

## II

### THE PATH EMERGES FROM OUR OWN PAST

SUCH A POSING of the question of India's path to socialism and the unification of the socialist forces in India itself suggests the correct approach to the question of elaborating the path we have to follow.

The path to socialism in India and the goal itself are a continuity, a historical fulfilment of the struggle and social aspirations that led us to national freedom.

Obviously the two stages are not identical. The first represented the end of foreign colonial rule and the establishment of national independence. It was a historic milestone in the march of the Indian people to freedom, progress and prosperity. Nonetheless it did not signify the economic and social emancipation of the people, the achievement of socialist power, which is the socialist revolution. Nineteen years after independence, that revolution has yet to come.

At the same time, the continuity lies in this, and that is most vital, that while the focus of the national freedom movement was against foreign rule, its most powerful driving impulse and of the masses who participated in it was undoubtedly that of complete social and economic emancipation, the abolition of all forms of exploitation and oppression.

As early as in the first non-cooperation movement, Gandhiji said that freedom cannot appear before the people except in the form of bread. Addressing the Round Table Conference in London in 1931, he said:

Above all, the Congress represents, in its essence, the dumb, semi-starved millions scattered over the length and breadth of the land. Every interest which, in the opinion of the Congress, is worthy of protection has to subserve the interests of these dumb millions; and so you find now and again apparently a clash between several interests, and if this is a genuine, real clash, I have no

hesitation in saying, on behalf of the Congress, that the Congress will sacrifice every interest for the sake of the interests of the dumb millions.

In his booklet *Whither India?* published in 1933, Jawaharlal Nehru wrote:

Indian freedom is necessary because the burden on the Indian masses as well as the middle class is too heavy to be borne and must be lightened and done away with. The measure of freedom is the extent to which this burden is removed. This burden is due to the vested interests of a foreign government as well as those of certain groups and classes in India and abroad.... If an indigenous government took the place of the foreign government and kept all the vested interests intact, this would not even be the shadow of freedom. (p. 19)

Further, in the same booklet, we have:

The exploited and suffering masses must carry on the struggle, for their drill sergeant is hunger. Swaraj or freedom from exploitation for them is not a fine paper constitution or a problem of the hereafter. India's immediate goal can, therefore, only be considered in terms of the exploitation of her people. There is no room for quibbling when the fate of nations and millions of human beings is at stake.

Then we have the resolutions of the Karachi Congress session of 1931, the Faizpur session of 1937, the reports of the National Planning Committee of that period, and so on.

Apart from incorporating innumerable concrete demands of the peasantry and the working class, these resolutions and documents projected the picture of independent India as one in which the tiller of the soil would become the owner of his land, key and vital industries would become social property, the state would have a dominant position in national economy, and as the Quit India resolution of 1942 stated, 'all power should belong to workers in the factories and peasants in the fields'.

This is not to say that even in that period the leadership of the Congress was capable of delivering the goods in terms of all these declarations and commitments. Even then it had its class limitations. The point is that these resolutions and declarations unquestionably reflected the impulses, urges and aspirations of the *masses in action* which was the essence of our freedom movement.

In fact, the sweep of the freedom movement was actually broader and deeper than what was reflected in the resolutions of the Congress and the mass movement led by it. This is not realised by many, partly because, in volume, the stream represented by the Congress was far bigger than the other streams of the period, and the dominant one in the country. Secondly, the class leadership of the Congress was interested then, and is interested now, in denying the role of the other contributory currents.

But this is a profoundly wrong outlook and understanding. The role of the various currents of our freedom movement cannot be measured in terms of their physical magnitude alone. A qualitative criterion is also needed for the judgment to be truly historical and objective.

If we look up the records of all the popular struggles in the period of the non-cooperation movement after the First World War (between 1919 and 1922); the period of the civil disobedience movement (from 1930 to 1934); and the entire subsequent period between 1936 to 1947 including the Quit India movement; if we study the popular struggles of all these periods (not to mention the decades before the First World War) we get an idea of the gigantic revolutionary upsurge that characterised the developments in India prior to our attainment of independence in 1947.

Most powerful and extensive working-class strikes as also peasant struggles took place during all the massive waves of our freedom movement in the three periods mentioned above. In most of these struggles the workers and peasants put forth, not only their immediate economic demands pertaining to wages, shorter working hours, reduc-

tion in rents and fixity of tenure, etc., but also the demand for swaraj and the ending of British rule.

The Akali movement in its early phase, when it was a part of the national movement, had a peasant aspect in view of the rapacious landlordism practised by the Mahants of the Gurdwaras. The Moplah rebellion was directed against landlordism in Malabar. Hindu and Muslim peasants fought in it jointly until the British rulers deliberately turned it into a Hindu-Muslim conflict.

Many of these struggles developed into violent rebellions against foreign rule and were most brutally crushed by the rulers, e.g. in Punjab in 1918 and Burma in 1931.

Powerful trade unions and kisan sabhas arose out of these struggles, pledged to national independence and also the economic liberation of the toiling people. An independent students' movement developed in the thirties.

Besides, the Ghadar Party developed in the Punjab, anti-imperialist revolutionary terrorist groups developed in Bengal, UP, Punjab and other provinces, and the Communist Party was built as a national party fighting for national freedom and social liberation.

These movements and organisations were the product of a number of contemporary economic and political forces. The immense expansion and sharpening of the freedom movement after the First World War was the first. In fact, many of the leaders of these organisations were devoted followers of Gandhi in the non-cooperation movement.

But they were also inspired by the Russian Revolution which blazoned a new path of national liberation for countries under imperialist rule. Simultaneously, the awakening of the working class and the peasantry in India against capitalist and landlord exploitation, the upsurge of strike struggles and no-rent struggles of the period, had also a tremendous impact on their ideas and activities.

Naturally, these movements and organisations functioned independently and also participated in congress activities and movements. And it is certainly not an exaggerated claim to make that it was the elements represented by them

that were mainly responsible for the radicalisation of the Congress in the pre-independence period. The initiative and pressure, exercised from without and within the Congress, used to be theirs.

The qualitative contribution of these movements and organisations, and mainly, of the Communist Party, to the national movement as a whole was that they struggled to evolve a genuinely people's leadership of the movement in which the working class would become the main driving force, which would assure that, with the attainment of independence, power would pass into the hands of the common people.

They were conscious that if such a development was not brought about, political power in independent India would pass into the hands of the capitalist class, innumerable compromises with imperialism and feudal elements would be made, and all the radical resolutions of the Indian National Congress would end in betrayal.

That is why while working in the Congress the sponsors of these movements also built up independent working-class, peasant and youth organisations. They unleashed working-class and peasant struggles with the support of the Congress where possible, without it where necessary.

The outstanding contribution of Gandhi and Nehru to the task of inspiring, unifying and leading the Indian people to the goal of national independence cannot be questioned. Among them, again, Nehru played a distinct role because of his sensitive reaction to the new urges of the people and his understanding of the international forces of freedom and progress.

At the same time, there is ample evidence to prove that both in 1922 and 1931 Gandhi suspended the mass movement when it threatened to break through the limitations of aims and methods imposed by him on it and give a revolutionary challenge to British rule and the Indian landed and feudal elements.

True, the reason he used to give for the withdrawal was that the people were not yet 'disciplined enough' to stick

to the path of non-violence. But there are plenty of his writings to show that what he actually recoiled from was an *uncompromising* struggle against the economic and political interests of British imperialism, feudal landlords and the Indian princes, which often took a violent form.

In the historic Indian Naval Mutiny of 1946, Gandhi denounced the unity of the Hindu and Muslim seamen as a 'sinful unity'. Many such instances can be given.

Our appreciation and respect for the role of Gandhi and Nehru in the freedom movement should not hinder us from seeing their class limitations, and hence the justifiability of the efforts of those who struggled to build a people's leadership in that movement. Surely not now, after nineteen years of immense hardship and sufferings which our people have had to suffer after independence because of capitalist rule.

Nor does it mean that those who struggled to build such a leadership did not make serious mistakes. It is undoubtedly true that had such mistakes not been made, the transition of independent India to a socialist India would have been far easier and faster.

The problem of India's path to socialism did not fall from the skies, all of a sudden, on 15 August 1947. If one bestows consideration to the organic relationship between the struggle for national independence and its further advance to socialism, one cannot fail to see that the problem was there, though at its incipient stage, even prior to the attainment of national independence.

The essence of this organic relationship lies in the question of leadership. If the toiling people, the working class, the peasantry, the radical intelligentsia, head the national freedom movement, it passes over, far more swiftly and painlessly, from the achievement of national freedom to socialism. If they do not, and the leadership of the freedom movement remains in the hands of the capitalist class, no matter how gifted and great its leaders, the transition from national independence to socialism becomes far more protracted, painful and tortuous.

But let us not anticipate. For before we come to the path ahead, there is one more vital feature of our freedom movement to which it is necessary to refer. It has a very important bearing on our goal of socialism, as also on the policies necessary for achieving it.

That feature is India's relations with the wide world outside. Our freedom movement was never indifferent to developments in the international world. It was never a closed movement without sympathies and antipathies with happenings in other countries.

It is not necessary here to go too far back into history but it can be shown that even in the first decade of this century Tilak and other radical leaders of the freedom movement always sympathised with movements in other countries aimed at undermining and fighting the imperialist powers.

Tilak wrote articles in the *Kesari* glorifying the Russian Revolution of 1905 and even declaring that India must learn from that revolution how to fight for its independence. Gandhi supported the Turkish struggle against British intervention after the First World War. The main trend in what may be called the foreign policy of the National Congress was sympathy with all subject and colonial people struggling against imperialist rule for national independence.

However, it was in the late twenties and thirties that the policy took a comprehensive, integrated and consistent shape, the credit for which goes mainly to Jawaharlal Nehru.

From then on, we consciously came out with the view that the Indian freedom movement was part and parcel of the freedom movement of all colonial people fighting for freedom, no matter whether the imperial power concerned was Britain, Japan, France, Holland, Belgium, Portugal or any other. We thus recognised the unity and the necessity of mutual support of all colonial liberation movements.

We also clearly recognised the Soviet Union as the friend and supporter of colonial liberation. Motilal and Jawaharlal Nehru led an official congress delegation to the Soviet

Union in 1927. Tagore also visited the Soviet Union and returned tremendously impressed with its message of human equality and brotherhood. The National Congress established official relations with the League Against Imperialism.

The antagonism between British imperialism and the Soviet Union was never bracketed with the antagonism between the British and other imperialist powers. The anti-imperialist, national emancipatory role of the Soviet Union was clearly recognised as totally different from the quarrels between imperialist countries over colonial conquest and loot.

The worker-peasant movement in India, of course, glorified the Soviet Union. It naturally saw in it the supporter of its own struggle for the abolition of *all* class exploitation. But it is extremely significant that the leadership of the Congress should feel such a high regard and admiration for the Soviet Union which arose from the realisation of its anti-imperialist role.

Two events of that period deserve to be noted because of their political significance. In the world famous Communist Conspiracy Case of Meerut in 1929, Motilal Nehru himself came forward to defend the accused and once actually appeared in court to defend them. The Congress also appointed other leading lawyers for the defence. Similarly, on the eve of the Lahore Congress session in 1929, Mahatma Gandhi personally met the under-trial Meerut prisoners in jail and invited them to join the coming freedom struggle.

The point is that with all their differences with the communists, congress leaders recognised them as a contingent of the freedom movement, not hostile to it.

With the emergence of fascism in Europe and particularly of Hitler Nazism in Germany, the Congress boldly and clearly espoused the anti-fascist cause. It denounced Mussolini's invasion of Abyssinia. It attacked the Munich Pact. Nehru himself visited the battlefronts in Spain in support

of the Republican cause. Indians joined the International Brigade in Spain.

When Japan attacked China, the National Congress not only condemned the aggression but sent an official Medical Mission to China. The Mission worked, not with the Kuomintang in the regions under its control, but with the Chinese Communist Party at Yen-an. When Hitler attacked the Soviet Union, the Congress Working Committee adopted a resolution giving support to the Soviet Union and expressing deep appreciation of its social achievements.

### III

#### COMPLETION OF THE UNFINISHED REVOLUTION

WE HAVE THROWN a retrospective glance at the pre-independence period at some length. For otherwise the theme about the continuity, the growing over of the national freedom struggle into the struggle for socialism, becomes a clap-trap or a nebulous notion that can cover up many sins of omission and commission.

The worst of these sins, of course, is the claim of the congress leadership 'to carry forward the freedom struggle to its historic destiny of socialism'.

India attained freedom in August 1947. But this did not imply, as Nehru himself stated in his historic speech from the Red Fort on that occasion, that all the vital conditions necessary for the exercise of full national independence had then been created.

The British stranglehold over our economy, based on British investments in and control of many of our industries, foreign trade, banking, shipping, and so on, still continued. Semi-feudal landlordism continued. Princely autocracy remained over a third of the country. These were not