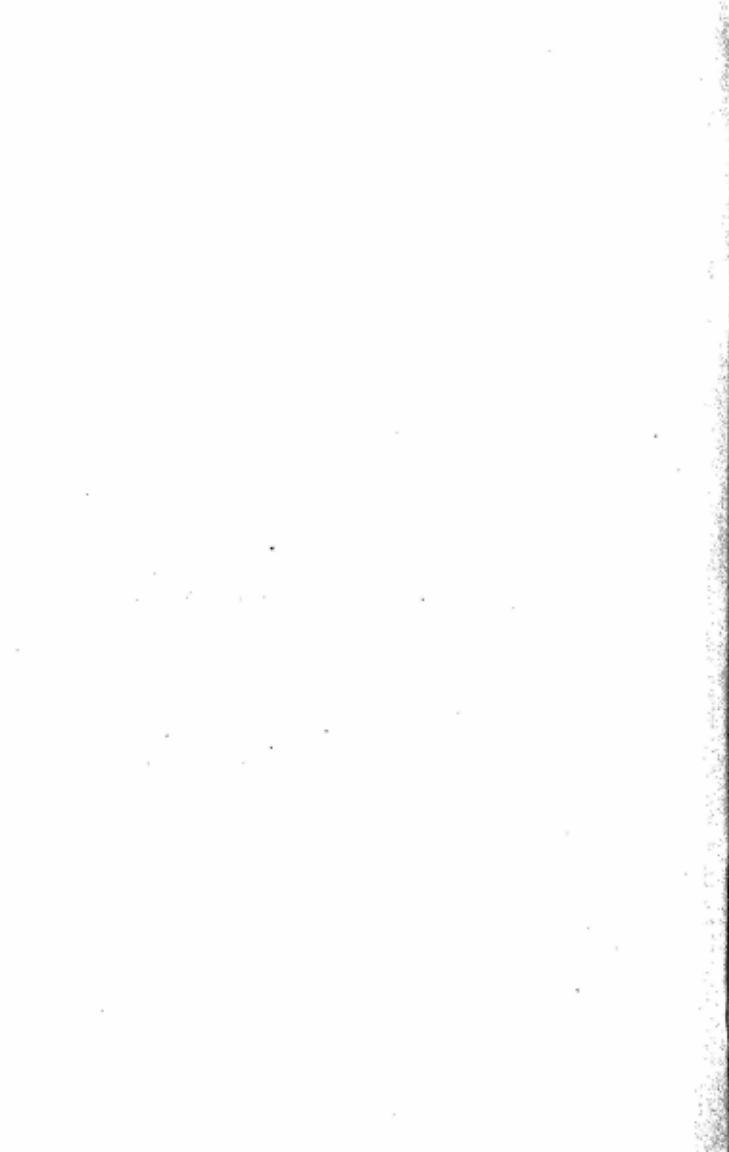
(Recorded in the Presidency Jail by Profulla Kumar Biswas,  
Inspector of Police, IB, Bengal, 5 January 1924.)

## XII

The revolvers, which I saw the Mahomedan sailors of a BISN Co's vessel purchasing in Germany (about which I spoke to you on 5 January 1924) were very small in size. They would be about 3 or 4 inches in length. I cannot give any further particulars about them. The small six chambered revolver which you show me now does not appear to be of German make. From the crown and "R" which are inscribed on it, I think it is a revolver of British make. I did not see the aforesaid sailors purchasing any revolvers of this type in Germany. The revolvers which they purchased might be smaller than this. I don't know where revolvers of this nature are available.

(Recorded by in the Presidency Jail by Profulla Kumar Biswas,  
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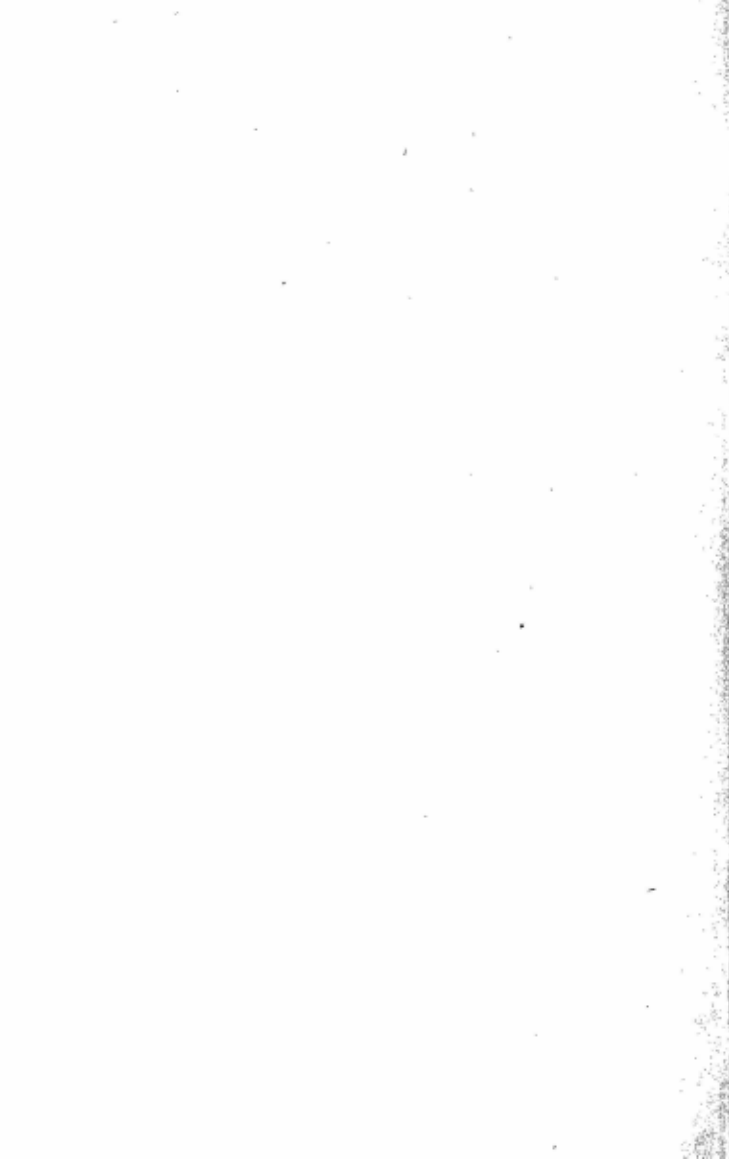
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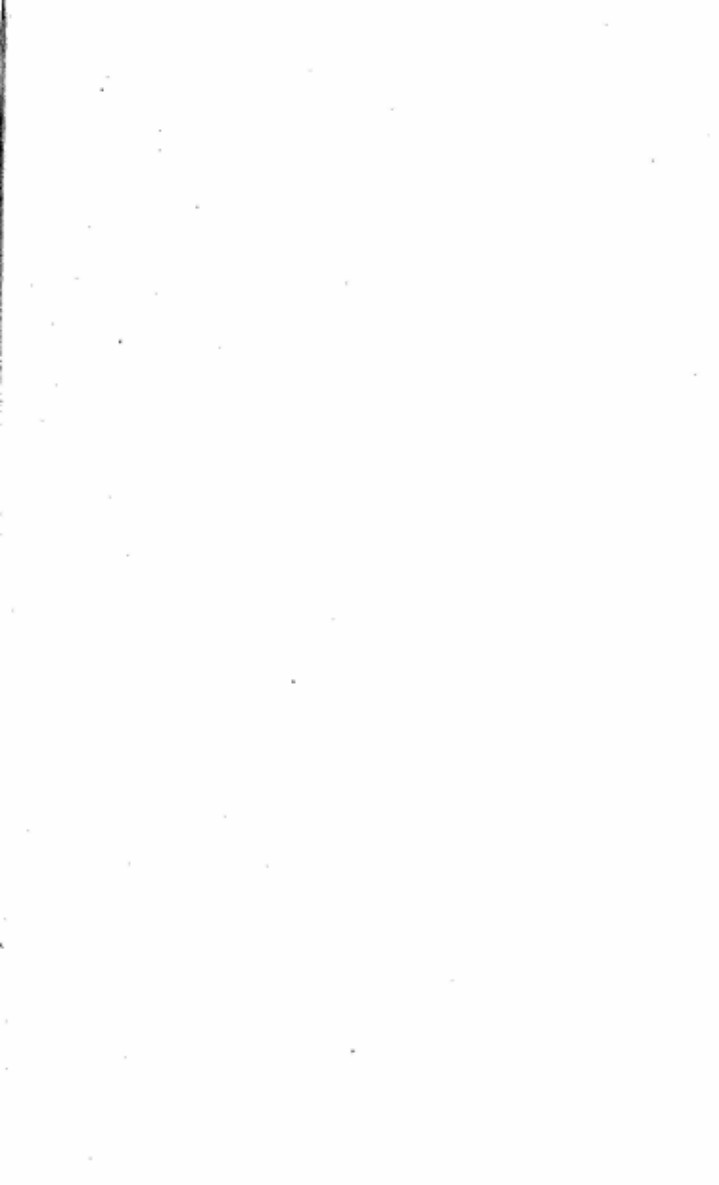
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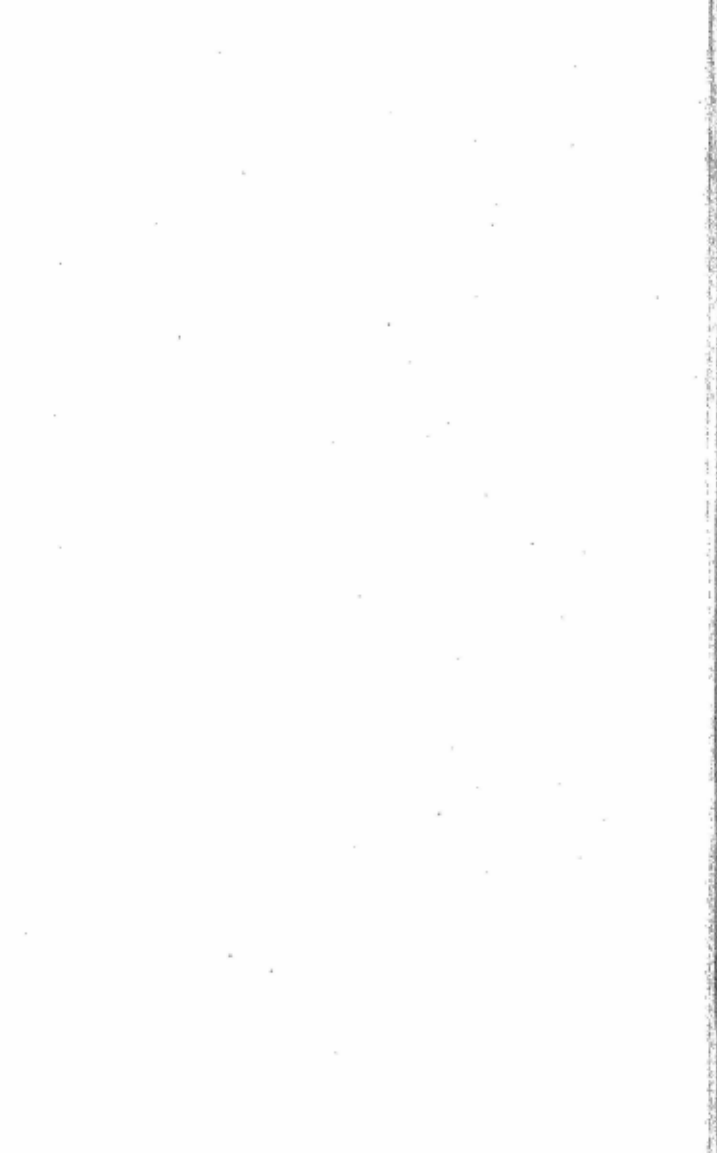
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