

ARUN SHOURIE

**'THE
ONLY**



FATHERLAND'

**COMMUNISTS, 'QUIT INDIA'
AND THE SOVIET UNION**

‘THE ONLY FATHERLAND’

Communists, ‘Quit India’ and
the Soviet Union

ARUN SHOURIE



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For our Adit again
who puts up with so much
with such nobility
and fortitude

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Introduction

To every question our communists have an answer. The answer accords with a line. The line they say flows directly from a theory. It is a Master Theory of course, a Revelation they would say, if only they could bring themselves to use the word.

If your answer does not accord with their line, they come down on you as an avalanche – of denunciation, of vicious abuse, of their sudden discoveries about your motives. ‘If your answer does not accord with their line...’ is in fact too optimistic. For their line changes often, as often as their convenience. Actually, it changes even more often: it changes as often as their perception of their convenience changes. And that is at least every few years. Hence, the sentence really should begin, ‘If your answer does not accord with their line of the moment...’

The line as well as its revisions are of course only for the furtherance of the Revolution, of the Emancipation of Man. Obviously therefore, when your answer deviates from their line, they show no mercy. In the interest of Man, of the Future, they cannot.

Nothing I had done or written had attracted any adverse notice of the established communist parties till late 1983. On the contrary, on a visit to Cochin I was invited to the office of one of the principal publications of the CPI(M) in Kerala. Several office-bearers of the party and some journalists connected with it were kind enough to be present. I was told that a well-known editor, who was a senior member of the CPI(M) in Kerala and was present, had laboured long and hard to translate a book of mine, *Hinduism: Essence and Consequence*. This was the first I had heard of the translation. The book had dealt with the explanation of suffering in our scriptures and with the difficulty of deriving the case for socially relevant action from the world view they contained. The persons present were generous in their expressions about the book, so much so that they did not pay much heed to my saying that the book had been written at a time of great

personal tragedy, that I had grown out of much that I had written in it. I was informed that the translation was in fact almost ready to go to press. It was a warm and pleasant visit.

Early in 1984 Mr V.M. Tarkunde asked me to deliver the M.N. Roy Memorial Lecture for the year. I had been planning to do a book – alas! the heap of notes still stares at me – on Indian liberals and communists – about how the former were unduly defensive, almost apologetic in their dealings with the latter; about how the latter had a purely instrumental view of the former. A chapter in it was to set out how the communists' ideology had become a set of blinkers – and how it had led them into adopting positions that were totally unjustifiable, how it had made them so very cynical of everyone else, in particular of liberals. That they had become skilful in rationalizing whatever they did – from the history they rewrote, from the falsehoods they propagated, to the use they made of others, including their followers and colleagues – only compounded the problem: it ensured that their inconsiderateness would go farther, it ensured too that they would persist in an error longer. This facility in rationalizing owed and owes much to native talent of course – many of the communists had in a sense been among 'the brightest and the best'. But the presumptuousness of that millenarist ideology more than anything else is what produces the rationalizations.

I had selected the Communist Party of India's 180 degree turn in 1942 to illustrate the matter. In studying it I was greatly helped by the staff of the National Archives, who allowed me to read the files of the period, and by Mr Sita Ram Goel, who loaned me his collection of communist publications. As my reading on this bit had progressed farther than on the other chapters, I sought Mr Tarkunde's permission to choose that episode as the subject for the Roy Lectures.

Pritish Nandy, the editor of The Illustrated Weekly of India, was kind enough to carry the lectures – barring passages which dealt with details – in the Weekly. He carried them with the flair and aplomb which are his hallmark.

The denunciation and abuse and pasting of motives commenced at once. And they were a torrent.

'It is an old canard,' both the communist parties, their intellectuals, their journalists shouted. But how did that affect its significance or veracity?

'He has not established the authenticity of his so-called documents,' they shouted. And simultaneously, 'There is nothing new. The documents have all been published earlier.'

'He has paid no attention to the world situation which necessitated the new line,' they said. And simultaneously, 'The Party has already, and long ago, acknowledged the error.'

Pamphlets were printed in several languages. Press conferences were addressed. The plan to publish the translation of Hinduism by the CPI(M) luminary and editor was aborted. The senior ideologue of the CPI(M) sent a turgid reply to the Illustrated Weekly which at great length dealt with nothing that I had said.

E.M.S. Namboodripad, the general secretary of the CPI(M), led the pack. He declared that I was an agent of the right, that I had resurrected this old canard as the forces of which I was a mouthpiece had been unnerved by the growing strength of progressive and secular forces. It was the timing which was important, he said: I had done all this in view of the elections which were round the corner.

A torrent of falsehood – from the fact that no elections were round any corner to the fact that there was nothing selective about the date: the lectures had been delivered as they are every year on M.N. Roy's birth anniversary.

As the abuse was so much to form, and as the traducers had found no specific fault with what I had said, instead of dealing with what they were saying about 1942 I was led to write a general essay on the roots of their verbal terrorism, and on what we should do to face it.¹ And as the communists were but a special example, though of course the most virulent one, of a widespread habit, I dealt with them as but an example. The essay was thus a sequel to the lectures. Accordingly, it has been included here after the account of the 1942 episode.

The episode itself remains stuck as a bone in the communists' throat. When they were first charged with having worked to sabotage the Quit India movement, they denounced those who had levelled the charge – the socialists in particular had levelled it, as hounding them down had been a special target of the collaboration. The communists denounced them most ferociously, and insisted that there had been absolutely no liaison with the British. In his book *A History of Indian Freedom Struggle*, the English edition of which was published in 1986, E.M.S. Namboodripad however acknowledges the liaison, in the oblique as well as the self-righteous way so characteristic of the communists, in particular of their 'leading theoreticians.' Congress policy was wrong and suicidal, he says. Gandhi had not thought the matter through, he says, and had left no instructions on how the struggle should be carried on in the event of the principal leaders being arrested, he says. The Congress had not prepared for guerilla war against the advancing Japanese, he says. It had not thought of providing medical assistance to the victims of bombing, he says, nor had it thought of mobilizing the masses against profiteers and hoarders. It was the Communist Party which took up these tasks, and accordingly, says Namboodripad, 'It did not hesitate to establish contact with the government and accept the assistance necessary for

carrying out this programme.’²

To somewhat modest results, it would seem. ‘The Japanese forces had to retreat even before entering India,’ EMS records. ‘The Communist Party, however, did make some efforts, in a small way though, to meet any Japanese attack.’ And then the acknowledgement that the liaison had been closer than may be inferred from the admission about obtaining assistance merely to stage demonstrations against black marketeers: ‘The authorities had come forward to give training in guerilla warfare to the Communists for that purpose,’ EMS writes. ‘The party did not hesitate to obtain assistance from the departments concerned for organising defence against air raids, etc.’³

EMS’s defence is the familiar blend of indignation, apologia, explanation and evasion. There were disagreements in the Congress too, he says. Other leaders too were confused, he says. Gandhi had not thought through the matter, he says. In fact, being imprisoned enabled the Congress leaders to escape responsibility for what had to be done, he says. Violence and sabotage broke out and Gandhi did not condemn these, he says. At the back of the Congress leaders’ decision to launch the movement was the object of furthering their bourgeois class interests by eventually negotiating and compromising with the British rulers, he says. It is the Communist Party, not the Congress, which acted in accordance with the resolutions of the Congress, he says. Though the Communist Party opposed the Quit India struggle, it simultaneously organized campaigns against the general policies of the government, he says.⁴

The mixture of half-truths, smears, non sequiturs, contradictions becomes pitiable in the end. And his ultimate verdict remains ambivalent.

‘This, however, does not mean,’ he writes, ‘that the Communist Party did not commit any error in translating its general approach towards the Quit India struggle into practical activities. Failing to properly appreciating (sic) the popular feeling behind the struggle, the party had often displayed a tendency to denounce those participating in the struggle as fascist agents. It had also made certain errors in organising mass struggles during this period. All such errors were subjected later to severe self-criticism, particularly in the Second Party Congress held in Calcutta in 1948.’⁵

But clearly that failure to appreciate ‘the popular feelings behind the struggle,’ those ‘certain errors in organising mass struggles,’ were just minor tactical errors.

‘Despite the omissions and commissions,’ the party general secretary concludes, ‘the Party adopted a policy which was by and large correct during the Quit India struggle.’⁶

And that follows from the fact that even forty years after the War ended, the

party's understanding of its nature remains exactly what it was.

The capitalist-imperialist nations were engaged in a gigantic conspiracy, EMS says, to set Hitler upon the Soviet Union. The British did not go to the aid of Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, he says. 'There was reason behind this ambivalence on the part of Britain,' he declares. 'They wanted to push the Soviet Union, the consistent enemy of fascism, into a war against Germany while keeping themselves aloof from it and provide an opportunity to Hitler to destroy the Soviet Union.'

But naturally, the latter, equipped as it was with the Great Theory which enabled it to see through and beyond, was not going to be fooled. 'Leaders of the Soviet Union saw through this imperialist design,' the general secretary says. 'The Soviet German no-war pact (the pact between Stalin and Hitler which has since been denounced most severely by the Soviets themselves) was a clever counter-move to this imperialist design.' Its consequence was immediate, decisive and beneficial: 'Hitler could now turn westwards,' says the general secretary.⁷

The general secretary remains absolutely certain to this day about the justification, about the brilliance as well as about the success of this pact. 'To anyone who examines the later events,' he reiterates, 'it would be clear now that the Soviet-German no-war pact was a clever move on the part of the Soviet Union to expose and oppose the strategy of the imperialist powers of turning Hitler against the Soviet Union without engaging themselves in the war.'⁸ And yet again: 'The strategy adopted originally by Britain and France,' he says, 'was to afford all facilities to Hitler to destroy the Soviet Union, the sworn enemy of capitalism and imperialist domination. They expected that in the event of a German invasion of Poland, the Soviet Union would go to the defence of Poland which would eventually result in a war between Germany and the Soviet Union. But the German-Soviet no-war pact frustrated the design of Britain and France. It made (it) possible for Hitler to turn to the west after conquering Poland.'⁹

All this in a book published in 1986!

Hitler of course proved perfidious, and eventually attacked the Soviet Union. But that too, the Theory (much like Nostradamus) is said to have foretold. Hitler's invasion is said to have been 'the culmination' of the same, long-standing, imperialist conspiracy to destroy the Soviet Union.¹⁰

The assessment of the nature of the war therefore remains unchanged. And so does the touchstone by which such events had to be and are to be judged. 'The characterization of the war by the communists as "imperialist" in its first phase and as "people's war" in the second phase was based on one and the same principle,' writes the general secretary. 'It is certainly a crucial issue what

attitude the ruling classes of Britain take towards the Soviet Union which is destined to decide the future of the human society.’ This in 1986! ‘The Communist Party had never hidden its stand on this issue,’ he declares. Moreover, ‘Everyone who is interested in man’s onward march to socialism would take the same stand...’¹¹ This too – all in the present tense – in a book published in 1986!

Can one then be surprised that the Indian communist parties are still – that is, in 1991 – in a quandary about the collapse and subsequent liberation of eastern Europe, about the collapse and threatened disintegration of the Soviet Union? At the fact that they have still not been able to say anything clear-cut on these architectonic transformations? That they are still debating what they should say about Gorbachev in public?

‘Discipline’, ‘stability’, the fact of having so completely abandoned the habit of thinking for themselves, all contribute to this mental morass. The secretaries and general secretaries today are the very ones who espoused and subscribed to those assessments forty years ago. They cannot today repudiate them without repudiating themselves. Nor is that all. Repudiating those assessments would mean acknowledging that the persons they have been denouncing and vilifying, against whom for forty years they have been whipping up so much hatred in their followers, in themselves, it would mean acknowledging that those persons were right all along. That is even harsher on the psychology. And there is the party to think of. The faithful can be held only if they can be made to continue to believe that the party has the talisman, that it alone has the great, all-encompassing, all-explaining Theory. The consequences of acknowledging that the party has been wrong on a particular matter therefore do not remain confined to that specific matter. The acknowledgement undermines the claim to infallibility itself; it undermines the very basis of believing in the party.

And then, to how many things should one own up? It is not after all a matter of having been wrong on 1942 alone. During 1945–47 the demand for Pakistan was embraced and espoused. In 1947 India was proclaimed to have not become independent. Nehru was proclaimed to be a lackey and running dog of imperialism. India was then proclaimed to be ripe for armed insurrection, and the armed offensive for the final capture of power was begun in 1949. Hungary was said to have been liberated by the Soviet forces from the tightening grip of world imperialism. Czechoslovakia too. China, an entire communist party maintained, just could not, by definition, have invaded the Indian border in 1962. The Revolution and Liberation were certain in 1975, declared Charu Majumdar. We got the Emergency instead... The Emergency, the CPI declared has been clamped to foil the international conspiracy to destabilize India. The Soviet

Union, China, east European communist countries were declared to have established ideal, egalitarian societies, affording the fullest scope for the creativity of the people to flower. These governments were said to have completely erased the problems which were inherent in and endemic to capitalist societies – from unemployment to pollution to alcoholism to drugs to high divorce rates...

How many times therefore can one go on saying that it was just in the interpretation of The Theory, in the application of the line, in the mere manner of conducting the mass struggle, that a few errors were committed?

But reality is so cruel! It compels reversals and somersaults. These are then sought to be explained away. The most frequent way is to blame the previous line on an individual – on P.C. Joshi today, on Ranadive tomorrow...To blame Stalin for the millions of deaths, for the reign of terror. To blame Brezhnev for the economic stagnation. This of course flies in the face of The Theory: how can an individual have made such a difference to an outcome which is supposed to be determined by titanic economic forces? It flies in the face of all those claims about the party: its inner democracy, the comradely equality in it among leaders and followers, its thorough discussions and incessant introspection. But the reality which compels the reversal forces the device too.

This hanging of the old line round the neck of an individual or faction is accompanied by trumpets. It is now claimed that this ability to ‘boldly correct itself’ is unique to the communist leadership and party!

And the two are accompanied by verbal terrorism. Anyone who looks askance, who recalls the insistence with which infallibility and unanimity were being claimed for the old line is terrorized into silence – by abuse, by sheer din. Anyone who did not believe the claims and theses then was by definition an agent of imperialism. Anyone who does not believe today that the party’s repudiation of those claims and theses does not affect its claims to infallibility is equally, and by the same definition, an agent of imperialism.

The first response to reality is thus to shut the eyes tight. When reality yanks them open nonetheless, convolutions, evasions, outright falsehoods, inventions, and verbal terrorism are let loose.

This was the sequence during 1939–42 in response first to Stalin’s pact with Hitler and then to Hitler’s invasion of the USSR. It is the sequence today in response to the revolutions in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

And that is why, though the example they use is an episode of 40–45 years ago, the lectures are about our communists and their mental habits as they are today.

-April 1991

1942: Was There a Deal?

Among the factors that helped Hitler the most to acquire absolute power were two: the determination of Stalin to subordinate everything to the exclusive pursuit of Russian interests, and the delusions of communist parties, in particular in this case of the Communist Party of Germany. The Communist International (till its dissolution in May 1943 each communist party, including the Communist Party of India was by its constitution, 'a section of the Communist International' headquartered in and controlled by Moscow) had declared that Nazism was just 'a temporary phenomenon', that it was merely a symptom of 'the final crisis of capitalism'. The thing to do therefore was to safeguard, to just preserve the communist organizations through the period of all-round capitalist collapse. The party would then seize power from the debris. 'After Hitler, us', that was the analysis.

Through the Comintern the communist parties had been transformed into instruments for advancing Soviet foreign policy interests. At this time two of these were predominant: to be left alone at home and to acquire control over Finland and the states in eastern Europe. As a consequence, when Hitler eventually turned on the German communists, decimating them and their organizations with diabolic thoroughness, the Soviet Union just looked the other way. Similarly, Stalin kept up a hide-and-seek game with England and France, hoping that in their need they would agree to his acquiring the Baltic states, Finland and the rest. The British and French governments were indecisive and incompetent and also weighed down by scruples of a sort – in view of the impassioned protests from eastern Europe, they could not bring themselves to hand over the territories Stalin was demanding as a price of his support. Hitler was not encumbered by any consideration of this kind.

A booty pact

On 23 August 1939, amidst much toasting and bonhomie, the Soviet Union entered into a pact with Hitler. It was styled as a non-aggression pact, but, as historians have pointed out, it was in fact a booty pact, a pact that set out how the spoils of aggression were to be shared. By its terms neither side was to support a country at war with the other. For Hitler this ensured that the Soviet Union would not come to the aid of any country that he invaded. The secret protocol to the pact set out, to use its euphemism, ‘the boundaries of the mutual spheres of interest in eastern Europe.’ ‘In the case of a territorial-political reorganisation,’ to use its delicate phrase for mutually agreed invasions, it gave the Soviet Union Finland, the Baltic states, the eastern part of Poland and Bessarabia, then a province of Rumania.

Communist parties the world over were stupefied. But they rallied swiftly. In his address, ‘The Identity of Interests between the Soviet Union and All Mankind’, delivered a month after the Stalin–Hitler pact, Mao explained what had happened (the address is merely representative; all communist parties, including the Indian one of course, sang all this in chorus): ‘The plan of Britain, the United States and France was to egg Germany to attack the Soviet Union, so that they themselves, “sitting on top of the mountain to watch the tigers fight,” could come down and take over after the Soviet Union and Germany had worn each other out. The Soviet-German non-aggression treaty smashed this plot.’

His eastern front secure, within a week of the pact, on 1 September 1939, Hitler invaded Poland. It was said that the Polish army had launched a cavalry charge and that therefore the German army had moved into Poland to protect the boundaries of Germany.

On 3 September Britain and France declared war against Germany. ‘Hitler,’ explained the general secretary of our Communist Party in his theoretical essay three years later, ‘preferred to sign the non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union which infuriated the British reactionaries so much that they promptly declared war against Germany.’¹

On 17 September the Soviet Union moved in to take over its share, the eastern parts of Poland. In the sort of passage that all communist parties (including our own of course) were to proclaim in unison, Mao wrote, ‘It would be wrong for us to waste any sympathy on the Polish Government.’ The reasons? ‘It was a fascist, reactionary government of the Polish landlords and bourgeoisie,’ he explained, ‘which ruthlessly exploited the workers and the peasants and oppressed the Polish democrats; moreover, it was a government of Greater

Poland chauvinists which ruthlessly oppressed the non-Polish minority nationalities – the Ukrainians, Byelorussians, Jews, Germans, Lithuanians and others, who number more than ten million; it was itself an imperialist government. In the war, this reactionary Polish Government willingly drove the Polish people to serve as cannon-fodder for British and French finance capital, and it willingly served as a sector of the reactionary front of international finance capital. For twenty years the Polish Government consistently opposed the Soviet Union...it obstinately rejected the Soviet offer to help it with troops...’ Therefore, ‘What the Soviet Union has now done is merely to recover its lost territory, liberate the oppressed Byelorussians and Ukrainians and save them from German oppression. The news dispatches of the last few days show how warmly these minority nationalities are welcoming the Red Army with food and drink as their liberator...’

So, that was settled. In December 1939, the Soviet Union invaded Finland. It was said by communist parties the world over that the imperialist powers had goaded Finland into attacking the Soviet Union, thus compelling the latter to react in self-defence.²

The Soviets expected that the operation would be over in ten to twelve days. It took three months. Soviet casualties numbered 200,000 – a number that exceeded the total strength of the Finnish army – with 50,000 dead. The reason was not far to seek.

Citing the estimates of A.I. Todorskii, Roy Medvedev, the Soviet historian, recalls that, as a result of Stalin’s purges, three of the five marshals of the Soviet army, three of the four first-rank army commanders, sixty of the sixty-seven corps commanders, 136 of the 199 division commanders, 221 of the 397 brigade commanders, both first-rank fleet admirals, both second-rank fleet admirals, all six first-rank admirals, nine of the fifteen second-rank admirals, both first-rank army commissars, all fifteen second-rank army commissars, twenty-five of the twenty-eight corps commissars, seventy-nine of the ninety-seven division commissars, and thirty-four of the thirty-six brigade commissars had been ‘arrested’ – most of them never to be heard of again.³ The army had been decimated, demoralized and thrown into hopeless confusion.

But the communist parties, including our own of course, blamed the Soviet toll on imperialist conspiracies.

Once the 23 August pact with Hitler had been concluded and the supplementary joint declaration of 27 September 1939 signed, the Soviet Union, apart from invading territories that had fallen to it under the pact, began ‘coordinating’ its police measures with the German Gestapo in Poland, handing over to the Gestapo German communists in Russian jails, supplying Germany

with vast quantities of raw material, acting as Germany's agent in neutral countries, thus helping the latter to evade the blockade. ('Some people,' wrote Mao, 'regard the Soviet Union's trade with Germany, which is based on the Soviet-German commercial agreement, as an act of participation in the war on the German side. This view, too, is wrong, for it confuses trade with participation in war. Trade must not be confused with participation in war or with rendering assistance. For example, the Soviet Union traded with Germany and Italy during the Spanish war...Again, during the present Sino-Japanese war, the Soviet Union is trading with Japan... At present, both sides in the World War have trading relations with the Soviet Union...')⁴ Most important, the Soviets brought other communist parties in line. This, as we shall see, required the least effort: they had all been weaned on the notion that the interests of the (till then the only) socialist Fatherland were identical with the interests of all mankind.

'Our brother congressmen'

In India the Communist Party was still a fledgeling one. It looked to Moscow for guidance, receiving its instructions via the Communist Party of Great Britain. The British party at that time was dominated by Harry Pollitt and Rajani Palme-Dutt, whose rivalry was almost traditional (and it was, as we shall see, to have comic consequences in this period). The CPI, as well as its committees and branches had been declared to be 'unlawful associations' in July 1934. Its publications were banned. Many of the most important communist leaders were members of the All India Congress Committee. (Later when in 1945 they were asked to explain their having acted entirely against the policies of the Congress and the freedom movement, they referred to other members of the Congress as 'our fellow Congressmen', 'we, a section of the Congress', 'us, your followers and a distinct section within the Congress'.)⁵

During 9–10 August 1939 the Congress Working Committee passed a resolution stating that India's sympathies were with countries that were the victims of aggression but that it could help fight the fascist onslaught only as a free country. It therefore called upon Britain to pledge freedom to India. When a few weeks later the war broke out, Gandhiji reaffirmed these propositions and also said that, while the Congress would continue to fight for India's freedom, it would do so non-violently, in a way that would not impede Britain's war efforts.

But the Soviet Union was ranged with Hitler, against Britain, France and the rest. The Congress stand – of not impeding British war efforts – was therefore unacceptable to the communists. The communists poured contempt on Gandhiji

and the Congress for what they described was a ‘neither-nor policy’.

They declared that the war is just a war between imperialist powers – Britain and France on one side and Germany on the other. Our task, they said, was to use the opportunity offered by Britain’s difficulties to wrest our freedom, to convert the imperialist war into a war of national liberation.

As the Politbureau of the party put it in its political resolution in October 1939:

Revolutionary utilisation of the war crisis for the achievement of National Freedom – this is the central task before the national forces in the New Period...The war crisis brings out in the sharpest manner and intensifies a thousandfold the conflict between the British Government and the Indian people... opposition to war measures grows. Struggle breaks out.

Thus grows the possibility of the most rapid and widespread mobilisation against the Government, of drawing even the most backward strata into active struggle... of carrying the isolation of the Government to the most extreme point. Thus opens up the perspective of transformation of imperialist war into a war of national liberation. This perspective must be brought before the entire national movement. This outlook must determine the action of every Congressman in this new period. Capture of power is an immediately realisable goal – a goal for which preparations must be begun in right earnest.⁶

Their scorn for Gandhiji, for the Congress, for the Socialists, for Subhas Bose – i.e., for all the shades of opinion in the national movement – was unbounded.

‘The blind messiahs’

In a typical pamphlet of this period, *Unmasked Parties and Politics*,⁷ they declared that the Congress represented the bourgeoisie, Gandhiji being merely the ‘astute leader of the bourgeoisie’; that the bourgeoisie ‘fears the masses more than it hates the imperialists’; that it was afraid of launching a struggle involving the masses against the British because it apprehended that a struggle started against the British would eventually turn against itself; that therefore on its behalf Gandhiji’s sole objective and that of the Congress was to curb the masses, to ensure that no struggle broke out.

Terming Gandhiji and Subhas Bose as the ‘blind messiahs’, the party accused Gandhiji of ‘accepting the enemy’s thesis, shedding tears over its fate’. ‘Could there be a more ignominious sight?’ it asked. It accused him of betraying the cause of the country, of ‘crossing the barricades’. ‘Gandhism,’ it declared, ‘has entered into its decadent phase. At the most critical time of our national history it

is acting as a fetter on the national struggle. It is acting as a disintegrating force in the mighty national organisation which was its own handiwork...' 'No longer,' its spokesmen said, 'is Gandhiji's leadership, in even a restricted sense, a unifier of the people's movement, no longer has it any progressive role whatsoever. Compromise on the issue of war is the biggest danger that faces the national movement and Gandhism today means the line of that compromise. Compromise with imperialism and disruption of the Congress are today politically synonymous terms and Gandhism, which stands for compromise, is the most disruptive force in national politics.' Therefore, they said, the task was 'relentless struggle against and exposure of Gandhism...the sharpest opposition to Gandhian leadership... the isolation of that leadership and determined effort to smash its influence'.

Declaring furthermore that 'with the aid of Gandhian techniques one cannot defeat Gandhian policy' the party launched 'mass struggles'. Recalling these in the 1945 Communist Reply the party said, 'We carried on as widespread anti-war propaganda as possible... In the rural areas we ran a mass campaign under the slogan 'na ek pai na ek bhai (not a penny, not a brother) to this Imperialist Government'. 'In the industrial areas we organised one of the most widespread strike waves on both industrial and political issues that India had ever seen. Most of our leaders were arrested but we carried on... '

During 11-13 October 1940, Gandhiji and the Congress Working Committee decided that satyagraha will be offered by individuals selected by Gandhiji. The Communist, the official journal of the Communist Party of India, of November 1940, declared:

Human wit could not have drawn up any better rules for sabotaging all struggle and for dashing the national movement to pieces... Every Congressman must be made to realise that this satyagraha can only lead to prostration before the enemy... That we have a national leadership that can offer such a plan is the supreme tragedy of the situation.

Week after week the Communist Party kept up its barrage. In February 1941 the Communist wrote:

The national movement under bourgeois leadership has entered into a blind alley. They feared the masses and trusted imperialism... They put their class above their nation... They hand over the national organisation to Imperialism for safe custody. They dissolve the Congress organisation lest the people might use it as the instrument of a mass struggle.

In March 1941 it was at its mocking best:

The struggle is a jolly merry-go-round. Shut up, you irrelevant scoffer! It is a nation's solemn non-violent suicide. In the phase of its decay Gandhism can only pursue an anti-struggle and compromising policy... The future under Gandhism is to lose all that the Congress has built up so far.

But on 22 June 1941 Hitler invaded the Soviet Union. And Stalin entered into alliances with Britain and the US. Once again the communist parties were stupefied. Harry Pollitt, general secretary of the Communist Party of Great Britain, switched immediately. He said that henceforth the communists must support and not hinder Britain's war effort. His rival, Rajani Palme-Dutt, who was in direct control of the Communist Party of India, refused to acknowledge that the 'character' of the war had 'changed'. Moscow too was entirely preoccupied. As a result, the Indian party did not receive any instructions for long. Pollitt's statement was of course published by the press in Britain and India. But in its pamphlet, Soviet-German War, issued in July 1941, the CPI declared that the press reports which suggested that Pollitt had changed his stand were nothing but 'imperialist lies'.

Sticking to the guns

The party's line of action therefore remained unchanged. Party Letter number 44 issued in September/October 1941 put the matter thus:

The war is still an imperialist war as far as imperialist Britain and Nazi Germany are concerned. It is a defensive war, a revolutionary war for the Soviet Union alone. Remember – supporting the British war effort is not supporting the Soviet Union. It will only strengthen British Imperialism. Remember – we cannot effectively support the Soviet Union without achieving our own People's Republic here. For support of the Soviet war of national defence we must deal a death blow to British Imperialism, fight for a democratic republic and for a people's army and intensify our struggle against imperialism a thousandfold.

The line was reiterated incessantly. In passages such as the following (this one from a pamphlet put out in October 1941 for more open circulation amongst 'sympathisers') the harassed party leadership tried both to stick to the old line, even as information about the change in the line of the British party was becoming too apparent to be dismissed as a forgery, as well as to show that, though different, its line was in fact no different from that of the British Communist Party:

We would not be aiding the Soviet by joining hands with the Imperialist rulers. We would be harming and not helping the great cause for which the Soviet Union is fighting. As far as India and the colonies are concerned, the imperialist character of the war is not one whit changed. In its international aspect the British war effort in India is not so much for the defeat of German fascism, or for the defence of the Soviet Union, as it is for colony-grabbing in Africa, for keeping the Indian people in permanent slavery. Therefore, the Indian people will not be advancing but going away from the great united front of the peoples which is being built against fascist aggression and for aid to the Soviet, by joining the imperialist 'win the war' campaign. It is right for the British communists to participate in the war effort and to intensify it. This is the tactical line they have to follow to proceed from Anglo-Soviet agreement to a united front of the British and Soviet people, by which they will convert the imperialist war into a revolutionary war. We in India to reach the same objective have to adopt a different tactical line. We do so by combining a popular 'help the Soviet' campaign with our intensified struggle against imposed war-efforts, with an

intensified struggle for freedom and democratic liberties.

The Party Letter issued by the CPI's Central Directorate in Bombay to commemorate the 'November Day' – i.e., almost five months after Hitler attacked the Soviet Union – still stuck to the old line:

Our main slogan this November is: 'Victory of the Soviet Union is bound up with the victory of all oppressed peoples over their exploiters. We must help to make Soviet victory possible, not by helping the Imperialist rulers in their war effort, but by fighting harder for our own freedom.'

The ensuing months tested the party's ingenuity. It first formulated the 'two war' line. According to this, now, not one, but two wars were being waged: on the western front the war was still an 'imperialist' one but on the eastern front – the one between Germany and the Soviet Union – it was a 'people's war'. Events, practicalities and, more than anything, an authoritative pronouncement from Moscow made short shrift of this new theoretical line. The events were the alarming setbacks of the Soviets on the war front. The practical difficulty was of devising a way by which the Communist Party could do something that on the western front would harm the Soviet Union's ally Britain, while simultaneously on the eastern front helping Britain's ally the Soviet Union. And then there were the three words from Moscow: 'War is indivisible.'

Clarity, at last

By November–December 1941, through a process that we shall examine later, all confusion was overcome: the 'imperialist war' had indeed become a 'people's war', that was official now. Everything turned 180 degrees: the task now became to help the British war effort. And the help had to be 'unconditional' – 'We are not,' said the CPI, 'like the bourgeois parties that have faith in imperialism and therefore want to strike a bargain with it through "conditions"; ours is a principled stand and so our help is unconditional.'

Repression on one side, collaboration on the other

Relations between the British government and the national movement on the one hand and those between the British Government and the Communist Party on the other moved in opposite directions: increased bitterness culminating in massive repression marked the former; growing familiarity culminating in collaboration marked the latter.

The Cripps Mission was announced on 11 March 1942. During 10–12 April the Congress Working Committee rejected the Cripps proposals. During 6–14

July the 'Quit India' resolution took shape in the Congress Working Committee's meeting in Wardha. On 8 August the 'Quit India' resolution was adopted by the AICC in Bombay. In the early hours of 9 August Gandhiji and other Congress leaders were arrested. Disturbances broke out all over the country. According to Pandit Nehru's estimate in *The Discovery of India*,⁸ ten thousand were killed in police and military firing in the ensuing months. Even according to the government's published estimates, over a thousand were killed and 3,200 injured.

On the other side, unexecuted warrants against communist leaders were cancelled in April 1942. The party itself was legalized and the eight-year-old ban on its publications, organization, etc., was lifted on 23 July 1942. Communist leaders who had been in detention were gradually released. The party staged its first Congress after its legalization in Bombay during 23 May–1 June 1943, amidst much thumping of tables and self-congratulation.

Issue after issue of *People's War*, the new organ of the Communist Party, while it railed against the British government, heaped sarcasm, scorn, abuse on Gandhiji, the Congress, JP and other leaders of the underground movement, and on Subhas Bose. While formerly they had been accused of leading the country to suicide by not disrupting the war effort, they were now accused of leading it to suicide by disrupting it.

Once Gandhiji was eventually released on 6 March 1944 after twenty-one months of detention – after enduring much pain, the deaths of Mahadev Desai and Kasturba, a three-week fast, a grave illness and much else – numerous Congressmen complained to him about what they said had been the treacherous role of the communists. Gandhiji entered into elaborate correspondence with the general secretary of the Communist Party, P.C. Joshi.

Joshi – now referring to Gandhiji repeatedly as 'the most loved leader of the greatest patriotic organisation of our people', 'a great leader of our people', 'the greatest leader of the nation', 'the nation's father', 'the National Father', assuring him that 'we honour and trust you', sending a colleague 'to pay you a warm homage on behalf of our Party' – indignantly denied all allegations of liaison with the British government.

When it became evident that Gandhiji was not to be easily cajoled, Joshi turned on him: 'I may as well give you in the very beginning,' he wrote on 12 September 1944 to Gandhiji, 'our reactions to your letter as a whole. If my own father had written to me what you have written, I would not have answered his letter and I would never again have gone to meet him... I know you don't mean it but your ignorance of our views and your prejudices against our Party are so great that you don't even realise what you are writing ...'

At the party's suggestion Gandhiji referred the complaints to Bhulabhai Desai. Bhulabhai reported that, on the party's own documents, the communist members of the AICC had followed a policy diametrically opposed to that of the Congress. The matter was then referred to a subcommittee of Pandit Nehru, Sardar Patel and G.B. Pant. They too were satisfied with the evidence. Charge sheets were then served on the communist members.

Arrant self-righteousness

The reply – running into 307 printed pages in two volumes – was filed on behalf of the Communist Party as a whole. There was of course no question of any error having been committed:

... we have suffered from no qualms of conscience and we have no regrets for what we did, except for what we failed to achieve...

We had nothing to hide and everything to gain by having to defend our own past role...

We firmly believed then and believe still more firmly today that between 1942 and 1945 we stuck to and popularised the best traditions of the Congress...

... We can assure you that between you as the leaders of the Congress and us, your followers and a distinct section within the Congress, we have no troubled conscience, no uneasy mind, nothing to explain but everything to justify, nothing to be ashamed of but everything to be proud of.

Indeed, the tone was one of arrant self-righteousness.

Gandhiji and the Congress were mocked for their 'illusions' about imperialism, about its morality, for their 'pathetic one-way faith in the imperialists', for fearing and distrusting the people and trusting the imperialists:

They (the British) were selfish but you were blind... How tragic a picture it was. Here was Gandhiji, the undisputed leader of the Congress, echoing only the blind bitterness, the ignorance and prejudice of the bazar...

You were old leaders who did not understand the new reality... You were too much in the grip of old ideas, old habits of thought and action. You followed traditional modes of action in a new situation...

The widespread allegations of a liaison with the British government were indignantly denied:

How is it that the anti-Communists start by calling us Government agents and that the only documents they have put out to show our liaison with the Government have been proved by us to be patent forgeries to the

satisfaction of any honest man?...

At what stage and who uses slander and against whom has such a weapon always been used not only in the world democratic movement but also in our own freedom movement? Is it not the dirty toady and anti-freedom hooligans that have always done it?

Far from the party having had any liaison with the government, it was portrayed as having been the special target of repression:

We bore our own share of repression for the anti-repression campaign and for demanding your release ...

During 1943-44 if there were any political arrests for open mass activity, they were of our Party workers for the anti-corruption and anti-hoarding campaigns which they organised in their localities. (The party did not of course say that the Congress leaders were already in jail and that the others were not allowed 'open political activity'.)... If you desire we can get you the exact figures.

In fact, the general secretary of the party, P.C. Joshi, had already supplied some of these on behalf of the party to Gandhiji. On 14 June 1944 he had written to Gandhiji:

The Congress Socialists suggest that we have grown by basking in the Government's favours... and explain this by pointing to the absence of the Congress from the field...

In these two years four of our comrades have been hanged... about 400 are behind bars and 100 are life prisoners. Is this the way the Government is helping us?'

Later, in February 1946, Soli S. Batliwala, a leading communist of the time and a member of the party's Central Committee, broke with the party alleging that there had in fact been a secret deal. The allegation was again denied and Batliwala was roundly denounced.

I am not waiting for the day...

So clear, according to it, was the record, that on behalf of the party its general secretary had written to Gandhiji on 12 September 1944:

I am not waiting for the day when the New Delhi Archives fall into the nation's hands, they will tell you what the Government thinks of our present political policy!

Well, the archives relating to the period are now open. What do they show? Files

upon files in the archives testify to:

- * Secret approaches by the CPI to the British government with offers of assistance;
- * Secret meetings of the communist leaders with Sir Reginald Maxwell, the home member of the Viceroy's Council, with intelligence officers and with several others;
- * Exchanges of information at these meetings and in memoranda about activities, about the real motives, as distinct from what the party was being compelled to say in public because of the pressure of nationalist opinion – exchanges of a kind that one encounters only among partners, and information exchanged of a kind that was certainly never made available by the communists to the national movement and the organization – the Congress – of which they claimed to be a part, indeed, information that was clearly detrimental to the movement and that organization;
- * A working relationship that was clearly perceived as 'an understanding' between the British Government and the Communist Party;
- * A working relationship that even covered ways of assisting in intelligence work;
- * Secret progress reports submitted by the Communist Party to the British government about the excellent work it had done in sabotaging the 1942 'Quit India' movement – so good in its view was the work it had done and was doing in this regard that the party henceforth asked that concessions and facilities be given to it solely on the basis of its performance;
- * A deliberate and well-planned effort to mislead the people so that they would acquire no inkling of the secret liaison that had been established.

I shall take up these matters, save one, in turn. I will leave out from this book the question of communist assistance in intelligence work.

By the end of November 1941, as noted earlier, the Communist Party had decided that its duty now lay not in opposing but in assisting the war effort.

The party now started making secret approaches to the British government. It chose as its intermediary N.M. Joshi, a member of the Legislative Assembly and general secretary of the All India Trade Union Congress.

On 16 December 1941 N.M. Joshi sent Sir Reginald Maxwell, the home member, documents certifying inter alia that the Communist Party would now

like to offer its unconditional support to the government's war effort. He requested Maxwell to ensure that the communists in detention were released swiftly so that they could press their changed point of view at the forthcoming meeting of the AICC.

Maxwell demurred. The offer is for unconditional support, but in fact the government is expected to do this and that, he wrote to Joshi on 19 December 1941.

Joshi got back to him on 27 December: "Your apprehension though natural is unwarranted; release them and you will see that their support will indeed be unconditional."

By 10 January 1942 the government had received enough information (I will later revert to the kind of information it had received later) for Sir Richard Tottenham, additional secretary, Home – the man who along with Maxwell orchestrated the entire deal, the one whom for public consumption the communists were later in their Reply to denounce as 'the arch slanderer' – to address a secret memorandum to provincial governments 'on the difficult question of the treatment of individuals or groups who have hitherto opposed the war effort, but who may now announce a change in their attitude.' The communists of course came in for special mention:

...It is true that many far reaching conditions have, in fact, been attached to this 'unconditional' offer, but it may be the beginnings of a real change which should not be summarily suppressed. Offers of cooperation have also been received from quite unexpected, and sometimes embarrassing sources, including certain individual security prisoners...

Between 25 January and 11 March 1942 each of the principal communist prisoners – Sunil Mukherji and Rahul Sankrityayana lodged in Hazaribagh jail; Sajjad Zaheer in Lucknow Central Jail; A.K. Ghosh, R.D. Bhardwaj, Sher Jung, Ramesh Chandra Sinha, D.N. Mazumdar and H.D. Malviya in Bareilly Central Jail; S.A. Dange, Soli S. Batliwala, B.T. Ranadive, S.G. Patkar and S.S. Mirajkar in Yeravda Central Jail; S.V. Ghate and A.S.K. Iyengar in Vellore Central Jail – certified in writing that their attitude had indeed changed and that it was only their detention which was keeping them from doing their bit for the war effort.

In its issue of 13 September 1942, People's War, the official publication of the CPI, carried a prominent item 'refuting' the 'slander' that it said had been spread about communists who were being released, the 'slander' that they had given anything in writing to secure their release. The item was said to be a letter from Comrade Soli Batliwala to his wife. The journal noted indignantly, 'These two beloved Comrades of ours not only suffer imprisonment at the hands of an alien

bureaucracy but also slander at the hands of our brothers. Such is the tragedy of the situation in India today.' The journal quoted Batliwala as certifying categorically, 'No Communist, not one single Communist, has ever given or will ever give any written undertaking to the Government or to anybody else to secure his or her release. If the Communists have been released it was the strength of the Party, the correctness of its policy, that has forced the hands of the Government...'

In fact all the statements which the communist leaders made in writing to secure their release lie neatly preserved to this day in a single file.

In view of the party documents and these written statements on 13 April 1942, the two-man Central Review Committee consisting of Sir John Dain and Sir S. Rangnekar recommended that the sixteen be released as a group.

Confidential plan of work

The communists now submitted a 'Confidential: not for publication' 'Memorandum on Communists' Policy and Plan of Work.' This elaborate ten-page memorandum dated 23 April 1942 was submitted through several channels: N.M. Joshi, of course (he urged it upon both the governor of Bombay, Sir Roger Lumely, and Maxwell), M.S. Aney, leader of the Hindu Mahasabha and an Indian member of the Viceroy's Council, P.Y. Deshpande, a Marathi writer and editor of Bhavitavya, and the labour member of the Viceroy's Council. Only a few extracts from the memorandum can be given here. As you read it keep in mind what the Communist Party was to affirm later in its Reply to the Congress Working Committee's Charges. Responding to the charge that the party had advocated unconditional support of the war efforts the party said, 'Every word of this is untrue.' The party, it insisted, stood for 'unconditional support to the war but not to war efforts'. Whatever the distinction, this statement too, as will become apparent in a moment, was a lie. Here are a few extracts from the secret memorandum submitted by the party to the British government:

Confidential: not for publication

Memorandum on Communist Party and Plan of Work

...We consider this war to be a People's War, a war of world liberation in which the Indian people in their own interest must participate to win their own liberation...

...We agree with the leadership of the Congress and the general patriotic opinion in the country that no effective national resistance is possible except under a truly National Government. We disagree with them when they say that the nation should not cooperate with the existing war efforts because the present government is foreign and not national. We think such an attitude boils down to cutting our own throats. It weakens the defence of the country against the aggressors and makes the task of the fascist invader easier.

We differ with the policy of the British Government that a purely military defence of India is possible and all that the Indian people have to do is to let the existing Government carry on. We are convinced that a total war on Indian soil cannot be successfully conducted except under the leadership of the nation's trusted leaders, except through the agency of a National Government which will symbolise the unity of the people with the Government and conduct the war as a real People's War ...

likelihood of success is concerned. It is quite possible that they may turn out to be lost, in which case it will probably be safe to ignore them.

I will see P.C. Joshi when he is here. Part of the plan should be done at present to expedite him as he would probably think that the object was to liberate or just pressure on him.

Maxwell
7/10

I put up a draft. After issue, D.I.B. may see the file.

8.10.42.

Secretary.

R. S. Chaudhary
9 X.

Serial no. 23 (1st issue).

D.I.B. 4/6
H.D. 4/10/42 - 7/15/42 - full (2) 10/10/42

13 8/10

to Provincial & District is presently shown by plan to Chief Secretaries. I am & returned with thanks. The Communist Survey goes.

4/2

17.10.42

Home Dept

D.I.B. no. 24/10/42 of 19 OCT. 1942

Courtesy: National Archives

The file on P.C. Joshi's arrest warrant: Maxwell writes he will meet Joshi when the latter reaches Delhi but that Joshi's mind should be allowed to ripen on its own.

...Today the danger to our country is great and imminent. Today it is no more enough to have a general political policy and agitate for it among the people and our fellow-patriots. Today all the Indian Communists, whether inside jails or outside, whether free or underground, are burning with an ardent desire to do all they can to cooperate with the existing war efforts even under the present Government, if we can do so IN AN

HONOURABLE AND EFFECTIVE MANNER. We know that a large mass of our fellow-patriots consider such a course of action antinational. We differ with them and we are convinced that the most patriotic duty today is to do all we can to halt the fascist invaders, whatever the political conditions be. We realise that one of the most effective ways in which this could be done is to give our cooperation to existing war efforts if we are enabled to render it. This is our policy and our burning desire, yet in practice we are unable to implement it. What stands in our way is the policy of the Government towards us – the continuance of its repressive policy against us...

...We give below our demands on the Government, demands which we think enable us to do all we can to help to resist Japs, to intensify the war efforts and win the support of our people for our policy and practice.

1. Unconditional release of all Communist prisoners and detenus.
2. Removal of restrictions on all Communists who have been interned, externed or otherwise restricted.
3. Withdrawal of warrants against all underground Communists.
4. Withdrawal of bans on the National Front, The New Age and all other organs of the Communists in provincial languages.
5. Immediate grant of press declarations for new newspapers, journals and periodicals.

...The Government cannot be more interested in destroying the fifth-columnists than us. Our comrades in Bengal are publicly facing the fifth-columnist Forward Bloc, fighting and denouncing their policy before the people and getting stabbed; one of us has already died a martyr's death at the hands of the Forward Bloc agents. We know the worth of our own comrades; if the Government is convinced about our anti-fascist bona fides, our guarantee of our list is the BEST guarantee the Government can conceivably get. No one can hate a fascist agent more than the Communists do.

Let the Government release our leaders, let the Government not stand in our way of starting our own printing plant, let the Government allow to file declarations for our journals (sic). We have no doubt that pretty soon we will begin selling a lakh of copies of our weekly organs. We have also no doubt that the Government will find our organ the most effective war propaganda newspaper that has yet been introduced in India. We Communists are fighters... Today, we 5,000 Indian Communists with our numerous followers and sympathisers have only one demand to make upon the Government: give us the chance to rally our people, give us the

opportunity to move freely among our fellow-patriots, we have only one desire today, to do 24 hours' duty against the Jap and German invaders of our land, the enslavers of entire mankind. Whatever our political differences with the existing Government, we are not blaming the Government today for conducting the war, but for not conducting it efficiently enough. We offer our wholehearted cooperation in the war efforts which the present Government is organising if we can do so honourably and win the support of our people for the plan of work we want to adopt.

Our plan of work

1. COUNTRYWIDE PROPAGANDA – We will send our released leaders on countrywide tours, to hold anti-fascist rallies, to rouse the patriotic instincts of the people in defence of our country, to fight panic and steel the morale of people, to denounce propaganda of the Forward Bloc ...

Hold anti-fascist melas throughout the country, with anti-fascist cartoons and poster-exhibitions, anti-fascist music and dancing troupes, staging anti-fascist playlets, *etc.*

2. RECRUITMENT – Soon after our political propaganda drive has gathered momentum, we will undertake recruitment for all branches of the fighting forces or concentrate for any single service if the need for recruitment therein is the greatest...

We will do all we can to build fraternal relations between the army and the people. We will undertake the organisation of farewells, welcomes and receptions for the Indian army when it goes to the front or when it comes to the rear... We will be happy to organise, through the student boys and girls, musical and dramatic entertainment for the British and American units... If the army authorities or the official organisation told us where else we, with our popular support, could help to build brotherly relations between the army – British or Indian – and the people, we will willingly cooperate and make our own suggestions.

3. SPECIAL RECRUITMENT – We will undertake immediate recruitment of Suicide Squads whom we would desire to be trained for guerilla work under the direction of the regular army authorities. They will be our own comrades and militant workers, peasant and student youth...

...We would desire that the volunteers specially recruited by us in this way should receive only a rank and file soldier's pay even if they are qualified for more or otherwise entitled to a higher rank. These recruits would volunteer themselves for the most dangerous jobs...We are making these suggestions in the most general terms. If the Army General Headquarters find it worthwhile we would be glad to discuss it further with a representative of the GHQ and together work out details and begin recruitment at once...

5. PRODUCTION – ...We state here our production policy in simple and clear terms to allay the Government's distrust if we may. We consider this war to be our war. When we are prepared to undertake recruitment, when we are prepared to shed our own blood at the front, our activities in the

people's rear are guided by one simple slogan: All for the Front!

...The wheels of production must not stop but keep running is a logical conclusion from our People's War policy. Though we stick to and defend the right of labour to strike, still it is our settled policy now to minimise strikes and settle all disputes through negotiations as far as it is humanly possible to do so. We are convinced if the Government releases workers' trusted leaders, who are also our leaders, and recognises the Trade Unions, it will have no need to fear strikes as far as we Communists can help it. All our endeavour will be directed to see that the workers' demands are settled through negotiations and at the conference table.

We go much further and declare that if the Government releases all our comrades and recognises the Trade Unions we will work out schemes for speeding up production and launch mass drives calling upon the workers to speed up production for all they are worth and emulate the glorious example of their Soviet brothers...

Conclusion

...We, however, hope that what to us is our political duty would also be a military practical necessity for the Government and that the Government will not let its political differences with us stand in the way of accepting our practical cooperation in the war efforts and letting us do for the war what we Communists alone can do.

If the Government thinks our cooperation in war efforts is worth seeking and it desires further elucidation of our policy or plan of work, all that it has to do is to withdraw the warrants and any other existing government order against the following: P.C. Joshi, G. Adhikari, P. Sundarayya, Somnath Lahiri, E.M.S. Namboodripad, D.S. Vaidya. They can speak with authority on behalf of all the Indian Communists, whether inside or outside jails. Let the Government give them the opportunity to meet together as free men and let the Government get in touch with P.C. Joshi direct.

This memorandum has the general support of the Communist leadership of India and is an informal draft of our policy and plan of work.

Dated the 23rd April 1942.

Secret meeting with IB

In fact, a few days earlier, the general secretary of the party, P.C. Joshi, who was still at large and against whom there were warrants of arrest, had already established contact with the Intelligence Bureau. Accordingly, by 30 April, Tottenham informed all provincial governments that the warrants against him were being cancelled to enable him to meet senior officials of the British government.

P.C. Joshi had a four-hour-long meeting in Delhi with Ghulam Ahmed, a senior and key official of the Intelligence Bureau, on 12 May 1942. The files contain a detailed note by Ahmed on the meeting (emphasis added):

I had a four hours' talk with P.C. Joshi this afternoon. Joshi is a short-statured young man, clean-shaven and spectacled, a 'student' type, very verbose, talks fast and with an accent which is occasionally very difficult to follow. On the whole a pleasant person but uninspiring.

2. I let him talk as much as he wanted because it became at once clear to me that he was bubbling over with his newly acquired ideas and was most anxious to air them. Two or three strains stood out prominently in his talk and were repeated over and over again, *i.e.* strong hatred of the Axis Powers and particularly of the Japanese, the desire to fight them in every practicable way and claims of extensive Communist influence over labour.

3. I gradually brought him round to a discussion of the 'Memorandum on Communist Policy and Plan of Work' which we have already seen. I asked him if it had the full authority of the Communist Party. He said it had and offered to sign the document at once, if so desired, on behalf of the Party. He added that the Party leaders in jail had not been consulted in regard to details but that their general views were known and their complete acceptance of the memorandum was assumed. He had no doubt whatever that the memorandum would be fully endorsed by the leaders as soon as they were able to meet and issue a public manifesto on the subject. (We have information that copies of the memorandum have been sent to some of the Communist leaders in jail). He later said that the release of Communists could, if necessary, be made contingent upon their signing the memorandum.

4. I then confronted him with the relevant passages from Forward to Freedom, bearing upon such matters as soldiers' alleged grievances, ARP, Civil Guards, War Fund collections and labour demands and asked him to reconcile what he had said in that publication with the statements made in

the memorandum. [On behalf of the Communist Party, Joshi had published this pamphlet in December 1941. It contained much brave rhetoric and sought to dress up the change in the Party's policy in a nationalist garb – asserting that while aiding the war it would actually be preparing the people, including the armed forces, for freeing themselves from the British]. His reply was interesting. He said that the Forward to Freedom – which he claimed had received the approbation of Rajagopalachariar – was a political document written for the benefit of (as he put it) 'the patriots'; the memorandum was a non-political document outlining in simple terms the practical programme of the Party in relation to the war. He did not think – or was not prepared to admit – that the doctrines enunciated in the booklet cut across the statements made in the memorandum. When I asked him if the memorandum superseded the booklet, he said: 'No.' But when I suggested that perhaps the booklet represented a stage in the development of his own ideas on the subject of pro-war policy, he replied in a reluctant affirmative. It was clear that he was not prepared to repudiate the Forward to Freedom outlook. Indeed, to do so would amount to renunciation of the entire Communist ideology which the Party could hardly afford, or be expected to do. He urged that the true worth of all Communists' writings should be assessed in the light of overriding consideration that the war against Japan must be won. 'You should judge us, not by our words, but by our actions,' he said, 'and our actions will be before you.' He added that if we doubted the good faith of the Party in any particular sphere of the suggested Plan of work, *e.g.* service in the armed forces in any special capacity, we could exclude the party members from it, if we so wished. But he was full of protestations of the Party's good faith. He repeatedly said: 'The guns are turned against Japan; that is where we want them,' and several times talked of the 'army of occupation' having become the 'army of liberation'. His views on post-occupational intelligence were interesting, if immature, but it was clear that the Party leaders had given considerable thought to the matter and were hopeful of good results.

5. He was confident of the ability of the Communist Party to steady labour provided Labour Unions were recognised and labour leaders allowed to function under the supervision of Labour Commissioners. He cited as an example the recent case of a strike in a 'war production' factory in Bombay and the part the Communists played in bringing the strike to a speedy end.

He said that the intensification of war production was the primary Communist objective and although Communists would continue to support TUC demands for higher wages, dearness allowance, no curtailment of the

right to strike, etc., they were not wedded to these demands and must treat them as secondary to war requirements. There was no question of sabotaging war industries or essential services; the Communist endeavour would be to avoid creation of conditions wherein strikes would become possible. Evidently, he laid great store by the extension of Communist control over labour. Curiously enough, he had very little to say about the peasants' grievances and Communists' interest in redressing them. Perhaps he realised that the peasants had few grievances and no demands to make in these days of comparative prosperity for them. I asked him if the 'no-rent, no-tax' slogan was abandoned; he said it was.

6. I then enquired what the limits of Communist criticism of the Government and its war effort would be. He said that the party must have the right to criticise the Government freely and to point out the inadequacy of the war effort, but he added that such criticism would be made in good faith and would, by and large, be constructive. I explained that unrestrained and vituperative criticism would render Communist writers or speakers liable to legal action; he appeared to see this point but was not particularly disturbed by its implications...

... He at first stuck to the demand for the general release of Communist detenus and convicts but later said that he would produce a list of 50 Communists whose release he would ask for in order to be able to put the Party's pro-war programme into immediate operation. From what he said, it appeared that he was likely to propose the release of practically all the leaders detained by the Central Government and several important leaders detained by Provincial Governments or convicted in Provinces. He promised to see me tomorrow and show me the list. He was most anxious that everything should be done most speedily so that no time was lost in enabling the Party to start its pro-war work at the earliest possible moment. I gave him no indication of our likely reactions to his proposals.

7. As a result of this discussion, the dominant impression left on my mind is that Joshi and his friends (or at least such of them as he has been able to consult) are genuinely pro-war and anti-Axis and are ready to show in a practical way their apparently intense desire to help in the war. In spite of the tall talk in the Forward to Freedom – which is intended largely for Party consumption – they will in all probability not attempt to sabotage the war effort or do anything to assist the enemy. The building up of the Party organisation on a secure footing is, however, an ever-present consideration with them and hence their anxiety to gain control over labour. Their adherence to old Party shibboleths is likely to land them in difficulties

sooner or later, unless they are able to keep the rank and file under the strictest possible control.

8. These are first impressions. As I have mentioned before, Joshi is a voluble but not coherent talker and it is no easy matter to hold him down to the discussion of any single point. Hence the difficulty of obtaining from him a more clear-cut exposition of the present Communist Policy. G Ahmed, 12.5.42.

More secret meetings

Two days later P.C. Joshi had a secret meeting with Sir Reginald Maxwell, the home member, himself. The files of the Home Department contain Maxwell's note about the meeting:

1. I interviewed Mr P.C. Joshi yesterday evening (14th May). He is young, very much of the student type and talks very fast and elliptically. He is thus rather difficult to follow and I would suspect him of thinking in the manner in which he talks. He was, however, ready to talk quite frankly and I think there is no doubt that he is convinced of his own sincerity and that of his party in their present attitude towards the war. It will, however, be remembered that only a short time ago they were equally emphatic about the need of destroying British imperialism by all methods, even fifth column activities. I put this to him and invited him to explain his change of front. He said that it occurred in November last when the Communists sponsored a resolution in the TUC and that they had been devoting hard thought to it for some months previously. Formerly, *i.e.* before Russia came into the war, the Communists' view was that both Britain and the Axis Powers were governed in much the same way and were merely contending among themselves for world domination. But when Russia came in, it became apparent that the object of the Allied nations was to fight a war on behalf of world liberation and freedom and this view was strengthened by changes in the personnel of the British Government in England, including the advent of Churchill to power. He did not, so far as I could make out, attempt to explain how the mere entry of Russia into the war could have changed its fundamental character and objects as understood by Great Britain when she commenced it long before. This apparently seemed to him to be self-evident. The implication would, I suppose, be that if in any event Russia ceased to be belligerent, the war as waged by Great Britain and America would again become an imperialist war. I put it to him whether he was not afraid that if with the assistance of those who now thought like himself the Allies were successful in defeating the Axis Powers there would not be a danger of a reversion to the old form and objects of Government against which the Communist Party is assisting the Allies to defeat Fascism. He explained that he believed that in the process of winning the war many things that he regarded as desirable would become accomplished facts and that he did not fear that after the war the Allied Governments would revert to their previous attitude towards world domination. World freedom would

in fact be established by an Allied victory. With a sudden descent into realism he added that anyhow nothing would be possible unless Japan and the Axis Powers were first defeated. It was apparent from his talk that the Communists regard the war from an international and not from any narrowly national stand point. They agree that fascism with its ideas of world domination must be totally eliminated throughout the world and that it does not matter where or how the war is won provided that this object is secured. It seemed to me from Mr Joshi's talk that the idea of world freedom and liberation loomed larger in his eyes at the present moment than any short term ideas of a proletarian revolution. In fact he never referred of his own accord to what has been understood as the immediate revolutionary programme of the Communists.

Government. He did not explicitly repudiate any of the methods indicated in the pamphlet but was prepared to drop the idea of influencing the army or the police or the civic guards. I put it to him whether it was not his real object to use the war opportunity to strengthen the hold of his party over the masses and thus to improve its future position. He disclaimed having any such object (not very convincingly, I think) but admitted that the Communists thought that they could improve on the war effort of Government and on the methods now followed in industry. That there was any danger in their attempting to secure the degree of control and the right of interference indicated in his pamphlet, he did not admit. The main question, of course, that we have to consider here is whether the methods which Communists would follow if they were free to pursue them would in fact cause more unsettlement than they were worth in terms of united support for the war effort. In dealing with the Communists the main reason for action against them has always been not so much their ultimate theories and objects as the methods which they wish to pursue. They do not, so far as I could make out from Mr Joshi, now put revolution in the front of their practical programme but the other methods of attempting to win mass support will undoubtedly to some extent remain. I put it to Mr Joshi that even supposing that their objects were good, the zeal of the Communists might outrun their discretion in such matters. But he indignantly repudiated the suggestion.

3. I then questioned Mr Joshi about the attitude of the Communists towards the Congress and asked how he reconciled his strong anti-fascist convictions with support of the party which was more than a little inclined to make terms with Japan. He expressed his own certainty that was not the attitude of the Congress and claimed to know the minds of most of the members of the Working Committee. But it was notable that he only mentioned Nehru and Abul Kalam Azad as instances of anti-Japanese sentiments. Apparently he regarded the Congress as justified in trying to obtain control of the government of this country on the ground that after 200 years of subjection they felt that they could not fully mobilise the country for war. From the memorandum as well as from Mr Joshi's pamphlet it appears that the Communist Party similarly feel that a 'national' Government would be better qualified to lead the country in war. But the CPI are prepared to go, I think, a good deal further than the Congress in the way of immediate cooperation with the present Government. In other words, as I put it to Mr Joshi, the Congress are anti-British first and anti-Japanese a long way afterwards while the Communists are anti-Japanese

first and anti-British afterwards. Here, however, he disclaimed any anti-British feeling on the part of the Communists and I rather gathered that such sentiments would be contrary to the doctrine of world brotherhood ...

4. I then questioned Mr Joshi about the probable relations of the Communist Party (if they were allowed to function) with other parties also working for the same ostensible objects and whether the advent of the Communist Party into this field would not merely be a way of setting up rivalries which would actually impede war production. He claimed that the Communist Party, in spite of long suppression, had a preponderating influence in the Trade Union Congress and he evidently thought that the Communists had the best title to come forward as leaders of labour. He claims also to have control over the All India Students' Federation and apparently (although vaguely) over the Kisan movement. When asked he stated that his programme would also embrace the kisans, but he did not appear very interested in the subject and I think that (like M.N. Roy) he thinks mainly in terms of urban labour. When asked about his relations with the Indian Federation of Labour he was rather reticent and he did not noticeably respond to the suggestion which I put to him that all those who regarded it as their primary object to defeat Fascism first and to leave other things till afterwards should be prepared to work together and to welcome one another's assistance.

5. I had no time to go into other matters of detail but ascertained from Mr Joshi that he would remain in Delhi for some days and be available if wanted for further discussion. He emphasised in conclusion his anxiety that the members of his party should be released as soon as possible in order that time might not be lost in starting on his programme of work.

R M M(axwell)

15.5.42

On 18 June 1942, P.C. Joshi met S.A. Dange, S.S. Batliwala, B.T. Ranadive, S.S. Mirajkar and S.G. Patkar in the Yeravda Central Jail. He gave them a 'gung-ho' account of his meetings in Delhi. The detenus gave him their enthusiastic endorsement. (Two documents relating to this discussion survive in the files.)

Events now moved swiftly. Rajaji – fighting his own battles against the emerging 'Quit India' policy – wrote repeatedly to Maxwell urging that the communists be released so that they could help in the AIACC meeting set for 8 August. [Denys Pilditch, the director of the Intelligence Bureau, said that the government should not be hurried into the releases. Tottenham was his

pragmatic best: ‘...when two such persons as Mr. Rajagopalachariar and Mr [N.M.] Joshi have asked us practically to rally whatever opposition is possible to the Working Committee at the forthcoming meeting of the AICC,’ he wrote four days before the meeting, ‘and when we have ourselves asked the Provincial Governments to consider the suggestion, it would be a mistake to refuse releases...’ The policy of gradual release held, so that, as Maxwell wrote on the file on 23 October, the Communists would realize ‘They are still on probation.’]

The ban on the Communist Party, its organizations and publications was lifted on 23 July 1942.

The government crackdown on Gandhiji and the Congress came on 9 August 1942. Disturbances rocked the entire country. The CPI and the government, however, moved closer.

On behalf of his party, P.C. Joshi met Sir Reginald Maxwell a second time on 2 December 1942. ‘Thanks,’ wrote Maxwell, returning the file to Tottenham, ‘I return the papers herewith. I saw P.C. Joshi today and will send a note of the interview later.’

Maxwell’s note shows the kind of relationship that had come into being – P.C. Joshi requests him to help with paper, with the release of a man who, as we shall see later, the party was using to run down Gandhiji in Gujarat; he confides to him why he is dressing up his propaganda in the nationalist garb; he tells him how he expects to be able to ‘use’ Gandhiji and the Congress; he tells him what lies behind the party’s public propaganda that the British establish a ‘National Government’; he offers to send him a memorandum setting out the good work the party had done in the provinces. As you read Maxwell’s record of the meeting, keep in mind the kind of things that the party was to claim two years later in the Communist Reply to the Congress Working Committee’s Charges:

We concentrated all our fire on the British Imperialists as the provocateurs... We kept our differences to be thrashed out with you when you came out, before our people...

To us your release became the central task of the hour...To foil the British game was our prime concern...

Here then is Maxwell’s note of what transpired at the meeting:

I had my second interview with Mr P.C. Joshi on the 2nd December. I found him very difficult to follow owing to his way of speaking and am afraid I missed a good deal of what he said. The following note, however, gives the general drift of the conversation and the points raised.

2. Mr Joshi is not now pursuing his other publications but is concentrating on the People’s War which is being reproduced in a number of language

editions. The editorial staff for all languages appears to be in Bombay but local news is added in the distant provinces. Generally speaking, however, the contents of the English and language editions are much the same. I gather that Mr Joshi has been chief editor but that Adhikari is taking on more of the work now. The paper is produced very cheaply and the wages paid to the staff are only about Rs. 5 a month. The chief difficulty is procuring sufficient paper. Although this is purchased in the black market, the rates and speed of delivery depend largely on the production of quota chits. Mr Joshi has applied to the Chief Controller of Imports for increased quotas but the latter has replied in his No.1-(66)/C.C.Imp/ 42 of the 27th November 1942 that no increased quota can be allowed to him. Mr Joshi points out that papers like the Hindustan Standard and A.B. Patrika which are merely organs of the Forward Bloc, are able to get sufficient paper and he asks that a special concession should be allowed to the People's War. The possibility of doing so should be explored with the Chief Controller since I think that it would be a useful indirect means of exercising some control over the policy of the paper.

3. I tackled Mr Joshi about the recent policy of the People's War and told him of the complaints that had been received about it. As I expected he explained that he has to appeal to the masses in his own way. The idea of 'fascism' has no meaning for the Indian masses. What would appeal to Government officers or the British people would have no appeal here. Hence Joshi is concentrating on the appeal to patriotism. He wishes people to believe that they are fighting for freedom. Having inculcated this idea he asks, will sabotage or strikes help you to gain freedom? He pointed out that only Indians suffer from such things and finds this line of appeal effective in conversations with young men whom he gets to listen to him. The demand for National Government voiced by the People's War is intended to appeal to this sentiment. So also the 'unity campaign' is based on it. The Muslims and the Congress are at one in wanting freedom. Hence they can unite on this platform. The younger Muslims, Mr Joshi tells me, are not wedded to the idea of Pakistan and are joining the Communists in increasing numbers. I asked him how the demand for release of Congress leaders and a Congress national government could appeal to Muslims. Mr Joshi was not very intelligible on this point, but seemed to think he could make use of the Congress and particularly Gandhi on the freedom platform because of Gandhi's recognised mass appeal. Mr Joshi was evidently confident that if National Government became a fact the Communists would dominate it with the aid of non-Gandhian elements, among which he

included Nehru, and in fact he expected Gandhi to take a back seat. He fully recognised the hostility of the orthodox Congress elements towards the Communists but felt confident of weaning the younger generation from the Congress and in fact claimed some success even among young Gujaratis in Bombay and elsewhere. Mr Joshi's claim is that the CPI is now one of the three major political parties in India ranking with the Congress and the Muslim League.

4. He drew a lurid picture of the pro-Japanese sentiments which were rife among not only the public but even Government servants. He declared this to exist even now when the Japanese danger was less, owing to the feeling that India could at least get something from the Japanese who would be no worse than the British Government. He is, of course, all out to combat this sentiment but represents that the fifth column mentality can be removed only by convincing people that both the British and the Japanese are bad and by appealing to the desire for freedom. It was tolerably evident that he did not contemplate any revolutionary means of obtaining freedom in the immediate future. He asserted that the fifth column mentality extended a long way up in the ranks of the police themselves and that this was one of the reasons why police reports could not be trusted. This I think applied especially to Bengal where Joshi evidently regards the Forward Bloc (which he seemed to identify with the Anushilan) as the chief enemy of his party. He expressed anxiety about the state of things in Orissa where Nilkanta Das, the leader of the National War Front, is a member of the Forward Bloc. He told me that fifth column work has been rampant in the Indian States adjoining Orissa.

5. As regards the achievements of the Communist Party, Mr Joshi had much to say. He described the tactics followed in influencing students in times of excitement, illustrated by an instance in Cawnpore where after a police lathi charge the students were out to burn the police station. There was no use in trying to dissuade them directly but what his workers did was to ask the students what was the use of burning the station and persuade them to come along and hold an indignation meeting instead. He is confident of exercising a restraining influence on students where he can get at them but complains of difficulties due to the action of the authorities in preventing meetings.

6. In the labour field Mr Joshi claims considerable achievements in the direction of preventing strikes and sabotage. Although meetings are not generally allowed, he employs the method of personal approach and argument and of diverting excited people from worse activities. Here again,

however, he complains that his workers are not only not allowed liberty of action but are frequently arrested even in the places where they have prevented strikes.

7. He was emphatic about the strike danger and prophesied a general strike in production centres within two months unless solutions could be found of the food question and the war bonus question. He described the plight of labourers in Bombay where the chawls are not provided in many cases with electric light and kerosene oil cannot be obtained. He emphasised the danger to war production if strikes began to spread and the danger of sabotage ensuing and wished to set up production committees in industrial concerns engaged in war production in order to prevent the waste which he alleges now goes on. This of course is on the lines of what Communists have been doing in England. It would be interesting to know whether Labour Department have intelligence of this threatened strike situation and what policy they are following in regard to outstanding subjects of dispute or complaints.

8. I asked Mr Joshi whether there was anything he wanted from Government. He asked, in the first instance, for the release of Communist security prisoners detained by the Central Government. He mentioned specially the names of Bharadvaj (apparently UP), Ghate (Madras) and Dange and Batliwala (Bombay). He asserted that the Bombay government had already recommended the release of the two latter. He also wanted similar prisoners detained under provincial orders to obtain their freedom. I told him that when the ban on the party was removed and certain Communists were released it was not the intention that those not released should be in custody indefinitely but that we had to see the result of the policy followed before proceeding further. I promised, however, to consider the case of the Central security prisoners. Then in regard to the provinces Mr Joshi asked if they could not be told to allow greater liberty of action to Communist workers so that meetings would not constantly be prevented and workers arrested. I explained to him that we should not get willing cooperation from Provinces if we pushed them too hard and that they must be convinced that the Communists would not be a greater nuisance than they were worth. They would naturally be inclined to take the People's War at its face value and to regard it as likely to excite pro-Congress and anti-Government sentiments. Mr Joshi laughed at this but I think took the point. I suggested to him that it would be well if he himself or responsible communist workers made contacts with high officials of the Provincial Governments so that the latter might be better satisfied about their aims and

objects and methods of work. He seemed inclined to consider this as a useful suggestion but also wanted us to tell the Provincial Governments something of what they had been doing. He offered to provide concise and factual memoranda of the action taken in the various provinces and I said I would await these before considering what we could say to Provincial Governments.

9. One case he mentioned was that of Prithvi Singh who he said had been recently arrested in Rajkot, although he had been placed in Kathiawar in order to combat fifth column work. This man apparently had the courage to repudiate Gandhi although working in an area where Gandhi had much influence. I told him that I had no knowledge of what was done in Indian States which was the concern only of the Political Department but I should be glad of any further information we have about this case...

R.M.M(axwell)

3.12.42

It was an understanding

The result of all these meetings and exchanges was a secret understanding and it was so perceived among others by the British administrators. For instance, D. Symington, secretary, Home, Government of Bombay, writing to E. Conran-Smith, secretary, Home, Government of India on 29 December 1942 about the warnings that had been conveyed to P.C. Joshi, who was editing the People's War and to his representative A.S.R. Chari, concluded his letter as follows:

5. As the issues dated 15th November 1942 and 22nd November 1942 contained some objectionable matter, Mr (H.V.R) Iengar, Additional Secretary, Home Department, called Mr (A.S.R.) Chari on 25th November and advised him strongly against intemperate language and exaggeration. Mr Chari promised to tone down his language.

6. In view of the above warnings issued to the paper, Government would normally proceed against it and the press by way of demanding security... However, on account of the peculiar position of the Communist Party, and since it is possible that any action taken by this Government against the People's War may have repercussions in respect of the understanding which the Government of India and the Communist Party have reached, I am to enquire whether the Government of India has any objection to this Government taking action as suggested above.

Did the Communist Party actually submit the promised performance reports? On its own reckoning what had it been able to do by way of sabotaging the 1942 'Quit India' movement?

‘Decadent’, ‘Traitors’, ‘Vultures’

All through the first two-and-a-half years of the Second World War the communists abused Gandhiji for ‘inactivity,’ for ‘curbing the masses,’ for ‘compromising with imperialism’. They abused the socialists, JP and others, for ‘compromising with the compromisers,’ for sinking into ‘the mire of Gandhism, the path of the bourgeoisie,’ for ‘utter blindness, utter political bankruptcy.’ Similarly, they abused Subhas Bose for, like Gandhiji, ‘promising a struggle to escape an actual struggle,’ for ‘proposing nothing but ‘an alternative road to compromise,’ for ‘unprincipled opportunism the like of which will be difficult to find elsewhere.’

Six months after Hitler struck at the very Soviet Union that had allied with him to partition Europe, when eventually the Indian communists decided that the British efforts should be helped and not hindered, abuse was again heaped on the former targets – the reason now being not inactivity but the suggestion of activity.

The black crew

‘This black crew,’ ‘the agents of Bose, the hirelings of the Axis,’ ‘the Boseite Traitors,’ ‘the traitor Bose.’ ‘the paid agents of the enemy,’ ‘the advance guard of Tojo and Hitler,’ ‘political pests,’ ‘agents of the foreign invader who have to be hounded out of political life and treated as traitors,’ ‘a diseased limb that must be amputated,’ ‘the diabolical activities... the nests of treachery, of the fifth columnists’ – that is how in this new phase the official weekly of the Communist Party of India, People’s War, referred to Subhas Bose, his followers, and to JP and other leaders of the 1942 underground movement.

Lest this generalized abuse miss the point, ‘Every section of the people,’ the general secretary of the party told the party’s Bombay Congress in May 1943, ‘must be made to see the fifth column as their own enemy and as the agents of Jap-fascists who must be wiped out as a political pest.’ As he put it in his nine-hour long political report to the party’s convention:

The Party (must) concentrate the main fire against the fifth column – not indulge in a wordy exposure of the fifth column in general but make every section of the people see in their own terms how he is the agent of the Jap invaders in the people’s ranks and thus the enemy of all.

The Congress patriot must be made to see that the fifth column does not want Gandhiji’s release because that means the end of the sabotage campaign and opens the prospect of ending the deadlock which does not suit the Jap invaders.

The League patriot must be made to see that the fifth column is more rabid than the worst Hindu communalist and more dangerous because it talks in pseudo-socialist jargon.

The town poor must be made to see that the fifth column is only out to exploit their economic grievances, to blow up production and not to get their just demands.

The peasants must be told that when the fifth column whispers ‘hold the crop’, it is not getting them a fair-price but only provoking the town-hungry on the one hand to come marching to the village to loot and the police-parties on the other to commandeer the harvest...

Subhas Bose and JP were repeatedly lampooned in cartoons – Bose being shown one week as a cat held up to a microphone from the scruff of its neck by Goebbels, the next as a midget being led by Tojo, a third coming down from the sky riding a Japanese bomb to ‘liberate’ the poor people of India; JP being shown as living up to his decision to do ‘something drastic’ by jumping into the

pouch of the kangaroo-Gandhi.

Two passages from the People's War will convey the flavour of the abuse that was heaped on these leaders and what they were doing.

Representative abuse

The first one is about Bose and appears in the People's War of 10 January 1943 in a signed contribution by B.T. Ranadive:

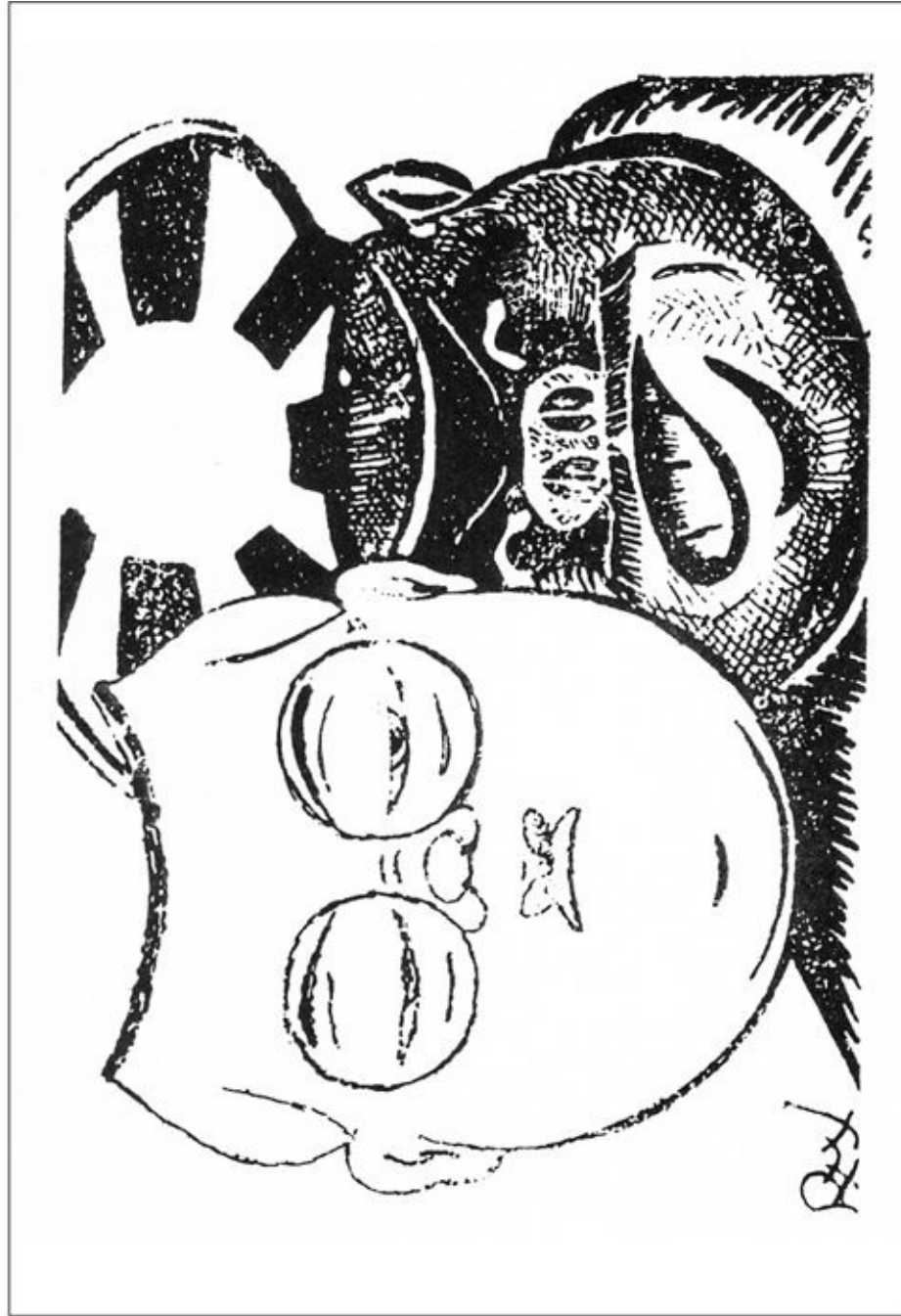
The Assam office of 'Japanese-German Independence Association' published a message from Subhas Bose which glorifies acts of anarchy and sabotage as 'War of Independence'! The guerillas are working (sic) destruction to government property and railways. I now appeal to my countrymen to join the War of Independence with heart and soul. I specifically appeal to the Communist Party of India to rise to the occasion. 'We shall help in all respects,' declares Subhas Bose, the henchman of Japanese imperialism...

The appeal will certainly not fall on deaf ears. The Communist Party will rise to the occasion and give the only reply which traitors and quislings have got from honest patriots. Bose's mercenary army of 'liberation', of rapine and plunder will feel the wrath and indignation of our people if it dare set its foot on Indian soil to enact acts of pillage and robbery.

The second – again a typical one – is about JP and other members of the Congress Socialist Party who were leading the underground movement at that time. It is from the People's War of 21 March 1943:

For six months these vultures have been feeding on the Congress, doing the dirty work of their masters in the name of the Congress... clear out the vampires... Its politics is the politics of dirty vampires who have been sucking the life blood of the Congress for six months, but who now see the end of their days drawing near...

Courtesy: Sita Ram Goel



Subhas Bose as a mere mask for the Japanese imperialist ogre: 'People's War,' 8 August 1942

Such vitriol was of course excellent from the British point of view. "Better and better," wrote Tottenham upon examining the People's War issue of 25 July 1943. 'M.N. Roy will soon have to look to his laurels,' noted Maxwell.

'We never "change front,"' as the party's general secretary had told Maxwell in his confidential 'legality' memorandum on 15 March 1943. 'Our enemies and critics charge us of this. We don't change sides, but we change our policy and practice as the situation changes, but the purpose remains the same, freedom for

ourselves and all...' Accordingly, even while bearing in mind the abuse that the party had heaped throughout 1942–44 one is not altogether surprised to read the following in the Intelligence Bureau's Review of Communist Activities for April 1946:

As the struggle against Congress intensified, the Communist Party began to seek means of restoring its dwindling popularity. Though it had wholeheartedly condemned Subhas Bose and the INA, it tried to cash in on the INA agitation by demanding the release of INA and Forward Bloc prisoners and by half-heartedly collecting money for the INA Defence Fund...

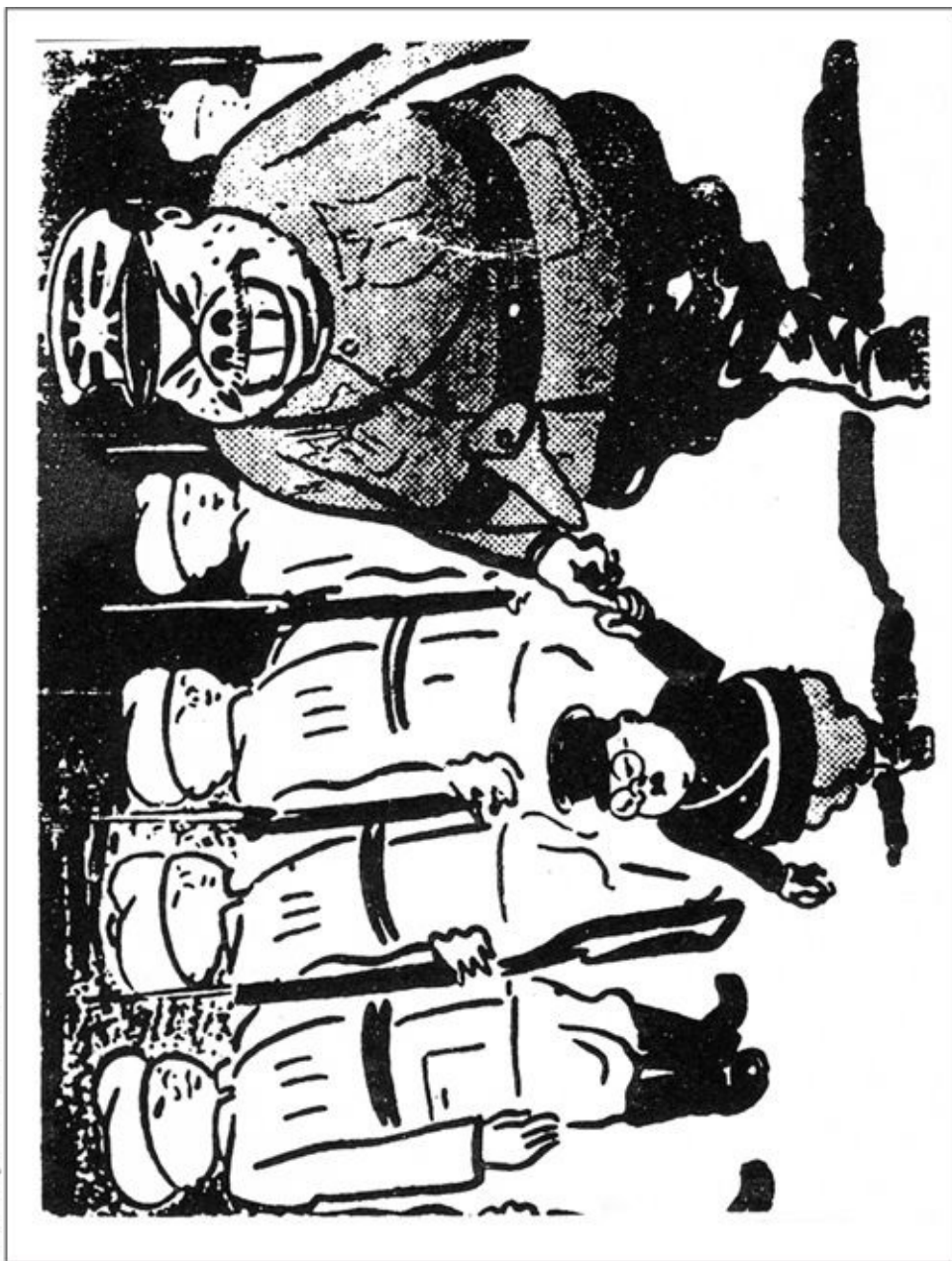
The past, however, is a cruel drag and the rest of the sentence shows its liabilities:

...but weakened the effect by characterising the bulk of the INA as misguided patriots and by decrying their glorification by the Congress...

‘Storming the Gandhian stronghold through communist lead’

Gandhiji, who as we have seen earlier, was abused as being in his ‘decadent phase’, as being merely ‘the astute leader of the bourgeoisie,’ as one who had reached ‘the nadir of his bankruptcy,’ as one who, by suppressing the urge of the masses to violently overthrow the British, was leading the country to ‘non-violent suicide,’ was now lampooned and abused for the opposite set of crimes.

Courtesy: Sita Ram Goel



Subhas Bose as a midget being led by the Japanese imperialist: 'People's War,' 26 September 1943.

When the Congress Working Committee passed the 'Quit India' draft resolution at Wardha, the People's War devoted the entire front page of its 19 July 1942 issue to what it called the 'Working Committee Resolution – a Blind and Desperate Lead':

After nine days of labour the Working Committee has brought forth an abortion. The resolution it has produced has bankruptcy writ large upon it. From the rut of inactivity it now seeks to lead the nation into the politics of blind desperation and disaster...

When after the arrests of 9 August 1942 the country was rocked by disturbances, the Communist Party blamed 'the mad bureaucracy' for provoking the people. The original sin, however, seemed to lie, as before, with Gandhiji and his associates. 'How did this situation arise?,' asked the People's War of 27 September 1942, and answered:

It arose because the national leadership, instead of going all out to unite the people to rouse them to do everything which strengthens the country's defences against the fascist aggressors and forging mass sanctions for securing National Government for national defence, chose the opportunist path of inactivity, of non-embarrassing non-cooperation with defence measures, hoping thereby to win the national demand as a gift from imperialism. The Communist Party had warned against this policy, which amounted to leaving the initiative and the fate of the nation entirely in the hands of imperialism. This only strengthened the obstinate attitude of the bureaucracy to deny power to the Indian people and led to the growing moods of frustration and defeatism among the nationalist masses. Instead of drawing from this the requisite lessons about the urgency of unity, the national leadership took one more step in the direction of its own opportunist policy. It advanced from non-cooperation and neutrality to plan of active opposition to measures of national defence in the name of launching a struggle for the national demand.

The path along which the present national upsurge is directed is one of national suicide, not of national salvation and freedom. It destroys the nation's indispensable defences inevitably leading to conditions of civil commotion and disorder, anarchy, and even loot and arson. It makes the national movement the prey of bureaucratic provocation in the name of struggle... It is leading the nation to a state of moral and political disruption and paralysis which far from helping the people to get their freedom can only clear the path of the invader. Such is the disastrous culmination of policies of not relying upon the strength of the people, on national unity, and leaving the initiative in the hands of the imperialist bureaucracy...

The Communist Party's ire was concentrated primarily on the socialists, and on Bose and his followers, on 'the saboteurs', 'the paid agents of the enemy,' as it labelled them. But Gandhiji and others were no less to blame, it seemed, for they were the ones who had created 'the atmosphere without which the saboteur could not function.' Here is how in a typical passage the People's War of 11 October 1942 put the matter in its editorial:

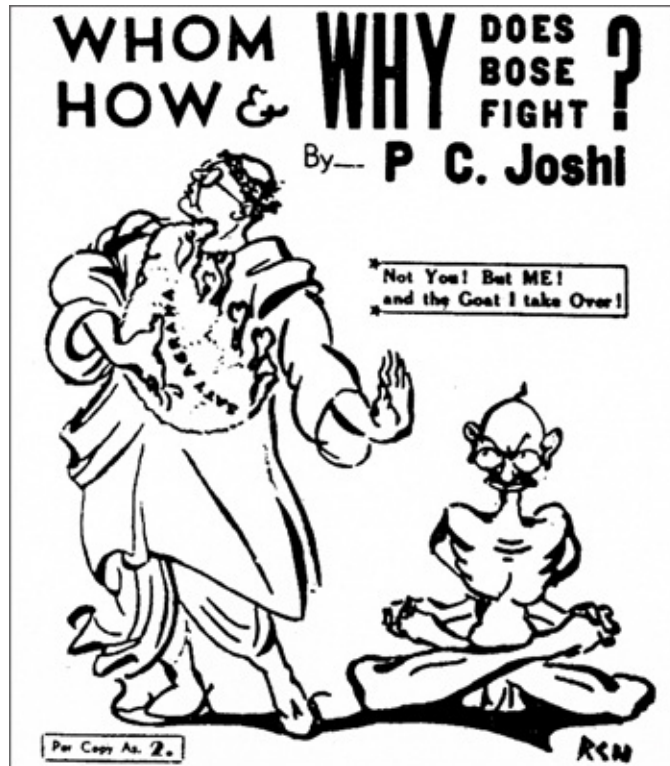
... Before this can be done, before the actual differences between the

saboteur and the satyagrahi can be made to yield any substantial political results, the objective unity of their plans which is there despite their desires and differences, must be clearly realised. The satyagraha creates the atmosphere without which the saboteur could not function. The saboteur has contempt for the satyagrahi but without the patriotic upsurge created by the Congress satyagraha, the saboteur will not get a second person to help him. The two trends are separate but despite themselves they strengthen each other. Why? Because both are aiming in different ways to achieve the same result, viz whipping up enthusiasm for a sagging movement. Because both are the product of frustration and despair that has overwhelmed most of the Indian patriots today. The satyagrahi is only partially disillusioned with sabotage as a form of struggle but not with satyagraha being struggle. The saboteur and anarchist is the patriot gone blind, the innocent tool of a hidden fifth columnist. Both seek their inspiration from the bankrupt policy embodied in the slogan DO OR DIE, and do not yet see the real way out is the patriotic slogan UNITE AND WIN...

Courtesy: Sita Ram Goel



Jayaprakash Narayan unnerved by the onslaught of the communist, jumps back into his mommy's pouch



Subhas Bose carries off the lamb as Gandhi sits stuck in his asana: 'Unmasked Parties and Politics,' CPI, 1940.

As Gandhiji was the main symbol of the national movement, he was lampooned, attacked, 'exposed'. The 26 July 1942 issue of People's War has a typical and glowing account of an 'Anti-Jap Mela' organized by the Communist Party at Calicut. It recounts the 'mock-Parliament' organized by the comrades to educate the audience:

All of a sudden the crowd saw ascending the dias Gandhiji, Nehru, Azad, Rajaji, Jinnah, Roy, Savarkar. Excitement ran high. No, not the real ones, of course! But their styles, their politics – how realistic the whole show was, depicted absolutely in the raw. Plenty of clean fun and laughter, plus really good political criticism and education. 'Nehru' makes a thundering speech about 'peoples' defence' and so on, but right when he gets to the mention of 'guerilla warfare', 'Gandhiji' casts a stern glance at him and immediately 'Nehru' shuts up. The whole audience went into fits of merriment. 'Gandhiji' was silent throughout the show. He remained there on the dias all the while, but did not utter a word. Only his glances were eloquent. Somebody from amongst the audience burst out: 'Why doesn't Gandhiji speak?' Came the grave answer from 'Azad': 'Today is his day of silence.' There was another roar of laughter. It was a grand idea of the Calicut comrades, this mock-Parliament. A fine way of carrying politics with a

punch to the people...

The 2 August 1942 issue of the People's War devoted an entire half-page to 'reporting' the tour of Prithvi Singh – 'the follower' of Gandhiji who, P.C. Joshi was to plead with Maxwell, was later wrongly arrested by the British and whose release the party sought most fervently. Under a heading stretching across the entire page 'Storming the Gandhian stronghold through Communist Lead,' the paper informed its readers:

Sardar Prithvi Singh who has chosen to go forward to freedom with the Communists and the people rather than lie stagnating in Gandhian defeatism and stagger towards fascist slavery, toured Gujarat, the stronghold of Gandhism, from the 10th to the 18th of July. He pointed out that Gandhiji's policy was one which would leave the Indian people defenceless and paralysed...

He said that it was because he saw the disaster that would befall the country by adopting Gandhiji's line, and the great national liberation that awaits India if she took the path indicated by the Communist Party of India that he decided to break with Gandhiji... Here again he forcefully presented to the audience the two paths. The one of defeatism, of frustration, of helplessness and of objective surrender to the fascists – that of Gandhiji. The other of determination to die for the sake of our Motherland, of confidence in the people's unity, in their strength, of confidence in the Soviet Union and China and the freedom loving peoples of Britain and America...

Of course, once Gandhiji was released after twenty-one months in detention, the Communist Party was to refer to him repeatedly as 'the most loved leader of the greatest patriotic organisation of our people', as 'the greatest leader of the nation,' as 'the National Father'. Indeed, it would seem that it had all this while harboured such respect not only for Gandhiji but for the Congress leadership as a whole. Here is how the party put it in its Communist Reply to Congress Working Committee's Charges:

It was not faith in the British nor even elementary patriotic duty towards victims of terror but of love and respect for you, despite our very serious differences, that inspired us, and columns after columns of People's War bear witness to this; and all those who in their thousands heard our agitators speak.

We know that you were the foremost leader of our country and that if you were not free to do your best and you did not give your best to the

problems facing the country, there was no way out for our national movement except its disintegration and disillusionment, bitterness with others and helplessness in themselves among our people. We were only doing our duty towards you and the country in the hope that you would do yours.

Onwards to Pakistan

Apart from railing at Gandhiji and the Congress for leaving the people leaderless by ‘escaping into jails’, for creating by their satyagrahas the atmosphere in which ‘the advance guard of Hitler and Tojo’ could function, the Communist Party now turned on the Congress, and on Gandhiji in particular for another crime: they were accused of disrupting national unity by not conceding ‘the essence of the demand for Pakistan.’

As it has been the communist practice to repeat their assertions incessantly, a host of publications can be cited for the paragraphs that follow. I will confine myself to the two key resolutions on the subject,¹ and to two publications.² All the propositions and quotations in the following account are taken from these publications. The formal line that the Communist Party came to adopt for public consumption (I shall allude to the motivations in a little while) was as follows:

1. National defence is the need of the hour;
2. National defence is best organized by a national government;
3. The prerequisite for a national government is an agreement between the Congress and the Muslim League;
4. To bring this agreement about, the Congress – in particular Gandhiji – must concede to Jinnah the essence of the demand for Pakistan.

While Jinnah was advised by the party from time to time to pursue his objective in a different way, the onus for doing something and the blame for not doing it was placed squarely on the Congress, and on Gandhiji in particular.

From the point of view of the British this kind of propaganda was at worst academic, at best quite helpful. It was academic in that, while the Communist Party was demanding a national government in public, the British knew from the several memoranda that the party had submitted to them in secret that the absence of a national government was not going to come in the way of the party helping out with the war effort. It was helpful in that here was one more platform from which the perfidious Congress and the cunning Gandhi were being put on the defensive; here was a non-Muslim party supporting the ever helpful Muslim League.



Subhas Bose as a cur held up by Goebbles: 'People's War,' 13 September 1942.

The secular and anti-religious league

Till the period that we are considering, the Communist Party had maintained that India was one nation, that the Muslim League leadership was a 'feudal-reactionary' one, that this leadership was fanning communalism to aggrandize its hold over the culturally and educationally deprived Muslim masses. The party now castigated itself for having made 'a theory of an illusion', for having so completely misunderstood and misrepresented the problem of nationalities. By incessant and vociferous repetition the party now started proclaiming the following theses:

1. India is not one nation but a collection of several separate nationalities, many of them being oppressed nationalities.
2. The Muslims are not quite an oppressed nationality but, as they fear that the Hindus could in the future oppress them, the demand for Pakistan is 'a just and democratic demand.'
3. The Muslim League leadership has changed: 'It is no longer feudal-reactionary, no longer just a willing tool of imperialism. It is now an

industrial bourgeois leadership, which is no more an adjunct of imperialism' but one which plays an oppositional role vis-à-vis imperialism. [Remember that the Congress and Gandhiji by contrast had been proclaimed previously as having entered their 'decadent phase' in which they were to be merely the 'compromisers with imperialism'.]

4. The Muslim League itself is now progressive, it is referred to as 'the secular and anti-religious League'; the Congress is the one that is told, 'You call in to assist your fight "Nationalist Muslim" elements, many of which preach their idea in theocratic terms, like the Ahrars and the Khaksars'; the growth of the Muslim League is now certified to represent 'not the growth of communalism but the rise of anti-imperialist nationalist consciousness among the Muslim masses.'

Accordingly the Congress, it was said, must concede to the Muslims 'the right to self determination,' 'the right of autonomous state of existence... accompanied by the unconditional right to political secession.'

These new propositions were justified by one practical example and by 'The Theory'. The practical proof consisted in 'the shining example', 'the glorious example' of the one country which was said to have 'solved' its nationalities' problem by granting to them the right of self-determination to the point of secession.

A theory of three sentences

The ‘theoretical basis’ consisted of three sentences from Stalin.

The first two – described by our CPI theoreticians to be ‘a brilliant prophecy, proving the remarkable acumen of vision that Marxism alone can give’ – were from an essay written by Stalin in 1925:

Now a days India is spoken of as a single whole. Yet there can be hardly any doubt that in the case of a revolutionary upheaval in India many hitherto unknown nationalities, each with its own language and its own distinctive culture, will emerge on the scene.

One could, therefore, be confident about the rise of the Muslim League. Representing the rise of Muslim nationalism as a result of the bourgeois development of the subcontinent, its rise and growth was now seen to be in accord with Stalin’s prophecy, hence to be in accord with ‘The Theory’, hence with ‘the laws of historical development’ and hence ‘progressive’.

The third sentence was from an essay written in 1912. Stalin, it was now recalled, had defined a nation:

A nation is a historically evolved stable community of language, territory, economic life and psychological make-up manifested in a community of culture.

The ‘essence’ of the demand of the Muslim League for Pakistan was seen to be in accord with this ‘definition’ of a ‘nation’ and hence to be perfectly in order.

It is of course comic that Stalin’s essay was written at a time when, under Lenin’s direction, the party in Russia was consciously fanning ‘reactionary’ demands – of the nationalities, of the peasants – to enlarge its following; that even in these circumstances Stalin had added two caveats the first being an amplification of his ‘definition’ itself:

It must be emphasised that none of the above characteristics is by itself sufficient to define a nation. On the other hand it is sufficient for a single one of the characteristics to be absent and the nation ceases to be a nation.

The case of the ‘essence of the demand for Pakistan’ would have been weakened by these sentences – no common language, after all, no common economic life... And so, by coincidence, these sentences of the same Stalin were not recalled.

The second caveat was characteristic of Stalin, for he was one to always keep his options open: while communists recognized the right of every people to form

a state of its own, he had said, this did not mean that they would support separatism in every case; that would depend on the interests of the working class. Was it not a fact, after all, that the bourgeoisie often used separatism as a slogan to rally the masses for its reactionary purposes? This caveat would have required at the least that the CPI work out how the Pakistan demand furthered the interests of the working class. Our theoreticians stuck to the broad brush.

Indeed, in 1917–18, now in possession of the state, Stalin had reverted to the question. Self-determination, he now clarified, must be understood ‘dialectically’ – i.e., it was to be a right for the masses and not the bourgeoisie (the Muslim League, on the reckoning of the CPI itself, was a party of the bourgeoisie that was asserting the right without any reference to the masses); that it must be subordinated to ‘the fight for socialism’ (this being the agenda in the USSR, it justified smothering all minority nationalities); that the question whether separatist movements were progressive or not depended on whether they were directed against bourgeois governments or socialist governments; that even if the demand for the right to self-determination passed all the other tests, it could be reactionary for ‘other’ reasons – the ‘secessions’ of Poland and the Baltic states, for instance, which he was to undo in 1939, Stalin had found to have been a reactionary development as it had set up a barrier between revolutionary Russia and the revolutionary West.³

Recalling so many caveats would have horrendously complicated the case for ‘the essence of the demand for Pakistan,’ so they too were not recalled by our Communist Party.

Instead, what was recalled was ‘the shining example’, ‘the glorious example’ of success that one can achieve in solving the nationalities problem by actually granting the right of self-determination and secession to each nationality. ‘The shining example,’ ‘the glorious example’ was of course the Soviet Union!

‘The shining example’, ‘the glorious example’

The Communist Party drew everybody’s attention again and again to the fact that Stalin’s 1936 Constitution had granted the right of self-determination including secession to each of the Soviet Union’s 200 nationalities. And it asserted again and again that it is the granting of this right that explained how the Soviet Union had ‘solved’ its nationalities problem. That, having granted the ‘right’, the Soviet state had exterminated every leader who might conceivably have stood up on behalf of any nationality;⁴ that having granted the right, the Soviet state had ruthlessly suppressed the minority nationalities, exterminating hundreds of thousands, shunting millions of them from their homes to distant

Kazhakstan, to central Asia and to Siberia; and that these ruthless steps were what explained how the Soviet Union had ‘solved’ its nationalities problem – all this was of course not mentioned.



Subhas Bose descending as the Japanese bomb to liberate the people of India: ‘People’s War’, 21 November 1942.

But what was worse, even in that single sentence of his setting out the ‘definition’ of a ‘nation’, Stalin had not allowed religion to get anywhere near becoming a criterion for determining nationality. And for a good practical reason: at the time Stalin wrote his original articles on the subject, he was

concerned in part to provide ‘the theoretical basis’ for refusing nationality status to the Jews! Yet here was our Communist Party advocating a demand that manifestly took religion as the exclusive – at any rate, the overwhelmingly preponderant – criterion of nationality. To the end the party was not able to resolve this inconvenience. We thus have it insisting in one breath that ‘in this sense alone [i.e., only in the sense it amounts to demanding the “secular” and “democratic” right of self-determination and secession] is the urge for Pakistan among the Muslim peoples real. In the religious sense it is unreal.’ And in the next it asserts, ‘One more point. Does all this really correspond to the essence of the demand of the Muslim League? It surely does!’ We find it insisting in one breath that religion is not a factor in its formula at all, and in the next that its formula ‘concedes to the Muslims the essence of the Pakistan demand.’

Apart from making sure by these convolutions that its progressive lineaments remained unsoiled, the Communist Party had, of course, to be consistent. Just as it could not concede that it was advocating ‘the essence of the demand for Pakistan’ to Muslims as a religious group, it could not limit the granting of the right of self-determination and secession to Muslims. It therefore took to proclaiming that the right to secede should be given to all ‘nationalities’ – ‘Karnatakis’, Andhras, Tamils, Bengalis, Marathis, Punjabis, Sindhis, Baluchis, Pathans, to list just the specific ‘nationalities’ mentioned by the party as illustrations of its thesis. Even the formula put forth by Cripps did not envisage the balkanization of India that this ‘bold’ formula of the party, this ‘very simple solution’, as it put it, would have ensured.

Of course, the party conceded that there had to be modifications on the ground. After all, the scheme could not be allowed to depart too much from what Jinnah was putting forth. Thus in the Punjab, only the Muslims in western Punjab were to be granted the right to self-determination and secession. As for the rest, there was a practical suggestion:

These western districts have a Muslim population of over 60 percent on an average. In many cases this percentage exceeds 70 or 80. But the question is not one of religion or of numerical preponderance. The dominant impress of the particular nationality is there on the life of this whole region. This is why we grant the right of self-determination to this Muslim-nationality of Western Punjab. The Sikhs and the Hindus in the eastern districts of the Punjab can easily come to a settlement with Muslims of the western districts on the basis of self-determination and guarantee of cultural rights. They can thus form, a united, autonomous Punjab, with the right to secede from the rest of India...

Assessment of ‘concrete, objective reality’

Apart from the ‘theory’ of nationalities as put forth by Stalin and put into practice by ‘the model experiment’ of the Soviet Union, the Communist Party buttressed its advocacy by its assessment of the facts, of ‘concrete, objective reality’, to use its phrase. It maintained:

1. Muslim leaders and their followers are not bent upon separation.
2. Mr Jinnah has already agreed to subject his demand to a referendum.
3. Mr Jinnah has already stated that Pakistan will be a secular state.
4. Most important, granting the right of self-determination and secession ‘can never lead to the vivisection of the motherland’; by granting it ‘no separate Pakistan and no Hindudom can ever rise but a happy family of free and autonomous states of various nationalities united in an Indian Union’; far from dismembering the country, the plan would lead to ‘still greater and more glorious unity the like of which India has not seen in her history,’ to ‘a greater and more glorious unity of India than we have ever had till now.’

On such grounds and with that ‘Theory’ of three sentences from Stalin was ‘the essence of the demand for Pakistan’ urged incessantly, and on such grounds, on such assessment of the facts, of ‘concrete, objective reality’ were Gandhiji and the Congress berated for their cussedness in not falling in line with the Muslim League. As has been the custom, anyone who disagreed with the party’s assessment of ‘concrete, objective reality’, or with the ‘Theory’ was abused: ‘an enemy of unity,’ ‘a communalist,’ ‘a chauvinist’ and worse. As noted above, while Jinnah was occasionally advised to go about his demand in a different way, the onus for blocking Congress-League unity, for thereby wrecking the formation of a national government and for thus sabotaging national defence was placed clearly and repeatedly on the Congress and specially on Gandhiji.

But jinnah remains suspicious

The Communist Party was to repeatedly compliment itself on how Muslims were flocking to it because of its espousal of the demand for Pakistan and on how even the Muslim Leaguers had begun to appreciate the communists' advocacy:

Among the Leaguers [the party was to recall in its Reply to the Congress Working Committee's Charges] we found that their earlier suspicion that we were fifth column of the Congress began to disappear, they were thunderstruck to hear non-Muslims explain Pakistan, as they said, 'better than was done from the League platform itself'...

All the Leaguers except Jinnah, I would presume. In spite of the Communist Party's fervent advocacy of the Pakistan demand 'in essence', Jinnah did not shed his customary disdain. As he put it in his presidential address to the Muslim League session in Karachi in December 1943:

Well now we come to the Congress and Hindu leadership. Gentlemen, I see no change except a parrot-like cry. I find that the cleverest party that is carrying on propaganda are the Communists. They have got so many flags, and I think they consider that there is safety in numbers. They have got the Red flag; they have got the Russian flag; they have got the Soviet flag; they have got the Congress flag. And now they have been good enough to introduce our flag also. ['Laughter', says the official record.] Well, when a man has got too many flags, I get suspicious...

The Communist Party was of course gracious enough to acknowledge that it had not always seen the matter as it was now seeing it. It said that the facts had become clear to it rapidly after the Muslim League passed its 'Pakistan Resolution' in March 1940, but that since then it had 'consistently espoused' 'the essence of the demand for Pakistan.' The reason it had been able to see through the matter while others had not was also self-evident, even if it was the familiar one:



Subhas Bose as the donkey carrying Tojo: 'People's War,' 19 July 1942.

To the Communists, this development is already becoming quite clear [the party's theoreticians put it in Pakistan and National Unity] but to the ordinary patriot, this new aspect of the communal problem, as a problem of multinational consciousness, has not yet become patent. We, the Communists, are able to see our way into the future by means of our theory and our ideology...

And what was that ‘theory ‘? Two sentences from one essay and one from another!

The impulse was not theory but opportunism. The communists had alienated nationalist opinion by their abuse of the Congress, of Gandhiji, of Subhas Bose, of the leaders of the 1942 underground movement. Now (and in this they had a good precedent – that of Lenin himself) they were latching on to other grievances to enlarge their following. Nothing betrays this better than the exultant passages in the communist publications of the period recording that Muslim youth had started flocking to the party since it took up the advocacy of the demand for Pakistan.

The Communist propaganda for a national government too must be seen in the light of what their general secretary had confided to Sir Reginald Maxwell, the home member: in the light, that is, of the need they felt to dress up their switch in a nationalist garb and of their confidence that, should such a government come to be formed, they would be able to dominate it.

From the point of view of the British, as noted earlier, the propaganda was academic at worst and helpful at best. They exulted at the communists’ abuse of the Congress Socialists and Subhas Bose, at their increasingly strident opposition to the Congress. And they watched, amused at the knots the Communist Party was tying itself into.

It was abusing those who were leading the underground movement. Simultaneously, it had to go on with its ritual castigation of the government for the latter’s repression. One week the party was printing extracts from a document alleging collusion between Maxwell and P.C. Joshi under the heading ‘Fifth Column Forgery’, and abusing the socialists and ‘Boseites’ for now stooping so low. In another issue it was reporting that a bomb had been thrown at its press in Bombay, this too by the same fifth column. Maxwell was amused:

Joshi must be finding it a strain [he wrote in the file on the People’s War in his neat hand] to keep up his enthusiasm for the abandonment of repression against people who bomb his press and forge his letters!

S.J.L. Olver, the undersecretary in the Home Department, had to prepare a review each week of the latest issue of the People’s War. The 9 January 1944 issue of the weekly carried reports of the Muslim League session in Karachi at which Jinnah had made the contemptuous remarks about the communists quoted above. Olver’s review of the issue:

The review of the Karachi Muslim League Session on the front page, continued in ‘Week in Review’ on page two is interesting as an illustration of the impasse which the Communists have reached in their unity

campaign. In their endeavour to present the Muslim League as an ally they have been led into a number of gross absurdities, since they are forced to shut their eyes to the predominantly authoritarian nature and Constitution of the League. Thus 'the Committee of Action' is described as a body to 'enforce democratic functioning' and 'curb the selfish landlord and money-making interests'! The front page article ends by reading a lecture to the League on the need for democracy, a lecture which is not likely to have much effect beyond possibly alienating the League leaders. All this seems to me to be floundering and one cannot help the feeling that the Communists themselves realise it...

And in reporting on the issue of 19 March 1944 he wrote:

...There is an effort in 'Week in Review', in Sajjad Zaheer's article on Pakistan and in 'We support self-determination' to show that the Congress is not really opposed to Pakistan, again an effort which will I fear carry little conviction...

Tottenham in commenting on the same issue was looking ahead:

It will be interesting to see how People's War reacts to Jinnah's 'hands-off' warning to the Communists ... [His curiosity was to remain unquenched. The Communists kept silent.]

Olver on the issue of 26 March 1944:

The support of Jinnah against the Punjab Ministry in 'Week in Review' is interesting. The entirely authoritarian, or one might say totalitarian, attitude that Jinnah had displayed does not, I suppose, necessarily conflict with the Communist ideology, but I cannot help feeling nevertheless, that their support is, in this case, even more opportunist than usual...

On the issue of 23 July 1944:

There is nothing worthy of particular comment in this issue. The two main political themes are naturally Rajagopalachari's plan and Gandhi's statements and, as is to be expected, the Communists are doing their best to push both...

And when he saw from the People's War of 15 October 1944 the agony the Communist Party was going through in making up its mind about what to say on the breakdown of the Gandhi-Jinnah talks, the ever understanding Tottenham wrote:

In fact the People's War is finding it more and more difficult to face both ways...

Tied up in knots, the CPI was no longer of much use to the British.

Motives and Recantations

Why did the British entice the communists into opposing the 1942 'Quit India' movement? Why did the communists cross over?

The answers to both questions are simpler than might seem to be the case. The first question, though, is wrongly phrased: the British did not entice the communists; the communists were the ones who went about systematically and persistently brandishing their usefulness to the British.

The British motive

The British motive was simplicity itself: the Indian freedom movement led by Gandhiji had been the government's hated adversary for long; now, with a life-and-death struggle on in Europe, it was doubly so; every party or group that was prepared to do the freedom movement in, that was prepared to denigrate Gandhiji, was most welcome.

Till the Communist Party began making its feverish approaches, it was, from the British point of view, the least likely to be useful. The British administration had long despised and pursued it. From the British point of view here was yet another group set to throw them out; indeed, by its 'Draft Platform of Action', this particular group was determined to throw them out by violent insurrection. The party was also – by its statutes of course, but even more so by its record – the Bear's paw in the Great Game: the communists got their inspiration and their instructions from Moscow.

The commencement of the war only heightened British animosity towards and suspicion of the communists. The Soviet Union was ranged with Hitler and against Britain. Its instrument in India – the Communist Party – had thus proclaimed the war to be a great opportunity for throwing the British out and was going about abusing Gandhiji and everyone else for dampening the prospects of a violent insurrection. The government had therefore intensified their raids to net the leading Communists. In October and November 1940, the raids had been particularly successful. Apart from three Central Committee leaders – G. Adhikari, P.C. Joshi, and P.S. Sundarama Reddy – almost all had been caught. Intelligence reports showed that the party was in disarray. Short of funds, of personnel, its few remaining leaders on the run, it had sent out urgent instructions: 'Do not establish contact with the Central Office; yes, continue the agitations but 'safety first' ...'

The fact that for six months the party stuck to the old line after Hitler invaded the Soviet Union only confirmed the British in their view that the communists were more interested in creating trouble for them than even in protecting their Mecca.

But then had come the overtures from the Communist Party. The Home Department establishment – in particular Sir Reginald Maxwell, the home member, and the additional secretary, Sir Richard Tottenham – saw the opportunity. They knew better than the others that the communists who were in jail had become restive, that they were pushing for the line that would get them out, and that those still at large had similarly reached the end of their tether. On

10 January 1942 they sent out a secret circular to all provincial governments. They informed the provinces of the likely change in the communist attitude, of the offers of cooperation that had already been received 'from quite unexpected and sometimes embarrassing sources, including certain individual security prisoners.' They urged the provinces and other parts of the administration to put aside the past rhetoric of the communists, to look only to the advantage of the moment. As the secret letter of 10 January 1942 put it,

... So far as the more genuine communists are concerned, there is the view which is well expressed in the following passage from 'Russia and Ourselves', to which a reference has been made above: 'Bitterness about the past must not in any way dictate present policy. When, in Litvinov's words (see his broadcast of July the 8th 1941) the house is on fire the important thing is that someone is helping you to put it out, not what he was doing previously.' (Nor, it may perhaps be added, what he may do when the flames have, been extinguished.) 'Indeed, the sincerity of a man's belief that to beat Hitler is everything may be tested by his ability to put the needs of the present before the memory of the past.' In this view it is neither the previous record of an individual or a party, nor even their ultimate aims, that need be considered: it is how they are prepared to act now and in the immediate future.

It is easy to give a dog a bad name and hang him. It is more difficult, but far more worthwhile, to recognise and seize the moment at which it may be possible to convert a rebel into a citizen. It may also be that the apparently respectable Congressman with the heart of a defeatist or a Quisling, is a greater danger to the country than the misguided youth who has spent his energies in revolutionary talk or planning, but who at least has energies to spend and a kind of enthusiasm which may possibly be directed into more truly patriotic channels.

In the circumstances of India it is extremely difficult to decide between these conflicting views; but such is the urgency of the times that it may be held worthwhile to take certain risks in order to rally every possible element to our cause. The crux of the matter is to divide the sheep (if any) from the goats, and then to make use of the former in such a way as not only to exploit the fissiparous tendencies that have already appeared, but also to make positive use of their services. This would mean that each case would have to be examined and dealt with on its merits...

Everyone went along, though all the other branches of government – the IB, the provincial authorities, the viceroy himself – remained sceptical, hostile. Many of

them are bona fide communists, they said, they were more attracted by the mechanics of disruption and violence than by the goal of a better society; even in the case of bona fide communists, their only interest was to use every occasion to further the interests of their party; in any case, their influence on labour, etc., was just not worth the trouble...

‘... As regards Communists and the War,’ Linlithgow, the viceroy, wrote on 26 February 1942 to Amery, the Secretary of State in London, ‘I would say that little practical support is forthcoming from the Party although there is lip service in plenty. A few young professing Communists have applied for Commissions in the Army...’ When Sir R. Lumely, the governor in Bombay, wrote to him enclosing the secret memorandum that he had received from the communists (as noted earlier he was among the half a dozen who the communists ensured got it), Lumely cautioned the viceroy against responding too enthusiastically,

I am inclined to the view that the support we would get from the Communists is probably not great enough to justify the social uneasiness which might result and that we should therefore go slow about it,

Linlithgow noted:

...One must constantly check the position by asking oneself what exactly the gentry can do to help us...

Denys Pilditch, the director of the Intelligence Bureau, exemplified a typical difficulty – that of making oneself believe that the communists would so readily eat their words. When on 13 April 1942 the Dain-Rangnekar Committee recommended that the sixteen communist leaders held under the Centre’s directions be released as a block, Pilditch strenuously opposed its recommendations. The committee, like the Home Department, had taken a pragmatic view:

As the departmental notes emphasize, the change [of the Communists’ attitude to the war] is in tactics only, but these men were detained for their tactics and not for their principles and if they change their tactics, their ideology does not matter. Even the change in tactics is temporary but if it lasts until the overthrow of Fascism, it lasts for all the time that need be taken into account...

than a cloak under cover of which anti-Government activities and propaganda were to be carried on in the furtherance of the unchanged objectives of the Communist Party ...What the Committee has failed to recognise is the existence of something more than a possibility that many Communist leaders, if released, would pursue a dual policy of professed resistance to the Axis Powers and practical opposition to British 'imperialism' in India – a position which would almost certainly lead to hinderance rather than help...

Nobody could believe that the communists would just swallow everything they had been proclaiming so incessantly. G. Ahmed of the Intelligence Bureau and Maxwell had taken the Party's Forward to Freedom seriously. What about the passages in it about using soldiers' grievances to organize them? they asked P.C. Joshi, the party's general secretary. He cared little for the passages: 'That's the language I use for the benefit of the patriots,' he told them. They had taken seriously the 1934 Draft Platform of Action calling for an overthrow of the British by violence, and were surprised that the party representative would not so much as mention it in passing...

But the need for finding Indians who would oppose the Congress, who would denounce the 'defeatism' of 'Gandhi and his crew' was growing by the day.

They had M.N. Roy's support, of course. It was sincere, they felt, but he was of little consequence. He has broken from the Congress and was going to set up the Radical Democratic Party, the IB reported, adding that it was likely to be another 'party of leaders without a following'. 'He is a better Communist than those of the CPI,' they wrote in the files, 'but he has offended everyone by his arrogance.' 'His strength is in his pen,' Tottenham noted, 'if only we could persuade him to write anonymously...' So, at least according to the files, they at one time paid him Rs 26,000 a month for his publications and his work among labour, but it was paid more out of fraternal gratitude than anything else. They did not expect him to sway Indian public opinion.

capitalism, i.e., hoarding, profiteering, and all forms of exploitation by owners, industrialists etc. There is hardly any criticism of the "Imperialist Government" and it is even suggested that the best way of helping the workers may in some cases be by ensuring that the Government scheme is given a genuine chance to work.

R. M. N.
2. 8. 43.

Asstl. Secy.

Better & Better!

R. Tottenham
2/8

S. R. N.
9/8

R. M. N.

M. N. Roy will soon have to look to his laurels!

N. M.
2/8

Asstl. Secy.

Courtesy: National Archives

Richard Tottenham on the 'People's War': 'Better and Better!' To which Reginald Maxwell adds: 'MN. Roy will soon have to look to his laurels!'

Hence it was that, everyone's doubts notwithstanding, ultimately, when the Communist Party made its overtures and sent its secret memorandum in May 1942 through half a dozen intermediaries, it was the Home Department's view that prevailed: keep an open mind, 'accept these people as short term allies so far as they help the way, without too much regard to the long term dangers, if any', (the words are Maxwell's); let them know at every step 'they are still on probation' (again Maxwell's words); let the releases be gradual; give them paper and matter for publication but not to such an extent that they get the impression that they are worth more to us than they are...

Apart from the assistance in gathering intelligence, in restraining labour and students, the tone of communist propaganda was to be the chief focus of British policy. The general problem here, as S.J.L. Olver, the concerned under-secretary, was to note in the files on 16 December 1942, was 'how best to ensure

that the seasoning of anti-Government propaganda, which the Communists insist must be added to their pro-war programme in order to make it palatable, is kept within bounds.'

The problem was never really resolved satisfactorily for either the communists or the government. One week Tottenham and Maxwell are exultant at the improvement: 'Better and better,' writes Tottenham on 2 August 1943. 'M.N. Roy will soon have to look to his laurels,' adds Maxwell. Another week Tottenham is calling the communists 'an unbalanced crew' and is angry with the government in Bombay for not acting energetically enough against the CPI publications. The communists too are alternately contrite in one meeting – attributing the harsh language to 'poor editing', promising to improve the tone – and defiant in the next.

In any event, the British allowed the CPI publications to get away with much more than was permitted to any nationalist paper. The reason was simple: in spite of the invectives against the government, the party was the one substantial group that was abusing the underground leaders and Bose and denouncing the Congress. All through 1943 the Home Department – though pressed by the provinces to move against the CPI publications – remained full of understanding: 'We must allow for the fact that they have to increase the circulation of their papers, that they have to try and enlist members,' it counselled.

But by mid-1944 the CPI had lost of its utility to the British government. Its campaign for Pakistan had not got it into the good books of the Muslim League.

Instead, it had brought trouble for the party with, for instance, the Sikhs. It was also clear that, given the nationalist upsurge of the times, an Indian party that had taken on the task of denouncing the Congress, etc., had to bend far in criticizing the government too. The Home Department understood this but also realized that, such being the case, the party's propaganda was less and less useful to it. Moreover, having alienated everyone, the party would soon have to begin looking for grievances it could stir to re-establish its following, the party's old long-term plans would again become more important. The war too was going in favour of the allies: an Indian party supporting the war effort mattered less, especially if the party was always looking to Moscow for guidance – after all Moscow and the Allies were likely to pull apart soon...

Even in the third quarter of 1943 – quite at the height of the partnership – even as he approved the proposed policies the viceroy had thought fit to register his scepticism in his own hand:

I have never concealed from H.M. [the Home Member] and the Home

Department that I have myself no confidence whatever in the lasting usefulness of the Communist Party to Government. I think that the policy of the C.P.I. is entirely opportunist, that it will be found ready and eager, if the Congress Party splits up, to join the leftward elements of that party, and I have no belief in the value of the Communist Party machine for the job of reducing the influence and prestige of Congress. Later on, if India once again attracts the leaders of Russia I foresee that the C.P.I. may be a great nuisance...

The provinces too had never got used to the idea of taking the communists as partners. They urged action. Punjab, in fact, proposed that the party be banned again. It was time to review the policy. Tottenham who had steered the policy all along, proposed a middle course:

The main reasons [he wrote on 4 August 1944] for our change of policy towards the Communist Party two years ago were:

(a) Our desire to give a fair chance to any political party in this country which openly supported the war efforts, and

(b) Our hope that the Communists might provide something of a makeweight against the pernicious activities of Congress.

When the war has been won, the first of these reasons will disappear, while the hope expressed in the second has not yet materialised. We do not, I think, want to give the impression that we tolerated the Communist Party only so long as they might be of some use to us in supporting the war and that we are quite prepared to resume our opposition to them as soon as our own skins are safe; but the fact remains that these people will always be more of a nuisance than a help and there are circumstances in which they may once again constitute a real danger.

(c) That danger arises not from the character of the Communist creed, but from the fact that the majority of those who profess allegiance to the party are not real Communists at all but merely hot-headed revolutionaries. If there were any prospect of a spread of genuine Communism in India, I would, indeed, regard it as a hopeful sign... However we may regard the Communist Party of India – whether as a body that genuinely believes in the doctrine of Karl Marx or merely as a collection of hot-headed revolutionaries – I would be inclined to the view myself that any radical change of policy towards them, and certainly any decision to proclaim them an unlawful association and thus once more drive their activities underground, would only increase the danger that they represent. As Under Secretary has pointed out, they have, as a legal party, not gained a great

deal of ground. In fact now they seem to be losing it. In spite of their campaign for unity and their attempts to pal up with both the Congress and the Muslim League, they are not regarded with any real favour by either of these parties and any use that the Muslim League may make of them in the Punjab will, I imagine, be purely temporary and opportunist. To ban them once again would merely play into the hands of the purely revolutionary element in the party, and, I should think, provide the sort of stimulus that the appeal of a secret organisation always seems to supply. At the same time it would destroy any faint hopes there may be of the Party's developing as a constitutional opposition to Big Business and their capitalistic programmes. From both points of view, therefore, I should say that there was a strong case for leaving things as they are and for putting this aspect of the matter before Provincial Governments – adding, of course, the usual injunction that no special favour is to be shown to the party and that those members of it who offend against the law are to be treated like any other law-breakers ...

SECRET.

Extract from the Punjab Fortnightly Report for the second half of April, 1942, received from the Central Intelligence Officer, Lahore.

Communist and left circles are deeply impressed by the courage shown by the Punjab Government in releasing their "top notch" leaders on May Day. Those released are Raja Singh Sataqar, Achhar Singh Chhina, Iqbal Singh Hundal, Mangat Singh Ullra, Sohan Singh Joshi, Feroz-ud-Din Mansur, Karam Singh Han and Fazal Kishi Turban. The first act of the C.P.I. group has been to issue a proclamation: "We must defend our country against Japanese Imperialism. For us there is no retreat, no surrender. We must and will oppose Japanese Imperialism to the bitter end." They go on to urge the formation of a National Government, the release of political prisoners, the creation of a democratic people's army by mobilisation of the Nation's manpower and the utilisation of all the industries and resources of the country. It appears that Communist and left circles are genuinely keen on proving their mettle, but there is some danger that over-emphasis on popular demands (most of which are extravagant and absurd) will negate the effect of pro-war propaganda. Now that the leaders are out of jail, there is some chance of the rank and file being properly guided so as not to undermine the authority of the Government established by law. This, however, remains to be seen.

7. 5. 1942.

N.D. (Sirt. Tottenham).

21. 5. 1942. 24. 5. 1942. MAY 8 1942

Achhar Singh Chhina is the man who went to Moscow

His release was arranged between I.B. and Punjab CID & Punjab Govt. in 1941. He has already passed on his message to the Punjab Province to various quarters. He has a very high authority of Communists to help the Govt.

Reginald Maxwell

7/5

7/5

Courtesy: National Archives

The Intelligence Bureau, the Punjab CID and the Punjab government arrange to release a communist so that he may go to Moscow, and bring back the message that the Indian communists should help the British government in India.

R.F. Mudie, who had by now taken over from Reginald Maxwell as the home member, concurred, writing,

I think that it would be a very great mistake to change our policy. As far as it can be judged by results, it is working very well. The fall in the circulation of the 'People's War', which I consider their most dangerous activity, from 31,350 copies a month in December 1943 to 25,000 a month in August 1944 is particularly interesting. The report shows that the party

failed to make any real progress. I have also read the note on Communism in the Punjab enclosed with the Punjab Government's latest letter on the subject and it has failed to impress me. I think it clearly shows that the Communists, though they may be a political nuisance to the Ministry, are no real danger to the State. It is bad policy to overdo things. Banning of an organisation, unless it is clearly necessary, only gives rise to accusations of repression which do Government harm even outside the ranks of the banned association...

And hence it was that British policy changed from wary encouragement to wary neutrality.

The communist motivation

Thus there is little mystery about the motives of British administrators in enticing the communists: in India the national movement for freedom, in particular the Congress, was their principal enemy; they were happy to encourage a party that had undertaken to abuse Gandhiji and the rest and to help hold labour and the students in check.

While the obfuscations put out by the communists since then have clouded the issue, the motives of the communists in crossing over as revealed by the records of the period are also as clear as such things can possibly be.

In the acrimonious debates that followed the 'Quit India' movement the communists were accused on two counts: first, that while claiming to be an Indian party, while its leaders were in fact members of the All India Congress Committee, they had been taking their orders from Moscow; second, that instead of proceeding by the interests of our country, they had gone about serving the interests of the Soviet Union.

The communists denied these allegations with abuse and vehemence: they insisted that they took orders from no one, that they thought for themselves, and that their sole concern throughout had been the interests of the Indian people. In a typical passage in the Communist Reply to Congress Working Committee's Charges, the communists declared,

...We have a political philosophy to guide us and we are members of a disciplined revolutionary party. Therefore, unlike most other Congressmen, we don't just wait for a lead to come from you. We endeavour to do some independent thinking and place our analysis and conclusions before the people and our fellow Congressmen ...

Further more, (they shot back in the same Reply):

...The criticism that Communists decide their policy not in the interests of their own country but in the interests of the Soviet Union is neither new nor original. It has been an old, very old gibe of the reactionary parties and their scribes the world over. In our own country, in the earlier days of our Party, this used to be the line of the Anglo-Indian press against the Party. This was the main political theme the British Prosecutor played up against us in the Meerut Conspiracy Case to which you refer, in which you helped our defence, which we gratefully acknowledged and took as our due from you.

If 17 years later you make the same suggestion against us we cannot but ask you:

Is it worthy of you?

Are you not wittingly or unwittingly casting aspersion on our devotion to our country?

Communist Parties exist in every country of the world and this is the cheapest gibe in which our opponents have indulged. All our brother parties had to live down the slander through their work among their own people and prove to them in practice, that our first love was to our own people, our daily work in their own interest and our first aim the freedom of our country and happiness in our own homes. If in the world of today there is any single political force that has grown it is the Communist movement and if any banner that has lost it is the bankrupt banner of blind anti-Communism...

Independent thinking

The question of who was doing the thinking for whom is easily answered. When the Comintern in Moscow declared that social democrats were the main enemy as they deluded people by feeding them illusions about democracy and so the principal task was to denounce and expose them mercilessly, our communists followed its diktat to the dot. Next, when the Comintern decided, 'No, the situation has changed and it now calls for an alliance with social democrats and the like,' our communists again followed its diktat to the dot, befriending socialists, the Congress, *etc.* And so on, throughout the war and later too. But the years we are considering throw light on the matter not merely by the general 'lines' that the Communist Party of India followed, repudiated and followed and how these corresponded to what was being prescribed, repudiated and prescribed in Moscow. There are those crucial six months of confusion between 22 June 1941 when Hitler attacked the Soviet Union and 1 December 1941 when the Communist Party of India announced its change of line. Little sheds the light as those months do.

The communists were to claim later that they had in fact foreseen the course of events all along, that they had all along followed a consistent line, that all along they had been unique in having a pair of binoculars – their 'Theory' that enabled them to foresee what was going to happen. If so, what was the Communist Party of India waiting for between 22 June 1941 and 1 December 1941?

Waiting for orders

It was waiting for orders. And these, as the records show, were for two reasons a long time in coming. First, Moscow itself was thrown into complete disarray by Hitler's invasion. Stalin had completely refused to heed the warnings and had gone on discounting the possibility that the 'character of the war' might change. Once the attack began, what with the terrible setbacks that the Soviet army suffered because of what had been done to it by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, everything was in disarray. It took time to put together the new 'theoretical formulation', and, more important, to ensure its transmission to and internalization by communist parties the world over. The Intelligence Bureau reports – based in part, it would seem, on what it learnt from informers within the party – speak month after month of how the party is waiting for a definite directive from Moscow:

...The Russo-German developments have of course shocked Communists the world over [says the Intelligence Bureau's Monthly Summary of Communist Activities of June 1941], and a lull in CPI intrigues whilst the leaders readjust their policy to current events may therefore be expected...

... Beneath the surface [says the Summary for July] there has been much suppressed excitement in the Communist underworld as well as indications of divided opinions over the Anglo-Soviet alliance... No Comintern instructions have yet reached India nor has there been any indication (apart from the shedding of the theme of 'World Revolution' from Moscow broadcasts) that the Communist International has itself abandoned its basic policy of 'revolutionary defeatism' – convert imperialist war into civil war – to which all Communist parties have been committed since the Soviet invasion of Poland...

...There is still no indication [says the Summary for August] of any Comintern instruction having reached India, nor has an 'official' pronouncement been issued by the Communist International laying down a policy for Communist Parties in general... Some kind of authoritative directive is eagerly awaited by the CPI leaders...

Stalin sheds lights

The Communist Party at last saw the light when, on 6 November 1941, Stalin, commemorating the twenty-fourth anniversary of the Soviet Revolution, put out the revelation. 'Great Britain, the United States and the Soviet Union,' he affirmed, 'have united in a single camp' [that put an end to the theory that not one but two wars were going on!] 'and set themselves the aim of routing the Nazi imperialists and their invading armies.' [Only one party was now named as the 'imperialists'.] '...The coalition of the United States, Great Britain and the Soviet Union is a real thing' [obviously it was necessary to affirm this in view of the fact that till recently it was the Soviet-German pact that had been the real thing] 'which is growing and will continue to grow for the benefit of our common cause, liberation...' Communists in India and elsewhere had been insisting, on the basis of their 'Theory' and 'class analysis' that in fact there was no difference between Germany and Italy on the one side and the Western democracies on the other. Stalin now provided a new 'class analysis': 'But in England and in the United States there exist elementary democratic liberties: Trade Unions for workers and employees, workers' parties, parliament. In Germany under Hitler all these institutions have been destroyed. One has only to compare the two sets of facts in order to understand the reactionary nature of Hitler's regime and the utter falseness of the harangue of the Hitlerites on Anglo-American plutocratic regimes.' [But till this moment anyone who had dared to 'compare these two sets of facts' had been abused as an apologist for capitalism, a dupe, a mouthpiece of the bourgeoisie. The Comintern had even detected a progressive consequence in the rise of Nazism: 'Nazism is destroying the democratic illusions of the masses,' it had said.] 'Fundamentally,' Stalin now said, 'the Hitlerite regime is a replica of the reactionary regime which existed in Russia under the Czar. The Hitlerite party is a party of the enemies of democratic liberties, of medieval reactionaries and Black Hundred Pogroms,' [with whom of course one had to ally till recently to stem imperialism]. The 'analysis' complete, came the operative directive: 'All honest people' [and every communist knew what that meant] 'must support the army of our country, of Great Britain and the United States as champions of liberation not only in Europe but in Asia, in Iran for instance...' And India lay in Asia.

Disrupted transmission

It was not just that Moscow had been in disarray. A part of the reason for the delayed awakening was that the transmission centre too had been disrupted. While Moscow was Mount Olympus, the active direction of the Communist Party of India had been delegated to the Communist Party of Great Britain. In the CPGB, the two figures of consequence for the Indian party were Harry Pollitt and Rajani Palme-Dutt. The former, being at that time the general secretary of the CPGB, was ex officio the more prominent. And he, as we have noted earlier, switched completely, but completely, the moment Germany invaded the Soviet Union. But for years the latter, Rajani Palme-Dutt, had been the one in charge of the active direction of the affairs of the Communist Party of India. Pollitt and Palme-Dutt had been uneasy rivals for long. And so, while Pollitt switched (some would say, because Pollitt switched), Palme-Dutt did not. In common with several Indian youth under his wing in England, he insisted that Britain's war efforts did not deserve to be supported till Britain settled the Indian question.

The dispute simmered and so the CPI did not receive any clear instructions as promptly as it might have. Of course, Pollitt's statement about the character of the war having suddenly changed was published by the press in India too. But, as we saw earlier, the CPI denounced the press reports as 'imperialist lies'. Eventually, of course, Palme-Dutt too fell in line (and in fact was as prolific in providing the 'theoretical rationale' for the new line as he had been for the old), and an authenticated copy of Pollitt's July statement was dispatched to the CPI.

Its receipt provided the occasion for the most flagrant self-flagellation in the CPI. The story is best told in the words of inner party documents – the Party Letters. (These Letters, priced at four to eight annas a piece, were issued approximately once a week for the edification of the members. The crucial ones that bear on what we are discussing are Party Letters numbered 54, 55 and 56 dated 1, 13 and 15 December 1941 respectively.) They help us see both whose thinking was guiding whom and also the priorities that governed the actions of the party in switching sides.

'Our New Line on War: British Comrades Correct Us,' proclaimed Party Letter number 54. 'In this Party Letter,' it said,

... we are reprinting the full and authoritative text of two important documents which British Communist Party published in the very first month after Hitler's attack upon the Soviet Union. These documents which have just come to our hands are an eye-opener to us. They make us at once

see that we, the Polit-Bureau and the leadership of the Communist Party of India, have been putting forward a completely wrong political line on the supreme issue before all mankind, namely, the joint war against Hitler-fascism... These documents and especially Comrade Pollitt's brilliant letter to the British Party make us realise as in a flash that in formulating our policy, we have allowed ourselves to be misled by our own 'theories' and 'speculations' which were products of our bourgeois-nationalism, rather than by the proletarian internationalism of Marx and Lenin. Not only this, we explained the policy of the British Communist Party about which we got hints in the daily press, in accordance with our 'pet theories' and not how it actually stood...

... In explaining the policy which the British Communists were following, we in our literature so far, presented it coloured by our own pre-occupations. It is true we had no more information about their policy than we got from the 'Reuter' reports in the daily press. But that was quite sufficient for us to present it correctly had we grasped properly the big and the decisive change brought about in the whole war situation by Hitler's attack on the Soviet Union, and by the Anglo-Soviet and the Soviet-American agreements...

The Party Letter then went on to recount how the party had kept quoting and re quoting the words of Stalin, of Lozovsky, but how it had completely and repeatedly missed understanding their true import. This refrain was repeated again and again and yet again to the crescendo that at last the arrival of an authenticated copy of Comrade Pollitt's 'brilliant' analysis had shown the light. Not only did the documents received from the Communist Party of Great Britain help show the party what error it had committed, they also, said the party, bared why the party had gone so grievously wrong. As the Party Letter put it,

... Why did we go wrong? We went wrong because our blind bourgeois-nationalist hatred of British imperialist Government prevented us from grasping the simple fact that the Government was now in the same progressive camp with the Soviet Union and ranged against Hitler-fascism.

It dimmed our Marxism-Leninism for a time and we were unable to see that this fact had to be recognised and made use of for the very purpose of the liberation of our people from the national enemy. The British Government was in the progressive front because it was reduced to such straits by the dire crisis of imperialism that it had to renounce its feud with the class enemy, the Soviet Union, and shake hands with it...

While Britain had thus changed its 'objective role' by having joined the

progressive front, it was not progressive enough, said the Party Letter, 'to see that the full and final victory of that front over Hitler-fascism demanded the freedom of India and her voluntary participation in the War'. Till this moment this had been the argument for refusing to help Britain's war efforts. Now the same fact became the reason for taking the initiative in helping it:

...That is just the reason why the progressive Indian people and the Communist Party of India have to take the initiative in their own hands to be in that front...

... If ever our struggle for national freedom was a part of the liberation struggle of the progressive peoples of the world, headed by the Soviet Union, it is so today. This recognition of the unity of our struggle with the titanic battle now going on for the future of humanity requires not spinning phrases such as: we shall only participate in that struggle as a free nation, but something concrete and practical. It is not a question of our promising that we shall be participating in the all-people's war when we would be independent but immediately taking the initiative for uniting the people for a struggle for such minimum demands as will enable India and the Indian people to throw in the full weight of their resources and manpower in this way. It must be clear to the meanest intelligence that a decisive victory over Hitler-fascism won by the joint forces led by the Soviet, British and American people cannot but transform the world, cannot but pave the way for the complete liberation of the Indian people as well as other oppressed peoples of the world.

And that is why, as we have seen, the Communist Party took the initiative to make secret approaches to the British government in India!

...This is what these documents from our brother party teach us. They have shown us the mistake we have committed. We have to correct it and march forward to shape the future of our people by practical action. More exhaustive documents on the new line will follow in the succeeding Party Letters.

In addition to Comrade Pollitt's illuminations the Party Letter carried extracts from the speeches of Comrades Stalin and Molotov.

The only fatherland

Party Letter 55 issued on 13 December 1941 contains as candid a statement of the principal motivation that impelled the change as one can expect to encounter. The Letter contains an over 30,000 word long, tortuous thesis that had been sent in by the communist leaders who were in jail (at least one account suggests that an authenticated copy of Pollitt's letter was made available to the detenus courtesy the Home Department), plus an introduction entitled 'On the Jail Documents' by the Politburo, Central Committee of the Communist Party of India. Introducing these, the Politburo declared,

...The document from our jailed leaders, which we are reprinting in this Party Letter ...with only minor and formal alterations, will go down in the annals of our Party history as a correct lead of decisive importance.

Together with the letter of Comrade Pollitt to the CPGB, which came into our hands simultaneously, this document enables us – the present leadership of the Party – to correct ourselves. It enables us to take the Party out of the mire of bourgeois-nationalism, negation and phrase-mongering into which we had led it, on to the path of proletarian internationalism through which alone we could lead the working class and the people forward, by playing our role in the world struggle against fascism.

The document teaches us that the attitude of the Communist Parties to war is always determined not by any national or local considerations but by the single consideration: international unity and action of the world proletariat to strike at world imperialism, to defend the Socialist Fatherland. When the Soviet Union was attacked suddenly by Hitler, we did not react in the same sound proletarian manner as our comrades in jail did. We said, we must fight harder for our freedom in order to defend the Soviet Union. We said, Britain was still conducting the imperialist war. In doing so, we were really following the path of Nehru and not that of Marx, Lenin and Stalin. Led by our nationalism, we went into historic explanations of why Hitler struck and what the British Government would now do, but missed the big split and the crisis that had taken place in the camp of world imperialism. Our jail comrades guided by proletarian internationalism at once applied the test: how do the imperialist nations stand in relation to the fortress of World Revolution, the Fatherland of all workers? That at once enabled them to see that the world was not divided sharply into two warring camps.

In fact they did not 'at once apply the test', and the test did not 'at once enable them to see.' Documents from the jails show that the communist leaders there

too were as wonderstruck, as weighed down by their past rhetoric, by the Theory as they had understood it thus far, as the comrades outside. There was one difference though: being in jail they were a bit more receptive to the change in line that would ensure their release.

Hitler-fascism stood isolated as the main enemy of humanity while against him stood the new realignment of the USSR, Britain and America. They at once saw how the joint war waged by the three powers could no longer be an imperialist war for redivision of colonies but a peoples' war for the defeat of fascism, for the defence of the USSR, for the defence of the achievements of the November Revolution which the peoples and workers of the world had to unite to win.

The thesis of the jail comrades was as Stalinist a presentation of 'facts' as possible: how Britain and France had goaded Hitler on to invade the Soviet Union; how therefore, as the chief instigator, Britain was at this stage 'the principal enemy'; how Stalin confounded Britain and France by allying with Hitler; how Britain declared war on Hitler when the latter refused to do its bidding; how Hitler by his treachery invaded the Soviet Union and thus became 'the principal enemy'; and how the crisis of capitalism and imperialism has forced Britain and the US to now seek an alliance with the Soviet Union...

What concern us at the moment are the repeated statements in this thesis about the criteria, the priorities that, on the reckoning of the party's leaders themselves, governed the decisions of the Communist Party of India. A few representative passages even though a bit repetitive will repay study: they set out the priorities and they also give the background to an all-important caveat which the Politburo had inserted into its introduction, a caveat to which I will revert in a moment as it gives the clue to much of the nationalist propaganda that accompanied the party's crossing over:

... How came it then the International, the proletarian state, began to distinguish between the aggressors and non-aggressors? Was not Britain as much an aggressor as Germany herself? In fact was not Britain a confirmed aggressor, while Nazi Germany was only a potential one at the time when distinctions were drawn? How could the proletariat and its parties demand popular front governments which were bourgeois governments, which agreed only to keep democracy intact, and that too, at home and not in the colonies? Since when did we become so enamoured of bourgeois democracy as to draw such important and even fundamental distinctions between it and the other kind of bourgeois dictatorships – fascism – as to extend support to the former in a war against the latter? Was it opportunism

of a state – the Soviet – of a nation, of a power which found itself cornered by other powers?

It was nothing of the sort if you take into consideration, the class positions of the two classes. To the proletariat, and this must be grasped in all its implications, the Soviet is not merely a state or a power, an ally or friendly country. It is the bastion of Socialism, the proletariat hurls its challenge to the capitalist world. It is the consolidation of the November Revolution, the biggest and the only breach in the steel wall of capitalism. The fate of the proletariat, of the enslaved nations, depends on keeping the breach open and then widening it. That is why the defence of the only proletarian state, the only Fatherland of the proletariat, is the fundamental task of all proletarians.

The proletariat attaches such fundamental importance to the defence of the USSR that it decides its immediate attitude towards parties, classes, Governments and states on the basis of their attitude towards the Soviet. Temporarily, it allies itself with all those sections and welcomes all such governments as ally themselves with the Soviet, genuinely and sincerely. It was because of this new factor in the situation, as contrasted with the first world war, that the distinction between democracy and fascism, between aggressor and non-aggressor imperialist states could be made.

Democracy could be distinguished from fascism on the international plane only in so far as it was capable of acting in defense of the USSR. The moment it ceased to do that, the distinction lost all meaning. The non-aggressor nation could be distinguished from the aggressors only in so far as the aggression of the new aggressors was a preparation for an assault on the Soviet. Really, it was distinction between aggressors or non-aggressors of the proletarian state. The former could again be distinguished in so far as they were not only not directly interested in the assault, but could be expected to join hands with the Soviet against the aggressors, out of selfish motives of defending their empires, of preserving their past gains. Beyond this the distinction ceased to exist, as they did when the Nazi attack fell upon Anglo-French imperialism. Had the Nazi aggression not been a potential danger to the Soviet, had it taken the form of expansion at the expense of some other imperialism, it would have been frankly an imperialist quarrel and neither the Soviet nor the proletariat would have made the distinctions that were made for the reorientation of the entire proletarian strategy and tactics...

...The main enemy of the proletariat is that section or sections of the bourgeoisie which take a lead in organising a direct assault on the Soviet.

When the national enemy differs from the main international enemy, as defined above, the proletariat concentrates its fire on the latter and its accomplices, attempting to compel its national enemy to do likewise. The proletariat does this just because it recognises no national barriers, no nation, no Fatherland except the Soviet...

...Failure to single out the main enemy on the international front, failure to recognise the main enemy in the enemy of the Soviet Union, failure to decide your immediate attitude towards the national oppressor in the international setting in terms of his attitude towards the USSR – is to join the most reactionary sections for an assault against the Soviet, to encourage a common front against her, and to be guilty of bourgeois-nationalism, is to betray the people into the hands of counter-revolutionary gangs.

As late as October 1941, the party had been insisting:

... It is right for the British Communists to participate in the war effort and to intensify it. This is the tactical line they have to follow to proceed from Anglo-Soviet agreement to a united front of the British and Soviet people by which they will convert imperialist war into a revolutionary war. We in India to reach the same objective have to adopt a different tactical line. We do so by continuing a popular 'Help the Soviet Campaign' with our intensified struggle against imposed war-efforts, with an intensified struggle for freedom and democratic liberties...

Now the insistence, more emphatic if that is possible, was on the opposite:

... Can we say – 'Right' for British Workers but not for Indians? Just because the issue is between the proletariat versus Nazi imperialism, the British proletariat and with it the Indian proletariat draws distinctions between the two, declaring Nazism to be the main enemy. The proletariat knows that British imperialism is actuated by imperialist motives but that does not alter its objective role in so far as it is forced to help the USSR. Taking advantage of these intense imperialist contradictions, the British proletariat extends its support to its own bourgeois government, demands changes only where they are necessary for a vigorous prosecution of the war and forbears from raising immediately the issue of capitalism versus proletariat on the national plane. It does not raise the slogan 'Convert the war into a civil war,' for the war is no more an imperialist one. It knows that it is nationally enslaved in spite of democratic rights and a parliamentary government. It is good to remember that bourgeois-democracy is another name for proletarian enslavement. There is as much

distance between proletarian freedom and bourgeois-democracy as between democracy and imperialism in the colonies. If the British and American proletariat were to declare war against their own bourgeoisie – a civil war – they will play the game of the Cliveden Set and the Isolationists.

It is stupid to think that it is right for the British workers to support the war, for they are 'Free'. They are not free. 'Right' because they have got democracy? If the war had not been for peoples' liberation and the role of British imperialism in this war had not changed, it would have been the height of opportunism to support it.

It is just because of the international role of British imperialism in view of its alliance with the Soviet, that it becomes the revolutionary duty of the British Communists to concentrate fire on Nazism and not on their home-made imperialism. But for this reversal of roles, the British workers could not have supported 'its own government' in the war, notwithstanding the 'democracy' in Britain.

To draw distinctions between the British and Indian workers on the score of democratic rights, *etc.* is to be guilty of breaking the international front and of failure to understand the international class interests which convert the proletariat into partisans of the war; it amounts to judging British imperialism from the standpoint of the nation, not from the standpoint of its immediate role in connection with the international proletariat...

Official at last

Party Letter number 56 of 15 December 1941 contained the new resolution of the Communist Party's Politburo. Like the Jail Document the resolution chastised the party for having fallen prey to bourgeois nationalism:

...The present Polit-Bureau adopted a completely wrong policy to the war in the present phase because it forsook the standpoint of proletarian internationalism and adopted unconsciously that of bourgeois nationalism. It failed to see that the character of the war waged by Britain jointly with the USSR, and the duty of the Indian proletariat towards it, could not be determined by the relation in which India stood to Britain but by her relation to the fortress of Socialism and to the main enemy of the world proletariat. We looked at the war from the point of view of narrow bourgeois-nationalism and theorised that Britain was still conducting an imperialist war and that real aid to the Soviet people could be rendered by the British and the Indian people only when a people's government was established in Britain and freedom was won by the Indians. We repeated parrot-like phrases like 'Hitler is the main enemy' and said that the imperialist war has to be completely transformed into a people's war, but stuck fast to the bourgeois-nationalist slogan that India could help the Soviet Union only as a free country. We lapsed into all manners of speculations and refused to see the blunt fact that war was already a people's war because we did not look at the war from the standpoint of internationalism and from the standpoint of the defence of the Soviet Union.

Failure to see that it was now a people's war led us to put forward the slogan: our freedom first and then we will fight for the Soviet, which was in practice the policy of Nehruism, which is subservience to Gandhian inactivity and sabotage of mass struggle and therefore, support to Rajaji's policy of surrender to imperialism and betrayal of the people ...

And the touchstone – the one and only touchstone – was reiterated, this time with finality:

...The attitude of the Communist Parties towards any war is determined by the Leninist principle of proletarian internationalism, by the class character and the class aims of the governments conducting the war.

The policy of all the Communist Parties towards the present war in its imperialist phase was guided by their internationalism, by their duty to

further the cause of world revolution and of defence of the USSR, its base and not by any local or international considerations. Every Communist Party sought to mobilise the workers and the people under the slogan 'End the War' and to overthrow the government in its own country and replace it by a people's government which would renounce imperialist aims and join up with the USSR in fighting for peace and for isolating the remaining imperialist aggressors. Similarly as soon as the Soviet Union was attacked by Hitlerite Germany in the midst of the imperialist war, the Communist Parties were required to recognise that the war waged by Britain against Germany became at once a part of the defence of the USSR. They therefore have to support it and strive to wage it in such a way that it ensures Soviet victory and the defeat of Hitler-fascism. The Communist Parties in all countries were required to recognise that Hitler-fascism was the main enemy and the war waged by the USSR in alliance with Britain and America was a war which had to be won by all the peoples in the interests of defending the base of world-revolution. This duty and attitude was imposed by the internationalism of our party. No national or local conditions could render it invalid.

The concern for 'the only Fatherland' was thus the sole criterion. This fidelity to the Soviet Union, the conviction that the interests of the Soviet Union are identical with the interests of mankind, the belief that the Soviet Union is automatically and always right, was the one constant refrain all through. At the beginning of the period we find the Communist Party's publication *Unmasked Parties and Politics* cited earlier reprimanding the Congress Socialist leaders like JP for the following sins:

... First, they took a hostile attitude towards the German-Soviet Pact. They were 'shocked' by the Red Army's march to Poland. They considered it an act of aggression. They shared the indignation of the world bourgeoisie over Soviet action against the Mannerheim regime... Our love for the only socialist country in the world, our eagerness to defend it against all slander, was put by the war to a practical test and the Congress Socialist leaders forgot all socialism, and began mouthing bourgeois liberal doubts and criticism. Instead of defending the Soviet they sat in judgement over it...

Here is how the general secretary of the CPI described the party to Reuters immediately after the ban on the party was lifted in July 1942:

...We are the Indian Party of Lenin and Stalin, the great leaders of the people whose teaching and work finds living expression in the epic

resistance of the Soviet people which the peoples of the world seek to emulate in their own lands ...

And here is the message of greetings from the Indian party's Congress of May 1943:

... Greetings above all to the glorious Communist Party of the Soviet Union and to Comrade Stalin, leader of us all. We shall win; our cause is just and there is Stalin to guide us...

So the criterion was unambiguous as well as exclusive. There was however a caveat. It was candidly put across by the party's Politburo in Party Letter number 55 while introducing the Jail Document:

...We are drawing attention of the Party comrades to these lacunae, with the sole purpose of warning them that it (the Jail Document) does not give them all the tactics and arguments with which they must be armed before they go to put the line across among the people. It is often enough for our own Party comrades if we tell them how our international duty to the world proletariat and to the Soviet Union at every time determines our national tasks in every new world situation. But in putting our line across to the people, we have to present it as what it actually is, a line which in the present situation is in the best interests of the people of our country. It is axiomatic and self-evident to all Communists that a policy which is required by the supreme duty of defending the USSR must also be in the best interest of our country. But this is not self-evident to the people at their present level of consciousness. Remember how Comrade Pollitt warns his Party members: 'It is necessary to avoid giving any impression that our present policy is determined solely because the Soviet Union has been attacked. Our line is in the vital interests of the British people, which now more than ever, are bound up with those of the peoples of the Soviet Union.' Our point is to sound a warning to the comrades that the arguments given in this document though enough to convince a Party leadership and Party members, are not enough to convince the people or the Congress rank and file. You will have to show how our policy not only furthers the best interests of the world struggle against fascism, the worst form of imperialism, but also furthers our own struggle for national liberation, is the only way possible in the new situation. In this respect the document will not be very helpful to you...

This is what explains the nationalist gilding of the change of line, the propaganda about having Gandhiji and other nationalists released, about forming a national government, this plus the confidence that the party's general secretary

had expressed to Sir Reginald Maxwell – the confidence that the communists would be able to ‘use’ the Congress, in particular Gandhiji, and that should a national government be formed they – although only 5,000 strong on their own claim – would be able to dominate it.

Four features

Apart from crass dishonesty and treachery, four things stand out in this episode.

First, in crossing over to the British, in putting the interests of the Soviet Union above those of India's freedom struggle, the Indian communists were good communists. This was no 'error', no 'deviation'. By the 'Draft Statutes' then in force, the Communist Party of India was 'a section of the Communist International.' The Communist International headquartered in and controlled from Moscow was out and out an instrument for furthering Soviet foreign interests. And so, subordination of everything to the interests of the Soviet Union, the acceptance of every statement of Stalin or Litvinov or Dimitrov as the last word in wisdom followed as an article of faith. The famous 'Assembly Letter' sent to the Indian communists in 1928 on behalf of the executive committee of the Comintern had put the matter precisely: '... A Communist Party must be an organic part of the world Communist organization. It cannot be otherwise and call itself "Communist". Those who smell foreign dictation in this organizational principle of a body that carried on a relentless struggle throughout the world are not Communists.' As a concession to the opinion of Western governments with whom the Soviet Union had suddenly to ally after Hitler invaded it, the Comintern was dissolved in May 1943 – you couldn't very well have an organization dedicated to the violent overthrow of governments whom you were trying to convince that you were sincere in allying with them. But the values and beliefs, the articles of faith, the reflexes that we have encountered in this episode had by now got embedded in the very genes of Indian communism. They have consequences to this day.

Second, the episode exemplifies another feature that we encounter to this day. We see in it not just fidelity to an entity abroad – the Soviet Union in this phase – but a craven subservience to oracles abroad. Notice how, to be cleared up, the confusion had to wait for Stalin to make his speech, for an authenticated copy of Harry Pollitt's communication to arrive; subservience, that is, not just to the Lenins and Stalins but to men in the second order of smalls – the Bradleys and Palme-Dutts in the period immediately preceding the one we have reviewed, the Pollitts and Palme-Dutts in this period, the Zhdanovs in the period immediately to follow.

Third, for everything they did, the communists on their own reckoning had a principle or a theory on account of which they did it. It was because of The Theory that they believed initially that the war was just a quarrel amongst imperialists and should therefore be taken advantage of to drive the British

imperialists out; it was because of The Theory that they concluded later that the character of the war had changed and that the British imperialists should now be helped. The Theory initially told them that Gandhism had entered its decadent phase, that Gandhiji's leadership now had no progressive role to play whatsoever; the same Theory told them later that he was 'the most revered leader,' 'the Father of the Nation' who alone could break the deadlock. The Theory told them that the Congress was an instrument of the bourgeoisie, that the bourgeoisie put its class above the nation and had therefore inevitably joined up with the British to suppress struggle. It was the same Theory that later told them that the bourgeoisie and its instrument, the Congress caught in the fever of bourgeois nationalism, equally inevitably 'let their hatred of the British blind them to such an extent that they gambled with national defence.' They first determined with the help of The Theory that, while the goal of the Indian and British masses was the same, the two had to adopt diametrically opposed tactics to achieve it and next that it was 'stupid' to have thought so. The Theory led them to argue in July–November 1941 that the principle of proletarian internationalism should not be applied mechanically and that the foremost task was still to fight imperialism and its ally, the native bourgeoisie; in December 1941, that it must override everything and that the task was to join up with the imperialist government; and thirty years later, that the party had fallen into errors as it had followed the principle of proletarian internationalism dogmatically. Because of what they learnt from The Theory, they took the Muslim League to be 'feudal-reactionary' one year and 'bourgeois-progressive' the next. The Theory told them one year that India was one nation and the next that the demand for Pakistan was 'a just and democratic demand.' One day they accused everyone other than themselves of disrupting the national movement, the next day they remembered the sound Leninist principle of using every grievance to further the interests of the party. And at each stage they insisted that The Theory was their sure guide, that it consistently enabled them to see farther, look deeper and foresee what was coming. They claimed that at each stage they had foreseen what was coming, that their practice had been consistent, consistent in its objectives, consistent in its adherence to the far-seeing Theory. 'What Stalin said in 1934 and what Communist International said in 1935 reads like a prophetic prevision, a warning and a lead,' says a typical passage in the Communist Party of India's ideological book of the period, *From Peace Front to People's War* (PPH, Bombay, November 1942). 'It will impress him (the reader) with the continuity of the Communist policy. The thoughtful reader will find that it is not the Communist Party which has made the alleged "somersaults". The most surprising somersaults were made by the tricky history of a world imperialism in

crisis. The world Communist Party and its leaders foresaw these twists and turns. They put forward practical policies to steer humanity clear of rocks and whirlwinds into the haven of peace, freedom and progress...'

Fourth, the method of argumentation and abuse we see employed in this episode carries an altogether contemporary ring. The same 'proof by assertion; the same assertion by interminable repetition; the same verbal terrorism against those who happen to differ; the same charge of guilt-by-association as in the following in Unmasked Parties and Politics:

The criticism that Communists decide their policy not in the interests of their own country but in the interests of the Soviet Union is neither new nor original. It has been an old, very old gibe of the reactionary parties and their scribes the world over... This used to be the line of the Anglo-Indian press against our Party. This was the main political theme the British prosecutor played up against us... They [JP and the other socialists] shared the indignation of the world bourgeoisie over Soviet action against the Mannerheim regime... the same conclusions which the world bourgeois press was furiously propagating...

The same smear of hidden, vile, diabolic motives:

... This is where their Socialism led them [JP, etc.] – not behind the Soviet but to the same conclusions which the world bourgeois press was furiously propagating, to the moral blackguarding of the Soviet, in order to be able to isolate it from democratic opinion as a preparation for anti-Soviet war.

It is all so familiar, as if the passages were from last month.

The craft of absolution

‘But hasn’t it all been acknowledged to have been an error? Haven’t the Communists repudiated the lines of that period?’

Yes and no. Individual communists were to say later that it was all wrong. Saroj Mukherji, an erstwhile leader of the Left Front in Bengal, said that the line had been correct. The official – in the sense of authorized by the party – Guidelines of the History of the Communist Party of India says it was part right and part wrong.

But even if we take the repudiations to be more fulsome than they have been, and even if we take them at face value, problems remain.

First, the clandestine liaison with the British has never been fully acknowledged, certainly not its full extent, and so it has never been unequivocally disowned.

Second, does retrospective repudiation undo the harm done at the time?

Third, one can never be quite certain in these things that the final judgement is in: lines vehemently affirmed today will be vehemently repudiated tomorrow, only to be vehemently resurrected the day after. And then there isn’t just time, there is space. In those years, you will recall, the communists were complimenting themselves for articulating the demand for Pakistan ‘better than the Muslim League’. Today in retrospect – seeing what it cost them – communists in India say that the espousal was ‘a serious mistake,’ that elements in the party’s stand on the matter were – the sin of sins – ‘a right opportunist mistake.’ But what would the communists in Pakistan be saying? Would they not be advertising that very stand as being precisely an example of that ‘brilliant prophecy, proving the remarkable acumen of vision that Marxism alone can give’?

But the final question is even more important. It is a fair bet that the lines the communists adopted – and which turned out later in their own retrospective assessments to have been ‘errors’, ‘deviations’, ‘mistakes’ – the lines of the early 1930s, the mid-1930s, 1941–44, 1947, 1948–50, 1975–77 – outnumber the ones that in retrospect remained valid. Repudiating lines has become a craft in itself – a craft of absolution. A ‘candid’ resolution that ‘frankly’ admits the past error and ‘boldly’ announces new lines, a new general secretary to project the new line, a journal with a new name... only to be thrown out five years later as yet another error, deviation, mistake. It is not enough therefore to note that the error has been acknowledged. The important questions are different. What are the presumptions, the intellectual blinkers, the inner-party relationships, the work

rules, the air of moral superiority that give rise so often to erroneous lines? True enough, in the face of terrible setbacks as in 1945, 1950, ... 1977 the erroneous lines are 'repudiated' in retrospect but do the presumption, blinkers, norms, work rules – to say nothing of the 'Theory' itself – which occasioned the 'error', which made it possible for the 'error' to persist and grow so enormous for so long – do these change?

‘Stick the Convict’s Badge’

The exception apart, almost everyone who puts himself out for the good of others in India is abused. And the more effective he is, the more vicious is the abuse.

Chandi Prasad Bhatt’s contribution to the Chipko movement is without parallel. Prem Bhai and his devoted team have brought about a revolution in the lives of tribals in Mirzapur. Shankar Guha Niyogi’s work in organizing the destitute in Chhattisgarh and in helping them transform their lives is exemplary. Each of them is what the Japanese call a living national treasure. And yet, each has been accused, to cite a typical example of the forms abuse in India takes, of being a foreign agent, accused sometimes of being an agent of the CIA, sometimes of China, sometimes of both simultaneously. Chandi Prasad had to contend with an intelligence inquiry that was instituted against him on this ground. Charges to the same effect were made against Prem Bhai in the UP Assembly: nothing much happened in the Assembly but, without the slightest inquiry, the charges were flashed by at least one ‘national’ newspaper. Prem Bhai had to interrupt his work to deal with them. Shankar Guha Niyogi had to contend, among other things, with the charge that he had continued to live in his modest, ramshackle hut only because beneath the hut was buried a ‘transmitter’ by which he talked every night ‘directly to his masters in New York.’

The abuse takes two forms, and emanates from three quarters. There is, first, out and out verbal terrorism – the open, virulent, unrelenting smear campaigns – and then there is the diffuse, but equally malicious and often more lethal, gossip – the anonymous sowing of rumours. Professional groups of course employ the two forms in tandem. These groups range from the local gangs, whose operations are endangered by the work of the reformer, to political groups to whom the reformer appears as a dangerous rival. The gangs of the liquor merchants, moneylenders, forest contractors, politicians whose ability to exploit the tribals is punctured by Prem Bhai’s work in Mirzapur, by Shankar Guha Niyogi’s work in Chhattisgarh are an example of the first. The communists are

an example of the second.

Malicious gossip, running down, goes beyond these professional groups, however. It is almost a national trait, at any rate a trait of the middle class. In this form the rumours are not spread systematically. The denigration is casual, offhand, almost disinterested. But it is pervasive. There is scarcely a person about whom we do not have something ill to purvey. There is scarcely a deed behind which we cannot detect some base motive, and there is scarcely an occasion that we miss to purvey the baseness to others.

Denigrating everyone who is doing good work is a habit, as I suggested, particularly of the middle class. But there is another, more specific feature of it. The gossip is the most malicious among peers: dancers are the one who talk more maliciously about the successful dancer, lawyers about the successful lawyer, journalists about another journalist, communists about communists of another brand. To each, it would seem, the nearest neighbour is the greatest enemy. Unfortunately, the habit has not entirely spared even those who are themselves engaged in doing good work: often, without the slightest examination, they come to harbour doubts about another person doing work as good as their own, and often they purvey these doubts, sometimes explicitly, on other occasions obliquely – and when they don't, their 'followers' do.

That such denigration weakens us, that it impedes good work, that it is one of the national habits that we should exorcise is self-evident.

What lies behind such abuse, and what may we do about it? To answer these questions, I shall take up first the professional abuse of a well-knit group and then the loose, unsystematic denigration by the middle class, especially the abuse by peers. To illustrate the first kind, that is abuse by a well-knit group, I shall take the abuse of the ones who in modern India have been at it the longest, to whom it has become second nature, namely, the communists.

The communist's way

Slander follows almost from the theory of communism. Five articles of faith – which can be documented at great length from the scriptures, and which communism shares with other millenarian religions – lead to it.

First, the communist believes that there is only one Great Goal. It is the only goal worth striving for. It is also the inevitable one.

Second, he believes that, given the circumstances there is only one way to the great goal. As time and circumstance differ and change, what is appropriate at one point may not be so at another. But, given the circumstances, there is only one way.

Third, he believes that deciding which particular way is the best in the circumstances, is a most difficult task. He, his party, his faction, possessing as he or it does an incomparable instrument – The Theory – have the power of divination. He, his party, his faction alone have it.

Fourth, he believes and has been so taught from Marx onwards, that every view, every policy is rooted in the class interests of the person or group espousing it. As for the communist, he, his party, his faction alone are dedicated to the true interests of the masses, everyone who differs from him or his group is ipso facto an agent of the counter revolution, of the bourgeoisie; he is by the mere fact of differing from the communist and his group conspiring to sabotage progress towards the one great goal, the one inevitable, as well as exclusively desirable goal.

The result of the four propositions taken together is well expressed by Revel in *The Totalitarian Temptation*: ‘The Communists claim, and eventually believe, that no one becomes anti-Communist because he has honest reservations about communism, serious reasons for not wanting to live under Communist rule or has had unfortunate experiences in his dealing with Communists, but only through innate anti-communism. He experiences those reservations, states those reasons, exploits those experiences only because he was already anti-communist. His belief predates any observation of reality: anti-communism is thus not an effect but the original cause. Anti-communism in this view is never a result of historical observation, only an evil predisposition...’

The good communist thus slanders almost on principle. Valentinov records the relevant hadis in his *Encounters With Lenin*. Lenin once told him:

Marxism is a monolith conception of the world, it does not tolerate dilution and vulgarisation by means of various insertions and additions. Plekhanov once said to me about a critic of Marxism (I’ve forgotten his name) ‘First let’s stick the convict’s badge on him, and then after that, we’ll examine this case.’ And I think that we must stick the convict’s badge, on anyone and everyone who tries to undermine Marxism, even if we don’t go on to examine his case. That’s how every sound revolutionary should react.

To these four propositions is added a fifth: the one great and inevitable goal is so overwhelmingly and so exclusively desirable that, to attain it, all means are justified. Individual annihilation, terror, mass violence, parliamentary elections may or may not be appropriate at any particular moment. But none of them is to be ruled out ab initio. As all means are permissible, slander, being one of the mildest of these, certainly is.

Notice that while the fifth proposition provides a merely tactical justification for slander, for verbal terrorism, a justification relative to particular

circumstances, the first four propositions provide an absolute, almost theological justification for it.

Abuse by rote

The compound result of the propositions is visible in the virulent abuse that our communists heap on others every week. A fair-sized volume can be filled with examples from publications and statements put out by them in a single year. But the abuse is thrice derived: the phrases and techniques are derived from Lenin and from the style set by Stalin's Comintern; the general direction was for long derived from the directives of our communists' inspirations and the example of their apostles abroad; and the specific targets are dictated by faceless bosses within the parties.

The reader can find ready examples from the publications of our communist parties. I will point to the genes, the pattern by citing examples from Lenin after whom, in this respect, our communists try so hard to model themselves.

'Curs', 'swine', 'scoundrels', 'brigands', 'rascals', 'lickspittles', 'absolute ignoramuses' – Lenin routinely pastes such expressions on anyone who differs from him. Many of Lenin's speeches and works are altogether devoid of argument, reason, facts. They contain abuse and allegations alone. Typical of these is his polemic, *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky* – a polemic that is often held up as a model among our communists. Here are some of the expressions that he hurls at his interlocutors in this single pamphlet (page numbers refer to V.I. Lenin, *Selected Works*, Volume III, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1975): 'Utter and ignominious bankruptcy' (17); 'it sounds just like he were chewing rags in his sleep' (20); 'twaddle' (20); 'windbag' (20); 'the Marxist pedant' (21); 'monstrously absurd and untrue statement' (22); 'like a blind puppy sniffing at random first in one direction and then another' (22); 'contemptible sycophants in the service of the bourgeoisie' (23); 'crass stupidity or very clumsy trickery' (23); 'Mr Muddleheaded Counsellor' (27); 'What wonderful erudition!' 'What civilised belly-crawling before the capitalists and boot-licking!' (30); 'Kautsky, with the learned air of a most learned arm-chair fool' (36); 'the acme of stupidity, the sentimental fantasies of the sentimental fool Kautsky' (38); 'sycophant of the bourgeoisie' (46); 'such sweet naivete, which would be touching in a child but is repulsive in a person who has not yet been officially certified as feeble-minded' (53); 'a mere sycophant of the bourgeoisie' (54); 'will be swept into the renegades' cesspool' (59); 'his banal and reactionary philistine view' (65); 'a shortsighted philistine' (67); 'the pig-headedness of a philistine' (74); 'fools or renegades like Kautsky' (76); 'a servant of the bourgeoisie' (79); 'a lackey of the bourgeoisie whom the capitalists have hired to slander the workers' revolution' (89); 'a deserter to the

bourgeois camp' (89).

Such are the expressions Lenin hurls at a person of whom he says, 'We know from many of Kautsky's works that he knew how to be a Marxist historian, and that such works of his will remain a permanent possession of the proletariat in spite of his subsequent apostasy' (49).

Not just a single work, often a single passage will contain a torrent of venomous abuse. Here is a typical passage, this one from his 'In Memory of Count Heyden':

...You do not realise that instead of turning the slave into a revolutionary you are turning slaves into grovellers. All your talk about freedom or democracy is sheer claptrap, parrot phrases, fashionable twaddle, or hypocrisy. It is just a painted sign-board. You are mean-spirited boors and your education, culture and enlightenment are only a species of thorough-going prostitution, for you are selling your souls, and you are selling them not through need, but for the 'love of the thing' (Collected Works, XIII, 50–57, at 53).

Our communists have imbibed this style to such an extent that to this day they are scarcely able to invent a new term of abuse. In fact, over the years shoving expressions of this kind into the text has become not just a necessary condition for making it authentic, it has become a sufficient condition as well.

Several standard techniques and principles of Leninist abuse have been internalized by our communists. I shall illustrate just two of them: the device to damn a man by association, and the device to paste a motive on him.

Socialist revolutionaries are condemned by Lenin because a book by an Eduard David (who, Lenin himself says, has nothing to do with their party but who, he says, is 'the well-known opportunist (and Bernsteinite)') gives an agrarian programme that is similar to the programme they have been advocating (Collected Works, VI, 431–35). Kautsky is condemned on the ground that his book has been mentioned over the French radio and is being praised by bourgeois commentators (Collected Works, XXX, 27–37). Lenin is continually attacking his colleagues and comrades because, he says, the arguments they are using are similar to the arguments someone else (the bourgeoisie one day, the Left newspapers another) is using (e.g., Selected Works, Volume 1, 119, 120, 585, 586, 597; Volume II, 373, 374, 546). Indeed, one of the refrains that runs through his famous work, *Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, is that Kautsky has reached conclusions which are similar to the ones bourgeois theoreticians have reached...

On Lenin's reckoning, anyone who has a point of view that differs from his, has it, and retains it, for some ulterior motive – the usual one being that he has

been paid by the bourgeoisie to acquire and broadcast it. Thus, in Imperialism we hear of 'bourgeois professors who are paid to depict capitalist slavery in bright colours' (Selected Works, I, 637). In The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky we learn that the 'pedant' Kautsky has disgracefully 'forgotten' theoretical propositions of Marx and Engels 'to please the bourgeoisie' (Selected Works, III, 29). Lenin's assessment of Tolstoy (e.g., Collected Works, XV, 202–09) is entirely predictable: in brief, that Tolstoy is genuine to the extent that he says what Lenin says and is just another 'jaded, hysterical sniveller called the Russian intellectual' to the extent that he says something different.

His diagnosis too is entirely predictable: Tolstoy represents the ambivalent and transitional configuration of class forces of the Russia of his time. (Needless to say, this assessment has served as a model and Marxist literary critics have spent their lives applying its reductionist formula to author after author ad nauseum.) The two sets of commentators who are expressing an assessment different from this, Lenin proclaims, are doing so for collateral purposes. There is, first, the officially sponsored 'venial hack': he was 'ordered yesterday to hound Leo Tolstoy and today to show that Tolstoy is a patriot, and, to try to observe the decencies before the eyes of Europe. It is 'common knowledge,' Lenin says, that hacks like him 'have been paid for their screeds.' Then there is the liberal. His hypocrisy, Lenin says, is even more dangerous. The liberal does not believe in Tolstoy's god, nor does he sympathize with his criticism of the social order. But, says Lenin, 'He associates himself with a popular name in order to pose as a leader of the nation-wide opposition. He seeks with the din and thunder of claptrap to drown the demand for a straight and clear answer to the question: what are the glaring contradictions of 'Tolstoyism' due to and what shortcomings and weaknesses of our revolution do they express?...'

But what is one to do when the sincerity of the person and his devotion to the cause are transparent, or when, for other reasons, they cannot be called in question? Lenin's standard formula works to this day: subjective motives, we read again and again in Lenin's works and in the publications of our communists, are unimportant: whatever the subjective motives of the person, by taking a stand different from that of Lenin (or of the CPI, or the CPI(M), or the CPI(ML), as the case may be) he is 'objectively' – that is, in fact – helping the counter-revolutionaries, the bourgeoisie.

Thus in a typical passage, Lenin brands a group 'social-chauvinists' – i.e., socialists in words but chauvinists in deeds – and pronounces:

The social-chauvinists are our class enemies, they are bourgeois within the working-class movement. They represent a stratum, or groups, or sections

of the working class which objectively have been bribed by the bourgeoisie (by better wages, positions of honour, etc.) and which help their own bourgeoisie to plunder and oppress small and weak peoples and to fight for the division of the capitalist spoils.

(Selected Works, II, 53)

One day the ‘Lefts’ who take a position different from him on the war end up ‘objectively’ helping the imperialists, their ‘objective role’ turns out to be that of ‘a tool of imperialist provocation’ (Selected Works, II, 626–27). Another day the worker or his representative who, by Lenin’s reckoning, drags his feet on improving, in the precise way that Lenin thinks is appropriate, the condition of other workers and peasants, ‘would’, he says, ‘in fact prove himself to be an accomplice of the white guards and the capitalists’ (Selected Works, III, 536–37). The third day Bogdanov, who, Lenin affirms, ‘personally is a sworn enemy of reaction in general and of bourgeois reaction in particular’, by distorting Marx’s ‘being determines consciousness’ into ‘social being and social consciousness are identical’, ends up ‘against (his) will’ and ‘independently of his consciousness’, ‘serving’ reaction, he ends up converting his philosophy into ‘a serviceable tool of the reactionaries’ (Collected Works, XIV, 325–26).

Notice how very handy the formula is: for instance, in the first case, that of the workers who have been ‘objectively’ bribed by the bourgeoisie, it is no longer necessary to show that they have actually accepted bribes and are acting the way they are because of the bribes, or that their conduct – of course, we have to take the word of the one who puts out the smear on what that conduct is – is what it would be if they had actually accepted the bribes. No wonder our communists employ this particular form of abuse so often: ‘a pen-pusher who objectively is acting as the paid agent of..., ‘you can fill in the blanks.

Being ‘the agent of...,’ in particular being the agent of some foreign power, is a much favoured expression. And when a person falls foul of them and comes to merit this insinuation, it always turns out that he has been the agent of a foreign power from the beginning. Thus, for instance, between 1936 and 1938 it was discovered by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union – and the ‘fact’ is duly recorded in the History of the CPSU (Bolshevik) which is used by our communists in their training courses to this day – that every associate of Lenin who was still alive, barring Stalin of course, had actually been working for foreign – in particular, German-intelligence agencies – and that he had been doing so for decades. Similarly, when Tito broke with Stalin, communists the world over, led in this case by the French Communist Party, discovered that he had been an agent of the Gestapo since the 1930s. Just as all these had been agents of Germans and others working against the Soviets, Lin Piao, Mao’s

comrade for decades and designated successor, it turned out, had all along been working for the Soviets, against the Chinese Communist Party! As they are so successful at finding foreign agents among their own – indeed, among their own heroes – is it any surprise that our communists should have proclaimed in the 1960s that JP was in the pay of foreign governments and in the mid-1970s that his movement was being ‘synchronised’ with the activities of the CIA to disrupt India?

But all this is not just a rhetorical or literary device. The good communist, because of the first four of the propositions which I have listed above, believes that anyone who differs from what he is saying or doing, could be doing so only out of ulterior motives; by the gospel every standpoint is rooted in class interests, and therefore, as he, his party, his faction represent the interests of the workers and peasants, of revolution, anyone who differs from him necessarily reflects the class interests of the bourgeoisie, he is therefore ‘objectively’ an agent of the reactionaries.

Therefore, the mere fact that one differs from the communists proves that one is conspiring with reactionaries. It is thus the communists’ duty to use all weapons – slander being the mildest of these – to do him in. Here is a typical incident. The Bolsheviks have been in power for over three years. There is a Famine Relief Committee in Moscow. Lenin hears that a member of the committee has made a speech criticizing the government. Lenin takes this as evidence of ‘preparations’. He shoots off a letter to Stalin and other members of the Politburo: arrest the man immediately, ‘this very day’; lock him up for three months pending a thorough investigation; ‘the other members (of the committee) should be expelled from Moscow at once, this very day, and settled singly in uyezd (sic) towns, preferably without railways, under surveillance’; dissolve the Famine Relief Committee; furthermore, ‘not later than tomorrow we shall publish five lines of a short dry ‘government communique’: ‘dissolved because of unwillingness to work’; and he adds, ‘We shall issue an order to the newspapers ‘The same day, tomorrow, start ridiculing (the accused) in a hundred ways ...’. They should be ridiculed and harassed,’ he says, ‘in every possible way at least once a week in the course of two months’; in this way, he tells his colleagues, ‘The sore tooth will be extracted right away, and with great benefit in every respect. There must be no wavering. I suggest that we get this thing over and done with at the Politburo today’ (Collected Works, XLV, 268–70).

As will be evident, the techniques of abuse – paste a motive, damn a man by association, *etc.* – of our communists are borrowed from this model, and so are the phrases and the adjectives. The abuse is derivative in yet another sense: in India much of it has been hurled in accordance with the directives of their

inspirations abroad or, at the least, in fraternal emulation of them.

One has only to compare what our communists have been saying – and the about-turns they have made in what they have been saying – about Gandhiji, Pandit Nehru, about the socialists, with the successive ‘lines’ that have been decreed from Moscow to see that this is so. From the time they came of age to 1935, they denigrated ‘Gandhism’ as they had been directed to do by the successive resolutions of the Comintern, starting with the resolution at its first World Congress that was held in Moscow in 1920, and ‘The Draft Platform of Action of the Communist Party of India’ that was released from Moscow in December 1930. Apart from directing our communists to continue their denigration of Gandhiji along the familiar lines, the ‘Platform’ laid down that henceforth doing in the progressive elements within the Congress was to be ‘the primary task of the Party.’ Our communists complied. In 1935 at its Seventh World Congress the Comintern in Moscow, in accordance with the new requirements of the Soviet Union, reversed the line: it laid down that what the CPI had been doing (on the previous instructions of the Comintern itself, needless to say) had been ‘sectarian’, that instead of weakening it, the denigration had strengthened ‘Gandhism’ and isolated the communists. Our communists dutifully switched lines and henceforth muted the abuse so as to form ‘United Fronts’ with those whom they had till yesterday been abusing with such vigour.

But in August 1939 Stalin signed his pact with Hitler. In accordance with the new line, as we have seen, our communists resumed full-throated abuse of Gandhiji and others for not using the opportunity of the war to throw the British out.

Alas! In June 1941 Hitler invaded the Soviet Union. He thereby compelled Stalin to ally with the British, *etc.* Our communists, in accordance with the newest line, let forth a torrent of abuse on Gandhiji, the socialists and others, this time for inconveniencing the war effort.

Throughout this period, abuse of Panditji was long muted on the ground that he represented the progressive section of the bourgeoisie. The war ended. Tensions between the Soviet Union and its former allies rose. Stalin’s apparatchik, Zhdanov, announced that there were only two camps, that those who were not with the Soviet Union were against it. Naturally, therefore, Panditji – what with his non-alignment – became the target of ferocious abuse: ‘He is,’ said our communists day in and day out, ‘the running dog of imperialism.’ But then it was found that he could be used in Korea, at Bandung.

The sorry record continues to our day. One has but to read the abuse our communists hurled at JP during 1973–77 and compare it with what was

pronounced about him in their Meccas. Since the 1960s, of course, a new set of examples is available on the point. We now have not just the abuse that the communists hurl at non-communists but also the abuse that they hurl at each other: the latter echoes so faithfully what Moscow and Beijing say about each other.

Roots and effectiveness

For our communist the abuse in Lenin's speeches and writings portrays vigour, strength, defiance. And in reproducing it in his own speech and prose he makes-believe that he is being vigorous, strong, defiant.

In fact, of course, the abuse reflects unspeakable frustration and insecurity. Frustration wells up naturally from the fact that by all their Theory India is and has long been ripe for revolution and yet they are not able to bring it off. Quite the contrary: a Gandhi or a JP comes along and the masses, who should be panting for revolution, take to him.

The insecurity is both collective and individual. Collectively each communist party, and each faction within each party, has but a limited following, some of them have a very small following indeed. Everyone else who is working among the people – not just the Gandhis and JPs, but even the Chandi Prasads, Prem Bhais and Shankar Guha Niyogis – are, literally, a mortal threat. Even if just a few follow these workers, they may well be the few who make the difference between the continued existence of and the demise of the party in that area. Hence the virulence against each of them.

There is great insecurity at the individual level also. Almost all the leaders of the parties, and all their 'theoreticians' and 'intellectuals' who account for most of the writing and speaking, are from the middle class. Even after years of association with the party, they are continually insecure and defensive on this score. They use strong and abusive words, and are rough and uncouth, to convince themselves, as much as others, that they have 'de-classed' themselves, that they have identified with 'the proletariat'. Abusing others is a form of self-reassurance.

Thus, communist abuse reflects collective frustration and individual insecurity, and – in its inspiration, targets, techniques, phrases – it is derivative as well as predictable. Even so, it is often effective, and that for four reasons. First, the party cadres – to whom it is primarily addressed – have been weaned on that kind of abuse. To them abuse is argument, and abuse by the party or on its behalf is conclusive argument. As the habit of thinking for themselves is ground out of them right from their induction into the party, when the leaders of the party dub someone 'a reactionary', 'an agent of the bourgeoisie', etc., for the cadre the man automatically and without a second thought becomes 'a reactionary', *etc.* Moreover, the cadre know the accused only through the abuse: the Russian communist knows Mach only through the abuse that Lenin hurled at him in his Materialism and Emperio-Criticism, Kautsky only through the abuse

that Lenin poured on him in *The Proletarian Revolution* and the Renegade Kautsky, Trotsky only through the mountain of abuse hurled at him since Stalin. No self-respecting communist would read the works of these ‘villains’ in the original, nor look for their deeds in anything but the party-approved ‘histories’. This is the situation of the handful, of the very few among our communists who still read Lenin, the party-sanctioned ‘histories’, *etc.* The overwhelming majority do not do even that much; for them the label is all, and the label stuck by the party is conclusive.

Second, the abuse is often effective as it is part of an entire operation. Under Stalin what gets the targets is not the abuse per se, it is that he physically eliminates them. But the abuse is a necessary part of the drive: it creates the climate for their liquidation and also for ‘the follow-up action’, that is, for extending the drive to others. In countries like India the communists are not in power, but fellow-travellers occupy many key positions, for instance in our educational establishment, in the press, *etc.* Abuse by the party becomes a signal to these persons in the educational establishment to cut the target out from posts, research funds and the rest, for fellow-travellers in the press to propagate the smear further.

Third, the abuse is most often effective when directed at the liberal or the fellow-traveller because of the anxiety of the latter to secure and maintain the approbation of the communists. The liberal or the fellow-traveller organizes his conduct with the likely reaction of the communists always at the back of his mind. If, in spite of this, he incurs their abuse, the abuse does not shake him into asking whether their approval is at all worth having; on the contrary, he only tries harder for it.

Fourth, the abuse is often effective because of the mindset of the middle class, the bulk of the reading public, as a whole. To anticipate just one among the traits to be mentioned later, few bother to examine the evidence themselves, few have the patience to go into the details of a public issue. Hence, if you can only create enough noise by your abuse, the evidence and argument of the person are cast in doubt. ‘Yes, yes,’ shrugs the harassed middle class man, ‘but the matter is controversial. They won’t be saying all that if they had no case at all. In any case, I have no time for details, those are for you fellows to sort out. I only know that there are two sides to every question.’ When the conduct of a person or what he is saying beckons us to change our own, we, in any case, do not want to hear of or from him. Now, what with his having ‘become controversial,’ we get a ‘reason’ for not listening to him. The communists – indeed, all totalitarians – let loose their barrage of abuse on the premise – a sound one – that this is how the average literate man will react.

What should we do?

What should we do about such abuse? Five things.

First, as the abuse flows from the ‘Theory’, we must examine and bare the claims of the ‘Theory’ itself. Is the record of the ‘Theory’ such that it entitles the communists to hold on to the first three propositions I listed above, namely, that there is just one inevitable and desirable goal and that they know, and that they alone know, how to get there? The moment the evidence is examined, all who are doing constructive work in India today – and they are the principal targets of communist abuse and they are the ones who ever so often feel defensive in the face of it – will see that the record of the ‘Theory’ does not entitle the communists to their presumptions.

Second, we should study and broadcast the pattern of abuse – its derivative, predictable nature, its standard techniques and phrases – so that the audience can quickly recognize it for what it is, so that it sees that the communists are trying in each instance, as Lenin said of another, to hide inconvenient facts beneath a shroud of angry words.

Third, the liberal, the democrat must not be intimidated by the abuse into silence, and certainly not into bending backwards to reacquire the communists’ approval. Their record is so dismal, their claims so unwarranted that their certificates are not worth having.

Fourth, we should help promote the spirit of rational inquiry, the habit of examining the primary evidence ourselves, of paying attention to details – these are sure solvents for the abuse. As we do so, the fact that professional groups – like the communists – have come to rely so heavily on abuse as their only argument, that it has become second nature to them, is an advantage: groups such as these think that they have answered the substance of an argument the moment they have heaped their abuse. The substance therefore survives that much more easily. But for the abuse to become an advantage in this way, the two preconditions are that the targets must not get intimidated into silence, and that the audience must swiftly be able to see that the abuse is a substitute for argument, for reason, for facts.

Fifth, we should let time pass. The same five propositions that make communists intolerant and abusive of non-communists also make them intolerant and abusive of each other. Give them a little time. Those who are abusing you today will soon start abusing each other. And you can be certain that when they do so, their abuse will be much more venomous than it is against you: to the faithful the apostate is infinitely more perfidious than the mere infidel.

Abuse in general

I distinguished between the well-practised and equally well-orchestrated abuse by professional groups, and the general, almost casual denigration of those doing good work by the middle class as a whole, in particular by their peers. As an example of abuse by professional groups, I have considered the abuse by communists, as among these groups they are the ones who abuse others the most and who have been doing so the longest. In considering their abuse, I have focussed on the pattern, on the genes so to say. The reader will find ready examples by the hundreds in writings and statements of our communists – in particular in their party publications.

Denigration of those doing good, exceptional work by the middle class in general is, of course, much more widespread. Examples are scarcely necessary. We encounter the denigration every day in our conversation, in our magazines. If you ask an average politician, civil servant, academic or journalist, ‘Name five persons you admire,’ he is scarcely able to name one. If, on the other hand, you say a good word about someone doing courageous and exceptional work, the listener does not take a moment to say something dismissive or denigrating about him: ‘But what difference has his work made? You know, don’t you, how obsessed he is with publicity...’

What is the impulse behind such abuse, such untruth? What should we do about it? The denigration is characterized by four features and these provide the clues for answering both questions:

- * The denigration is pervasive;
- * Much of it is casual, offhand, it has become a habit;
- * The more effective the person is in his work, the more strident, the more vicious is the denigration; and
- * The peers of the person, that is persons who are themselves engaged in the same kind of work are the ones who run him down the most energetically.

Now, in general the middle class aims at getting by with the least effort; it is aware of and is reconciled to the mediocrity of this effort; it is concerned almost exclusively with furthering its immediate and private interests; and even those in it who grumble and complain get along well enough by making private deals with the system. The work of a Chandi Prasad, on the other hand, is the opposite of all this in every particular: he exerts himself to the maximum; he puts himself

out on issues that concern him no more than they concern the average citizen; instead of making deals with the system as it is, he makes every effort to alter it; and, for these troubles, he is hounded by the very apparatus with which the middle class is making private deals.

Such a man is therefore a reproach to the middle class. There is, thus, not just a willingness, but an anxiety, almost a compulsion to believe the worst about the best, to discover or invent some ulterior motive that could be taken to account for his conduct – ‘Must be RSS, must be CIA, must be hungry for publicity’ – something, anything that would distance him from us, that would explain away the chasm between his conduct and ours. So long as we can make-believe that he is doing what he is for some base reason, we do not have to change our conduct – ‘Why should we? After all, we are not CIA or RSS, nor are we hungry for publicity.’

But we have to account for the other feature too: while the middle class in general denigrates, peers do so more energetically than others. Dancers are the ones who talk most viciously about an exceptional dancer, lawyers about the exceptional lawyer. You will seldom find either set being vicious about an exceptional social worker. For that you must listen to other social workers. There are two reasons for this. First, as mediocrity is the norm in our professions, the exceptional effort of a person is a reproach to others in that field. Second, it is not just a reproach, it is a threat.

One obvious explanation for excellence being a threat is that in each field there are too few opportunities: anyone who begins to do good work at once threatens those who have clambered to, and are now precariously occupying, the few perches available in that field. And his peers take to abuse and intrigue as these, rather than more dedicated work, are what ‘succeed’ in warding off the threat.

But another fact also contributes to the result. Pranab Bardhan, one of our outstanding economists, once suggested that the paranoic defensiveness could in addition be traced to the fact that in any given field in India, the number of persons who are doing exceptional work is very small, not just the opportunities but the numbers availing them are very small. An exceptional economist in India, for instance, is liable to be one among half a dozen. In the USA, a person of the same calibre would be one among five hundred. Therefore, in little time each of these few comes to acquire an exaggerated opinion of his worth, an inflated ego. This inflated self-image in turn works in two ways: first, with an inflated self-image, almost by definition, goes a poor opinion of others; second, the inflated self-image compels the person to continually reassure himself by believing – and propagating – the worst about the others.

Inflated egos are fragile egos. Reality intrudes all the time, with its disconcerting reminders that the work does not really warrant the inflated self-image, the celebrity status. The more 'eminent' the person, therefore, the more he feels threatened, the greater is his compulsion to pull others down; the more promising the work of another, the more urgent is our man's need to undermine it.

What should we do about it?

We should not underrate denigration of this kind. It is corrosive in the extreme. You cannot fight it any more than you can box the air. Satyameva Vijayate Naanritam is unwarrantedly optimistic. Truth may prevail in the long run – in Professor Robertson's 'never-never land of unrealised tendency' – but it certainly does not always prevail in the period that matters to ordinary mortals, in the period in which issues get decided. In a climate in which everyone wants to believe the worst about everyone, to believe that which will allow him the comfort of not having to act, it is virtually impossible to fight the lie. How is one to fight back when witnesses will testify to falsehood on oath, when 'jurors', to put the matter at the least, would rather stay clear of the thicket of detail?

Bane hein ahale-havas muddai bhi munsif bhi

Kise vakil karen, kis se munsifi chahein...

What should one do about this pervasive, and, therefore, corrosive denigration, this intense denigration by peers? First, the abused should see that, just as it hurts him and impedes his work, the abuse, even as far as he and his work are concerned, serves a positive function too. It puts him on guard, and so makes him more careful in what he does. It provides him a mirror – 'Do I abuse others in the same way? Do I purvey gossip too?' – and thus makes him a better instrument for the public weal. And it enables him to get to know the detractors better. How often is it that we take the 'judgement' about others of such persons at face value, and purvey it citing them as authority? It is only when the same detractors pass their 'judgements' on us that we see how they do so without checking the facts, how often they do so on the basis of lies. The abuse, by educating us to the detractors, shields us from passing on their gossip about others.

In this sense the abuse is also its own antidote: the peers are the ones who denigrate most incessantly; the abuse distances one from them; moreover, it reveals them. Both the distancing and the revealing immunize one to what they say. Those doing good work can help this immunization along by seeing the impulse – for instance, insecurity, a subconscious awareness of the detractor's

own mediocrity – that underlies the denigration. This is the second thing that should be done. I do not mean that they should develop contempt for the detractors. Contempt would make them as dependent on the detractors as being unduly sensitive to what they say. The attitude should be as to a thought in the preliminary stages of meditation: the thought is not to be fought and kept out, nor is it to be dwelt upon and pursued; it is to be taken note of and put aside gently.

But more important than any of this, all who are exerting themselves in the public weal, and are for that reason abused, must recognize that standing up to abuse is one of the functions that they have to perform, it is a part of the good work which they have to do. For denigration, we have seen, has become a national habit. It is a habit that weakens us. Such men and women have therefore to help the country break the habit. When Gandhiji perseveres in the face of detractors, he proves to the country that there are men who will stay the course in spite of the abuse. He also holds a mirror to society: ‘Such is your state that you will denigrate a Gandhi too.’ And, just as important, he gives heart to his associates as well as to all who are to follow: ‘Even Gandhiji was ridiculed.’ Of course, it is not that anyone who is abused is Gandhiji by virtue of the abuse, but that, as even Gandhiji was not spared, there is little reason for those who work at a scale infinitely smaller than his to let the abuse ruffle them.

Hence, in a society such as ours bearing abuse itself serves a function. But as one of the tasks is to help society discard this corrosive habit, something more than merely standing up to it is required. In response to the abuse those doing good work must consciously cultivate large-heartedness. Their dedication to their own work must be matched by a generosity towards others.

This does not always come naturally. Indeed, good work, requiring as it does considerable sacrifice, itself leads us to underrate the work that others are doing. This attitude must be consciously neutralized.

Gandhiji’s example

Once again, Gandhiji is an example. He has been one of the most visible historical figures. A hundred volumes of his spoken and written words are available. For half a century he was almost constantly in public view. Literally, hundreds of persons who observed him have published their accounts. Neither in words spoken and written by him nor in the recollections of those who observed him do we find him uttering one word of malice; there is not one expression that we can trace to meanness.

He is often stern. His criticism stings. He defends the use of strong words

saying that ‘abuse’ means ‘misuse’, ‘perversion’, ‘bad use’, that is, unwarranted use – ‘When therefore we call a thief a thief, or a rogue a rogue, we do not abuse him’; he says that strong words are often necessary to wean the person from evil or to ensure that others do not follow him. But he also lays down the conditions for the use of strong expressions: there must be no evil intention in using them, and the person using them must be prepared to face the consequences of doing so (Collected Works, XXI, 452–54). In each instance, when he criticizes someone, his purpose is to improve the conduct of the person, the movement, the people; it is never to merely run the person or group down. And the criticism is conveyed first and directly to the person or group concerned.

But he does more. He is forever discovering the good in others, he is forever lavishing the most generous praise on them. When was it that you heard one of our present leaders find something to praise in another? Contrast this with Gandhiji’s perception.

He praises the great and the eminent of course:

Who am I to estimate the value of his services to the country? [he asks, talking about Dadabhai Naoroji.] I am no more than one who sat at his feet... I came to revere him from the very moment I waited upon him with a letter of introduction. Dadabhai’s flawless and uninterrupted service to the country, his impartiality, his spotless character, will always furnish India with an ideal to follow... (XIV, 61).

As he is a poet [he says of Tagore] so is he a philosopher and believes in God. Andrews has even called him a prophet. This great poet is a priceless gem of India... (XVII, 72–73).

...Who in India today does not know Malaviyaji? ...I feel that there is no one who has that power of service which he commands... (XV, 245).

And he is equally warm in acknowledging the great work of those from whom he differs.

He mentions his ‘sharp differences’ with Annie Besant, but look at the words he uses to commend her example:

The air of the country is thick with cries of swaraj. It is due to Mrs Besant that swaraj is on the lips of hundreds of thousands of men and women. What was unknown to most men and women only two years ago, has, by her consummate tact and her indefatigable efforts, become common property for them. There cannot be the slightest doubt that her name will take the first rank in history among those who inspired us with the hope that swaraj was attainable at no distant date ... (XIV, 50).

I cannot do full justice, nor can anyone else for that matter, I am sure, to the task of introducing Mrs Besant...[he mentions their differences].

Having said this, I admit I cannot but look up to her with reverence, honour her, pay tribute to her for her excellent qualities, for she has dedicated her very soul to India. She lives only for India – to live thus is her sole aspiration... (XVI, 251–52, for similar remarks see XVI, 201–02, 215–16). He has grave reservations about Tilak Maharaj's views and often criticizes them, but he also freely affirms that the latter is 'an idol of the people,' that 'he wields over thousands of men an unrivalled influence, his word is law to them,' that 'his immense sacrifices and a resolute advocacy of the popular cause have earned for him a place in the politics of India which no other leader has' (XIV, 427). Speaking of the two he says, 'The policy of Mrs Besant and Tilak Maharaj is mistaken, very much so indeed, but their achievement has been simply heroic. Their services it is impossible to measure. It is from them that the young got the message of patriotism...' He says that a time will surely come when the educated will turn away from their policies, but that they will not cease to hold the two in reverence (XV, 26).

When Tilak Maharaj loses a case, Gandhiji heartily associates himself in paying tribute to the Lokmanya's 'great services to the country, his self-sacrifice and his learning', saying how proud he is of Tilak's conduct. He asks all to contribute to the expenses of the suit, reminding the audience, 'He has been in his life acting to the very letter up to what he has believed to be the essential teaching of the Gita.' And this when Gandhiji completely disagrees with Tilak's interpretation of it. 'He devotes himself entirely to what he believes to be his karma, and leaves the result thereof to God. Who could withhold admiration from one so great?' (XV, 336–37).

Nor are such words reserved for the great and the eminent. On the contrary, he is forever lavishing the most fulsome praise on humble workers. It is indeed instructive to pick up any volume of the Collected Works and read through what Gandhiji says and writes over any set of weeks or months.

Anandashankar Dhruva is a humble professor: 'Ever since I came to know Mr Anandashankar Dhruva,' Gandhiji says, 'I have been all admiration for him. He is a priceless jewel of Gujarat... Mr Dhruva is a jewel not only of Gujarat but the whole of India... It was a pleasure to me to listen to his sincere words and I would simply love to be in his company... Mr Dhruva is a hidden jewel...' (XIV, 43–44).

And when Malaviyaji selects Dhruva to be the vice chancellor of Banaras Hindu University, Gandhiji commends Dhruva to the country: '... Anandashankarbhai is a priceless jewel of Gujarat... By sending Anandashankarbhai to Kashi, Gujarat is making an invaluable present to India. We cannot be proud enough of the profit India will derive from this gift...'

(XVI, 237–38).

C.F. Andrews, he says is a rishi, ‘I don’t know how to estimate the value of all these services of Mr Andrews... A great man like him we cannot thank enough’ (XIV, 273–74); ‘...fortunately, the good Mr Andrews has come forward to help our brethren and is proceeding there. The service he has rendered is impossible to estimate. Wherever he hears the cry of Indians in distress, he runs to their help ...’ (XVI, 291).

‘...What shall I say about Mr Andrews? In what way may I congratulate him? He has dedicated his whole life to us...’ (XVI, 314–16). His life, Gandhiji says, holds a lesson for us: we may oppose British policy but we must bear no hatred towards Englishmen (XVI, 295–96, 314–16).

A young man, Sorabji Shapurji, who had worked with him in South Africa, dies at thirty-five. Gandhiji commends his example to the country: ‘One of the best Indians... During the struggle, he showed a steadfastness of purpose, probity of character, coolness of temper, courage in the midst of adverse circumstances, such as the best of us do not often show. There were occasions when the stoutest hearts might have broken – Sorabji never wavered... Love of India was a passion with him, her service an article of faith. He was indeed a rare man ...’ (XIV, 507–08).

A few weeks later he is recalling another of his associates in South Africa, Ahmed Mohammed Kachalia: ‘...a prestige unequalled by any other Indian... And he was among the very few who never flinched through these long and weary eight years of untold sufferings... He felt that as a leader his sacrifice should be striking and that he should stop at nothing if thereby the honour of this country might be saved. He reduced himself to poverty...’ (XV, 56–57).

The editor of the Bombay Chronicle is extolled: ‘Mr Horniman is a brave and generous Englishman. He has given us the mantra of liberty, he has fearlessly exposed wrong wherever he has seen it and thus been an ornament to his race ...’ (XV, 252–53); ‘...The people will never forget what Mr Horniman has done for them. He has given them a new life, a new hope ...’ (XV, 273–74).

Dawood Mohammed, a merchant in South Africa, was, Gandhiji tells the country, ‘among the ablest’ of those who served India in South Africa: ‘His versatile ability and perseverance... his native wit... as keen a politician as he was a merchant... in my humble opinion, though India knew him not, she has every reason to be proud of having produced Dawood Mohammed ...’ (XVI, 78–79).

Ten days later he is commending Maulana Abdul Bari: ‘We on this side of India, barring the Mohammedans, know little of this great and good man. He is one of the foremost religious preceptors in Islam and has thousands of followers

all over India. His unassuming and truthful nature... Would to God that all of us, Hindus, Mohammedans, Christians, Parsis, Jews, belonging to all races, have the same virtue of charity, justness and breadth of vision...' (XVI, 90–91).

And the next week he is extolling a lady who has worked to popularize the spinning wheel: '...In my humble opinion, the work of Mrs Gangaben is of the highest importance and the nation ought to know about it. She has dedicated her all to this work...' (XVI, 161–62).

Two months later it is time to commend Bhai Paramanand (XV, 303–04). A fortnight after that it is Durgadas Adwani's turn: 'Durgadas Adwani is one of the best workers I have had the privilege of meeting... He has been a consistent, conscientious and zealous worker in Sind for many years...' (XVI, 325–28).

He is as usual praising the Ali Brothers: 'I could see how the Ali Brothers had been able to win the affection of their community. Their sweet speech, their constant readiness for work, their loving nature and sympathy for all, their religious zeal – who would not be charmed by such qualities! Their very presence fills our Muslims with happiness and now, by their love, they are winning over the Hindus as well' (XIV, 513).

And then their associate: 'The Ali Brothers embraced Hasrat Mohani introducing him as "our mad Mullah". This man does not want honour nor does he mind insults. He remains engrossed in his work, indifferent to heat and cold and making no difference between day and night. These are three jewels of the Muslim community and I feel that Hasrat Mohani is the brightest of the three. There are not many even among Hindus who could rival him in his single-minded devotion – it is doubtful if there is any...' (XVI, 517).

In this way, month after month, Gandhiji would bring workers to the attention of the country by such generous, almost extravagant praise. The mere list would fill pages and pages. His commendation anointed them as leaders: the country took notice of them, and they, having been commended by Bapu, had a standard to live up to. Moreover, through the virtues that he focussed on while commending them and their work, Gandhiji taught the country the values that were necessary for the tasks that lay ahead.

Have you heard any of our leaders commend anyone in such terms recently? Now, it cannot be that there are no good men or women today, or that there is no good work going on around us. On the contrary, and partly because of the legacy of Gandhiji himself, the work that is being done is larger in volume and in many ways more innovative than the work that Gandhiji was praising. Or is it that, though such work is going on, our standards are higher than Gandhiji's? If that be the case, they would merit a pathological examination. For our practice certainly does not entitle us to demand standards higher than those which

Gandhiji found adequate.

Conclusion

Long ago Gandhiji bemoaned our national habit. Writing to Arundale, he observed,

You suggest the desirability of unity. I think unity of goal we have. But parties we shall always have – and we may not find a common denominator for improvements. For some will want to go further than others. I see no harm in a wholesome variety. What I would rid ourselves of is distrust of one another and imputation of motives. Our besetting sin is not our differences but our littleness. We wrangle over words, we fight often for the shadow and lose the substance. As Mr Gokhale used to say, our politics are a pastime of our leisure hours when they are not undertaken as a stepping stone to a career in life.

I would invite you and every editor to insist on introducing charity, seriousness and selflessness in our politics. And our disunion will not jar as it does today. It is not our differences that really matter. It is the meanness behind that is undoubtedly ugly (XVI, 6).

He urged us to recognize the truth of life:

...Tulsidas has said that everything, animate and inanimate, is a mixture of good and bad qualities. But our duty is to distinguish between the good and the bad, and imbibe the former and ignore the latter, just as the swan takes in only milk, leaving the water of evil behind. For where would we be if our kinsfolk and our society saw only our faults? (XVII, 469).

And he urged us to conduct ourselves accordingly:

... Hatred, fault-finding *etc.* are the symptoms of a disease, of weakness. The weak sees weakness everywhere; the wicked believes everyone to be wicked. The snake and the scorpion are afraid of every creature. Why do we forget the law of this world: 'If we are good, the whole world is good'? (XVII, 469).

It may be that to a degree some persons are 'by nature' large-hearted and others are not. But surely that is not the entire explanation. Gandhiji himself, it would seem, consciously cultivated generosity. He often talks of rules by which he fashioned his assessment of others and their work.

We find him making sure that he adheres to 'the golden rule' that a person's words must not be interpreted so as to do him an injustice (Satyagraha in South Africa, p.118). A little later we find him remarking, 'But it was a rule with me never to attach any weight to my own doubts where the party concerned himself asserted to the contrary' (ibid., p.193). We find him insisting that he will trust

the adversary unless there are cogent reasons for distrusting him even though the latter repeatedly goes back on his commitments (e.g., *ibid.*, pp. 147, 175–76, 301). And there is his famous injunction, ‘The duty to exaggerate,’ that is, the duty to exaggerate our faults and to minimize those of others. Each of these is a rule that he formulated consciously, each is one by which he lived deliberately.

‘We should not be too ready,’ he says, ‘to come to conclusions against any man who may appear to have acted unjustly. But judge the matter how carefully we will, if we find that a wrong has been done, we should fight it to the end. At the same time, if we discover that we were in error in believing that a wrong had been done, we should be ready to admit our error that very moment and apologize for it’ (*Collected Works*, XVII, 320). There are three rules in that. How different they are from our practice: we are quick to judge, we do not stay the fight to the end, and we do not own up our errors.

And how very different Gandhiji’s rules are from Lenin’s principle:

... And I think that we must ‘stick the convict’s badge’ on everyone who tries to undermine Marxism even if we don’t go on to examine his case... Gandhiji, then, not Lenin. And even if in this, as in other matters, we cannot emulate Gandhiji fully, let us, to recall Pyarelal’s expression, try to be at least ‘four-anna Gandhis’.

Postscript: The Collapse of the Fatherland

The ouster of Gorbachev 'is a very positive development,' proclaimed Harkishan Singh Surjeet. He was addressing the press on behalf of the CPI (M) on 20 August 1991 that is, the day after the coup in Moscow. The mood at the party's headquarters in Delhi was of 'unconcealed glee', the Indian Express reported; the reaction of the party was 'ecstatic', it reported. The emergency measures which Yanayev and the other leaders had announced would be accepted by the people, Surjeet forecast. 'They (the leaders who had ousted Gorbachev) have nothing to hide,' Surjeet declared, adding, 'That is why they have convened a meeting of the Central Committee for today and of the Parliament for August 26.'

In Kerala, the party's paper, Deshabhimani, was full of good cheer for the future. 'In any case,' it forecast on 21 August in its editorial about the coup, 'it can be hoped that Gorbachev's ouster will bridle the move of reactionary forces to return to the memory of the Czar emperor abandoning Lenin. It can be hoped that the move to give sovereignty to the Republics and thereby dissolving the Soviet Union will be halted. It can be hoped that the move to convert the CPSU into a social democratic party will be ended. It can be hoped that the reprehensible journey to re-establish capitalism abandoning Marxism-Leninism will be stopped. It can be hoped that the move towards the dangerous concept of a unified and mutually dependent world giving up class perceptions will be corrected ... The response of the extremely reactionary forces the world over to Gorbachev's ouster is becoming a guide to us. They have shown us very clearly where we should stand. We take position against the phalanx of forces ranging from Bush to the grandmother of Kottayam (the Malayala Manorama daily, the Deshabhimani's bête noire in Kerala).'

E.M.S. Namboodripad too was full of hope, as he was no less certain than the party's spokesman in Delhi, Harkishan Singh Surjeet, that the Communist Party of the Soviet Union would stand determinedly by the restoration of Marxist-Leninist principles, but also because he was certain that the Soviet army would

stand by the CPSU in that determination. But for that very reason he was full of warning too. The phase in which Gorbachev and Yeltsin had opposed each other was over, he said, Yeltsin was now trying to restore Gorbachev to power.

Now, there are two things about this endeavour which struck our general secretary and 'leading theoretician'. First, that, if it were persisted in, it would lead to clashes between Yeltsin's supporters and the great Soviet army. Second, he saw in what was happening the foreign hand, he saw in the events nothing but a continuation of the nefarious designs of the imperialist powers. They had tried this in China two years ago, he said, but the government and the party in China had defeated that attempt very successfully (surprising, isn't it that he did not mention the people of China in that context!). The imperialist powers had tried the same thing and succeeded in eastern Europe a year and a half ago, he said. Bush and company are now trying to ignite a civil war in the Soviet Union, he said, as a continuation of what they did in eastern Europe. If they succeed in their new attempt, socialism would suffer an even graver reverse than it had a year and a half ago. 'Therefore, let us hope,' the general secretary concluded, 'that working class revolutionaries the world over will defeat this attempt and save the Soviet Union and the world socialist movement.'

The statement was a bit pathetic, I thought on reading it. What had happened to all those claims that the masses in those countries having drunk of the ambrosia were ever ready to defend the communism which had showered all those boons on them? What was one to think of the claim that communism had ushered in the New Soviet man in these societies if 'Bush and company' could ignite civil wars throughout their length and breadth, if they could, as they on this account had done, mobilize millions all across eastern Europe to throw out with their own hands the communism and the communist parties which had brought paradise for them?

By the next day, 22 August, the party's paper, Deshabhimani, had not just hopes to express, or a mere warning to deliver. It had proof. It published on its front page on 22 August an eyewitness refutation of what was visible on television screens the world over – that thousands and thousands had gathered in front of the Russian Parliament building in Moscow, in the square at Leningrad to defy the coupists. 'CPI leader, K. Govinda Pillai, who returned from the Soviet Union on Wednesday (August 21),' reported the paper in a box item complete with the man's photograph at the top of page one, 'said that he had not seen in the Soviet Union the kind of agitations and demonstrations reported by Western media ... Newspapers had reported that tens of thousands of people had assembled before the Russian Parliament when Yeltsin addressed them. We were staying that day in the Ukraine Hotel in front of the Parliament. We could

see Yeltsin's meeting from our room. At the most only a hundred people could be seen...' And he had a reason to explain why the people had stayed away. 'Gorbachev could not achieve through reforms what had been expected,' he declared. 'That is why the people did not respond to Yeltsin's call for struggle.'

The most detailed exposition of the party's reasons for supporting the ouster of Gorbachev and for its confidence that the people of the Soviet Union were all for the coup was furnished by Asok Mitra, the former finance minister of the party's government in West Bengal. Writing in *The Telegraph of Calcutta*, he was at his mocking as well his scholarly best. 'To call it a coup is sour grapes,' he proclaimed.

That procedures prescribed by the Soviet Constitution for replacing the president had not been followed 'is causing some concern to such eminent experts as George Bush and John Major,' he began. 'Maybe they have a point,' he conceded to conquer, 'but it is of ephemeral relevance. Once the Central Committee meets on August 26 and endorses ex post the measures taken in the early hours of Monday by the Committee for the State of Emergency, that minor crisis would be resolved.' And he found precedent in 'an analogy' which even as he cited it as a precedent 'familiar to us' he tried not quite to embrace. 'The constitutional impropriety perpetrated by Zail Singh,' he recalled, 'in swearing in Rajiv Gandhi as Prime Minister on the night of October 31, 1984, was duly set right by a subsequent resolution of the Congress Parliamentary Party.'

Though the ouster had gone through, though the Central Committee was going to ratify in a few days what had been done, it would be unwise, he warned, to assume that things would be allowed to settle down. The people would not let things settle down? Nonsense. The danger was the exact opposite. Gorbachev had succeeded in one area without dispute, he said: '... The affairs of the USSR are now internationalised.' 'Certain tendencies have been unleashed in the country. Certain urges are aflutter. Powerful exogenous forces have been backing them up.' Even if NATO decided to refrain from direct intervention, he warned, 'there are ways and ways of resuming the cold war.' The imperialists were diabolic. There was 'for instance a bucketful of suggestions,' our theoretician pointed out, in an innocuous looking source you and I would in our customary ignorance and complacency and conditioned carelessness have overlooked because it looked like a mere detective novel – 'John le Carre's *Russia House*'!

The ouster of Gorbachev was inevitable, he wrote. While 'the philosophical basis of the free market principle' predicates the equality of opportunity to all to, among other things, disseminate information, in practice under Gorbachev, 'the manner in which the media in the Soviet Union was being manipulated in the

recent months however provided the impression of a one-buggy race for glasnost-cum-perestroika,' he pronounced. 'The fiction was allowed to spread that Soviet citizenry one and all were keyed up to ditch the Communist Party and the social and political arrangements that had crystallised in the course of the past 70 years. This was dangerous falsification of reality,' he fumed.

'Fiction'? 'Dangerous falsification'? The manner in which people across that benighted country were to cast the Communist Party out was to show within three days of the essay appearing in print which was 'fiction', which was the 'dangerous falsification of reality'. But that was three days hence.

For the moment the party's intellectual and ideologue recalled how thoroughly and swiftly the October Revolution had transformed a backward nineteenth-century 'near primitive economy' into a modern industrial power. 'Western susceptibilities were hurt by the methodology of it,' he noted. Susceptibilities only, mind you. And those also only of westerners. The millions who were killed and tortured? Oh, yes, our ideologue had not forgotten them. 'Perhaps the forced collectivisation was cruel and harsh,' he conceded. 'Perhaps it cost as many as three million lives.' Note the double Perhaps! And note too the slight oversight of not mentioning the millions executed, tortured, transported, consigned to slavery and death in the camps in pogroms other than the collectivization! 'But at the end of it,' Mitra said, 'there was an apparatus, built without any external assistance, which withstood the shockwaves of Nazi aggression. The Second World War cost the Soviet Union thirty million lives, but the system did not collapse...' Not a word, naturally, about the pact Stalin entered into with Hitler by which Hitler got time to move against western Europe and consolidate his strength, under which Stalin annexed the Baltic republics and countries such as Poland, and in accordance with which he delivered German communists who had taken refuge in Poland to Hitler. Not a word too about the fact that the war cost so many million lives to the USSR precisely because Stalin had entirely decimated the Soviet army and rendered it incapable of fighting. And not a word naturally about the fact that to rally the people against the invaders, Stalin had to invoke not the banner of communism but of the very nationalism which communism was said to have rendered obsolete.

Mitra had no space for any of these, naturally. Instead he set out the glorious achievements of the Stalinist system 'in the Soviet Union along with the rest of East Europe' – 'stable prices, guaranteed full employment, social security on an extraordinary scale, meticulous care of old and disabled people and children, full equality of sexes, millions and millions of copies of Shakespeare and Pushkin and others at fantastically low prices, classical music for the multitudes through discs and cassettes of Mozart, Brahms, Beethoven, Bach, Tchaikovsky et al., at

throwaway prices, and of course, two-thirds of the Olympic Medals'. This nonsense on 21 August 1991. After four years of an avalanche of disclosures by East European and Soviet governments themselves of what life had really been in those societies.

Oh, sure, there had been some problems, our theoretician was not oblivious of them. 'True, there were gaps and blemishes,' he wrote. 'Food was generally bland and rationed, luxury items were few and far between, housing was in perennial short supply, the services were underdeveloped.' It isn't just that our theoretician did not recall that none of these – nor anything else – was in short supply to the party's bureaucracy, it was that he saw in the shortages the virtues of a new Sparta. 'But, and this is the crucial point,' he continued, 'symptoms of imperfection' – pause and note the delicate word he chooses, imperfection, and, after all, we all know that no system can be perfect; in fact the shortages are not even 'imperfections,' they are mere 'Symptoms of imperfection' – 'were not necessarily evidence of the ineptness of the system; they could be a faithful reflection of the system of values which characterises, or should characterise, socialism'. Thus, first that the failures were mere 'imperfections' and no system can be perfect; then that they were mere 'symptoms of imperfection'; then that they were 'not necessarily evidence of the ineptness of the system' – the system could, like our own plans, have been perfect, that is, and still the imperfections could have resulted from inept implementation, exactly like our plans! And, finally, that in fact they were the 'faithful reflection' of a conscious decision to pursue certain values. And still more finally, that, if they were not that, they were the faithful reflection of what should have been a conscious decision to pursue certain values!

Even this was not all for our theoretician. He next went on to recall that immediately before the outbreak of the Second World War 'hordes of bright young economists, nurtured by capitalism in different American universities,' had themselves bemoaned the crises of those economies and reached the conclusion that 'the panacea... lies in a centralised command structure...'. And he had nothing less than the notorious World Bank's World Economic Report to prove that 'barring the exceptions of a handful of countries in East Asia like Japan and South Korea' the rate of economic growth had been higher in the socialist bloc of countries. Not a word naturally about the revelations of the socialist bloc countries themselves of how the data about the growth in production had been shamelessly exaggerated in those countries over the decades! Not a word either to explain how, with such solid foundations having been laid by the great Stalin, and with such a long uninterrupted run of higher rates of growth to buoy it, the wretched thing had collapsed so ignominiously.

Instead, the mother of facts: the slide in growth in East Europe as well as the Soviet Union ‘dates from the year Mikhail Gorbachev and his policies moved centre stage.’

But in that case why had so many – specially the young – hearkened to Gorbachev and his policies? Naturally, the theoretician had an answer: amnesia, these youngsters had no memory of the mire the Revolution and the party had lifted them out of. ‘Two full generations have arrived since the Revolution...’ he noted. ‘The latest generation is unburdened by memories and’ – please note the touching mixture of innocence and confession and lament – ‘what is somewhat surprising by ideology too.’ ‘It is’ – note the words the theoretician uses and contrast them with the words, ‘the flower of the Soviet Youth,’ that it was obligatory to use but five years ago – ‘the lobby of this emerging crowd of outward-minded technicians and such like who, strongly entrenched in, for instance, the metropolises of Moscow and Leningrad, took the fullest advantage of the processes of democratic centralism to’ – note now the words he uses to describe their movement to establish elementary human rights – ‘upset, even if temporarily the political priorities of the system.’ And that was of course just the beginning of the evil. ‘From transformed political priorities to economic reordering which will’ – mark the words again – ‘favour the protection of luxury goods, they reasoned, was only a short hop, particularly if’ – mark the guilt-by-association – ‘the capitalist West chipped in with their generous contributions.’ Evil it was, therefore – ‘the protection of luxury goods’ instead of millions of copies of Shakespeare and records of classical music at throwaway prices – and the evil had naturally to be nipped.

And, therefore, the triumphant claim of our theoretician. ‘They’ – that is, ‘the lobby of this emerging crowd of outward-minded technicians and such like’ – ‘and Gorbachev were mistaken. The Soviet people, along with the rest of East Europe, have had a harrowing experience of the free market adventure during the past few years.’ And from this, the triumphant forecast, which of course we could have known from The Theory all along, of what would transpire: ‘It was always improbable that merely because the Western governments and the Western media had made up their minds,’ wrote the theoretician, ‘the Soviet people could be enticed into flying in the face of their own experience.’ And from that to triumphant condescension is, as our theoretician would say, ‘but a short hop’, and so he concluded: ‘You may not like the particular happening’ – those delicate words again – ‘but to describe it as a coup is sour grapes plus self-deception.’

The CPI was more circumspect, but only more circumspect. It recalled that many ‘negative developments’ had been occurring in the course of implementing

Gorbachev's reforms; it 'invoked', the Indian Express reported, the justification Yanayev had given for the coup – that all-round political, economic, financial, social and ethnic crises had engulfed the country; it added that it would have preferred if the changes had been affected by democratic methods; and to that addition it added that it did not wish to pass judgement on what had happened. Governmental changes, sometimes unexpected and sweeping, were nothing new in the world, it declared. But basically it was an internal affair of the Soviet Union, the party declared, hedging the matter.

An internal affair? What a change the years had wrought! Here were communists to whom proletarian internationalism had been mother's milk, who had been proclaiming that developments in the Soviet Union were not just the concern of all mankind, the way they and developments anywhere in the world would affect the prospects of Socialism in that, The Only Fatherland, was the only touchstone – here were the same communists taking cover under that most petit bourgeois of evasions: it is an internal affair of that country!

The secretary of its Kerala unit and its Politburo member, V.S. Achuthanandan, was more candid than the party's draftsmen in Delhi. The developments in the Soviet Union during the last six years, the Deshabhimani reported him as declaring, represented another phase in the attack carried on by imperialist forces to root out the world socialist order... Gorbachev's style had been one of surrender to imperialism, he said. The agreement concluded by Bush and Gorbachev did not provide for the dismantling of America's Star Wars arsenal, he declared, while Gorbachev had unilaterally surrendered...Gorbachev had planned to sign a treaty giving independence to the republics, he recalled. The campaigners for Khalistan, he fumed, juxtaposing opposites, wanted Punjab to be an independent country; he said it was wrong, how then could this move of Gorbachev be right, he thundered.

Such a heap of nonsense from these 'theoreticians' and 'eyewitnesses' about a man who had done more to liberate mankind than anyone else. 'Soviet arms shall not be available to you to settle your contests with your neighbour,' he said in effect in Vladivostok, and thereby compelled rivals all the way from Vietnam and China in South-east Asia to the factions in Angola to abandon their murderous jostling. 'Soviet arms shall not be available to you to sit on your people,' he told the communist oligarchies in East Europe, and thereby enabled the people to triumph, to reorder not just their lives but the world. Contrast the fate of the Hungarians in 1956, of the Czechs in 1968 when Soviet troops rolled in to perpetuate the local tyrants, with what happened in 1989: Soviet troops were present everywhere; in East Germany, in Poland, they were present in numbers that would have proved overwhelming. By not making them available

to the tyrants, Gorbachev had freed so much of humanity. And he had brought about a revolution of this incomprehensible magnitude by the force merely of argument and persuasion, and of abstention: that non-violence, that the mere withholding of violence would bring about transformations so vast, that certainly could not have been imagined here in Gandhiji's land.

And then the idea itself. The world over, millions had been duped by being told that in those societies the future had been brought into being, that it worked, that – by virtue of the communist revelation – they had solved the problems: they had obliterated unemployment which the capitalist countries would never get rid of as it was an instrument the capitalists wielded to keep the workers in line; they had been made immune to the ups and downs of economic activity which were endemic to the capitalist system – what with the inevitably rising capital intensity of production, the declining rate of profit coupled with the compulsion to invest; as they were states which worked for the people, they had annulled the pollution which the capitalist countries could never get rid of because power in these countries was in the hands of capitalists and they were interested only in their immediate gains; they had extirpated high divorce rates and alcoholism and drugs which were inherent in the capitalist societies because of the irremediable alienation of man in these societies. How many thousands and thousands of intellectuals and how many millions of young men and women had drugged themselves on this opium! How many millions of lives were extinguished as a consequence! And this one man had taken the lid off and had held it away long enough for all to see what the reality was in these countries – what it was now and what it had been in the years that communists the world over had glorified. He had allowed an independent examination of the past, and out had come the Hitler–Stalin pact the Soviets had denied all along, out had come the massacres of Soviet troops by Soviet troops the Soviets had denied all along, out had come the facts about slave labour camps, about torture chambers... He had held the lid back and thereby liberated mankind from that mesmeric and lethal nonsense.

This is what everyone saw. But our communists saw something else: they saw a nightmare – the man was overturning all their formulae, he was giving the lie to all their claims. For half a century our communists had been living off these borrowed formulae, 'picked up', as they would have read Mao say if only they could have taken time off from quoting him, 'with pitiful industry from the dung heap of textbooks written abroad.' For half a century they had been living off these claims: 'There all these problems have been overcome. A workers' State, meticulous health care for all, rosy, plump children... Soaring productivity... Democracy on the shop-floor, in the barracks... A mighty world power ...' In a

word, they saw what Gorbachev was doing: he was shutting their shop.

And then he had been thrown out. And so, naturally, there had been ‘unconcealed glee’, ‘ecstasy’, as the Indian Express reported.

The aftermath was as cruel as it was swift. ‘The CPM’s leadership in West Bengal,’ The Times of India reported from Calcutta on 22 August, ‘is deeply embarrassed over the incredibly speedy collapse of the Soviet coup. Instead of the jubilation that was all too evident on Monday, that orthodoxy had at long last been restored in the Soviet Union – which would lead to an end to the confusion and turmoil of the glasnost-perestroika policies – a pall of gloom had settled over the State Committee’s office by yesterday evening. Veteran CPM leaders said, “The counter-revolution has succeeded.” ... Some leaders went so far as to question the information coming through last evening, even though the State Committee’s office is linked to CNN television ...’

There was after all the assurance of K. Govinda Pillai who had himself been in Moscow and seen everything with his own eyes: there had been – what was his phrase? – at the most a hundred persons at Yeltsin’s meeting ...

But history is no respecter of ecstasies, as our communists would be the first to remind us. The coup collapsed. And worst of all, it collapsed because the people, with all the world seeing them, would have none of it. Our Communists were struck dumb for once – a stupefied silence. But they regained their composure soon enough. The Deshabhimani was first off the mark. ‘Gorbachev has earned the stature of the executioner of the great CPSU which had given leadership for the great events that changed the history of the twentieth century and through it the story of mankind...,’ it thundered in its editorial on 26 August. ‘What they have now achieved is what Hitler could not achieve. They [that is, those who rejoice over the Soviet developments] will now take the initiative to install Hitler’s statue in place of the dismantled statue of the great Lenin ...’ Defiance was back: ‘The struggle of socialist forces will continue as long as the capitalist system exists letting man exploit man... A reawakening is called for against imperialist over-lordship. The counter-revolutionary forces which subserve the interests of imperialism will be consigned to the dustbin of history.’

The Central Committee of the CPI (M) met for four days from 28 to 31 August. Defiance by now was the better part of discretion. The Central Committee endorsed the stand its leaders had taken in endorsing the coup. Gorbachev’s policies had undermined the very foundations of socialism, it declared, they had threatened the unity of the world’s first socialist state (a change, I must concede, from the days recounted in this book when the Soviet Union was ‘The Only Fatherland’). As a result of these policies, the Central Committee said, ‘The CPSU was ideologically disarmed and organisationally in

disarray.’ The policies had caused grave shortages and dislocation in the economy.

It is in this context, it said, that ‘the attempt to check these trends on August 19’ – notice again the delicacy of the expression – had to be viewed. That attempt had failed, the Central Committee said, ‘for various reasons’ – a euphemism, I take it, for the people who right across the country had rallied to thwart the coup that our communists had hailed. And since then all hell had broken loose. A unipolar world, a setback to the Third World and liberation movements ...

The fault was Gorbachev’s clearly, not of the stagnation and cruelties of the preceding seventy-five years! And it was the fault also of course of the USA and other imperialist powers with whom ‘Yeltsin and his supporters’ – those hundreds of thousands who had stormed the squares in Leningrad and Moscow, those mine workers who had struck work across the country, the army which had refused to go along! – ‘are openly allied’ and who were now ‘gloating over the developments in the Soviet Union.’

As for the future, the Central Committee was defiant and resolute, even if in shop-worn words. The Central Committee ‘reasserts its firm adherence to the ideology of Marxism-Leninism and its creative application to Indian conditions,’ the declaration proclaimed. ‘It upholds the principles of proletarian internationalism and consistent anti-imperialism which conforms to the basic interests of the people of India. It reaffirms the revolutionary potential of the Communist Movement in our country in the fight against class exploitation and for social emancipation.’ ‘The CPI (M) along with other progressive and revolutionary forces the world over,’ the Central Committee declared, ‘will never reconcile to the “new world order” dominated by US imperialism. The CPI (M) will continue to develop and strengthen the working class and democratic movement in the country; it will strengthen its bonds of solidarity with all those forces fighting for peace, democracy, national independence and socialism the world over.’ As even the Portuguese Communist Party had by now disowned its earlier support for the coup, that left us in very select company indeed.

The CPI had been preening itself on its prudence. Its initial statement had been obfuscatory. The press had highlighted its diffidence. This had come in handy and the impression had since been fostered that, unlike the CPI (M), the CPI had all along had serious reservations about the coup. Now that Gorbachev was back, the CPI moved to emphasize the positive elements of his rule and to defend him against villainous calumners. He had declared that he still believed in the ideals of communism, it pointed out. He had not said that he would

convert the Communist Party of the Soviet Union into a social democratic party, it noted in his defence. It had barely drawn the world's attention to these facts than Gorbachev did not just resign from the general secretaryship of the party, he not only fell in line with the suspension of the activities of the CPSU, but he declared, and that too on American television, that communism had failed!

That was the position as this book's printing commenced. The collapse of the Soviet coup had plunged our communists in gloom – they feared they might lose much. The collapse of the Soviet Union on the other hand has ended the uncertainties – they see that as they have lost all, there is nothing more they can lose. Hence the clarity, and hence the choice they have made: they have chosen to stand by purity, to become the guardians of the lost cult. 'Now that Marxism-Leninism has been disowned in the Fatherland itself, our responsibility has become all the greater,' the CPI (M) seems to be saying in effect.

Once events blast the very gospel on which a movement or an organization is based and show it to have been wholly and entirely a fabrication, one can be confident that the movement and the organization based on it will eventually wither away. But eventually. In the meanwhile those movements and organizations can continue to do great harm. And in India, placed as it is today, the communists and the corpse they clutch, their ideology, are likely to continue to retard and harm for several reasons.

First of course there is the stalemate on all sides: no group, no party has the strength in India today to push things through in any direction; every group on the other hand has strength enough to stall anything anyone else attempts. The communists with their clutch of MPs, with their influence in two states, with the numbers they control amongst industrial labour, are not just one among the groups that can stall – they, along with that other bunch, the Lohiaites, are the group that are most practised at this obstructive art: of impeding things, of frightening others by feints and shouts, in a word, of wielding a degree of influence wholly out of proportion with either their real strength or the merit of their argument.

And the results of their expertise remain in place. They have helped each other to places in universities and in the media: members of these cliques secure places for one another and burnish one another's reputation, they stick halos on one another, for instance, by reviewing one another's books! As the peer group in many an institution – the Indian Council of Historical Research, a university like JNU, publications of a very wide range – consists entirely of those they have allowed to survive, as they have been so systematically successful in shutting out the other point of view – from so many of our newspapers for instance – their reputation survives in the face of facts.

These cliques remain in place. And therefore their ability to derail discourse, their ability to prevent people from learning the full facts, the wherewithal to inveigle our poor and uninformed people into drawing the wrong inferences from even such cataclysmic events as the ones in East Europe and the Soviet Union, remain. As does the debility of the liberal which has made them so effective over the decades. Ridden by guilt, the liberal has always looked over his shoulder to see what the leftists will say about what he is about to say. The latter have therefore been able to exercise as their own what has in fact been the strength of others. Pandit Nehru, with his reactions to a host of events, provides a ready example.

From this perspective the repudiation of communism in the Soviet Union makes the immediate danger from our communists greater, not smaller. To divert attention from those events many a 'progressive' will become even purer fundamentalist: V.P. Singh is an apt example – he has become even more of a Mandalite after the rout in the elections than he was before. And they will, as they have always done in such moments of embarrassment and defeat, take to espousing in more and more extreme a fashion the demands of narrower and narrower sections. Reeling under the opprobrium of having helped the British thwart the Quit India movement the communists, as Chapter 4 above recalls, took to espousing the demand for Pakistan, to certifying that the Muslim League was an anti-imperialist force, a progressive force, indeed a secular anti-religious force; and they congratulated themselves on the ground that this espousal of the demand for Pakistan was attracting many young Muslims towards the party. The same pattern is liable to be repeated now, the attempt will certainly be made to repeat it. Demands of tribals, Dalits, industrial labour, linguistic and religious minorities – these will be fanned and agitations launched in their name.

The antidotes are as evident as they are necessary. The record of the communists and their 'Theory' must be documented in minute detail and disseminated far and wide as a prophylactic, as must information about the techniques of their cliques in the media, in universities and the like: we will thereby convince our liberals in general and our policymakers in particular that the certificates of these cliques are just not worth having. And to counter their espousal of regressive policies we must expose our people to what is happening in the world: we will thereby convince our people that the mere fact that a party or a group is shouting in their name does not mean that the course it is advocating is the one that will benefit them.

And all this must be done thoroughly and with a sense of urgency because, as their reactions to the coup revealed in a flash, for all their camouflage our communists remain Stalinists at heart and in mind.

And that is also why, as I suggested in the Introduction when this book was originally sent to the press, though the example it uses is treachery of 40–45 years ago, the book is about our communists and about what their mental habits are as well as what their mentality is to this very day.

September 1991

Notes and References

Italics, unless otherwise indicated, have been added by the author. In those days, emphasis was supplied by printing the words in bold or in caps or by underlining them.

1. The essay has been reprinted in *Individuals, Institutions, Processes*, Viking, 1990, though the date should be July 1984 and not July 1983 as reported in that volume.
2. E.M.S. Namboodripad, *A History of Indian Freedom Struggle*, Social Scientist Press, Trivandrum, 1986, p. 771.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 772.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 690–774, in passing.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 773.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 773.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 696–7.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 698.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 714.
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 729–30.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 733.

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- [1.](#) P.C. Joshi, 'Imperialist War into People's War', in G. Adhikari ed., *From Peace Front to People's War*, PPH, Bombay, Second Edition, 1944, p. 353.
- [2.](#) As the general secretary of our Communist Party explained, 'That the Soviet Union stood aside and neutral' [stood aside and neutral?] 'was a great fiasco for the British and French imperialists. They got the war in a manner they had not bargained for... Even after the outbreak of war, the British imperialists tried hard to light the conflagration in the east. They provoked Finland to fight the USSR and openly supported it...' (Joshi, *ibid.*, p. 353).
- [3.](#) 'Todorskii's figures,' adds Medvedev in a footnote, citing this time the estimates of the official *Short History of the Great War of the Fatherland*, 'are apparently incomplete'; cf. Roy Medvedev, *Let History Judge*, Alfred Knopf, New York, 1972, p. 213.
- [4.](#) Mao Tse-tung, *Selected Works*, Vol. II, 1965, p. 278, Foreign Languages Press, Peking.
- [5.](#) cf. *Correspondence Between Mahatma Gandhi and P.C. Joshi*, PPH, Bombay, 1945, p. 13. *Communist Reply to the Congress Working Committee's Charges*, Vol. I, PPH, Bombay, 1945, pp. 108, 210–11.
- [6.](#) *Communist Reply to Congress Working Committee's Charges*, Vol. I, 1945, p. 36.
- [7.](#) PPH, Bombay, 1940.
- [8.](#) Signet Press, Calcutta, 1946 edition, p. 593.

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2. Pakistan and National Unity, PPH, Bombay, third revised edition, 1944, edited by G. Adhikari; and Communist Reply to the Congress Working Committee’s Charges, PPH, Bombay, 1945.
3. Stalin’s writings on the matter used to be available in plenty till recently. The reader will find an excellent account of them in Kolakowski’s justly famous *Main Currents in Marxism*, Volume III, Oxford, 1982, pp.12–20.
4. Kolakowski illustrates the matter with the case of the progressive peasant leader Mir Sayit Sultan Galiyev.

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