

Communist Party of India's Manifesto

This Manifesto was presented to All India National Congress, Gouhati Session by the Communist Party of India in 1926, December 1st(01-12-1926). The 'Class Struggle' republishes it for study.

On the eve of the annual meeting of the Indian National Congress, the nationalist movement presents a picture which is apparently very discouraging. What a change compared with the situation that prevailed in 1920-21 when the people were enthusiastically gathered around the National Congress eagerly looking up to it for a courageous lead in the fight for freedom!

Today the National Congress exists but in name, a number of conflicting political groups contending for the possession of its prostrate frame. Nationalism—the courageous fight for real freedom—is drowned in the surging sea of communalism. Bickering over petty formalities is the outstanding feature of political life of the country. More than half a dozen political constellations are vilifying each other. Each claims to represent the nation. But none of them touch the vital issues before the nation, their sole object being to secure a majority in the legislatures.

Even those who recognise the impotence of these pseudo-parliamentary bodies are nevertheless frantically trying to enter them. They have forgotten that the road to freedom does not lie through the blind alley of those impotent and unrepresentative legislative bodies. They have forgotten that in the fight for national freedom these at best can only serve as auxiliaries to other more powerful and effective weapons.

The Legislatures do not Represent the People

The present legislative bodies, to capture which has become the beginning and end of the programme of nationalist parties, are impotent. They are impotent because they do not represent the people. Being unrepresentative, they cannot act as the vehicle through which popular energy can find adequate expression. The experience of the last two years should have made this abundantly clear. The Swaraj Party entered the councils ostensibly with the object of wrecking them. What actually happened, however, was the wreck of the Swaraj Party on the treacherous ground of pseudo-parliamentarism.

Although the situation is as clear as daylight, it may be useful to give a few facts showing the unrepresentative character of the legislative bodies established by the reforms of 1919. It is necessary to repeat this axiomatic truth because of the lamentable parliamentary degeneration of the entire nationalist movement.

The total population of British India (excluding Burma) is 221, 500,000 in round numbers. Of these a little less than 5,000,000 are qualified voters according to the findings of the South borough (franchise) committee. That is to say, about 2.2 per cent of the entire nation is enfranchised by the reforms! The councils at best, therefore, represent this small minority. The overwhelming majority of 97.8 per cent, being unenfranchised, cannot make themselves heard or felt through these bodies.

Is not the nationalist movement reared on a very narrow social foundation when its programme and policies are largely concerned with entrance into an action within these legislative bodies? Can the nationalist parties which stake their very existence on capturing a sufficient number of seats in these councils be expected to shake the power of imperialism? Still, these un-representative legislative bodies have become the centre of nationalist politics. Consequently, the nationalist movement as represented by the existing political parties is divorced from the popular masses. It has neither the power nor the will to fight for freedom. The general desire is to reach a compromise with imperialism without losing face. Mutual recrimination and loud protestations of patriotism do not change the essentials of the situation.

No Fundamental Differences among the Nationalist Parties

Nationalist criticism of the councils seldom concerns their unrepresentative character. Neither the National Congress nor any particular party inside or outside it has ever conducted a campaign for the extension of the franchise. The National Congress in the beginning boycotted the reformed councils not as a protest against their unrepresentative character, but owing to the limited power conferred on them. The general nationalist demand is that the government should be responsible to the legislatures representing 2.2 per cent of the population. This would be considered self-government! Political domination and economic exploitation of the people by British imperialism would obviously be considered tolerable and permissible provided that they are carried on with the sanction of the legislature representing the enfranchised few of the native upper and middle classes.

The year 1925 was marked by a complete decomposition of the nationalist movement. The National Congress was split up into warring factions. But there is little fundamental difference between these parties. They all subscribe to the program of self-government within the British Empire. Even their immediate demands are identical.

The bitter controversy between the orthodox swarajist leaders and dissidents (responsivists and independents) confused the situation. The rank-and-file members and adherents of the Swaraj Party failed to see the sham character of their fight over formalities. Ostensibly, the difference was only on one point-on what condition the nationalists should accept office. On principle, however, there was no objection to accepting office under the present Constitution, which only three years ago was boycotted.

During his negotiations with Malaviya, Motilal Nehru stated on 15 September that "the general principle and policy laid down in the resolution of the Kanpur congress shall be

adhered to." But two days later, after the negotiations had broken up, the central organ of the Swaraj Party wrote editorially:

"The result of the elections would go a great way to show if the country wanted a change of policy formulated by the Kanpur Congress... The Swaraj Party would also approach the Congress to formulate a new policy, if necessary, in the light of the mandate of the country" (*Forward*, 17, September).

Where is the fundamental difference between the two parties then? Both are ready to change principles and policies at the behest of the electorate representing 2.2 per cent of the population. Both are prepared to override the interest of the unfranchised masses in favour of an infinitesimal minority. The independents stated the new "principle and policy" of agreement with imperialism before the election; whereas the swarajists wanted only to temporise. At the moment of writing, the results of the election are not fully known. But it is a foregone conclusion that the swarajists will lose ground. Nowhere will they have an independent majority to carry on their old tactics. So they will approach the Gauhati congress to revise the decisions of the Kanpur congress. The endeavour will be made to trick the National Congress into sanctioning a policy of compromise dictated by the interests of the upper and middle-class minority.

The authority of the National Congress will be asserted, it will regain its position as the supreme organ of the Indian people, only if at Gauhati the tricky politics of the bourgeois leaders are frustrated. This can be done by mobilising the rank and file on a platform of revolutionary nationalism.

Contradictions inside the Swaraj Party

One by one the consciously bourgeois elements have gone out of the Swaraj Party. But unfortunately the leadership of the party still remains predominantly bourgeois. The left-opposition which saved the party by repudiating the treacherous Sabarmati pact, and which made itself felt in Bengal, is still incapable of and unwilling to revolt openly against the bourgeois leaders. But the Swaraj Party will not be able to become a party of the people, leader of the fight for national freedom, until and unless it breaks away completely from the bourgeoisie, seeking compromise with imperialism.

The weakness of the Swaraj Party has always been the contradiction between the leadership and the ranks. The programme and policy of the party have always been dictated by the interests of the capitalist and land-owning classes; but the members and adherents of the party largely hail from other sections of society. The party has always defended aristocratic and bourgeois interests while making some meaningless gestures to hoodwink its revolutionary following. But in course of time even these meaningless gestures became somewhat harmful to the agreement between British imperialism and the native upper classes. The Swaraj Party stood at the parting of ways. It must completely betray its petty-bourgeois followers or forfeit the votes of the upper and middle classes. The latter eventuality would be fatal for a party which had staked its existence on the success of a parliamentary policy.

Serving as a connecting link with the people, the petty bourgeoisie give the Swaraj Party a national significance. But most of them cannot give it the vote. Connection with

the popular masses would be vital for the party that wants to lead a revolutionary fight. For a party depending exclusively on parliamentary action, however, the electorate is more important than the nation. The class composition of the present electorate demands that any party seeking its vote must be committed to defending capitalist and landowning interests. Should these interests conflict with those of the nation, the latter must be betrayed.

This was the vital issue in the controversy that raged in the period immediately preceding the elections. The bourgeois leaders who still remained at the head of the Swaraj Party were called upon to speak clearly on this point: Would they throw overboard their trusting lower-middle class following, betray the people and stand openly as the spokesmen of the capitalist and landowning classes? They evaded a straight answer. By means of sophistry and hair-splitting over formalities, they deceived the party. Actually, however, they have betrayed the party and the nation. Their insistence upon staking the future of the party on the verdict of the electorate is a violation of the sovereignty of the people. They would make not only the Swaraj Party, but the National Congress, an instrument to be used in the interests of the small minority-enfranchised by the grace of Britain.

The Programme must be Changed

The Swaraj Party cannot rescue itself from the deadening grip of bourgeois influence unless it adopts a new programme. A new programme reflecting the interests of the people and providing for militant mass action for the realisation of national freedom will put the leaders to the test. They must either accept that programme and thereby burn the bridge over which they want surreptitiously to sneak over to the camp of the bourgeoisie with the party in their pocket, or leave the party, following the example of their spiritual comrades who have preceded them.

The programme of the Swaraj Party is essentially a programme of bourgeois-nationalism. Literally, it is ambiguous. For example, while formulating its broad principles at Gaya, C. R. Das said:

“Swaraj is indefinable, and it is not to be confused with any particular system of government. Swaraj is the natural expression of the national mind, and must necessarily cover the whole history of the nation.”

This statement ought to be laughed at, were it not so tendentious. Das could not have been able to carry the best elements in the nationalist movement with him had he at that critical period defined Swaraj, which was enunciated as an undefinable metaphysical category at Gaya, in the course of two years and a half assumed a very definite material form—a particular system of government. At Faridpur, the Swarajist leader defined swaraj as dominion status within the British Empire. The party, intellectually paralysed by the cult of hero worship, could not even ask the leader how such a modest place on the outskirts of the British Empire would be “the natural expression of the national mind covering the whole history of the nation.”

Dominion status is not an expression of the national mind. It corresponds with the interests of the nationalist bourgeoisie. Here is what C. R. Das has had to say in favour of

dominion status: (1) it brings material advantage, (2) it affords complete protection; and (3) it provides all the elements of swaraj (Faridpur speech).

Dominion status will bring material advantage to whom? To the Indian bourgeoisie. An agreement with imperialism will assure the development of Indian capitalism. Protection is needed by those who have something to protect. They again are the capitalist and landowning classes who are afraid that national revolution involving the worker and peasant masses might encroach upon their preserves. The classes of Indian society that live and thrive by exploiting the toiling masses and to whom national freedom means the freedom to increase this exploitation, want the protection of British imperialism against the possible revolt of the people. This is the meaning of dominion status. Material advantages for the Indian bourgeoisie and protection of the rights and privileges of exploiting classes—these are the principal elements of the swaraj, which the founder of the Swaraj Party desired to see established.

So long as the Swaraj Party stands by the programme outlined at Gaya and expounded in detail at Faridpur by its founder, it cannot claim to be essentially different from the other nationalist parties. It must go the same way as that pursued by other parties committed to the defence of the upper classes. Even dominion status is a far cry. It won't be granted by imperialism just for the asking. There must be a long period of apprenticeship, which must be served by co-operating with imperialism on the basis of the reforms. The nationalist bourgeoisie are anxious to serve this apprenticeship to qualify for a further instalment of concessions—economic and political.

This is the situation in which the Congress meets at Gauhati. It must choose between the enfranchised 2.2 percent and the unfranchised, oppressed and exploited 97.8 per cent of the nation. The hypocritical policy of shouting "swaraj for the 98 per cent" and doing the bidding of the 2 per cent cannot be carried on any longer without ruining the nationalist movement, without prostituting the name and prestige of the National Congress.

The opinion of the *Forward* quoted above, and more than one pronouncement of the swarajist leaders in a similar strain, do not leave any doubt about the policy that will be pressed upon the Congress as soon as the results of the election are known. In the very unlikely event of the swarajists increasing their forces in the councils or even retaining their present strength, they will accept office. The fiasco of the last two years cannot be repeated all over again. In the much more likely eventuality of their defeat in the polls, they will, of course, change their policy and try to secure the sanction of the Congress for this bankrupt policy of surrender and compromise.

The National Congress can save itself only in one way.

It is roundly repudiating the programme and policy that seek to make it an instrument of parties betraying national interests for the sake of a small minority. The repudiation of the bankrupt policy of bourgeois nationalism should be followed by the adoption of a program of democratic national freedom. Pseudo-parliamentarism should be replaced by militant mass action. The policy of surrender and compromise should be discarded in favour of a policy of courageous and genuine fight with

imperialism. The National Congress should be liberated from the treacherous bourgeois leadership and brought under the inspiring influence of a republican people's party.

Communal Conflicts

Many must have been discouraged by the communal conflicts that have been devastating the country during the last years. It is certainly a discouraging phenomenon. But here again a party of the people will find the solution. While the upper classes fight for rights and privileges, the masses of both the communities have one very vital thing in common. It is exploitation. Hindu and Muslim workers are sweated in the same factory. Hindu and Muslim peasants toil on the land, side by side to be equally robbed by the landlord, the money-lender and the agents of imperialism. The Muslim worker is not better paid when the employer is his co-religionist. Nor does a Hindu landlord take less rent from a Hindu than from a Muslim tenant.

The same rule largely applies to the exploited middle classes (petty intellectuals, small traders, artisans, etc.). United by the common tie of exploitation 98 per cent of the entire people have no reason to be involved in the communal conflicts. Help them to be conscious of their economic interests, give them a courageous lead to fight against their common enemy, the forces of exploitation, and the bottom will be knocked out of the insidious policy of provoking communal conflict. It is true this cannot be done overnight. But there is no other remedy for the cancer of communalism which eats into the vitals of the nationalist movement.

The collapse of the nationalist movement has given an impetus to the communal conflict. Reorganisation of the nationalist movement with a program of militant mass action will remove this impetus. Non-cooperation and the khilafat agitation quickened religious fanaticism at the expenses of political consciousness. This grave error must be rectified by placing the nationalist movement on a solid secular basis. The masses should be mobilised under the banner of nationalism with slogans of immediate economic demands. Land tenure, land rent, usurers' charges, prices, wages, working conditions, primary education—these should be the main topics of agitation. On every one of these points, vitally concerning the life of the people, the identity of interest can be made clear very easily. Agitation along these lines, therefore, will provide for the safest guarantee against communal tension, while building up a solid basis for the nationalist movement.

Democratic principles, however, do not operate against the interests of national minorities. The mutual distrust between the Hindus and Muslims in India has a historical background, the communal question, therefore, should be approached as the question of a national minority. One of the main planks in the nationalist platform must be the protection for national and communal minorities. If the nationalist movement fails to guarantee this protection, imperialism gets the chance of offering it and thus drives a wedge straight through the nation.

The behaviour and pronouncements of more than one prominent Hindu nationalist leader gives the Muslims sufficient reason for suspicion. The extra-territorial patriotism of a section of the Muslim leaders, on the other hand, gives a handle to the injurious

propaganda of the Hindu reaction aries. Excesses on both sides should be avoided. The surest guarantee against communalism is the mobilisation of the masses on the basis of their economic interests. Class lines cut deeply across the superficial and often artificially drawn communal lines.

National Interest and Class Interest

The recrudescence of communal conflicts has been very harmful to the nationalist movement; but the present decomposition of the movement is caused primarily by the conflict of class interests inside the nationalist ranks. Indian society is as much divided into classes as capitalist society in any other country.

The relation of British imperialism with the different classes of Indian society is not uniform. The nation is oppressed and exploited by a foreign power. But the pressure of this oppression does not fall equally on all the strata of the Indian population. The object of exploitation is not the entire people, but only the classes that produce wealth by their labour-power. These are the workers and peasants constituting over 90 per cent of the nation. The quarrel between imperialism and the upper classes of Indian society is a quarrel over the booty. Native landlords and capitalists also live at the expense of the producing masses. But the monopolist policy of imperialism did not permit them an unrestricted economic development which would increase their capacity to exploit the working class. The major portion of the values produced by the Indian workers and peasants go to swell the pockets of imperialism. The Indian bourgeoisie were allowed only a modest middleman's share. In course of time they have become dissatisfied with this small portion of the booty. They wanted an ever-increasing share and finally the prior right over the entire resources of labour-power of the Indian masses.

The Indian bourgeoisie, however, could not realise their aspirations for the mastery of the country without challenging the monopoly of imperialism. This again they can not do by themselves. India cannot become free from foreign domination except through the revolutionary action of the entire people. But the popular revolt against imperialism is not caused by the grievances of the nationalist bourgeoisie. It has its own causes. The popular masses rise against exploitation as such. Consequently, the nationalist bourgeoisie, who would like to be the sole masters and rulers of the country, do not dare to use the weapon which alone can seriously threaten the imperialist hold on the country. National interests—the interests of the 98 per cent—are thus sacrificed for class interests. The attempt to conquer sole mastery over the country being fraught with possible danger of immense gravity, the nationalist bourgeoisie enter into agreement with imperialism to exploit the Indian people jointly.

Why does imperialism enter into such an agreement? There are several reasons. Firstly, the general crisis of capitalism has weakened the basis of imperialism so much that the policy of the old classical colonialism must be revised. Secondly, the Indian market is attacked by Japan, USA, Germany, etc.; only goods manufactured in India with cheap labour can compete with these intruders. Therefore Britain adopts the policy of industrialising India under the domination of imperialist finance. Thirdly, the decline of the accumulation of capital in Britain does not permit her to spare sufficient capital to

carry on the programme of industrialising India. She must draw Indian capital into operation. Fourthly, the mass character of the post-war nationalist movement forces imperialism to win over to its side ever-wider strata of the native society.

A foreign power cannot rule a country for a long time unless supported by a certain native element. A government to be stable must have a social basis. Up to the world war, two social factors supported the British government in India. They were the landowning class and the peasantry. These two together constitute a majority of the population. So imperialism had a sure social base. But these two social forces did not support the British government in the same way. The landowning class gave positive, conscious support, while the peasantry provided an unconscious support, by virtue of its passive loyalty. Since the war, the situation has changed. The passive loyalty of the peasant masses has been disturbed. It has been replaced by a state of seething revolt which breaks out from time to time; consequently, the basis of imperialism is now seriously shaken. A new ally must be found to reinforce it.

The new ally is the nationalist bourgeoisie (bankers, merchants, manufacturers, high officials and the professional people closely connected with these classes). In the years following the war, the nationalist movement was heading towards revolution. The ominous prospects were dreaded by a nationalist bourgeoisie. They decided to travel the safer way, and accept the junior partnership with imperialism in the exploitation of the Indian people.

The defection of the bourgeoisie left its mark on the nationalist movement. Compromise and surrender became the policy. This sacrifice of the people on the altar of class interest has been carried on by stages ever since 1922. The last stage will be when the new legislative assembly and council meet. It does not matter what form it will take. There may still be staged the farce of his majesty's opposition. But, essentially, the parties representing the bourgeoisie will give up all real resistance to imperialism and co-operate—either “honourably” or “responsively”—with the British government.

What is to be Done?

The reconciliation of the antagonism between imperialism and the native bourgeoisie, however, does not remove the basic cause of a national revolution. The necessity of freedom for the Indian people is not determined by the sectional interests of the nationalist bourgeoisie. The agreement between imperialism and the native bourgeoisie does not free the Indian people from political domination and economic exploitation. Nearly 98 per cent of the population still remains without any political rights. Economic concessions to native capitalism are not and will not be made by reducing the share of imperialism. The latter will increase the exploitation of the labouring masses who will be forced to produce value for native capitalism over and above what they produce for imperialism. This being the case, the fight for national freedom must be continued. The nationalist movement must be a movement of the masses with a programme reflecting the interests of the majority of the people. The programme of the

movement must be free from all haziness and ambiguity, such as has been the case with the swarajist programme.

Particularly clear should be the position of the nationalist movement on the agrarian question. The peasantry constitute over 70 per cent of the population. It is the most important economic factor in the present state of Indian society. It will play a decisive role in the movement for national liberation. The fight for the peasantry should be one of the main tasks of the nationalist movement. Imperialism is endeavouring skilfully to regain the confidence of the peasantry. During the last years, it has forced upon the landowning class tenancy reform laws in several provinces. This has enabled it to take in hand the alarming situation created by the acute agrarian disturbances in 1919–21. The next step in the attempt to regain the confidence of the peasantry is the royal commission on agriculture. Needless to say that the motive behind all these moves is not to help the peasantry, but to deceive them. Brutal exploitation of the peasant masses is the main source of imperialist profit from India. To frustrate the sinister designs of imperialism to regain the confidence of the peasantry, the nationalist movement must adopt a radical agrarian programme and expose the motive of the so-called reform measures passed or proposed by the government.

The following occurred in the manifesto issued by the Swaraj Party on the eve of the 1923 elections:

“It is true that the party stands for justice to the tenant, but poor indeed will be the quality of that justice if it involves any injustice to the landlord.”

If the nationalist movement wants to secure active support of the peasant masses, it must liberate itself from the reactionary point of view expressed in this quotation. Such a programme is necessary for a party fishing for the vote of the landed gentry; but it is positively harmful for a party that proposes to lead the popular masses in the fight for freedom. If you are so careful as not to touch the privileged position of the landowners, you can only do injustice to the peasantry. The landowning class is a social parasite that sucks the blood of the peasantry. Then, over nearly half the country, the government is the landlord. The maxim of justice should also apply there.

Thus the swarajist program about the peasantry not only protects the parasitic landowners: it gives British imperialism an unlimited lease of life. The agrarian programme of the nationalist movement must be to defend the interests of the peasantry. It should be directed ruthlessly against all the agencies, foreign and native, that exploit the peasantry.

The Programme of the Nationalist Movement

The movement for national freedom can be led to victory only by a party of the people. Unless it is led by a party which acts according to a clearly-defined programme, the nationalist movement will be floundering like a rudderless ship. It is remarkable that for years the leaders did not tell the country what exactly was the object of the nationalist movement. Swaraj was defined as everything but what it is—national independence. The nationalist movement loses all meaning if its object is not to secure national freedom. National freedom — it is a very clear expression. It does not require any legal or

constitutional commentary. It means freedom for the people to establish its own government—to manage its own affairs, political, economic, cultural and so forth. Up till now this fundamental point of the nationalist programme has not been clearly and squarely placed before the country. This must be done as the first act in reorganising the nationalist movement. Let not the controversy over the conditions under which nationalists should accept office confuse the main issue. All the existing nationalist parties today are committed to the programme of dominion status. Even that much is not demanded immediately. Some measure of responsibility to the present unrepresentative legislature would placate the most radical element. This is no struggle for national freedom. It is mockery. It is a downright betrayal of the nation.

The people must have freedom, complete and unconditional. There must be a people's party to demand and fight for this freedom.

Then, national freedom is not a thing in itself. National freedom would not be worth having and fighting for if it did not bring the people political and economic rights that they are deprived of under the present conditions. The concrete form of national freedom will be the establishment of a *republican state* based on advanced democratic principles.

A national assembly elected by universal adult (man and woman) suffrage will be the supreme organ of the people. All caste and class privileges will be abolished. The country will be thoroughly democratised.

To the masses, national freedom must offer more concrete advantages. It must remove their immediate economic grievances and guarantee them a higher standard of life. National freedom must establish the principle: *The land belongs to the tiller.* Parasitic classes living in luxury on unearned incomes from land will be deprived of their vested interest. The enormous sums that swell the pockets of landowning class will go to relieve the burden on the peasantry. Land rent will be reduced all round. Poor peasants, eking out a miserable existence on uneconomic holdings will be entirely exempt from rent. The peasantry will be protected against the excesses of the money-lenders. The national government will help the peasantry by means of extensive agrarian credits. The cultural level of the peasantry will be raised through the introduction of machinery in agriculture and through free primary education.

The national government will guarantee the industrial workers an *eight-hour day and minimum living wage*. There will be legislation as regards decent working conditions and housing. Unemployed workers will be taken care of by the state.

Public utilities such as railways, waterways, telegraphs etc. will be the property of the nation. They will be operated not for private profit, but for the use of the public.

Workers (also peasants) will have full freedom to combine, and the right to strike to defend their interests.

There will be complete freedom of religion and worship. National and communal minorities will enjoy the right of autonomy.

These are the main points of the programme which will unite the overwhelming majority of the people and set them in irresistible action. The programme of bourgeois nationalism (defence of the interests of the capitalist and landowning classes) has betrayed the nation. The nation must assert itself and move towards freedom in spite of the treachery and timidity of the bourgeoisie. The National Congress must be liberated from the influence of hypocritical bourgeois politicians. Those willing to fight honestly and courageously for freedom must become the spokesmen of the people. The party that wishes to lead the struggle for national liberation must become the party of the people, representing not the fortunate few of the electorate, but the unfranchised majority. Council chambers present too restricted a field of operation for the party of the people, which must find much wider spheres of action.

National independence and complete democratisation of national life in every respect—these are the main planks of the nationalist platform. The battle to realise this programme must be fought with the slogan: "*Land, Bread and Education.*"

1 December 1926

THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF INDIA