

# The United Front, the Peasant Movement and the Communist Party

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Political developments in our country during the last two years have shown how wrong was the oversimplified understanding of United Front which many of us had before and after the 1951-52 general elections – the understanding that if only the non-Congress parties, groups and individuals joined their forces and formed a united Opposition, they could defeat the Congress at the polls and subsequently form a non-Congress Government.

For, not only has the Congress been able to come back to power despite the minority of votes secured by it in the country as a whole. It has also succeeded in winning over many of those elements which during the last general elections had opposed it – like the Cochin and Praja-Republican Parties in Travancore-Cochin, Commonweal and Tamilnad Toilers Parties in Madras, a big section of the Akalis in PEPSU and of Jagirdars in Rajasthan, etc. The result was seen not only in the fact that two groups which had joined the UDF in Madras – the Tamilnad Toilers Party and the Commonweal – were now represented in the Congress Government but also in the fact that both in Travancore-Cochin and PEPSU, the Congress could make a better show during the recent elections than in 1951-52.

The last two years have, at the same time, shown that what appeared as the solid force of the Congress in 1951-52 has shown signs of crack-up. The number of Ministerial crises that have developed in the various States during the last two years – both those crises which resulted in Ministerial changes as well as those which were patched, up – show that the apparent consolidation of the forces of the Right under the banner of the Congress is by no means a stable consolidation.

Other parties like the PSP, RSP, Forward Bloc, Peasants' and Workers' Party, etc. had also made similar efforts at consolidation and have had to face similar internal crises. It is enough to recall such developments as the merger of KMPP and Socialist Party to form the PSP; Nehru-Jayaprakash talks which led to an internal crisis in PSP; attempts made by RSP, PWP and certain other parties of the Left to form what was called an "All-India Marxist Front"; the "United Front of Non-Congress, Non-Communist Parties" formed in 1952 on the slogan of "Sanctions Against Pakistan". We will then see how complicated are the mutual relations of the different parties of the Opposition.

Why are such shifts taking place in all the political parties? How should the Communist Party study these shifts? How should it work out its policy toward each of these parties in the light of these shifts? These are the questions to which the Indian Communists should seek to get answers.

They will therefore study the selected works of Mao Tse-tung, of which the First Volume has already appeared and other volumes are expected. For, they contain the rich lessons of the struggle waged by the Communist Party of China to build the anti-imperialist, anti-feudal United Front under the leadership of the working class.

While we would, of course, not try to find parallels in our country's political situation to the situations that arose in China at various stages, while we would examine the concrete conditions in our own country in order to decide our strategy and tactics, we would go again and again to see how, at the various turns and twists which in the history of the political developments in China, the Chinese Communist Party led by Comrade Mao Tse-tung combined flexibility in tactics with firm adherence to the fundamentals. The uncompromising struggle which the Chinese Party leadership headed by Comrade Mao waged against opportunism, on the one hand, and close-door sectarianism, on the other; in evolving correct concrete tactics for each phase of the development of the revolution is an example for us to study, assimilate and *apply*, not copy.

#### **UNITED FRONT AND CLASS STRUGGLE**

The first volume of the Selected Works which is now available and, which contains Comrade Mao's important works in the 12-year period of 1926-37 begins with an article entitled "Analysis of the Classes in Chinese Society". This article which was written in March, 1926, poses the fundamental question of United Front. The very opening of the article is almost a question, almost a challenge, to us.

"Who are our enemies and who are our friends?" It is with this question that Comrade Mao opens the first paragraph of his article. "This question," he continues, "is one of primary importance in the revolution. All past revolutionary struggles in China achieved very little, basically because the revolutionaries were unable to unite their real friends to attack their real enemies. A revolutionary party is the guide of the masses, and no revolution ever succeeds when the revolutionary party leads it astray. To make sure that we will not lead our revolution astray but will achieve positive success, we must pay attention to uniting our real friends to attack our real enemies." (Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung, Vol. 1, p. 13.)

Comrade Mao, however, makes it clear that, when he speaks of friends and enemies, he does not speak of individuals, groups or parties but *classes*.

Individuals, groups and parties do, of course, count in politics and their mutual relations should be very carefully studied in evolving correct tactics of United Front. It is because of this that in the subsequent articles collected in this volume, we find a very detailed examination of the changes that developed inside the KMT and in the attitudes of even individuals.

How the treatment meted out by the revolutionary elements even to individuals will play a decisive part in changing the course of history is seen in the efforts made by the

Chinese Communist Party to mediate in the Sian Incident. Comrade Mao considered the peaceful settlement of the Sian Incident as a blow dealt to “the intrigues of the Japanese imperialists and the Chinese punitive group who deployed the troops for civil war, fomented internal dissension and tried to put Chiang into a death trap during the Sian Incident.... This indication of Chiang’s awakening to reason may be regarded as a sign of the Kuomintang’s willingness to end its ten-year-old erroneous policy.” (P. 254.)

It is, however, not these individuals, groups and parties that ultimately decide the course of history; it is not their mutual relations that have to be straightened out in our efforts to build the United Front. For, it is the millions of *people, divided into classes*, that ultimately decide the course of historical development; the individuals, groups and parties which undoubtedly play their part in history do so as representatives of certain definite classes. That is why any effort at building a United Front in a non-class way—effort at uniting certain parties, groups and individuals against certain other parties, groups and individuals, with no consideration being given to the question of the class or classes represented by these parties, groups and individuals arrayed against each other—is bound to lead us to wrong conclusions and to total disappointment.

Comrade Mao says:

“To distinguish real friends from real enemies, we must make a general analysis of the economic status of the various classes in Chinese society and of their respective attitudes towards the revolution.” (P. 13.)

This emphasis on classes as the major forces in the development of history makes it necessary for us, as it was for the Chinese Communist Party, to examine what are the classes that have to be united and how they are to be united. It also makes it necessary for us to examine what are the classes against whom the United Front has to be built.

It is for this reason that the first article, “Analysis of Classes in Chinese Society,” should be read together with the second article, “Report of an Investigation into the Peasant Movement in Hunan.” He closes the first article with the definition of who the enemies and friends of the people are:

“...all those in league with imperialism — the warlords, bureaucrats, the compradors, the big landlords and the reactionary section of the intelligentsia dependent on them — are our enemies”;

“The industrial proletariat is the leading force in our revolution”;

“All sections of the semi-proletariat and the petty -bourgeoisie are our closest friends.”

“As to the vacillating middle class, its right wing may become our enemy and its left wing may become our friend, but we must be constantly on our guard towards the latter and not allow it to create confusion in our front.” (P. 20.)

### **PEASANT MOVEMENT-THE CRUCIAL ELEMENT**

Now, what exactly is to be achieved by uniting our closest friends? It is to help the million-headed peasantry to rise in revolt against their oppressors. It is to this question that Comrade Mao addresses himself in the second article collected in this volume. He says:

“For the rise of the present peasant movement is a colossal event. In a very short time, in China’s central, southern and northern provinces, several hundred million peasants will rise like a tornado or tempest, a force so extraordinarily swift and violent that no power, however great, will be able to suppress it. They will break all trammels that now bind them and rush forward along the road to liberation. They will send all imperialists, warlords, corrupt officials, local bullies and bad gentry to their graves. All revolutionary parties and all revolutionary comrades will stand before them to be tested, and to be accepted or rejected as they decide.” (Pp. 21-22.)

He goes on to place three alternatives before the revolutionaries:

“To march at their head and lead them?

“Or to follow at their rear, gesticulating at them and criticising them?

“Or to face them as opponents?

“Every Chinese is free to choose among the three alternatives, but circumstances demand that a quick choice be made.” (P. 22.)

Comrade Mao and his colleagues in the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, i.e., those leaders of the CPC who carried on a consistent struggle against opportunism of both the Right as well as of the “Left” variety, had no hesitation in choosing the first alternative. The whole article, “Report on an Investigation”, is a masterpiece of defending and glorifying the great deeds of the peasant masses on the move, deeds which created utter panic among the opportunists like Chen Tu-hsiu.

“When I first arrived in Changsha, I met people from various circles and picked up a good deal of street gossip. From the middle strata upwards to the right-wingers of the Kuomintang, there was not a single person who did not summarise the whole thing in one phrase: ‘An awful mess!’ Even quite revolutionary people, carried away by the opinion of the ‘awful mess’ school which prevailed like a storm over the whole city, became downhearted at the very thought of the conditions in the countryside, and could not deny the word ‘mess’. Even very progressive people could only remark, ‘Indeed a mess, but inevitable in the course of the revolution’, In a word, nobody could categorically deny the word ‘mess!’ ” (Pp. 24-25.)

Comrade Mao characterises this “awful mess theory as a theory “which, in line with the interests of the landlords, aims at combating the rise of the peasants, a theory of the landlord class for preserving the old order of feudalism and obstructing the establishment of a new order of democracy and a counter-revolutionary theory” (p. 25).

### **TASK OF REVOLUTIONARIES**

Asking all revolutionary comrades not to blindly repeat it, Comrade Mao goes on —

“If you have firmly established your revolutionary view. point and have furthermore gone the round of the villages for a look, you will feel overjoyed as never before. There, great throngs of tens of thousands of slaves, i.e. the peasants, are overthrowing their cannibal enemies. Their actions are absolutely correct; their actions are very good indeed! ‘Very good indeed!’ is the theory of the peasants and of all other revolutionaries. Every revolutionary comrade should know that the national revolution requires a profound change in the countryside. The Revolution of 1911 did not bring about the

change, hence its failure. Now the change is taking place, which is an important factor necessary for completing the revolution. Every revolutionary comrade must support this change, or he will be taking the counter-revolutionary stand". (Pp. 25-26.)

Combating the theory of peasant associations having gone "rather too far in its present actions" and countering the slogan that "the peasant movement is a movement of the riff-raff, movement of the lazy peasants" with the slogan that the peasants who are in revolt are the "vanguard of the revolution," Comrade Mao lists "Fourteen Great Deeds" which the peasantry, under the leadership of their associations, have performed in the course of the movement which was considered an "awful mess" by the landlords and their agents. The very mention of the Fourteen Great Deeds show how important it is in Comrade Mao's opinion that the peasants are in revolt. Beginning with the "organising of peasants into the peasant associations" which, according to Comrade Mao, is the first of the Fourteen Great Deeds, we find the following:

- Dealing political blows against the landlords;

- Dealing economic blows against the landlords;

- Overthrowing the feudal rule of the local bullies and bad gentry;

- Overthrowing the landlords armed forces and building up the peasants' armed forces;

- Overthrowing the political power of His Excellency the County Magistrate and his Bailiffs;

- Overthrowing clan authority of the elders and ancestral temples, the theocratic authority of the city gods and local deities, and the masculine authority of the husbands;

- Extending Political Agitation;

- The peasants' prohibitions (like prohibition of gambling, opium smuggling, vagabondage, etc.);

- Eliminating banditry;

- Abolishing exorbitant levies;

- Cultural movement;

- The co-operative movement;

- Building roads and embankments:

All the fourteen deeds enumerated above have been accomplished by the peasants under the leadership of the peasant associations. Considering the general spirit in which they have been carried out and the revolutionary significance they possess, I would ask the reader to think them over and say which of them is bad? I think that only the local bullies and bad gentry I will say that they are bad." (pp. 58-59)

### **MAO'S STRUGGLE AGAINST OPPORTUNISM**

It was with regard to this approach to the revolutionary peasant movement that Comrade Mao and his colleagues had to fight a prolonged struggle inside the Party.

There was a section of the Party leadership, led by en Tu-hsiu, which opposed this approach with their own understanding of United Front as the alliance between the bourgeoisie and proletariat. Comrade Mao had to carry on a prolonged struggle against this. He argued:

“Although the Chinese bourgeoisie may take part in the revolutionary war on certain historical occasions yet, owing to its selfish character, and its lack of political and economic independence, it is neither willing nor able to lead China’s revolutionary war to complete victory.”

This is a theme which occurs again and again in Comrade Mao’s writings. As a matter of fact, the whole volume before us may be said to be a historical narrative of how the bourgeoisie and its various sections changed their position from time to time and how the proletariat led by the Communist Party assessed these changes and changed its own tactics accordingly. Taking advantage of whatever oppositional role the bourgeoisie played at different stages in the history of China, doing the utmost to overcome the vacillations of the bourgeoisie, the Communist Party headed by Comrade Mao at all times, exercised vigilance and took prompt and effective steps against the bourgeoisie whenever, it took a counter-revolutionary or compromising stand.

There was, at the same time, another group of Party leaders headed by Li Li-san and Wang Ming who would have nothing to do with the bourgeoisie, nothing to do either with the petty bourgeoisie or the peasantry, but would take what Comrade Mao calls the stand of close-door sectarianism. Against the arguments advanced by this group, Comrade Mao said:

“The content of China’s democratic revolution according to the directives of the Third International and the Party Centre, includes overthrowing the rule in China of imperialism and its tools, the warlords, so as to complete the national revolution, and carrying out the agrarian revolution so as to eliminate feudal exploitation of the peasants by the landed gentry.” (P. 64.)

Comrade Mao draws attention both to the strength and to the weakness of the peasantry, and of the urban petty bourgeoisie. They are, according to him, “willing to take part actively in the revolutionary war and to bring about its complete victory. They are the main force in the revolutionary war.” He, however, warns: “Small-scale production which is their characteristic and limits their political outlook (a section among the unemployed being imbued with anarchist ideology), renders them unable to give correct leadership.

It is these specific features of the bourgeoisie, peasantry and the urban petty bourgeoisie that make it extremely necessary for the Party of the proletariat to carry on an incessant struggle against the non-proletarian outlook which manifests itself inside the Party itself. It was through this struggle that Comrade Mao was able to steel the Communist Party of China and make it a real Bolshevik Party. We are eagerly waiting for the further volumes of his works which are sure to contain the material on which the various rectification campaigns run by the Communist Party of China in the 1940s and in subsequent years.

### **BOLSHEVISATION THROUGH STRUGGLE AGAINST ALIEN IDEOLOGIES**

However, even this first volume contains a very important work “*On the Rectification of Incorrect Ideas in the Party*” which is the result of such struggles conducted by

Comrade Mao and his colleagues as early as in 1929. In this important work of his, Comrade Mao goes to the root of incorrect ideas developing in the Party.

“The source of various incorrect ideas in the Party organisation in the Fourth Army lies, of course, in the fact that the Party’s organisational base is largely made up of peasants and other elements of petty-bourgeois origin; yet the failure of the Party’s leading bodies to wage a concerted and determined struggle against these incorrect ideas and to educate the members along the correct line is also an important cause of the existence and growth of such incorrect ideas.” (P. 105,)

The history of the last 25 years has shown that, in spite of the fact that in its social composition the Communist Party of China consists of a majority of members drawn from the peasantry and the urban petty bourgeoisie, it has been able to develop a real proletarian outlook precisely because Comrade Mao and his colleagues carried on a continuous, systematic struggle against these incorrect ideas which had their source in the non-proletarian origin of the majority of Party members.

The rectification of incorrect ideas in the Party of the proletariat has, of course, to be carried on in different ways in different countries and even in one country, in different ways in different phases of its history. It would, therefore, be incorrect to copy all that Comrade Mao speaks in this article. It would, however, be useful for us to study and ponder over several points made by Comrade Mao in this article: We will give just a few examples:

*Extreme Democratisation* : “... it should be pointed out that the source of extreme democratisation lies in the nature of the petty bourgeoisie, which is easy-going and averse to discipline. Such a nature, having found its way into the Party, manifests itself politically and organisationally as the idea of extreme democratisation. This idea is basically incompatible with the fighting, tasks of the proletariat.” (P. 109.)

*Absolute Equalitarianism*: “Like extreme democratisation in political matters, absolute equalitarianism can be traced back to an economy of handicrafts and small peasant farming as its source, the only difference being that the one manifests itself in political life and the other in material life.” (P. 111.) :

*Adventurism*: “Adventurism, in its social source, is a combination of the ideology of the *lumpen*-proletariat with that of the petty bourgeoisie.” (P. 115.)

It was in the process of this struggle against incorrect ideas that Comrade Mao wrote the significant philosophical work, ‘On Practice’, with which this first volume ends. This is a work which will be studied and re-studied in our country. For, the tendency against which Comrade Mao is fighting here is manifesting itself in various forms in our own country.

“Knowledge starts with practice, reaches the theoretical plane via practice, and then has to return to practice. The active function of knowledge not only manifests itself in the active leap from perceptual knowledge to rational knowledge, but also—and this is the most important—in the leap from rational knowledge to revolutionary practice.” (Pp. 292-3.).

This is a lesson which we have to assimilate and apply when we deal with the subject with which we open this review—United Front.

The very concept of a United Front is the result of practice, the practice of the revolutionary movement in the world in general, and in our country in particular. But, having accepted that concept, we have begun to practise it and, in the course of that we have learnt many new lessons. These new lessons have now to be assimilated and generalised, so that they may guide us in future practice. Without constantly drawing such lessons and conclusions from the practice of building United Front, we cannot strengthen the United Front movement as a whole. It is in fact this that our own Central Committee has tried to do and are still trying to do. In this task Comrade Mao's works will be of great help.