

## **Marxism, Bengal National Revolutionaries and Comintern**

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***Abstract:** The origin and development of national revolutionary movement in India, particularly in Bengal, in the beginning of the twentieth century constituted one of important signposts of Indian freedom struggle against the colonial British rule. The Bengal national revolutionaries dreamt of freeing India through armed insurrection & individual terrorism. But in spite of supreme sacrifices made by these revolutionaries, almost after thirty years of their movement, in the thirties of the twentieth century, they came to the realisation about the futility of the method which neglected involvement of the general masses so long. In the first half of the thirties most of these revolutionaries were detained. While in detention in different jails & camps for a pretty long period many of the revolutionaries came in contact with Marxist literature there. Imbibed by the Marxist view of social change they gave up 'terrorism' as a method altogether after coming out of jails/camps in 1938 or later. However, a sharp debate developed among them on the perception of the Communist International (CI), its colonial policy in general and the policy with respect to the Indian freedom struggle in particular. Further, CPI's policy of following Comintern decisions as its national section also came under scrutiny. A large number of revolutionary converts questioned the applicability of the Comintern formulations in the perspective of late colonial Bengal. They were not ready either to accept CPI as a real communist party or to pay unquestionable obedience to the dictates of the Comintern. As a result, instead of joining any of the existing Marxist political parties, these revolutionaries formed their own parties having Marxism as the guiding principle. It has been the common notion among many scholars and writers that the Comintern's colonial policy has, at least to some extent, resulted in the disintegration of the communists' in Bengal. The role of the Comintern and conflicting understanding about its role in the Indian context that led to the development of a number of Marxist political parties has been tried to be analysed in this paper with a newer perspective.*

**Keywords:** Anti-colonialism, National Revolutionary, Terrorism, Colonial Bengal, Anushilan Samiti, Jugantar Federation, Marxist, Indian National Congress, CPI, Forward Bloc, RSP, SUCI.

### *The key issue*

The national revolutionary movement in pre-independent Bengal constituted one of the most significant aspects in the history of the Indian freedom movement. Imbued by the spirit of unrelenting fight against British imperialism, the national revolutionaries of India tried to set before the people of the country a bright example of personal courage and heroic self-sacrifice, and thereby wanted to instil a mood of defiance in the minds of the people in the face of colonial repression. The revolutionary trend in the Indian freedom movement of the twentieth century was most ably represented by the *Anushilan Samiti*, the *Jugantar Federation* and the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association - HSRA (formerly Hindustan Republican Association - HRA) and such other revolutionary parties and groups. As history has unfolded in later years, national revolutionism failed to reach its logical culmination. The revolutionaries came to the realisation that their achievements had been disproportionately small in relation to their sacrifices. As a result, by the thirties of the twentieth century, a large number of national revolutionaries started feeling that their 'exclusively petty-bourgeois movement ... had reached its climax'. It could not develop further. So, the national revolutionaries started engaging themselves in search for a new revolutionary ideology and programme which they expected would help them in rectifying faults and errors, if any, in their line of struggle pursued so long. This search ultimately culminated in most of the revolutionaries accepting Marxism. Incidentally, though the Communist Party of India (CPI) was founded in India in 1925 as the first organised Marxist party of the country, Marxism as an idea had come to India much earlier, mainly through the efforts of the Indian revolutionaries abroad. As a result, distinct swing towards Marxism was noticed clearly in many of the Bengal national revolutionaries and a form of transition from national revolutionism to Marxism was discernible.

This, however, in the process, gave birth to not one or two, but a number of leftist-Marxist political parties in the Indian soil. The year 1934 saw the termination of explicit national revolutionary politics, particularly in Bengal and the United Provinces. After 1934, no act of violence had been perpetrated which indicates that the national revolutionaries, by that time, had renounced the politics of 'terrorism' as a political weapon. In the meantime, as the colonial repression went on unabated, most of the revolutionary activists belonging to different revolutionary parties and groups were under detention. It was during these detention years that the national revolutionaries found time for reviewing their strategies and tactics followed

for the last thirty years. For some national revolutionaries, at least, Marxism offered the most plausible solution to their problem.

Most of the revolutionaries who were detained in various places in the mainland were released in 1937-38 (in the case of Andaman detenus, it was 1945-46). Many of them came out of the jail as staunch supporters of either Gandhism or Marxism, and some of them dropped out of politics altogether. But none of them were in the mood of pursuing the former line of action and reverting to the old 'terrorist' path. So, in 1938, the *Jugantar* and the HSRA were formally dissolved. The *Anushilan Samiti*, though not formally dissolved, also ceased to exist as a separate revolutionary party. The national revolutionaries who were still then in politics either joined the political parties already existing at the time or took part in forming new political parties in line with their newly acquired ideological preferences. Thus, 'terrorism' *per se* had become a thing of the past with all the parties. David M Laushey makes a conservative estimate regarding the number of national revolutionaries working in Bengal at any particular point of time and concludes it would not more than '3000 active members' at any one time. (Laushey, 1975: 135) He is further of the opinion that out of these estimated numbers, only fifty percent converted to political leftism. But, even after adopting new ideology, these national revolutionaries failed to unite in a single unified party. Some of the causes behind this disunity have been tried to be examined in this paper.

The national revolutionaries were basically nationalist; therefore, joining the mainstream nationalist politics under the Congress was naturally expected. But, barring a few, most of them did not join the Congress. Besides the INC, during the thirties, there had been the Communist Party of India (CPI-1925) and the Communist League (CL-1934). Further, in the then political milieu, there were also the Roy Group (the followers of MNRoy-1931), The Labour Party (1932) and the Congress Socialist Party (CSP-1934), all of which had some kind of Marxist leanings.

The revolutionaries who formed the 'Communist Consolidation' in different jails mostly joined the CPI after their release. Another group of Marxists comprising members both from the *Anushilan Samiti* and the HSRA, instead of joining the CPI, started working with the CSP as a separate group since 1938, though the venture proved to be a short lived one. Simultaneously, a rapid change in the political scenario, particularly in Bengal, was taking place. The Communist League became the Revolutionary Communist Party of India (RCPI) in 1943 under the leadership of Soumyendranath Tagore. The Roy Group became the League of Radical Congressmen in 1939, and

sometime later, 1940, took the name of Radical Democratic Party (RDP), and the Labour Party became the Bolshevik Party of India in 1939. Another important leftist party of the time was the Forward Bloc (FB) founded by Subhash Chandra Bose in 1940. The rank of the party was swelled by the joining of the national revolutionaries belonging to *Bengal Volunteers, Sree Sangha, Dipali Sangha, Benu Group*, other revolutionary groups and a number of leading *Jugantar* activists.

Three political parties, however, were formed exclusively by the national revolutionaries - turned - Marxists. These parties were the Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP-1940), the Democratic Vanguard (1943), which became the Workers Party of India in 1960, and the Socialist Unity Centre of India (SUCI-1946/1948).

The RSP originated in 1940 through the efforts of a number of 'Anushilan Marxists' and the HSRA activists who did not join the CPI upon their release from the jails. As these groups- of Marxists had differences with those of the CPI on many counts, including the role of the Comintern in a colonial country and the characterisation of the INC-led freedom movement, they preferred to work rather with the CSP for providing an 'alternative to the official Communist line'. However, very shortly, these Anushilan and the HSRA Marxists severed their relationship with the CSP and formed their own party known as RSP.

Again, a group of Anushilanites who were associated with the process of formation of the RSP as a separate Marxist party soon started expressing their reservations by way of publishing political pamphlets relating to the organisational structure and the process of formation of the party, as well as its main ideological planks *vis-à-vis* the role of Stalin as a living authority of international communist movement and the Comintern. As these differences of opinion could not be resolved within the organisational framework of the RSP, this group of Marxists, under the leadership of Shibdas Ghosh, 'both in continuity of the struggle within RSP and after a break with it' evolved a 'Platform of Action with a party content' in 1946 and then, in 1948, founded the SUCI (renamed as SUCI-Communist since 2009), as a political party.

The purpose of the present paper is to investigate and explore the role of the Communist International with respect to the colonial countries, and more particularly, to India and its possible impact on the process of conversion from national revolutionism to Marxism and the consequent formation of multiple leftist- - Marxist political parties in Bengal with the

common purpose of establishing scientific socialism on the basis of the Marxist notion of historical development and revolution. Further, the national revolutionaries who accepted Marxism failed to organise themselves into a single unified Marxist party. Rather, they remained disunited as earlier. Whether the decisions of the Communist International (Comintern) had any bearing behind the disunity among these adherents of Marxism has also been tried to be enquired in this paper.

### *The Comintern and the Bengal Marxists*

By late thirties of the twentieth century, a heroic chapter in the history of Indian national movement came to an end. The most pertinent question which comes logically here: What would have been the future course of action of the revolutionaries who accepted Marxism? For David Laushey, the question was either to join the CPI/the CSP or to form a new leftist party of their own. (Laushey 1975: 124) Satyendra Narayan Mazumdar, an Anushilan revolutionary who was passing through this turmoiling situation during the time as a prisoner in the Andamans, expressed his mental turbulence in following:

1. The Communist Party of India is a section of the Communist International. Does it mean that the party in India will have to mechanically follow the directives of the Communist International irrespective of the peculiarities and specific features of our national situation?
2. Is internationalism and patriotism contradictory to each other? Will not loyalty to the principles of internationalism lead to the neglect of national tasks?
3. What will be the attitude of the communist party towards participation in the national movement led by the bourgeoisie? (Mazumdar 1979:274).

Buddhadeva Bhattacharyya, an Anushilan activist and an RSP ideologue as well, raised the issue in his own way:

Except for a section of the national revolutionaries, including Anushilan men, who went over to the Communist Consolidation and later the CPI, the majority of Anushilan members, though being convinced of Marxism-Leninism, still hesitated. While they accepted Marxism in principle and held the Soviet Union in high esteem for her magnificent achievements in the field of an economic reconstruction they seriously doubted the efficacy of the Comintern as an agency for promoting world revolution and more particularly for aiding the anti-imperialist movements in colonies. These

questions centred round the documents of the Sixth World Congress of the Communist International, namely, *Programme of the Communist International* and more, particularly, *Theses on the Revolutionary Movement in the Colonies*. The role of the CPI during the CD movement further alienated them from it and the CI (Bhattacharyya 1982:21-22: Italics original).

Shibdas Ghosh, an Anushilan activist and the First General Secretary of the SUCI (renamed as SUCI-Communist since 2009) had his share of views on the issues which agitated him and his compatriots prior to 1948: 'We profess to be communist representing the school of thought of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin and yet we cannot join the Communist Party of India nor can we support its present stand.' (Ghosh, 1948: Introduction) A 'platform of action' was formed with effect from May 01, 1946 in the name of 'Socialist Unity Centre' which declared:

SUC is not a Party, not a sectarian group in any sense but a propagandist platform and a TEMPORARY INSTRUMENT FOR THE UNIFICATION OF ALL SOCIALIST FORCES that identify their interests completely with the working class without reservation and pledge themselves to work for the Social Revolution on the basis of fundamental principles of Marxism-Leninism, socialism or communism, as against capitalism, imperialism and fascism, as speedily as the objective conditions of the country would permit (Socialist Unity Centre 1948:8-9).

The debate and discussion among the converted revolutionary nationalists on joining either the CPI or the CSP or forming a new Marxist party centered mainly on two or three closely related issues—first, what would be the stages of revolution in the coming days, secondly, to what extent Comintern's formulation of strategies and tactics for the colonial countries, particularly for colonial India, were correct and whether the adherence to Comintern's policies for India by the CPI was really beneficial for India's anti-colonial freedom movement; and last but not the least, the issue of leadership of Stalin in his reported control of the policy-making process of the Comintern.

We can start with the opinion of Sobhanlal Datta Gupta, a longtime researcher and a prolific writer on the role of Comintern in shaping the future of India's communist movement:

The Third International, generally known as the Communist International (Comintern:1919-1943), was born out of a vision, originating in the dream of a world revolution. The visionary was Lenin...it was going to be the rallying point of all revolutionary forces who sided with the cause of the great October, and who pledged to struggle for the creation of a brave new world of the future, for the victory of socialism...In the inter-war period it emerged

as a massive structure of power, a gigantic international organization, claiming to represent the collective will of the Communist Parties. Consequently, the rigid disciplinary control of Comintern over the parties, ensured through the enforcement of 21 conditions, which constituted the preconditions for a party to be recognized by the Comintern, **made it imperative for the communist parties to accept its decisions as unconditionally binding on them and destinies of the parties thus came to be inseparably linked with shifts in the policies of the Comintern...** Consequently, a proper understanding of the Comintern provides not simply the most vital clue to the directions of international communism in the twentieth century, but is also a **pointer to how it virtually prefigured the destiny of the Communist Parties in different parts of the world** (Datta Gupta 2006:1-2; emphasis added).

Comintern's role in formulating policies for anti-imperialist movement in India guided by Marxian class analysis and correlation of forces came in for severe criticism from a group of Anushilan converts who had the support of the majority of converted national revolutionaries:

The Samiti members in detention were gradually released...in 1937 and early 1938. The alternatives before the Samiti leaders were: 1. to form a new open party with well-defined Marxist ideology and a Marxist-Leninist programme of action, or 2. merge the Samiti with one of the existing political parties. The first alternative was soon rejected...Merger, therefore, with one of the existing like-minded parties was the only alternative conceivable. The attitude and political line of the CPI was suspect. The CPI, since it allowed itself to be dictated to by the Comintern and the Communist Party of Great Britain, failed to ascertain correctly the objective political situation in India and the true nature of anti-imperialist struggle. This party consistently ignored and even opposed the mass struggles initiated by the Congress...lliance with CPI was absolutely ruled out. The CSP, on the other hand, had within its fold congressmen of the left-wing persuasion, some having firm Marxist conviction, who were committed to fight uncompromisingly for complete independence. So, Anushilan Samiti finally opted for the Congress Socialist Party, in 1938. (Ray 1993: 104-105).

We have another story regarding the conversion to Marxism and joining the CPI by a number of political deportees who were imprisoned in the Cellular Jail, Andaman. As stated by SN Mazumdar, a message was sent to the communist-minded prisoners by the CPI leadership in 1935. In that message, the revolutionaries who veered around Marxism were requested to unite in a Communist Consolidation. The Communist Consolidation was formally formed on May 01, 1935 and the red flag was hoisted. The Consolidation was formed with 35 members. They came from different

parties, Anushilan, Yugantar, Revolting group, the Chittagong group, the BV group and above all, the HSRA. Later on, the majority of the members of Anushilan and Yugantar gradually joined the Consolidation and swelled its rank (Mazumdar 1979: 259).

Upon their release, they formally joined the CPI. Similar Communist Consolidations were also formed in various detention camps situated in the mainland. So, the query about which Marxist party to join ended for the revolutionary converts who formed the Communist Consolidations. On this issue, Satyendra Narayan Mazumdar writes:

The Communist International is the vanguard detachment of the different forces of world revolution. It exposes the character, the designs and manoeuvres of world imperialism. It analyses the new turns in the world situation and outlines the common task before the different sectors of the world-revolutionary process...It is the duty of the communist parties in every country to implement the common tasks and to chalk out a correct plan of action in accordance with the specific features and alignment of forces in their respective countries. This is the theoretical position. It is true that in the implementation of that position mistakes have been committed by both the Communist International and its different national sections. But as for myself, while in the Andaman, the theoretical position as elaborated by Lenin was the sole concern. I was quite satisfied with what was written by Lenin (Mazumdar 1979: 275).

The SUC which had been acting as a 'propagandist platform of action' since 1946 tried to solve the issue of joining any existing leftist party or forming a new one of their own, in another way. Elaborating this point further, Shibdas Ghosh writes in a 1948:

The history of the Communist Party of India is the history of strategical mistakes, tactical blunders and theoretical deviations so much so that in the phase of bourgeoisie democratic revolution in 1929 it accepted the programme of socialist revolution and now in the phase of socialist revolution it clings to the old programme of bourgeois democratic revolution...The right wing deviation of the Communist Party of India, its organisational defects, and its present wrong policy demands its rectification of bonafide communists. But as it is not possible to do the same from within the party for mechanical rigidity and established bureaucratic leadership at the top, we as revolutionary vanguard of the people take it as our duty. In the absence of any organisation to lead the Indian masses in the coming revolution, the appearance of propagandist instrument like ours has become an indispensable objective necessity (Ghosh 1948: 25-27).



For them, as a general international programme, the stand of Comintern Sixth Congress was correct but its application to India, in particular, by the CPI was undoubtedly wrong. **‘But in the World Seventh Congress the acceptance of ‘United Front’ as the general international political theory as a result of which the Anti-Fascist Peoples’ Front with the Democratic Imperialist forces was accepted as the general programme during the war was a blunder’** (Ghosh 1948: 16- emphasis added).

Thus, we find at least four different patterns of thought over the issue. First, rejection of the Comintern as an international authoritative body of Marxists and the CPI as a Marxist party; Secondly, acceptance of both the Comintern and the CPI as mostly correct; Thirdly, CPI was full of blunders and vacillations and the Comintern was basically correct and, lastly, the CPI was just a mere pawn at the hands of the Comintern and the CPGB having no independence in formulating its strategies and tactics of the revolution.

This leads us to a further discussion on the interaction of Comintern and the Bengal national revolutionaries.

### ***Formation of the Comintern***

The Soviet Socialist Revolution of 1917, it appears, led to the establishment of two opposing systems, socialism and capitalism and, consequently, the believers of Marxian socialism started thinking about the necessity of effective forms of mutual solidarity and co-ordination between the revolutionaries operating in different countries. By December 1918, the Russian Communists were appealing to the Communists of other countries swiftly to unite in a Third Communist International. Hence, the setting up of the Third Communist International, or Comintern in Moscow in 1919 – a new proletarian international, which, according to Lenin, would begin the task of implementing the dictatorship of the proletariat. The recognition of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the struggle to secure it represented, in fact, preliminary conditions for membership.

For Lenin it was of the utmost necessity for proletarians around the world to be liberated from capitalist oppression, lest future world wars send more to their deaths, and a growing capitalistic machine takes more and more of their humanity and [freedom](#). Armed with these convictions, Lenin set out to establish the Communist International. In early January of 1919

preparations began for the Communist International with a meeting of representatives from a number of Communist Parties and Left-wing Socialist groups from all around the world who discussed the founding of the Third International. They adopted a manifesto entitled “For the First Congress of the Communist International”. The manifesto was published on behalf of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party, foreign bureaus of the Communist Workers’ Party of Poland, Hungarian Communist Party, Communist Party of German Austria, the Russian bureau of the Central Committee of the Latvian Communist Party, Central Committee of the Finnish Communist Party, Executive Committee of the Balkan Revolutionary Social Democratic Federation and the Socialist Labor Party of America. At the end of February, delegates began arriving in Moscow in response to the call to establish the Third Communist International. On March 1, a preliminary meeting took place under Lenin’s chairmanship to discuss the agenda of the Congress. March 2, 1919, was the opening day of the International Communist Conference, attended by 52 delegates from nations all around the world – 34 delegates with a vote (one delegate per party or organization represented), accompanied by 18 redundant delegates (their party or organisation already represented) with a voice but no vote (Summary of the First Congress, March 1919).

Each delegate gave a report on the revolutionary situation in their own countries, which was followed by discussing the platform of the Communist International. Lenin’s [thesis and report](#) on bourgeois democracy and dictatorship of the proletariat was placed. The thesis in Russian and German were circulated among the delegates before the speech. At the third session on March 4, Lenin read his thesis. The conference expressed its unanimous approval of Lenin’s thesis and decided to submit them to the Bureau for wide circulation. It also adopted resolution moved by Lenin as a [supplement to the thesis](#). The thesis drew attention to the ‘revolutionary ferment in all the colonies’ and put forward the following, ‘The emancipation of the colonies is possible only in conjunction with the emancipation of the metropolitan working class’ (Degras Vol. I: 43). It was assumed, further, that a socialist Europe would render all-round help to the liberated colonies. A Soviet commentator, A Reznikov, writes in this connection: ‘Thus, from the first moment of its existence, the Third, Communist International addressed the oppressed people of the East as allies in the fight against imperialism and colonialism, and acted as the first world, genuinely revolutionary organisation’ (Reznikov 1984: 55).

On March 4, on the motion of the delegates of the Communist Party of German Austria, Left Social-Democratic Party of Sweden, Balkan Revolutionary Social Democratic Federation and Hungarian Communist Party, the Conference resolved **‘to constitute itself as the Third International and adopt the name of the Communist International’**. The Conference formulated the policy statement of the Communist International, which contained the following main propositions:

- 1) inevitability of the replacement of the capitalist system by the Communist social system
- 2) necessity of the proletarian revolutionary struggle for the overthrow of bourgeois governments
- 3) destruction of the bourgeois state and its replacement by a new type of state, a proletarian state of the Soviet type, which would insure the transition to Communist society.

The Communist International soon became widespread beyond Europe. And by acquiring vital significance for all the communist parties, the Third International also exercised considerable social and political influence in the international arena. As socialism was being consolidated in the Soviet Union, the Comintern remained in existence until its dissolution in 1943. Seven congresses were held (the last taking place in 1935). Between congresses its highest organ was the Executive Committee (ECCI), which convened thirteen plenary sessions from 1922 to 1933. Juergen Rojahn categorised the Comintern history into three major periods: 1917-1923, 1924-1934 and 1935-1943. Marcel van der Linden classified the Comintern history in three periods: 1917-1921, 1921-1924 and 1924 to the dissolution of the Comintern in 1934 (Datta Gupta, 2006: 14-15). The Chinese Communist Party leader, Zhou Enlai classified the Comintern history into three: March 1919 to July 1927, July 1927 to July 1935 and lastly, 1935-1943 (Zhou Enlai 1989: 306-319).

The Second Comintern Congress took place from July 19 to August 7, 1920. The discussions were long and multifarious. A number of resolutions have been adopted but among these two theses are very relevant for our present study: 1. Theses on the Conditions of Admission to the International and 2. Theses on the national and colonial questions. Lenin guided the entire preparatory work of the Congress and did much to elaborate this aspect of

the agenda (Reznikov 1984: 56). The Congress accepted nineteen conditions for entry to Comintern.

Presenting the Theses on the conditions of Admission to the International before the delegates Lenin remarked:

The First Inaugural Congress of the Communist International did not draw up precise conditions for the admission of parties into the Third International. When the First Congress was convened, only communist *trends* and *groups* existed in most countries.

.....

The Second Congress of the Communist International resolves that the following are the terms of Comintern membership:

.....

***17. All decisions of the Communist International's congresses and of its Executive Committee are binding on all affiliated parties. Operating in conditions of acute civil war, the Communist International must be far more centralised than the Second International was. It stands to reason, however, that in every aspect of their work the Communist International and its Executive Committee must take into account the diversity of conditions in which the respective parties have to fight and work, and adopt decisions binding on all parties only on matters in which such decisions are possible.***

.....

***19. After the conclusion of the proceedings of the Second World Congress of the Communist International, any party wishing to join the Communist International must at the earliest date convene an extraordinary congress for official acceptance of the above obligations on behalf of the entire party.***(Lenin CW Vol. 31, 1965: 206-211—Emphasis & Italics added)

Lenin in his Address to the Second All-Russia Congress of Communist Organisations of the Peoples of the East on November 22, 1919, however, already adopted a flexible attitude for the colonial countries: ‘...you are confronted with a task which has not previously confronted the Communists of the world: Relying upon the general theory and practice of communism, you must adapt yourselves to specific conditions such as do not exist in the European countries; you must be able to apply that theory and practice to conditions in which the bulk of the population are peasants, and in which the task is to wage a struggle against medieval survivals and not against capitalism’ (Lenin CW Vol. 30, 1965: 206-211). So it appears that though

Lenin was strict in making the decisions of the Comintern binding upon the sections at the very infant stage of the formation of this body for checking any untoward development that may creep in like the two previous failed examples of building international communist organisation, he was in no way in favour of showing blind allegiance to any central directions that are not in tune with the socio-economic realities of the countries of the East.

The other one is the Theses on the national and the colonial questions. The preliminary draft was prepared by Lenin himself. After prolonged discussion on the draft by Lenin along with MN Roy's draft supplementary theses, the Thesis was adopted by the Congress on July 28, 1920. Zinoviev was the chairman of the session and the Theses was adopted unanimously with three abstentions. The most relevant areas of the Colonial Theses for the present study are as follows:

In relation to those states that have a more backward, predominantly feudal, patriarchal or peasant patriarchal character, special attention must be paid to the following points:

- a) All Communist Parties must support the revolutionary liberation movements in these countries by their deeds. The form the support should take must be discussed with the Communist Party of the country in question, should such a party exist. This obligation to offer active assistance affects – in the first place the workers of those countries on which the backward countries are in a position of colonial or financial dependence.
- b) An unconditional struggle must be carried out against the reactionary and medieval influence of the clergy, the Christian missions and similar elements. ...
- d) Support for the peasant movement in the backward countries against the landowners and every form and remnant of feudalism is particularly necessary. What must be striven for above all is to give the peasant movement as revolutionary a character as possible and wherever possible to organise the peasants and all victims of exploitation in soviets and thus bring about as close a link as possible between the Western European communist proletariat and the revolutionary movement of peasants in the East, in the colonies and in the backward countries.
- e) A determined fight is necessary against the attempt to put a communist cloak around revolutionary liberation movements that are not really communist in the backward countries... (Minutes 1920)

It was the Second Congress of Comintern which may be considered to have inaugurated the entry of the Orient in the European circuit in an

altogether new perspective, the principal text in this direction being Lenin's *Imperialism—the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1917) followed by the *Colonial Theses*, adopted at the Second Congress of Comintern (Datta Gupta 2006: 65) It was these two writings which, for the first time, made it possible for the East to be 'de-essentialised'; it is no longer operated as an essentialist Other to the West, as it did for Marx' (Seth 1995: 59). The East entered history, and Marxist theory, as the colonial question. The destiny of the proletarian revolution in the West now got linked up with the anti-imperialist struggle in the colonies.

### ***Third Comintern Congress to Fifth Comintern Congress - 'United Front Theory' continued***

The colonial question was not specifically discussed in the Third Congress of Comintern held in Moscow from June 22 to July 12, 1921 in which both Lenin and Trotsky played the leading role. Consequently, no such discussion on India was taken up in the Third Congress. But, on the eve of the Congress attempts were made by the Berlin Group of Indian revolutionaries in Germany, including Virendranath Chattopadhyaya, G A K Luhani, Bhupendra Nath Datta etc., to negotiate with the Comintern on the issue of understanding of the Indian question since they never recognized M N Roy as the authentic spokesman of India in Moscow. Further, Roy, who carried the mandate of the Communist Party of Mexico, could not officially represent India. Whatever be the reason, the Eastern question hardly figured in the Third Congress. This rather unceremonious treatment of the East evoked a sharp reaction from M N Roy. However, it is evident from the discussions of the Third Congress that in order to win over the proletariat in the colonies, there should be no hesitation in striking up an alliance with the nationalists in the Orient, knowing fully well that they would deceive the masses (Datta Gupta 2006: 78 & 86).

The Fourth Congress of the Comintern held from November 30 to December 05, 1922 witnessed a discussion on India and the colonial question. In this Congress also, like the previous one, both Lenin & Trotsky played the leading role. A 'Theses on the Eastern Question' was adopted by the Congress on December 05, 1922 which stated that the objective tasks of the colonial revolution go beyond the bounds of bourgeois democracy because a decisive victory for this revolution was incompatible with the rule of world imperialism. The colonial revolutionary movement was at first championed by the indigenous bourgeoisie and the bourgeois

intelligentsia, but as the proletarian and semi-proletarian peasant masses became more involved and the social interests of the ordinary people came to the fore, the movement started to break away from the big-bourgeois and bourgeois-landowner elements. A long struggle still lies ahead for the newly-formed proletariat in the colonies, a struggle that would cover an entire historical epoch and would confront both imperialist exploitation and the native ruling classes, who were anxious to monopolise for themselves all the gains of industrial and cultural development and to keep the broad working masses in their former 'pre-historic' condition. The *Theses* declared:

**The Communist Parties of the colonial and semi-colonial Eastern countries are still in a more or less embryonic stage and must take part in every movement that gives them access to the masses.** At the same time they must campaign hard against patriarchal-craft prejudices and bourgeois influence in the workers' unions in order to safeguard these rudimentary trade unions from reformist tendencies and turn them into militant mass organisations. They must make every effort to organise the numerous agricultural labourers and farm-girls and the craft apprentices of both sexes around the defence of their everyday interests (Fourth Congress 1922; emphasis added)

M N Roy by this time emerged as a leading figure within the Comintern but his 'Report on the Eastern Question' placed before the Congress was on sharp contrast with the *Theses* that was adopted ultimately. Roy's main thrust was on the belief that capitalism and industrialisation had sufficiently developed in colonies like India and that a revolution under the exclusive leadership of the proletariat was a real possibility in the advanced colonies of the East. The *Theses* adopted in the Congress while rejecting the Report of Roy also gave a warning to the delegates against the ultra-left understanding of the colonial question.

The Fourth Congress was the last Congress of Comintern which witnessed the presence of Lenin. He was quite convinced that the East was fast emerging as a force to be reckoned with. After Lenin's death in 1924, the leadership of the Comintern undergone a change and a relevant and leading role in Comintern affairs was also played by Joseph Stalin, elected in 1922 as secretary general of the RCP(B), later CPSU(B). His active involvement began at the Fifth Comintern Congress in 1924, when he was elected to the Executive Committee and its Presidium. But a striking feature of Stalin's relationship with the Comintern lies in the fact that, after a few years of intensive participation and engagement (his Works are filled with speeches

on Comintern and international affairs during 1924-25-26-27-28), Stalin ceased to participate in it from the late twenties onwards. He remained absent during its last two Congresses in 1928 and 1935, and his official Works contain no contribution to Comintern affairs after 1928.

The Fifth Congress of the Comintern was held in June-July, 1924. The official position of the Comintern can be understood from Manuilsky's Report on National and Colonial Question presented in the Congress. The Report highlighted, *inter alia*, that the anti-imperialist struggle in the colonies had reached a critical phase, following the increasingly compromising position of the nationalist bourgeoisie and direct link between the nationalist struggle in the colonies and the Comintern had to be forged. Secondly, in countries where the communist party was small and a section of the bourgeoisie had revealed its compromising face like that of India, the building up of WPP etc. was prescribed aiming at mobilization of the workers, peasants and non-compromising section of the nationalist middle class (Datta Gupta 2006: 105).

The Fifth Congress, continuing the tradition of the Fourth Congress, accepted the 'United Front Theory' as the correct tactical line for all the sections of the Comintern. As Stalin pointed out, this Congress 'merely sealed the victory of the revolutionary wing in the principal sections of the Comintern' (Stalin 1954: 306).

### ***The United Front tactics***

Despite serious opportunist errors and the distortion of united front tactics by the right—which in many cases might have meant the outright ruin of the communist parties—the application of united front tactics between the fourth and fifth congresses was, by and large, of undoubted use to us, and furthered the development of a number of Comintern sections into mass parties. In a period when the communist parties in a number of the most important countries are still in a minority, when social-democracy for a number of historical reasons is still supported by large proletarian masses, when the capitalist offensive is continuing in various forms and the working class cannot summon up sufficient energy to wage serious defensive struggles, united front tactics were and are correct and necessary. . . United front tactics are only a method of agitation and of revolutionary mobilization of the masses over a period (Degras Vol. II: 163-164).



Just to highlight Stalin's initial problems in the Comintern (Lenin had withdrawn from active political life from December 1922), the composition of the Russian delegation to the Executive Committee, elected at the Fifth Congress in 1924 may be worth noting. Except Stalin, the other members – including Zinoviev, Bukharin, and Trotsky – were all in opposition to Stalin. Members of the Russian delegation to the ECCI elected by the Fifth Comintern Congress in 1924: Zinoviev (also Comintern's president), Bukharin, Stalin, Kamenev, Rykov; candidates: Sokolnikov, Trotsky, Lozovsky, Piatnitsky. In December 1926 Zinoviev ceased to be the Comintern's president, this office being replaced by a political secretariat. The presence of so many leaders' opposing Stalin's formulations in the Comintern during the twenties, however, did not prevent the acceptance of the views of Stalin, mainly, with regard to united front tactics and the defense of socialism in the Soviet Union.

As a matter of fact, the proletarian dictatorship in the Soviet Union was continuing, despite the Trotskyist opposition had made attempts to deny the possibility of socialism being built in a single country. According to Trotsky's theory of the permanent revolution, only the victory of the revolution on a world scale would save proletarian rule in the Soviet Union from "degeneration and decay." The construction of socialism in one country would – according to Trotsky – give up the prospects of the international revolution and neglect proletarian internationalism. A good number of writers on Comintern believe that a prominent role in defeating the Trotskyite line was played by Stalin himself in the Comintern. Together with the other delegations attending the Executive Committee Plenum in November/December 1926, Stalin recognised the fundamental necessity of the closest possible alliance and solidarity between the USSR, the international revolutionary process and the various liberation struggles. Stalin was emphatic in asserting that he was not giving up the cause of the revolution outside the USSR in upholding the principle that socialism could be built in one country. Indeed, the victory of the November Revolution represented, in Stalin's words the beginning of and the precondition for the world revolution.

There can be no doubt that the universal theory of a simultaneous victory of the revolution in the principal countries of Europe, the theory that the victory of socialism in one country is impossible, has proved to be an artificial and untenable theory. . . the victory of the revolution in one country, in the present case Russia, is not only the product of the uneven development and progressive decay of imperialism; it is at the same time the beginning of and the pre-condition for the world revolution... the

unfolding of the world revolution will be the more rapid and thorough, the more effective the assistance rendered by the first socialist country to the workers and labouring masses of all other countries. . . The world significance of the October Revolution lies not only in the fact that it constitutes a great beginning made by one country in causing a breach in the system of imperialism and that it is the first centre of socialism in the ocean of imperialist countries, but also in that it constitutes the first stage of the world revolution and a mighty base for its further development. . . not only does the October Revolution need support from the revolution in other countries, but the revolution in those countries needs the support of the October Revolution in order to accelerate and advance the cause of overthrowing world imperialism (Stalin 1954: 143-148).

Accordingly, the Comintern characterised the Soviet Socialist State as: 'the most important fortress of the world revolution' (Degras Vol II: 323)

### *Sixth and Seventh Comintern Congresses - the reversals*

Before entering into discussion on Sixth and Seventh Comintern Congresses, a look to what Stalin delivered at a Meeting of Students of the Communist University of the Toilers of the East on *May 18, 1925* at Tashkent may be of significance:

The distinctive feature of the colonies and dependent countries at the present time is that there no longer exists a single and all-embracing colonial East. Formerly the colonial East was pictured as a homogeneous whole. Today, that picture no longer corresponds to the truth. We have now at least three categories of colonial and dependent countries. Firstly, countries like Morocco, which have little or no proletariat, and are industrially quite undeveloped. Secondly, countries like China and Egypt, which are underdeveloped industrially, and have a relatively small proletariat. **Thirdly, countries like India, which are capitalistically more or less developed and have a more or less numerous national proletariat.**

Clearly, all these countries cannot possibly be put on a par with one another.

... The fundamental and new feature of the conditions of life of colonies like India is not only that the national bourgeoisie has split up into a revolutionary party and a compromising party, but primarily that the compromising section of this bourgeoisie has already managed, in the main, to strike a deal with imperialism. Fearing revolution more than it fears imperialism, and concerned more about its money-bags than about the interests of its own country, this section of the bourgeoisie, the richest and most influential section, is going over entirely to the camp of the

irreconcilable enemies of the revolution, it is forming a bloc with imperialism against the workers and peasants of its own country. The victory of the revolution cannot be achieved unless this bloc is smashed. But in order to smash this bloc, fire must be concentrated on the compromising national bourgeoisie, its treachery exposed, the toiling masses freed from its influence, and the conditions necessary for the hegemony of the proletariat systematically prepared. In other words, in colonies like India it is a matter of preparing the proletariat for the role of leader of the liberation movement, step by step dislodging the bourgeoisie and its mouthpieces from this honourable post. **The task is to create a revolutionary anti-imperialist bloc and to ensure the hegemony of the proletariat in this bloc...** But the **Communist Party can and must enter into an open bloc with the revolutionary wing of the bourgeoisie in order, after isolating the compromising national bourgeoisie, to lead the vast masses of the urban and rural petty bourgeoisie in the struggle against imperialism** (Stalin SL-Vol. VII, 1954: 135-154; emphasis added).

What appears from Stalin's speech on political tasks of the peoples of the East in general is very much significant for India's ongoing national liberation movement. Stalin, as back as in 1925, classified the Indian bourgeoisie into two categories: compromising section and a revolutionary section, of course, in relation to British imperialism. In view of Stalin's observation, the communists of India should try to unite with the petty-bourgeoisie revolutionary elements represented by the revolutionary nationalist' & the progressive section of the Congress represented, mainly, by Subhash Chandra Bose and his followers (Ghosh 2010: 54). The Comintern suggested the Indian communists the following: to work within the Indian National Congress; to form an alliance with its left-wing groups for the purpose of putting pressure on the right; to strengthen the left wing of the Congress, so that it went over to national-revolutionary positions. At the same time, in the opinion of the Comintern, the communists should fortify and extend their own influence and mass base within the INC (Reznikov 1984: 146).

The Sixth Congress of the Comintern was held from July 17 to September 01, 1928. Prior to holding of Sixth Congress, the conflict in the Soviet party took a decisive turn. While the Stalin-Trotsky conflict which was 'essentially a struggle for power', leading to the expulsion of Trotsky from the CPSU(B) in 1927, the period that followed seen 'an ideological as well as programmatic conflict' between Stalin and Bukharin. (Datta Gupta, 2006: 121) The economic restoration of the Soviet Union which was at the stage of socialist industrialisation and collectivisation in agriculture were accompanied by the emergence of political opposition to Stalin's leadership around prominent

figures such as Trotsky, Zinoviev (who was also the Comintern president), Kamenev, Sokolnikov who were all executive committee members in the Comintern. They were joined in the executive committee by two other influential members, Bukharin and Rykov, who would later put forward a common offensive against the leadership of Stalin. Of course, this factional fighting in the USSR also sharpened the struggle within both the Comintern and the various communist parties. In June 1926, for example, Stalin regarded the Zinoviev group as more dangerous than Trotsky's because of the former's control of the Comintern in his capacity as president.

In the backdrop of this, the Sixth Congress was held. The Congress marked the beginning of the decline of the authority of M N Roy on the colonial issues which ultimately led to his expulsion from Comintern. As he was involved himself in the political struggle of the Soviet party and sided with the anti-Stalin elements, Roy was expelled from the Comintern. The information of Roy's expulsion from Comintern was published in *Inprecor* of December 13, 1929, almost simultaneously with Bukharin's fall from grace.

The draft theses on the colonial question were placed by Otto Kuusinen. The finally adopted '*Theses on the Revolutionary Movement in the Colonies and Semi-Colonies*' witnessed a 'far left' shift on the question of forging an anti-imperialist united front, which had, till then, been Comintern's strategy in the colonies. The Theses declared:

**The basic tasks of the Indian communists** consist in struggle against British imperialism for the emancipation of the country, for destruction of all relics of feudalism, for the agrarian revolution and for establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat and peasant in the form of a soviet republic. These tasks can be successfully carried out only when there will be created a powerful communist party which will be able to place itself at the head of the wide masses of the working class, peasantry and all the toilers, and to lead them in the struggle against the feudal-imperialist bloc.

**... The communists must unmask the national reformism of the Indian National Congress and oppose all the phrases of the Swarajists, Gandhists, etc., about passive resistance, with the irreconcilable slogan of struggle for the emancipation of the country and the expulsion of the imperialists...**

**It must be remembered that under no circumstances can the communists relinquish their right to open criticism of the opportunist and reformist tactics of the leadership of those mass organisations in which they work (Sixth Congress 1928; emphasis added).**

Thus, it appears that the Sixth World Congress of the Communist International took a negative stand with regard to the revolutionary prospect of the national bourgeois of the colonial countries (Ivanov 1985: 85). The *Theses* accepted the view that the petty-bourgeois parties had slipped into the position of bourgeois reformism and already discredited itself which posed main threat to the national liberation movement. Thus, in order to be able to attract masses to the communist movement, the communists had to fight the petty-bourgeois parties. However, in actual practice, the acceptance of the guidelines led to the communists' refusing to cooperate with the national bourgeoisie in colonial countries like India, isolated them from the masses and the national liberation struggle, thus depriving them of the opportunity to become mass organisations capable of leading the people at large.

The Soviet commentators writing on Stalin after 1956 Twentieth CPSU Congress are generally conspicuous in maintaining total silence on his role in the Comintern. But, non-Soviet writings are full of accusations against Stalin for this sudden 'ultra-left' twist in the Colonial communists' role *vis-a-vis* the national bourgeoisie. Sobhanlal Datta Gupta writes that the Colonial Theses bore heavy imprint of Stalin's understanding of the colonial question although Stalin himself was not present in that Congress (Datta Gupta 2006: 135). Stalin's 'class vs. class' strategy came out victorious, as written by many, indicating a shift from 'united front' tactics and it became the chief strategy applicable for all the colonial countries so far as the Comintern guidelines are concerned.

Those who are opposed to the idea of accusing Stalin for this reversal of Comintern's strategy in the Sixth Congress have argued that in most capitalist countries during the late twenties intense class antagonism was giving rise to what Stalin assessed as the preconditions for a new revolutionary upsurge of the working-class movement. And it was during this time that left sectarianism of united front policies began to emerge after the Sixth Comintern Congress through the class-against-class tactics. This new line, dominating the Comintern during the early thirties, was based on the assumption of an equation between social-democracy and fascism. Hence the theory of 'social-fascism', strongly opposed by Stalin who, avoiding a straight identification between the two, characterised them as 'twins', with social-democracy being 'objectively the moderate wing of fascism.' Contrary to Stalin's view, the Comintern now presented the social-democratic parties as 'the main enemy' of the working class, against whom the main blow should be directed. And by regarding the left wing of social-

democracy (that which supported united front tactics) ‘more dangerous’ than its right wing (that which opposed united front tactics), united front became permissible – under the ‘class against-class’ policies - only from below. Consequently, under Comintern instructions, a number of communist parties during this period put forward slogans such as that of a ‘Red United Front’ (i.e., a front limited to conscious revolutionaries alone) and that of revolutionary trade union opposition (i.e., withdrawing communist activity from the reformist trade unions in order to form new ‘revolutionary’ splinter unions). Stalin, on the contrary, regarded ‘trade union unity’ as ‘the surest means of winning over the vast working-class masses.’ Indeed, this unity represented the indispensable precondition for disintegrating the influence of social-democracy in the trade unions, exposing its leaders and ultimately achieving the dictatorship of the proletariat. For such purposes, provided that communists retained their independence, Stalin indicated that ‘temporary agreements with mass reactionary trade unions [were] not only permissible but sometimes positively essential.’ Due to its ultra-left policies of the early thirties, the Comintern could not successfully challenge the attacks of capitalism and the growing threat of fascism and war. As masses of workers were deserting the social-democratic parties, Stalin could not agree with pseudo-left ‘revolutionary’ agitation, but he regarded the appropriate consolidation of communist activities as an essential precondition for the revolution. Accordingly, the communist parties had to ‘be capable of appraising the situation and making proper use of it’ in order to ‘definitely fortify themselves on this road . . . and successfully prepare the proletariat for the coming class battles. Only if they do that can we count on a further increase in the influence and prestige of the Communist International’. The victory of the revolution never comes of itself – Stalin also indicated – . . . only a strong proletarian revolutionary party can prepare for and win victory (Steinmayr 2000).

In any case, the national sections that pursued this new line of the Sixth Congress had to face great difficulties. By denying a qualitative difference between bourgeois democracy and fascism, the Comintern also rejected the concept that the working class had an interest in defending bourgeois democracy against the threat of fascism. For the sake of striking the main offensive against social-democracy, for example, the German communists – under the Comintern’s directives – rejected proposals for joint actions and demonstrations with social democratic parties against the Nazis. For some time, after the 1933 Nazi coup in Germany, the Comintern insisted that its “class-against-class” tactics – tactics which had paved the way to that coup – had been correct. The Executive Committee even maintained

that the Nazi coup had been ‘accelerating the rate of Germany’s advance towards the proletarian revolution.’ Hence, an effective resistance to the Nazi advent to power was in deed sabotaged by dividing the German working class and avoiding the formation of a broad anti-fascist united front which, in the conditions pertaining to Germany at that time, would have been an integral component of the revolutionary struggle for socialism. The Communist Party of India also accepted this strategy by writing ‘Draft Platform of Action’ (1930) which was a faithful replication of the *Colonial Theses*. In the opinion of the then CPI leadership they had to face two enemies: British imperialism and the national reformists, especially the left wing (Datta Gupta 2006: 142). The CPI’s prospect of leading the anti-colonial movement was a total failure. But no question, whatsoever, has been raised by the CPI as to whether the failure was linked up with the flawed strategy of the Sixth Congress.

By 1934, it was evident that the strategy of the Sixth Congress had failed to reap dividends. At such a critical juncture the Seventh as well as last Comintern Congress was held in Moscow from July 25, 1935 to August 21, 1935. The ‘leftist’ swing of the early thirties as well as of Sixth Congress was discarded. A new strategy of supporting the establishment of people’s fronts, or popular fronts, in the struggle against fascism – was adopted at the Seventh Comintern Congress in 1935 under the new leadership of Georgi Dimitrov. Presenting the *Main Report on the Fascist Offensive and the Tasks of the Communist International in the Struggle of the Working Class against Fascism* on August 02, 1935 Dimitrov explains:

We must strive to establish the widest united front with the aid of joint action by workers’ organizations of different trends for the defense of the vital interests of the laboring masses.

.....

In *India* the Communists must support, extend and participate in all anti-imperialist mass activities, not excluding those which are under national reformist leadership. While maintaining their political organizational independence, they must carry on active work inside the organizations which take part in the Indian National Congress, facilitating the process of crystallization of a national revolutionary wing among them, for the purpose of further developing the national liberation movement of the Indian peoples against British imperialism.

.....

*And we want all this because only in this way will the working class ... be able to fulfil its historical mission with certainty — to sweep fascism off the face of the earth and, together with it, capitalism!*(Dimitrov 1972: Italics original).

A strange fact about this Report is that there have been a number of references of Lenin in the Report but not a single reference was made of Stalin by Dimitrov though Stalin was the top leader of the USSR at the time in whose capital city it was being held and who played the most important role in defeating Fascism. Stalin was also absent from the sessions of the Congress like the previous edition of 1928. A hard fact to believe, indeed. Some even argued that the Comintern reorientation – the switch from left to right – became possible at a time when the ‘Marxist-Leninist elements’ around Stalin remained a minority within its leadership. The new Political Secretariat elected by the Congress in 1935, for instance, included a strong majority of leaders who were the known critics Stalin. Members of the Political Secretariat elected by the Seventh Comintern Congress were Dimitrov (General Secretary), Togliatti, Manuilsky, Pieck, Kuusinen, Marty, Gottwald; candidates: Moskvina, Florin, Wang Ming. Further, the new popular front policies were never endorsed by Stalin which shows strong circumstantial evidence of his personal opposition to them. This opposition became almost evident at the 18th Congress of the CPSU (B) in 1939, when Stalin, in his long report, made no reference whatsoever to the Comintern policies. Besides, no attention at all to the people’s fronts was paid by the official History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks)—Short Course published in 1939.(Steinmayr 2000) Stalin’s problem with a section of the top most leaders of the CPSU has been the issue of plethora of writings and he was criticized severely by Khrushchev in his secret speech in 1956. However, ‘every “revelation” in Nikita Khrushchev’s infamous “secret speech” to the 20<sup>th</sup> Party Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union on February 25, 1956, is provably false’. (Furr 2011) This study of Grover Furr substantiates the position maintained by Steinmayr to an extent.

If we look at some of the striking features of the Seventh Congress decisions, it would be found that the Congress rejected the previous assertion that the proletariat should be the sole leader of the national liberation movement. The policy of the Comintern, directed towards forming a united anti-imperialist front and establishing relations of cooperation with the patriotic strata of the bourgeoisie, provided new opportunities for developing the communist movement, for increasing the influence of the communists in



mass organisations and for consolidating the political role of the proletariat in the national liberation movement. The implementation of the new strategic line was not very easy for the Indian communists (CPI) as the party was banned in 1934 which continued till 1942. However, the main obstacle was the issue of reconciling the position of the Sixth with that of the Seventh Congress. Thus, soon after the Seventh Congress, the CPI leadership, referring to the new orientation, observed that the decisions of the Seventh Congress did in no way undo the work of the Sixth, but carried it forward by basing itself on the decisions of the Sixth Congress, and thus formulated a new tactical line for the changed situation. (Datta Gupta, 2006: 185) But the CPI, in practice, found it difficult to put the new strategy into action. They were confused about how to apply the policy of united front with those who were branded as enemies to national liberation movements just a few days back. An attempt was made, in the meantime, to come in terms with the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) but the project did not materialise and the CPI-CSP rift instead of bridging widened further. However, with the breaking out of Second World War in 1939 the tactical line of action changed somewhat. For the CPI, the War has become the 'imperialist war' between two greedy power blocs and full support was extended to the Comintern's characterization of War. Secondly, calls were now given to launch and intensify anti-British struggles throughout the country. Thirdly, the Congress and the CSP were severely criticized for their passivity in regard to anti-British struggle. The War, the CPI believed, provided an opportunity for the seizure of power.

The Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941 created a decisive turn in the history of the Comintern. The 'Imperialist War' now turned out to be the 'People's War' for the Comintern. The Comintern asked the communist parties to reverse its line and go back to the understanding of the Seventh Congress that a difference between bourgeois democracy and fascism indeed existed (Datta Gupta 2006: 205). However, it was not an easy task for the CPI to switch over to the new strategic understanding. Because, acceptance of the new Comintern line, they feared, would led the CPI to give up the policy of opposing the British war efforts and, at the same time, British imperialism too. What CPI pursued later on as the fall out of the Comintern decisions was to oppose the Quit India Movement launched all over the India in 1942 and, in the process, instead of cementing unity with the people further, got themselves isolated from the main currents of anti-imperialist movement.

It was not a coincidence that in 1935, as soon as the Seventh Comintern Congress was over, steps were taken to decentralise the organisation by giving individual parties a significant degree of autonomy in managing their affairs. From this time onwards, there would be no more congresses, no more Executive Committee plenary sessions, which had been very frequent in the past. In 1941 the management of its work was placed in the hands of three leading figures who were proved to be anti-Stalinist afterwards – Dimitrov, Manuilsky and Togliatti. The news of dissolution of the Communist International was announced in 1943. This took place without convening a congress but as a result of the ‘growth and political maturity’ reached by its communist parties. The Executive Committee of the Seventh Congress announced that ‘the Presidium of the E.C.C.I., unable owing to the conditions of the world war to convene the Congress of the Communist International, permits itself to submit for approval by sections of the Communist International the following proposal: To dissolve the Communist International as a guiding centre of the international labor movement, releasing sections of the Communist International from the obligations ensuing from the constitution and decisions of the Congresses of the Communist International’ (Dissolution 1943). By declaring that its dissolution had been ‘proper and timely’, Stalin must have reached the conclusion that the Comintern had ceased to be of any use as an organ of the socialist revolution. However, in 1947, on Stalin’s personal initiative, a new Marxist-Leninist international, on a restricted basis, was set up in the shape of the Communist Information Bureau, or Cominform, under a new leadership which excluded Dimitrov and Manuilsky. Significantly, the first acts of the Cominform were to express strong criticism of the revisionist lines of such communist parties as those of France, Italy, Japan and, later, Yugoslavia.

Leader of the Chinese Revolution Mao Zedong supported the dissolution of Comintern:

Comrade Mao Tse-tung pointed out that at present the form of revolutionary organization known as the Communist International is no longer adapted to the necessities of the struggle. To continue this organizational form would, on the contrary, hinder the development of the revolutionary struggle in each country. What is needed now is the strengthening of the national Communist Party [*min-tsu kung-chan tang*] of each country, and we no longer need this international leading centre... (Mao 1946).

***Role of Comintern and the CPI- perception of revolutionary converts***

Satyendra Narayan Mazumdar, an Anushilan activist who joined the CPI upon his release in September 1945, writes that he & his fellow travellers treated the CI as the vanguard detachment of the different forces of the world revolution. It helped in exposing the character, designs and maneuvers of world imperialism. It analysed the new turns in the world situation and outlined the common tasks before the different sectors of the world revolutionary process. Without the knowledge of such analysis it is not possible for the forces of revolution in any country to have a correct perspective of struggle or to devise any effective plan of action against imperialism. In spite of committing mistakes, the role of the CI cannot be undermined in any eventuality. (Mazumdar 1979: 274-276; Ghosh 2004: 122-123) So, for him and for his fellow national revolutionaries' who earlier became the members of Communist Consolidation in the Andamans or in various detention camps the only option acceptable was to join the CI affiliated CPI. After their release, the members of the Communist Consolidation joined the CPI. It appears here that though this group of revolutionaries was not fully satisfied either with the Comintern or CPI policies, after some initial vacillations, they found in the CPI the culmination of their search for 'A Revolutionary Ideology and A Revolutionary Programme'.

Again, a good number Anushilan revolutionaries who accepted Marxism for their future political battle and organized themselves as Anushilan Marxists since 1937 were not inclined to join the CPI and were the staunch critics of the Third International and its Indian national section, the CPI (Samanta 1995: 768-771). For them, as it has been recorded subsequently, the Third International had been following the opportunist policy of United Front and Popular Front which resulted in the complete betrayal of international socialism and world revolution. On the pretext of saving the world from fascist aggression, it was alleged, the Third International and its branches played into the hands of the international bourgeoisie (RSPI, May 1946: 152-153). A large number of Anushilan adherents who were converted to Marxism examined the implications of the policies formulated by the Communist International and their implementation by the CPI. More particularly, the Seventh World Congress line was subjected to close scrutiny. After prolonged debates and discussions, Anushilanites who were by that time convinced of Marxism clearly felt that the CI had lost its internationalist character and transformed itself into an agency for carrying

out the foreign policy needs of the Soviet Union and that the CPI's policy of shift from 'leftist' policy to 'United front' tactics was not the product of its own independent judgment of the correlation ship of class forces prevalent in the country *vis-a-vis* imperialism but of its unquestioned, uncritical allegiance to the dictates from the Comintern. Anushilan Marxists held that a considerable degree of unity among the broad sectors of the anti-imperialist masses had already been achieved under the Indian National Congress and as such the INC provided the most suitable basis for the organisational realisation of revolutionary anti-imperialist people's front. But they clearly understood that the INC was not already such a front but it had to be transformed into one. The dominant leadership of the INC was bourgeois reformist and the anti-imperialist masses were still prevented from exerting sufficient pressure on the leadership not being sufficiently organised themselves, the duty, as conceived by Anushilan Marxists, was to discourage the anti-imperialist rank and file of the Congress from the bourgeois reformist leadership and assume the leadership of the Congress on behalf of the masses and transform it into a real anti-imperialist people's front. This was in striking contrast to the line of thinking of the CPI about the formation of the anti-imperialist people's front. The CPI thought, according to Anushilan Marxists, that with the increasing offensive of imperialism since the days of the general crisis of capitalism the Indian bourgeoisie as a whole barring a handful of rabid reactionaries had moved to the left and it would be possible to retain them (even the Congress right wing) within the AIPF. This line of thinking, as Anushilan Marxists viewed it, was an 'illusion which fundamentally misunderstands the dual role of the Indian bourgeoisie'.

Under the circumstances, more advanced elements among Anushilan Marxists felt the impelling necessity of preparing a document defining their ultimate aim, immediate objective and attitude towards anti-imperialist struggle from an authentic Marxist-Leninist point of view. By 1936 they thought of introducing a new Marxist trend in Indian politics as an alternative to the current official communist line. The draft document of Anushilan Marxists was prepared in the Deoli Detention Jail in Rajputana by the close of 1936 which was subsequently discussed and debated in different jails and detention camps. It was only when most of them came out of jail in the middle of 1938 they adopted their thesis in September 1938 (Bhattacharyya, 1982: 29-30) The Anushilan Marxists formed their own party as a 'Marxist-Leninist working-class party', shortly, in March 1940 and took the name of Revolutionary Socialist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) [From May 1946, as RSPI and, then from 1956 as RSP]. Thus, a

group of revolutionary converts gave birth to a new party based on 'non-conformist' 'revolutionary Marxism' as opposed to 'conformist, official communism of the CPI' (Bhattacharyya 1982: 49). At the same time, another important cause of their aversion to Comintern was the belief that under Stalin, the Comintern has lost its international character and became fully subservient to the needs of the Soviet Union.

Now, coming to third point of view which considered the 'CPI was full of blunders and vacillations and the Comintern was basically correct', we find another set of revolutionary converts', mainly from the revolutionaries who just started work in late thirties or early forties of the twentieth century as the supporters of *now-mostly defunct* Anushilan and Jugantar parties, formed a 'platform of action with a party content' in May 1946 in the name of SUC and, later on, from 1948 SUCI as a separate Marxist party. The ideologue of the party, Shibdas Ghosh, prior to the formation of the party in 1948 wrote that the general programme of the Sixth Congress of 1928 was adopted on the correct study of world economic structure nor did it fail to envisage the rise of fascism in Europe. Against the capitalist world economic structure, the programme of socialist revolution was accepted as the general international programme of the communist movement. But it does not follow from it that this programme is to be applied in toto in all cases and in all countries. The thinking of those who asserted that general programme is applicable to all countries irrespective of the objective conditions is non-dialectical and formalist. The application of the general programme must differ with different objective conditions. The general programme only provides guiding programme, ultimate objective which in particular is to be applied differently in different countries, differently to England than to India, differently to India than to China. A country in the phase of bourgeois democratic revolution cannot as such accept the general programme of socialist revolution as its immediate programme. India was in the phase of bourgeoisie democratic revolution at the time of Sixth World Congress of Comintern. So, the correct application of that general programme to India in particular would have been then to strengthen the national liberation movement along with other democratic forces and to lead this bourgeois democratic revolution to its logical conclusion, the socialist proletarian revolution through the establishment of working class leadership over the country by neutralizing the bourgeoisie hegemony (Ghosh 1948: 14-15). But, for Ghosh, instead the CPI blindly accepted the general programme as the particular programme of India, applied it in entirety, dissociated completely from the national liberation movement, declared the INC as a bourgeois party without taking notice of its all national anti-imperialist platform

character. 'This definitely wrong ultra-left move deprived the country of the possibility of establishment of working class leadership' (Ghosh 1948: 16).

On the question of Comintern's role, these young converts were of the opinion that as a general international programme the stand of the Comintern Sixth Congress was correct. But, the acceptance of united front policy in the Seventh Congress was a 'blunder'. This was a swing to the 'right wing' of liberalism. As a general international political programme, it was undoubtedly a deviation based on wrong analysis of correlation of world social forces. The general programme of the united front of the Comintern with imperialist capitalist betrayed the cause of socialist revolution in various countries of Europe, particularly in France. Therefore, the Comintern has been designated as 'corrupt and incompetent' with respect to the wrong formulation of policies following the Seventh Congress (SUC 1948: 12-13).

The last but not the least important perception is that the national sections of the Comintern had no other alternative but to follow the Comintern line without raising any question as they were bound to do so as per the Terms of Admission into the Communist International proposed by Lenin and accepted by the Second Congress. Sobhanlal Datta Gupta was one of those commentators/researchers on Comintern who believes that becoming member of the Comintern was fine but, at the same time, it was also a beginning of losing independence in formulation and political action on the part of the national sections. So, for Datta Gupta, it already prefigured the destiny of the communist parties in different parts of the world including India and not a single party affiliated to the Comintern were in the position to challenge the programmes accepted by the Comintern in various Congresses in spite of genuine misgivings regarding those policies. Once a member of the Comintern, the fate was sealed (Datta Gupta 2006: 1-2). In the concluding note in his seminal book, *Communism and the Destiny of Communism in India 1919-1943*, Datta Gupta makes the following observations:

The reconstruction of the history of Indian communism in the light of the new revelations on Comintern ...points to four moments when the intervention of Comintern decisively shaped its destiny. **First**, the birth of communism in India was marked by a sectarian stance from the beginning...

**The second moment** of intervention was the aftermath of the Sixth Congress, when, in 1928, the Indian Communists were expressly directed by the Comintern to disband the Workers' and Peasants' Parties... and to switch over to the line of left extremism...

**The third moment** was the Comintern's shift in 1935 to the united/popular front strategy but without admitting that the line of the Sixth Congress had been a mistake...

**The fourth moment** refers to the Comintern directives concerning the German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact and transformation of the 'Imperialist War' into a 'people's War', which ...were channeled to the CPI through the CPGB...

All alternative notions of difference, locality and autonomy were thus destined to be erased and the Indian case was no exception to this process (Datta Gupta 2006: 297-298).

Hence, the fate of the CPI was destined to be doomed since its formation the party remained always a faithful follower of the Comintern dictates.

### ***Communist Party of China and the Comintern***

Here, an attempt may be made on the patterns of interaction between the Chinese Communist Party and the Comintern as CPC is the party which after its formation in 1921 always kept coordination with the Comintern and successfully led the Peoples' Democratic Revolution in 1949. So, how they responded to the Terms of Admission to the Comintern by keeping its independent political activities unabated, even going against the Comintern directions at times? These would help us in understanding better whether the CPI was, as has been argued by Datta Gupta, really helpless in exerting independence from the fetters as imposed by the Comintern!

Let us begin with Mao, the leader of the CPC and the Chinese Revolution:

**The Chinese revolution won victory by acting contrary to Stalin's will.** The fake foreign devil [in Lu Hsün's *True Story of Ah Q*] 'did not allow people to make revolution'. But our Seventh Congress advocated going all out to mobilize the masses and to build up all available revolutionary forces in order to establish a new China. During the quarrel with Wang Ming from 1937 to August 1938, we put forward ten great policies, while Wang Ming produced sixty policies. If we had followed Wang Ming's, or in other words Stalin's, methods the Chinese revolution couldn't have succeeded. When our revolution succeeded, Stalin said it was a fake. We did not argue with

him, and as soon as we fought the war to resist America and aid Korea, our revolution became a genuine one [in his eyes].

.....

**In short, our basic line is universal truth, but details differ.** This applies to each country and to each province. There is unity and there are also contradictions. The Soviet Union stresses unity, and doesn't talk about contradictions, especially the contradiction between the leaders and the led. (Mao, March 1958 - emphasis added)

Mao further discusses the issue of independence from the Comintern:

They did not permit China to make revolution: that was in 1945. Stalin wanted to prevent China from making revolution, saying that we should not have a civil war and should cooperate with Chiang Kai-shek, otherwise the Chinese nation would perish. But we did not do what he said. The revolution was victorious... Later when I went to Moscow to sign the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Alliance and Mutual Assistance, we had to go through another struggle. He was not willing to sign a treaty. After two months of negotiations he at last signed. When did Stalin begin to have confidence in us? It was at the time of the Resist America, Aid Korea campaign, from the winter of 1950. He then came to believe that we were not Tito, not Yugoslavia... (Mao Sept. 1962)

In the Talks on Questions of Philosophy Mao further stated:

**Stalin felt that he had made mistakes in dealing with Chinese problems, and they were no small mistakes.** We are a great country of several hundred millions, and he opposed our revolution, and our seizure of power... **Even before the dissolution of the Third International, we did not obey the orders of the Third International. At the Tsunyi Conference we didn't obey, and afterwards, for a period of ten years, including the Rectification Campaign and down to the Seventh Congress, when we finally adopted a resolution ('Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of our Party') and corrected [the errors of] 'leftism', we didn't obey them at all** (Mao Aug 1964-Emphasis added).

As an authority of Marxism, Mao Zedong clearly states the issue of independence of the national communist parties. In one of his essays written in 1936, Mao explained that the experience of the civil war in the Soviet Union directed by Lenin and Stalin has a world-wide significance. All Communist Parties, including the Chinese Communist Party, regard this experience and its theoretical summing-up by Lenin and Stalin as their guide. But this does not mean that it should be applied mechanically to their specific conditions. In many of its aspects, China's revolutionary war has



characteristics distinguishing it from the civil war in the Soviet Union. Of course, it is wrong to take no account of these characteristics or deny their existence. This point has been fully borne out, as Mao wrote, in China's ten years of war (Mao SL-Vol I, 1975: 194-195).

Zhou Enlai, another important leader of the CPC also spoke on the relations between the CPC and the Comintern. In this speech, Zhou Enlai also upheld the principle of independence of the national communist parties (Zhou Enlai SL Vol. II 1989: 306-309).

The above being the view of the two stalwarts of Chinese Revolution on the mutual relationship between the Comintern and the national communist parties, the fear expressed by many that by inserting some conditions of admission in its Statues, the Comintern effectively worked as a stumbling block in the process of development of independent initiatives and, hence, the blind and unquestionable adherence of the Comintern decisions by its national sections may appear to be too simplistic and one sided. It has also been argued that even after the dissolution of Comintern in 1943, it was hard to reconcile that communist parties became, overnight, national parties that were wholly independent and without any links between them. (Claudin 1969-70: 15) An observation made by Stalin on February 09, 1951 is of great significance in this context. While conversing with a group of leaders of CPI in Moscow on the issue of programmes and policies of the CPI, the CPI leaders present their, viz., Rao, Dange, Ghosh, Punnaih - all the top leaders of the then CPI- thanked Stalin for giving time and patiently hearing them and 'declared that on the basis of the instructions of Comrade Stalin they will reconsider all of their activity and would act in correspondence with these instructions'. To this, a very short & sublime answer of Stalin as concluding observation may act as an eye opener for many who were greatly averse to the leadership of Stalin: ***'I have given you no instruction, this is advice, it is not obligatory for you, you may or may not adopt it'*** (Record 1951; emphasis added).

Stalin was then the general secretary of the Soviet Communist Party and the head of the Soviet Government who was then enjoying tremendous authority over all the world leaders because of his leadership in defeating the German fascism in his country. A man of such a stature is so polite even while talking to leaders of the CPI whose party had been in a very bad shape during that time is really hard to believe. It makes one to raise question on the belief that Stalin himself dictated everything for the Comintern without considering the dialectical relationships between/among the national communist parties that pre-destined the fate of all the national

communist parties under the Comintern and even after the dissolution of Comintern.

What we could find here from our discussion that many of the Bengal national revolutionaries who were attracted towards Marxism were not satisfied either with the CPI or the Comintern. They were rather trying to develop party on Marxist Leninist line either separately or joining with some other like-minded groups except the CI affiliated CPI. As a culmination of this process, the Anushilan Marxists first tried to work sometime within the CSP maintaining their separate identity and, after some years of their strained relationships, formed their party, RSP. While the members of the SUCI(C), first started working as the members of the RSP but after sometime entered into a debate on the process of formation of the RSP as a Marxist party which led to their severing ties with the party. Then they formed the SUC as a platform of action in 1946 in association with three other like-minded groups, and, finally, in 1948 SUCI as a separate party through a founding convention on the basis of conventional structure. The party was given a constitutional basis only through its First Party Congress held in March-April, 1988.

However, the actual process of transition is another story which remains outside the purview of the present paper.

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