

**CHARGES AGAINST MEMBERS OF THE
COMMUNIST PARTY OF INDIA
IN THE CONGRESS**

THE A.I.C.C. OFFICE HAVING RECEIVED A LARGE number of complaints and accusations against the activities of Communist members of the Congress and of the Communist Party in India generally in relation to the Congress, the Working Committee have referred this matter to us for examination and, if the facts so warrant, to frame charges to which the persons concerned might be invited to reply. There is a vast mass of papers and reports in the files before us. For the most part they are vague and sometimes irrelevant. Some of the charges, relating to individual or group activity, are serious, but they would require fuller examination and proof before any action could be based on them. We do not propose to take into consideration any of these vague and unproved assertions, or to initiate further inquiries in regard to them at this stage. As we understand the reference made to us, the Working Committee are concerned with the larger issues involved and not so much with individual misdemeanours. Under the Congress constitution and rules, it is open to Provincial Congress Committees or their executives to take disciplinary action against any individual Congressman or Congresswoman who has acted contrary to Congress policy. Such action, we are informed, has already been taken or recommended in certain cases by some Provincial

Congress Committees. We propose, therefore, to consider only the broader aspects of the question in this report. It is not without significance, however, that complaints and accusations against Communist activity in India have been received from a very large number of Congressmen all over India. There is also no doubt that the attitude of the Communist Party towards the communal problem and their unqualified support of the Muslim League's claim for Pakistan have added to the prevailing estrangement. It is manifest that there is at present a widespread and deep sentiment against members of the Communist Party in India, and the Congress rank and file are powerfully influenced by it. We cannot allow ourselves to be guided by this sentiment in considering any action which might have to be taken.

The Congress has in the past kept its membership open to all individuals, classes, and religious and political groups in India, provided only that the objective of Indian independence was accepted, as well as the method of peaceful and legitimate action. Within that broad framework various ideologies have found their place even when they were not wholly in line with the governing ideology of the Congress. Even foreigners who accepted the objective and methods of the Congress could join it. Thus the Congress has been more of a movement than a narrow political party. It has, however, functioned as a party also especially in the legislatures. Being an organisation which has indulged in militant action from time to time on an extensive scale, it has inevitably tended to function as a strictly disciplined organisation, even though it consisted of people with differing views on many political and economic matters. These two somewhat differing approaches—as a broad movement and as a disciplined party—have usually been reconciled by allowing full freedom of expression of views and opinions and at the same time insisting on uniformity in action, especially when that action meant a conflict with the British Government in India. In practice this meant freedom in discussing the policy to be laid down, and when that policy had been determined to adhere to it as closely as possible, and certainly not to oppose it in any way. Without that strictness of uniformity in the field of action, the Congress would have faded away as a militant organisation

and become an ineffective motley crowd pulling in different directions and wholly incapable of acting. Thus while different groups continued in the Congress, if any member of the Congress clearly acted against Congress policy, disciplinary action could be, and sometimes actually was, taken against him. This applied particularly to such Congressmen as were members of executive bodies within the organisation. It was manifestly absurd for a person to be a member of an executive committee when he or she did not accept the policy which that committee was supposed to further, or even opposed it.

Owing to the conflicts that have arisen between the view points and policies of the Congress and various communal organisations in India, it was laid down in the Congress constitution some years ago that "No person who is a member of a communal organisation, the object or programme of which involves political activities which are, in the opinion of the Working Committee, anti-national and in conflict with those of the Congress, shall be eligible for election to any office or membership of any elective Congress Committee." Even in this case, it should be noted, members of communal organisations were not barred from joining the Congress as ordinary primary members; they were prevented from seeking office or membership of any executive.

The Communist Party in India came into existence in a very small way early in the twenties. It was for long an illegal organisation. A few of its members joined the Congress but the general attitude and policy of the Party were to criticise, ridicule and condemn Congress policy. Congress, which had spread to the masses of the people and especially among the peasantry, and was in fact carrying on mass struggles on an unprecedented scale, was characterised as a bourgeois reactionary body trying to prevent mass urges from following their natural course. In particular, the Congress leadership was blamed for coming in the way of the masses. Official Congress policy was often held up to ridicule. In spite of this no action was ever taken against the Communists in India by the Congress, partly because they were so few in numbers and influence that they did not count at all, and partly because they belonged to an illegal organisation

which was being harassed and suppressed by the governmental authorities. The sympathy of Congressmen always went to all who suffered from Government's repressive policy. In 1928 when the Meerut trial took place, and many prominent Communists were involved in it, leading Congressmen helped in the defence.

Even in the early thirties the general attitude of the Communist Party of India towards the Congress did not change and was one of strong criticism and ridicule. In 1935-36, however, there was a change in the wider policies of the Communist Parties all over the world and attempts were made in various countries to form 'Joint fronts' and 'Popular fronts.' It took some time for the C.P. of India to be affected by this and indeed it was resisted for a while as it directly opposed the policy they had so far been pursuing. However in 1936 Communists in India became more friendly to the Congress, exhorted people to join it, and tried to enter its local executives. From then onwards till the middle of 1939, that is for a little over three years, there was often much friction between the Communists and other elements in the Congress, but on the whole they functioned together and no major crisis arose. It should be noted that even this friction was in regard to internal and domestic policies in India, and seldom had anything to do with Communism as such or with reactions to events in the Soviet Union. In the Congress there was a considerable body of opinion which was favourably inclined towards many of the aspects of Communism and Socialism, as there were also many who did not approve of the philosophy underlying Communism. In particular, the stress by Communists on violent methods was in conflict with the Congress policy of peaceful action. But in practice this did not usually lead to conflict in action, except occasionally in local areas. Usually this resulted in long and sometimes heated argument in A.I.C.C. meetings. A few Communists, not exceeding 2 or 3 per cent of the total membership of A.I.C.C. were elected to that body chiefly because of the system of voting by means of proportional representation (single transferable vote) which enabled small minority groups to be represented.

It should also be noted that within the Congress ranks there was widespread admiration for many of the achievements of the

Soviet Union, though some of the policies pursued there were not uniformly admired.

This was the background when the War broke out early in September 1939. The Congress policy before and after this turning point in world history is well-known. It was defined at some length in a statement issued by the Working Committee on September 14, 1939 and subsequently this led to the resignation of the Congress Governments in the Provinces. The Communist Party of India, characterising the war as an imperialist war, bitterly attacked the Congress and Mahatma Gandhi for not launching a mass struggle immediately after the war began for the emancipation of India. The following extracts from a Review on Gandhism published by G. Adhikari at the time of the Ramgarh Congress in March 1940 may be read with interest in this connection.

- (1) Once Gandhism held the fate of British rule in its hand. . . . Today it pursues the logic of "unconditional co-operation" with the same Government and that at a time when an unjust, imperialist and predatory war is raging in the world. Gandhism has entered into its decadent phase. At the most critical time of our national history it is acting as a fetter on the National struggle.
- (2) Immediately on the outbreak of the present war Gandhiji declared that his sympathies were with England and France. He responded to the call of the Viceroy and interviewed him. To the angry demonstrators and correspondents, who resented his action, he replied: I have come to the conclusion that it is Hitler who is responsible for the war. If Hitler thought his claim to Danzig and the Corridor was just, he should have submitted it to an impartial tribunal. Britain is fighting a just war. A Satyagrahi must support a just cause even when it is espoused by an enemy. That is how "non-violence" is invoked in support of an Imperialist war. Gandhiji would not bargain with Imperialism at this critical hour. He would not use England's difficulty to win India's freedom. . . . The popular feeling of 1939

on the other hand was violently against and demanded the immediate resumption of the national struggle for freedom.

- (3) The results of the strategy of stalemate which has been adopted during the last six months are clear enough. First it will mean that the revolutionary vanguard is decimated in isolation through imperialist repression. Secondly demoralisation would spread among the centre elements in the Congress and bring them to accept the position that no struggle is possible, Gandhiji's line is the best. . . . Shorn of its moral embellishment it is the line of the cowardly and compromising bourgeoisie. . . . Gandhism still retains its leadership in the national movement. It is seeking to use its position to overtake and imprison the rapidly growing forces of revolution, to isolate and eliminate them. It is paving the way for the most ignoble compromising and defeat at a time when all the factors are favourable for decisive victory over imperialism.

In the summer of 1940 the collapse of France and the blitzkrieg over England produced powerful reactions in India and it was not considered desirable to start then the civil disobedience movement which had been envisaged in the Ramgarh Congress resolution. In the autumn, however, the situation in the West was more stable, while in India conditions were rapidly deteriorating. In October 1940 the Congress initiated the individual satyagraha movement, controlled and conditioned by Gandhiji. Referring to this, the *Communist* of November 1940 wrote as follows :

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

Again the *Communist* of February 1941, wrote :

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

And in March 1941, the *Communist* wrote :

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

When in the summer of 1941 Nazi Germany attacked Russia there was widespread sympathy and anxiety for the Soviet Union all over India. The Communist Party of India naturally felt this all the more keenly but, in view of their past policy, it was not easy for them suddenly to change their whole attitude to the war. It took them many months to do so but when the change came it was a complete swing-over to the other extreme. The slogan of the "Imperialist War" gave place to one of the "People's War" and co-operation with Britain was urged. This was directly opposed to Congress policy then and later and resulted from it. Soon after the Cripps negotiations the old ban on the C.P. of India was removed by Government and the Communist Party became a legal organisation in India. As such it carried on intensive propaganda for its new point of view, which brought into conflict with Congress activities and propaganda. The C.P. of India started a weekly, the *People's War*, to carry on this propaganda aggressively. Individual Communists who were members of Congress executive were thus placed in a very invidious position, and as they adhered to the Communist line, complaints against them began to mount up. There were some actual conflicts in public meetings, in Andhra

especially, where it was alleged that Communists used violence. In some provinces, as in the U.P., disciplinary action was taken locally against Congress members of executives who were adopting the Communist line. All this was in June and July 1942, prior to August. Thus the position had already become difficult before the August resolution was passed, and it was becoming increasingly clear that no person could or should be simultaneously a member of the executives with differing and hostile policies. In view of the vastness of the Congress organisation and the relative smallness of the C.P. of India, the problem was not in a sense of great importance, but it created a great deal of bitterness.

The resolution of the A.I.C.C. passed on August 8, 1942 was followed by the arrest of large numbers of Congressmen and other events which are well-known. Owing to governmental repression, spontaneous upheavals took place all over the country, hartals, strikes etc. and there was also a good deal of violence in some places. While it was clear that no movement had been officially started by the A.I.C.C. or Gandhiji, it was equally clear that this mass upheaval of unprecedented proportions was the direct consequence of the chain of events that preceded it. Undoubtedly it was a direct manifestation of the people's will, which the Congress had claimed to represent.

In this vast conflict between the forces of Indian nationalism and British imperialism, when people were being shot down by the thousand and many of the horrors of war were being perpetrated on unarmed people in the towns and countryside alike, the Communist Party of India appeared to be lined up with the British Government in India. It is true that they mildly criticised British policy occasionally and asked for the release of the leaders, but they also condemned as traitors many Congressmen and Congress groups and carried on a virulent campaign against the people's movement. Whether the Communist Party's policy was right or wrong it is not for us to consider here. But there can be no doubt whatever that it was opposed to Congress policy and to that policy which had arisen spontaneously as a result of the people's movement. The two could not possibly be reconciled then or now. The *People's War* in its various editions in different languages carried out ceaseless propaganda against this people's

movement in which nearly all Congressmen were involved in some form or other.

The *People's War* dated August 23, 1942, had the following : "To call upon workers to go on political strike is not to exert pressure upon the British Government but to disrupt the country's advance and starve the workers for nothing. Continued production is a vital war necessity whatever the Government might be." Again in the same issue we find the following : "We Communists know that to keep production going is the workers' contribution to national defence and to keep transport running is to help to hit the fascist. We realise more seriously than others that there is no shortcut to Indian freedom except the unity of our nation which will bring us national Government ; and not satyagraha nor sabotage, which can only destroy our national defence and open the gates to fascist invaders." The following extract from Joshi's letter is significant : "We gave up our strike policy because we considered it anti-national in the conditions of today, aiding the Jap aggressors on the one hand and intensifying the economic crisis for our own people on the other. That we successfully prevented the Indian working class from resorting to strikes even in a period of their worsening material conditions is the measure not only of our influence over it but its capacity to understand national interests as its own." Further : "If you enquire into the bona fides of the persons who have written to you you will find that they are those who organised or supported the post-9th August sabotage campaign or have been intensely prejudiced against us by these people. They are bitter against us because we oppose sabotage and exposed them not only in words but in practice."

The first meeting of the Communist Party was held in September 1942. Joshi and Adhikari wrote in the report submitted by them to their Party that there were two groups in the Congress Working Committee. "One, the anti-fascist group of Azad etc., and other, the group of Gandhiji, Patel, Rajendra Prasad and others who wanted to bring British imperialism on its knees by creating a standstill in centres of war production and in all means of communications. This group dominated in the Working Committee and so the paralysis of communications, road

and bridge traffic and production and other anarchical acts etc. that took place on the disturbances were according to the ideas contemplated by the Second group." Thus the responsibility for the August disturbances was placed by the Communists on the Congress Working Committee directly and positively in September 1942, long before the publication of Tottenham's pamphlet on the subject.

The following extracts are taken from the resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of India passed at the same meeting: "The path along which the present national upsurge is directed is one of national suicide not of national salvation and freedom. It destroys the nation's indispensable defences, inevitably leading to conditions of civil commotion and disorder, anarchy, and even loot and arson. It makes the national movement the prey of bureaucratic provocation in the name of struggle. Finally, it creates a mass basis for fifth column activity in the name of patriotism. . . . It is leading the nation to a state of moral and political disruption and paralysis which, far from helping the people to get their freedom, can only clear the path of the invader. Such is the disastrous culmination of policies of not relying upon the strength of the people, that is, on national unity, and leaving the initiative in the hands of the imperialist bureaucracy." Still more emphatic is the following:

"The central tasks to which the Party must address itself today are three fold. . . . (b) carry on persistent political explanations among workers, kisans, students militants and Congressmen, how the present struggle leads to destruction and anarchy and is suicidal."

Again:

"Our first and foremost task must be to re-establish firmly the leadership of the Unions and the Party in the industrial centres and stamp out the efforts of provocateurs and of misguided patriots to drag the working class into the suicidal campaign of sabotage and anarchy."

"Among the kisans we must conduct a sharp political campaign against the saboteurs and promoters of anarchy."

"Among the students we must carry on a political explanatory campaign. We must explain to them that to pursue the policy of permanent strikes, to go in for destruction and anarchy is not to play their part in the freedom movement."

That the Party faithfully carried out these decisions is borne out by a circular of the Government of India issued just a year later on 20th September 1943, from which the following extracts are given:

- (1) The Party has as a whole exercised a restraining effect on students and its influence over the student community, though not great has, such as it is, been used in the direction of preventing student strikes and disorderly demonstrations.
- (2) Such influence as the Party has with labour appears generally to have been exercised in the direction of opposing or minimising the effect of strikes.
- (3) In the Party Congress held in Bombay from May 23rd to June 1st 1943, there was an attack on the negative policy of the Congress and the resolution openly identified for the first time the Congress Socialist Party and Forward Bloc with the fifth column elements who are accused of taking advantage of the Congress resolution of August 1942 to lead the country to the brink of disaster.
- (4) Not only are the Communists almost the only Party which fought for victory . . . they alone, however hesitantly, have criticised the Congress defeatism from a political point of view as opposed, for instance, to the fundamentally communal criticisms of Congress policy by the Muslim League etc. and have openly attacked as traitors the off-shoots of Congress, the Forward Bloc and the Congress Socialist Party.

There are numerous reports from Congress Committees alleging that the Communists had consistently condemned the

August resolution of the Congress and vigorously criticised it as being opposed to the country's true interests. They accused the Congress and Congressmen as responsible for all the disturbances which followed the August resolution. They had similarly thrown their full weight on the side of the Government advocating unconditional support of the war effort and dissuading all classes whether peasants, workers or students from countenancing anything that might hinder the war effort or actually embarrass the administration. There are also many reports made apparently after investigation, showing that the Communists had been violently abusing and vilifying prominent Congressmen, and sometimes co-operating with the police in their activities against some Congressmen in the post August 9th period. Numerous cases of rowdiness and hooliganism on the part of Communists in connection with meetings organised by or under the auspices of local Congress Committees and otherwise, especially in Andhra, are also mentioned in detail. Some of these cases are still the subject of inquiry and trial in some of the Madras courts. On the other hand there are charges made by Communists against Congressmen. We have not gone into these charges and counter-charges. It would be difficult to arrive at exact and definite findings without elaborate enquiries, and, in any event, even if some local charge was proved, it will not follow that this was the result of the official policy of the Communist Party of India. There can, however, be no doubt that the Communists in the Congress, as well as those outside it, have ceaselessly opposed both in letter and spirit the Congress policy from early in 1942 onwards and especially since the resolution of August 8, 1942.

There has been a prolonged correspondence between Gandhiji and Shri P. C. Joshi in regard to the activities of the Communists in the Congress and this has been recently published. At the suggestion of Mr. Joshi, the matter was referred to Shri Bhulabhai Desai for opinion. "You place your whole anti-Communist file," wrote Joshi, "before any patriot of eminence who inspires mutual trust, for example, Mrs. Naidu, Rajaji or Bhulabhai. These are your old colleagues and known to us not to be prejudiced against us. Let me have a copy of the file and let them ask me for explanations on any point. I am sure after reading their

report you will consign the anti-Communist file to the flames." Mr. Desai tendered his opinion on the 20th of August last. In the course of his written opinion Mr. Desai states that "it is candidly admitted by Mr. Joshi that they regarded the European war which has just now ended as the people's war for the reasons he had given." Evidently there was no room for prevarication in this matter. With the propaganda that was being carried on day in and day out in the columns of the *People's War* it did not require much candour to make this admission. Mr. Desai further says: "It does appear that the views and attitude of the Communist Party after the 9th August have been to carry on propaganda contrary to the views and policy of the Congress." A copy of Shri Bhulabhai's note was sent to Mr. Joshi. Mr. Joshi while complaining that Shri Bhulabhai's decision was *ex parte* did not seriously contest his findings. In fact in most other matters Shri Bhulabhai had virtually exonerated the Communists. His conclusion that the Communist Party had been carrying on propaganda contrary to the views and policy of the Congress ever since 9th August, is of considerable significance. At a time when the country was passing through a reign of terror and the Congress was involved in a life and death struggle, no organisation allied with the Congress could without committing a serious outrage to the ordinary tenets of discipline indulge in such hostile activities.

Although we have had to consider largely the past, we might add that even in the present, the policy of the Communist Party of India, as represented by the writings in the *People's War* is very far removed from and often opposed to the Congress policy.

We are therefore of opinion that there is ample evidence on the record before us to establish a strong *prima facie* case against the members of the Communist Party in the Congress and they should be asked to justify their position and policy and to show cause why action should not be taken against them. We have not dealt with individuals in this respect but we can only ask individuals to show causes. We suggest that such Communists as are members of the A.I.C.C. should be asked to do so, as presumably they have a leading position in their party. If any other important member of their party desires to put forward

his explanation or justification, he should be allowed an opportunity to do so. We understand that it is the desire of the President, as well as the Working Committee, that full opportunities for explanation and justification be afforded to Communist members of the Congress. We entirely concur in this opinion. As a matter of fact, as we have mentioned above, there has already been a great deal of inquiry and explanation, and, at the instance of Shri P. C. Joshi, Secretary of the C.P. of India, Shri Desai has given his opinion.

In the event of the explanations given not being satisfactory, the question will arise as to what further steps should be taken. This is premature at this stage. But we should like to make it clear that the issue before us at present, is not to shut the door of the Congress completely to the Communists but to consider how far it is desirable to allow persons who are opposed to the basic Congress policies to be elected to or remain on Congress executive bodies which are charged with carrying out those policies.

BOMBAY,
September 21, 1945.

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