

## **Rise and fall of the Communist Movement in India with Special Focus on Kerala**

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**Abstract:** The British Government in India was keeping watch on the growth of the communist movement in India even from the very beginning of it. In 1924, the Indian Government launched the Cawnpore conspiracy case to arrest the spread of communism in which certain communists were tried for sedition. In the meantime, in December 1925, a conference of the Communist Party of India was convened. The prominent among those who organized the convention was one Satya Bhakta. But, after a few days of its inception, he left it and founded "National Communist Party". Another communist connected with the formation of the Communist Party of India was Singaravelu Chettiar. Thus, a Communist Party in India was established on the Indian soil in 1925.

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

The association of Indian nationalist leaders like Dadabhai Navaroji and Romesh Dutt with the labour and socialist leaders of the West may be cited as the first contact of resurgent India with socialist thought. When Rammohan was in England he happened to meet Robert Owen, the socialist leader. Owen had unsuccessfully tried to convert Rammohan into communism. Mr. Navaroji and Mr. Dutt, the moderate leaders of the Congress Party, as they were called, tried to show that the traditional Indian economy was disintegrating under the influence of British imperialist policy and that the old agro-industrial balance was on the verge of destruction. Socialists in Britain criticized British imperialists and held that imperialism was bound to lead to exploitation. Indian freedom fighters also traced the poverty of the masses to British imperialism and plunder. Apart from criticizing British imperialism the early Indian liberals also attacked the free-trade policy of the Physiocrats which was wholly opposed to socialistic theory. In 1892 in his essay on "Indian Political Economy, M.G. Ranade, one of the first Indian nationalists, pointed out that the theory of laissez-faire could not be applied indiscriminately to all countries.

Among the extremist leaders, Lajpat Rai and Bepin Pal, came into contact with socialist thought. When they were in Europe, they happened to meet with many socialist intellectuals and labour leaders. Lajpat Rai held that the nationalist movement in India should adopt the aims of the British Labour Party. The Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 in Russia had tremendous influence on both Lajpat and Bepin Pal. They wanted to reform the capitalistic system by the development of a strong trade union movement.

Lajpat strongly believed that not only the foreign rulers but also the privileges which the Indian capitalists and land lords enjoyed must be fought. However, their attraction to socialism was in a vague humanitarian way. "We know we cannot fly the flag of socialism. We do not understand socialism. We have never studied it". In fact, till the Russian Revolution, not many educated Indians had come into contact with socialistic thought.

Since the 1920's vague socialistic and communistic ideas began to spread among the young intelligentsia of India. The young welcomed these Indians with energy and enthusiasm. Meanwhile, the 3rd Communist International set up a special branch for the dissemination of communism in India. The red flag and the device of the hammer and sickle became increasingly evident in labour meetings in India. The cry of Inquilab Zindabad began to be heard in the processions of workers.

### **Cpi-Cpm Differences Over The Establishment Of The Cpi**

Muzafar Ahmed, one of the veteran communists of India, claims that the Communist Party of India was founded towards the end of 1920 at the Tashkent Military School. But there is a great deal of controversy over the date of the establishment of the C.P.I. The present day C.P.I, after a great deal of debate, say that the communist movement began in this country under the leadership of the Communist Party in 1925. "In support of their contention, the C.P.I. historians say that even the late Muzafar Ahmed had mentioned 1925 as the year

the communists began their journey in India. Later, however, he changed his mind when he joined the C.P.I (M).

But the above contention of the C.P.I historians does not corroborate with facts. Mr. Muzafar Ahmed in his work *The Communist Party of India and its Formation Abroad* wrote even as early in 1962 itself, that the Communist Party of India was established in 1920. Hence, the accusation that Mr. Muzafar Ahmed changed his mind after he joined the C.P.I (M), the new Communist Party established after the ideological split in the C.P.I in 1964, is not based on facts.

### **Dispute Between M.N.Roy And Lenin Over The Role Of The Bourgeoisie**

Manavendra Nath Roy is supposed to be one of the first Indian communists. The radical humanist attended the Second Congress of Communist International in 1920 as a delegate from the Mexican Communist Party. He was the founding leader of it. At the second Congress, Roy submitted a thesis on the attitude to be adopted by the communists to national liberation movements. This was in complete disagreement with Lenin. Roy believed that in the dependent countries there was a mass movement of the peasants and workers. But Lenin considered the significance of bourgeois democratic revolutions and held that the communists should help the colonial liberation movements under the leadership of national bourgeoisie.

Roy objected to the use of the expression ‘the bourgeois-democratic liberation movement’ by Lenin. In the end, when the manifesto of the Second Congress of the Communist International was prepared, the disputed expression by Lenin was replaced by the words “national revolutionary movement”. In his reply to Roy, Lenin pointed out that in the beginning the Communist Party would be ineffective with a few members and weak resources and therefore, the Indian communists should co-operate with the national liberation movement.

Considering the liberation movements of the bourgeoisie in subject countries as democratic movements, in the Preliminary Draft Thesis on the National and Colonial Questions prepared for the Second Congress of the Communist International, Lenin stated. “with regard to the more backward states and nations in which feudal or patriarchal and patriarchal-peasant relations predominate, it is particularly important to bear in mind first that all communist parties must assist the bourgeois-democratic liberation movement in these countries and that the duty of rendering the most active assistance rests primarily with the workers of the country upon which the backward nation is dependent colonially or financially”.

But Lenin was not heeded. Similarly there was a dispute between Mr. Roy and Lenin over the role of Gandhi in the Indian national movement. Lenin considered Gandhi to be a progressive, while Roy considered Gandhi as a medieval reactionary. Roy argued that Gandhi might travel the way of Russian social revolutionaries, who were “politically revolutionary” and “socially reactionary”. The Indian communists, however, after several years, admitted their failure to adopt the correct approach to the national liberation movement in India. They also admitted their failure to recognize Gandhi’s positive role in the liberation struggle against the British imperialists. “There is no doubt that if Indian communists in the early thirties had studied and grasped Lenin’s opinion on this question the Communist Party of India would have been saved from the extremely costly mistakes it made in the Civil Disobedience Movement between 1930 to 1934, and would have emerged as a powerful national force in the course of it”.

### **Establishment Of The Cpi In The Indian Soil**

The British Government in India was keeping watch on the growth of the communist movement in India even from the very beginning of it. In 1924, the Indian Government launched the Cawnpore conspiracy case to arrest the spread of communism in which certain communists were tried for sedition. In the meantime, in December 1925, a conference of the Communist Party of India was convened. The prominent among those who organized the convention was one Satya Bhakta. But, after a few days of its inception, he left it and founded “National Communist Party”. Another communist connected with the formation of the Communist Party of India was Singaravelu Chettiar. Thus, a Communist Party in India was established on the Indian soil in 1925. Hence, the controversy between, the C.P.I. and the C.P.I (M) over the date of the establishment of the Communist Party of India is insignificant as both sides are correct on their sides.

The national liberation movement of India, prior to the emergence of the ‘Gandhian Era’, had two facets. On the one hand, political pundits and philanthropists tried to move the people of India against the British rule; while, on the other, adventuring revolutionaries through subversive terrorist activities endeavored their best to mobilize the people against the foreign yoke. It goes to the credit of Gandhiji for amassing all the potent energies of both the movements and guiding them through a novel and creative path. However, the suspension of the Civil Disobedience Movement by Gandhiji disappointed the emotional young generation. Meanwhile, the feverish attempts made by the Communist International to spread communism in the colonial countries propped up the pro-Bolshevik leanings of the Indian ultra revolutionaries, and consequently, many communist groups emerged in India.

The 1921 conference of the Indian National Congress held in Ahmedabad was a turning point in the history of communist movement of India. For the first time in the history of National Congress, a manifesto was distributed on behalf of the Indian Communist Party. As a result of the various propaganda devices and struggles conducted by the Thashkent group which came to be known as the Communist Party of India and other active communist groups, another historical turning point also emerged. This was the All India Public Conference of the Communists in Kanpur, U.P. Thus legal Communist Party functioning in the Indian soil was founded. Bombay was, in the mid thirties, another strong hold of the Communists. The communist movement found a fertile plot among the textile mill hands there.

### **The Communist Movement In Kerala**

The most striking feature of the communist movement in Kerala is its indigenous and popular character. The founders of the movement in Kerala had an excellent record of participation, and even leadership, in the national liberation struggle against the British. Many of them, to name a few, P.Krishna Pillai, K. Damodaran, N.C. Sekhar, E.M.S. Namboodiripad, had been prominent members of the Congress Party at one time.

The principal reason responsible for making communism in Kerala an indigenous movement was the physical and ideological aloofness of the communist movement of Kerala from the problems which had been rocking the central leadership of the Communist Party in New Delhi. The dictates of the third international forced the leaders in New Delhi many a time to plunge themselves into struggles which often ran counter to the interests and aspirations of the Indian people. These factors virtually isolated them from the mainstream of national life. The aloofness of the communist leaders in Kerala from central leadership saved them from such troubles. Thus, the communist movement in Kerala initially grew within the Congress Party which was the true representative of the ambitions of the people at that time. “In fact, the story of communism in Kerala, until the establishment of an independent Communist Party in 1940, is the history of the Congress Party and its struggle against foreign domination and for the introduction of political, economic and social reforms.”

But, from 1941 onwards, the communist movement in Kerala came to be highly sensitive to the changes in international communism and it began to live up behind the leadership in New Delhi in its opposition to the Quit-India Movement and in support of British war efforts. By this time, the communist movement in Kerala had been well established among the workers, peasants and intellectuals and the deviations from the main stream caused marginal loss to its organization, membership and prestige.

One of the striking features of communism in Kerala is that its leaders had occupied important places in the National Congress in the pre-independence days. Within the congress, these leaders represented the radical wing which was under the leadership of Nehru. In 1935, the radicals established the Congress Socialist Party and continued to function within the organizational framework of the Congress Party. In 1938, the radicals established a rival Congress organization in Kerala and started functioning independently of the all India Congress leadership. However, the real outburst in the Congress was in 1940, when the most radically minded of the radicals left the rival Congress organization and formed themselves the Communist Party of India. Since the outbreak of war in September 1939 and until July 1942, the Communist Party in Kerala was more anti-British than the Congress Party. This earned for the party in Kerala a lot of credit while the all India leadership of the party was in serious difficulties. When the Soviet Union entered the war in June 1941, Communist Party in India was caught up in great confusion because the leaders of the party in Kerala had to submit before the dictate of international communism and declare loyalty towards the Soviet Union rather than supporting the mother land. Superseding their previous stand, the Kerala communists declared that their principal enemy was German Fascism threatening to destroy the Soviet Union and not British imperialism. Every assistance to the British, they argued, helped the Soviet Union. Sri. A K. Gopalan has frankly admitted that the political line of the party at that time ran counter to the anti imperial sentiments of the majority of the Indian people. Strangely, while this anti-national stand of the Communist Party in Kerala gave a violent shock to its top leadership, it had practically little effect upon its local units. During this period, the party grew into a mass organization. The local party units had been kept away from those delicate problems confronted by the all India leadership of the party. The local leadership was instructed to concentrate on the immediate and concrete problems confronting the working class and the peasantry. Another reason favourable to the growth of the Communist Party was created by the co-operative attitude shown by the British authorities. While the patriots from the Congress Party and other patriots were imprisoned for anti-war and anti- British agitation, The Communist leaders in Kerala had all the sympathy and support of the British authorities, which they gained as a reward for anti-national activities during the period. The leaders of other Leftist forces accused the communists of betraying the national cause. They labeled the communists as paid agents of British imperialism.

During the ten years between 1947 and 1957, Kerala witnessed a sudden deterioration of the Congress Party. The bitterness between the Congress Party and the socialist splinter groups led the latter to co-operate with the communists to dislodge the Congress Party from power. The political tussle and the rise and fall of

cabinets in quick succession in the Travancore-Cochin state during 1947-1957 is attributed to the quick decline of the Congress Party and the growth of the Communist Party in Kerala. The result of the first General Election in Kerala came as a rude shock to the Congress Party. The combined strength of the Party with the Tamil Nadu Congress in the Travancore- Cochin Assembly was 52, out of 109 seats, meanwhile the Communist Party won 29 seats against nil 1948.

### **The Communist Rule In Kerala-1957 General Elections**

The second General Elections were held in India during January-February 1957. The political situation at this time was in favour of the Communist Party. The Congress had proved its inability to provide a stable government. The history of the party in the post-independence years until 1957 demonstrated this fact. The decline in the morale and political stature of the party led to the erosion of mass support the party had been commanding in the pre-independence years. Its failure in offering a solid leadership and guidance to the demand for the formation of the United Kerala and the manifestation of the new forces of regionalism shook the very foundations of the popular support of the Congress Party. While the congress Party remained indifferent to the people's call for a United Kerala, the Communist Party exploited the situation by utilizing the regional feelings of the Keralites.

The policy of the Communist Party on the national question in Kerala formulated by Sri. Namboothiripad offered the party line as well as a slogan to keep itself the vanguard of the Akhila(united) Kerala movement. The party organized many campaigns for mobilizing the public opinion in favour of United Kerala. On the basis of the report of the States Reorganisation Commission's report, the Central Government ordered the formation of a new state of Kerala through the incorporation of Malabar and Kasaragod into the Travancore-Cochin State and the separation of 4 Tamil-speaking taluks from Travancore and their merger with the Madras State. On the first of November, 1956, the new State of Kerala came into existence. The Communist Party successfully claimed the paternity of the United Kerala, though the demand for this was raised by the Congress Party first.

### **Preparation For 1957 General Election**

Having failed to secure an electoral alliance with the PSP, the Communist Party initiated the last Phase of its electoral campaign. In January 1957, the party published its election manifesto. It was a unique document. It combined heavy punches against the Congress with a constructive programme of political, economic and social reforms. "The Communist Party was the only party which placed before the electorate not only a plan of how to end the agony of political instability in the state, but also how to improve the lives of the people." The manifesto detailed the three conspiratorial groups which menaced the prospects of the State. They are: (a) Advocates of the Southern State or 'Dakshina Samsthana'; (b) Advocates of the Western costal State; and (c) Agitations for the 'Akhanda Kerala' The plea of the Communist Party in the election manifesto that the people of Kerala had to rally behind the party to defeat the machinations of the conspiratorial groups against Kerala was nothing but a Quixotic fight of the party against imaginary ghosts of the newly formed Kerala State.

### **The Cpi Coming To Power Through Ballot**

The newly formed Kerala State was divided into 114 single member constituencies and 12 double member constituencies to elect 126 members of the State Legislative Assembly. The different political parties contested the elections as follows:

Indian National Congress	124
Communist Party of India	100
Praja Socialist Party	62
Revolutionary Socialist Party	28
Muslim League	63
Independents	74

The following table shows the number of votes polled and the seats won by the contesting parties:

PARTY	VOTES	%	SEATS	%
Communist party	2,059,547	34.98	60	47.6
Congress party	2,209,291	37.40	43	34.2
PSP	628,261	11.20	9	7.2
RSP	188,553	3.22	-	-
Muslim league			8	6.3
independents	751,965	13.20	5	3.9

Elected unopposed			1	0.8
TOTAL	5,837,617	100	126	100

In terms of the votes polled, the Communist Party emerged as the second largest in the State. The party won 34.98% of the votes cast. Securing 47.6% of seats in the Assembly, the party became the majority party in the legislature. Though the Congress Party won 37.4% of the votes cast, it secured only 34.1% of seats. Yet the Congress Party remained the largest party in the State. But the electoral tactics of the CPI enabled the party to win the largest percentage of seats in the Assembly.

On April 5, 1957 the Communist Government assumed power in Kerala. Many theoreticians believed that the event marked the beginnings of the world communist movement acquiring a large base in the Indian sub-continent. In reality, this prophecy was proved wrong. Twenty eight month's communist rule in Kerala totally discredited the party within the State and outside. The Communist Ministry was dismissed by the President of India on 31<sup>st</sup> July 1959, as per Article 356 of the Indian Constitution, when the mass upsurge in Kerala against the Communist Government reached its zenith. The communist rule in Kerala was severely criticized on the ground that it associated with a unique case of systematic adaptation, conversion and exploitation of the institutions of parliamentary democracy for the purpose of its transformation into a special form of the dictatorship of the proletariat. The Communist Party in Kerala began to work for the fulfillment of "The Kerala Pattern of Peaceful Transition to Communism" which was articulated by EMS Namboothiripad as early as in 1956. In this Pattern there were implicit proposals for the neutralization of the Police force and Courts. It stressed upon the actual process of transition to be effected through direct actions of the Communist Party-controlled mass organizations. These organizations made attempts to implement directly the ideals of the Preamble and the Directive Principles of State Policy in order to overcome the limitations in controlling the private property rights and civil rights. Later, it was known that huge State funds had been diverted towards communist manned organizations such as organizations in agriculture, industry, education, culture and so on. In Kerala, they wanted to make the Constitution and State apparatus as means to promote and protect the interest and aspirations of the party in power, instead of punishing those engaged in the activities of the mass organizations. Yet another feature of the Kerala Pattern of Communism was the linking of the State apparatus and the bodies of municipal administration to the Communist Party to make sure that the commands of the party were transmitted and executed. In order to link the Communist Party with the Ministers, the Police, the Courts, Magistrates and Panchayats, 1200 special liaison bodies were reported to have been formed. There were instances of demoting and transferring the officers who refused to execute the commands of the liaison groups. At the lowest level of administration, in the villages and small towns, the Communist Party established cell courts. Such courts were composed of members of the party and functioned as agencies of class rule in rural areas. Cases involving party members were adjudged by the cell courts.

The net result of the direct actions of the mass organizations controlled by the CPI was a sharp increase of crime. The Kerala Police Administration Report for 1957 showed increase of crime.

Nature of Crimes	1956	1957	Increase in %
Cognizable Crimes	4747	10461	120.0
Serious Offences	4149	4880	17.5
Murder	167	256	55.0
Riots and Assualts	479	870	81.0

The crime detection efficiency of the Police dropped from 41.1% to 27.5 % during the period.

#### **The Split In The Cpi: Sino-Soviet Dispute And Sino-Indian Boarder Dispute**

The Sino-Soviet ideological dispute and the Sino-Indian boarder conflict had their impact on the Communist movement in India in as much as they were instrumental for bringing about a split in the Communist Party of India. At the Amritsar Congress of the Communist Party of India early in 1958 the rift between the Right and the Left groups became acute. The result was an opportunistic compromise at the sixth Party Congress in Vijayawada in 1962, in pursuance of an effort to avoid an open clash.

During 1957-61, the Right-Left factionalism in the CPI coincided with the acceleration of Sino-Soviet ideological dispute and the Sino-Indian boarder conflict. In 1956 the dispute was limited in scope in the sense that it was mostly confined to mutual discussions between the Soviet and Chinese party leaders and ideologues. But in 1957, the ideological dispute assumed a new dimension. Open verbal war between the communist leaders of China and Russia began. In 1959, when Nikita Khrushchev's plan for co-operation with the USA became popular and the Soviet Union refused to afford atomic aid to China, the ideological conflict reached at its zenith. Besides, there were two other events which accelerated the clash. They were: (1) the publication of an article in the Red Flag with the title Long Live Leninism wherein the Communist Party of China described the ideological

aberrations of the CPSU; (2) A fierce verbal battle between the leaders of the two communist parties in Bucharest in June 1960.

### **The Beginnings Of The Sino-Indian Dispute**

The beginnings of the Sino-Indian border dispute can be traced to 1954, when the Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru raised to the Chinese Prime Minister Chou-en-Lai the question of certain Chinese maps showing Indian territories as belonging to China. The Government of India was then informed by the Chinese authorities that such maps were mere reproductions of the maps of previous Regimes and that the Government of the Peoples Republic of China had no time to revise them. In 1956, when the Chinese Prime Minister visited India, it is reported that, he told Jawaharlal Nehru that China would agree to the proposed formalization of the Mc Mohan Line, demarcating the Indo-China boundary in the case of Burma. It was during this period that the Lama Revolt in Tibet was intensive. On July 20, 1958, China blamed India for permitting Kalimpong, a border town, to be used as the centre for directing the Tibetan insurrection.

In January 1959, Chou-en-Lai questioned the established boundary alignment, but advanced no specific claims. Sino-Indian relations, already got strained, became worse by April 1959, when the Lama Revolt in Tibet was crushed and the Dalai Lama fled Lasha to seek political asylum in India. This incident brought about a severe rift between India and China. In September 1959, Chou-en-Lai stated his country's claim for about 50,000 square miles of territory in India's possession followed by a border clash between the two countries.

The Soviet attitude towards the Sino-Indian border dispute was one of the factors that strained Sino-Soviet relations, a fact attested by the Chinese. "One of the main differences of principle between the Soviet leaders and ours turns on the Sino-Indian boundary question" (peoples daily 1963).

### **The Cpi And The Cpc**

The Communist Party of India was drawn into a dilemma by the Lama Revolt in Tibet which had already strained the Sino-Indian relations. The Communist Party of India which had thenceforth supported the foreign policy of Nehru "in changing the world alignment of forces" was embarrassed by Nehru's attitude to the Lama Revolt in Tibet and the party could neither support the views of Nehru nor endorse the Chinese criticism of Nehru. The party tried to maintain a precarious stand by supporting the fraternal party in China on the one hand and supporting Nehru's foreign policy on the other. Ajoykumar Ghosh, the General Secretary of the Communist Party of India, observed that Nehru seemed to think that India's conduct during the Lama Revolt in Tibet was "unimpeachable" and was in total conformity with Panch Sheel and the entire blame lay with the Chinese. Ajoykumar Ghosh hastened to add that Nehru had rejected "imperialist" attempts to bring about a total change in India's foreign policy. The Chinese charge of Indian expansionism was interpreted by Ajoykumar Ghosh as not intended against Nehru or his Government but against "Certain reactionary circles in India." Endorsing the Chinese charge that Kalimpong had become the command center of the rebels, the Secretariat of the C.P.I demanded that the Government of India should investigate "the affairs of Kalimpong". However, the CPI Secretariat was happy that the Nehru Government had taken "a proper attitude" to the question and refused to oblige with reactionaries whose sole aim was, "to sow discord between our two friendly people." But, in March 1959, resolutions of Central Executive Committee of the CPI criticized Nehru, because he had allowed himself to take positions and make utterances which can't be reconciled with his foreign policy. The resolutions tried to interpret the Chinese criticism of India as directed against the reactionary forces in the country. However, all the resolutions praised Nehru for not distorting India's foreign policy in accordance with the imperialist wishes.

### **The Deepening Of Sino-Soviet Rift**

As has been stated earlier, the real burst up in the relationship between the USSR and China over their respective attitude to India was the former's statement in September, 1959.

The statement of the Soviet Union served a dual purpose in India. It indicated to the Nehru Government that the Soviet positions were shifting in its favour, while, at the same time, it helped the Rightist group in the CPI in its plea for the support of Nehru regime. The CPI was in no mood to defend the Chinese position or actions anymore, because even the Soviet Union was not supporting them. Therefore, the CPI found it easier to identify itself with the Government's side on the border issue.

On September 30, 1959, Mr. Khrushchev made a public statement which proved to be a soothing balm to the CPI's drive for supporting the Nehru regime. In his statement, Mr. Khrushchev blamed China for its desire to test the stability of the capitalist system by force. On a later occasion, the Chinese disclosed that while Khrushchev was in Peking, they had explained to him on October 2nd the background of Sino-Indian hostilities; pointing out that China would not yield to Indian reactionaries all the time. However, Khrushchev did not care

to know the real situation and “identity of the party committing provocation” but insisted that it was wrong for people to die in clashes.

#### **Disagreement In The Cpi On The Chinese Stand**

The CPI leadership was divided over the Longju incident. This is very clearly proved by the ambiguity in the statement of the CPI Secretariat issued on August 30. Further, it failed to locate the responsibility of the clash either on India or China. The statement merely pointed out that the boarder clashes in the North occurred because “unfortunately a great part of the northern border of our country has not been clearly demarcated.”

The Link, a pro-Moscow journal commented on the Secretariat’s statement that it hardly convinced anybody in the party. When the CPI Secretariat met again the members were divided. S.A. Dange, Z.A. Ahmed and A.K. Gopalan would have preferred a nationalist line. While some leaders were un-inhibited, some others were cautious in their reaction. The Soviet statement of September 30, however, provided some of the leaders with confidence. P.Ramamurthy, A.K.Gopalan and E.M.S.Namboodiripad declared in public that any aggression on Indian borders would be fought by the party.

The Central Executive Committee of the CPI met towards the end of September and called for a negotiated settlement of the border dispute without either side declaring acceptance of its own claims the preconditions for talks. The Central Executive Committee was convinced that “Socialist China can never commit aggression against India just as our country has no intension of aggression against China”

This resolution of the CPI is believed to have made as a stop-gap arrangement because many of the second rank leaders of the CPI were demanding a firm declaration supporting the Indian Government’s stand on Mc Mohan Line. Ajoy Ghosh did not stand with the majority. Yet, to avoid a split in the party, he urged everybody to pursue a cautious line. The Calcutta resolution of the CPI, however, endorsed Prime Minister Nehru’s approach towards the problem. It did not accept the Chinese claim, and thus, for the first time, there was a difference of opinion between the CPI and the government of a communist country. The CPI leadership was grossly divided over the Sino-Indian boarder dispute. Mr. P Sundarayya believed that Government of India was responsible for the dispute with China. Ajoy Ghosh condemned the Indian reactionaries for their exploitation of the boarder dispute to create ‘Sino-Phobia’, thereby trying to expel Nehru Government from power. He believed that China’s attitude to maps and other related things had strengthened the hands of Indian reactionaries. However, Mr. Sardesai thought that the Chinese leadership was totally responsible for all the troubles over the boarder issue. The ideological division in the CPI was complete on the eve of the Central Executive Committee meeting on April 30,1960. B T.Ranadive wanted to uphold a pro-Moscow line. He asserted the futility of the middle path. S A.Dange also was against the ‘middle path’.

When the National Council met in Vijayawada before the 6<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 1962, there were two documents before it. Delegates were clearly divided on the Leftist and Rightist sides with equal strength on the national and international issues. The Rightist document was introduced by Ahmed Sardesai, K Damodaran and Bhavani Sen. P Ramamurthy introduced the Leftist document on behalf of B T.Ranadive. The Left wing focused its attention on three developments. They were:

- 1) Massive foreign aid has begun to undermined or already undermined the independence of the country.
- 2) Independent industrial development under Congress leadership was virtually impossible.
- 3) Joint action with democratic and progressive Congressmen against Right reaction was impossible.

At this juncture, the National Council was saved from a ravage by a motion of J Nagi Reddi to stop discussion for the time being and the same was endorsed. The division in the CPI grew from bad to worse when the question of the selection of the Indian delegates to the Moscow Conference of the World Communist and Workers’ Party came up. At last the decision of the Central Executive Committee was imposed on the Party, without discussion of the issue in the Central Committee. Another issue that created division was regarding the preparation of documents for the 6<sup>th</sup> Party Congress. The National Council was confronted by two draft programmes and two draft political resolutions. At this juncture, the principal issue for discussion was the concept of national democracy which was formulated in the 1960 Moscow statement as a form of transition to socialism in underdeveloped countries where the national bourgeoisie played an objectively progressive role and deserved political and economic aid. This was a Soviet theoretisation. The Chinese leadership was not in total agreement with this concept and the Communist Party of China attacked it in the Peoples’ Daily in October 1961. The draft political resolution proposed by Mr. Ajoy Ghosh envisaged the goal of the national democratic

Government and that this was to be achieved through a National Democratic Front to fight the extreme rightists. The alternative draft prepared by B T. Ranadive envisaged a narrower Front. In his draft, the goal was to be peoples' democracy, not national democracy. The debate in the National Council on the two drafts created a lot of sound and fury. EMS dubbed the draft of Ajoy Ghosh as revisionist. The Rightists attacked Ranadive's draft with strong vocabulary. The Leftist report held that India's independence was not complete, because after independence the bourgeoisie had compromised with domestic reaction and imperialism and more concession was given to foreign monopolies which led to a link between domestic and foreign capital.

Ajoy Ghosh, Dr. Adhikari and P C. Joshi presented the rightist case and argued that the test of a country's independence was its foreign policy and that the foreign policy of India was not only anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist but also one of continuous collaborations with the Soviet Union. Further , it was argued that the new threat to independence arose from weaknesses and shortcomings of the Government's internal policies attributable to the heterogeneous character of the Indian bourgeoisie. Hence, the task was to push the people into action defend and strengthen the progressive aspects of Government policies. In order to accomplish this, the National Democratic Front must be comprised of all classes ranging from the national bourgeoisie to the working class and attract progressive Congressmen to the Communist Party. In simple words, the Rightists advocated a metamorphosis of the existing bourgeois democracy into national democracy.

Another document of EMS condemned the leadership's revisionist attitude and held it responsible for the reduced membership, loose discipline and the organizational weaknesses of the party. However, the CPI could avoid open split over the programme by a unanimous decision of the National Council that the two alternative drafts of B T. Ranadive and EMS should be with Ajoy Ghosh's draft should be amended.

Another major issue that accelerated the process of split in the CPI was the publication of "Dange Letters" in March 1963 by an anti-communist weekly, the "Current" which alleged that Dange, Chairman of CPI, when he was a prisoner after his conviction in the Cawnpore conspiracy case, wrote to the then British Viceroy of India in 1924 offering his service in return for pardon. The Central Secretariat of the CPI described the Dange letters as a "deliberate forgery" and charged the Leftist group in the CPI with responsibility of the circulation of this forged document. When the National Council of the CPI met on 19th April, 1964, the division between the supporters of Dange and the Leftist group was clear. All efforts to patch up a compromise proved futile and finally, thirty two members of the National Council walked out and issued a statement claiming that the letters in question were genuine. In July 1964 those who had left the CPI met at Tenali in Andhra and decided to form a separate party which came to be known as the Communist Party of India (Marxist).

Before the split in 1964, the position of the CPI was quiet well in the Parliament. In the first General Election the party got 23 seats and in 1957 the strength of the party in the Lok Sabha was 29. In 1962 elections the tally of the party remained the same. In 1967 and 1971 despite the split and formation of CPI (M), the Communist Party of India bagged 23 and 24 seats respectively. However, thereafter, the performance of the party began to suffer declines. In 1977 it got only 7 seats and in 1984 its strength again declined to 6. In the 10th and 11th Lok Sabha elections held in 1991 and 1996, however the party managed to improve its strength to 12. In 1996 when the United Front formed its government at the centre, the CPI joined the government and its General Secretary Mr. Indrajith Gupta became the Home Minister. It was also a partner in the second United Front government which remained in power from April 1997 to March 1998. Thereafter, its position again began declining. In the 12th Lok Sabha it could win only 9 seats and in the 13th Lok Sabha its tally came down to just 4 seats. In the 14th General Election held in 2004 there was revival of communist parties. The CPI improved its strength to 16. But this was the last resurgence of the party. Thereafter, in the 15th, 16th and 17th Lok Sabha elections the presence of the CPI became nominal bagging only 4 seats in 2009, 1 in 2014, and 2 in 2019.

Since 1964, the CPI(M) had been an important actor in the Indian political system. Over the five decades it has emerged as a more popular party than the CPI. In 1967 it polled 4.4% of popular votes and secured 19 Lok Sabha seats. During this time the total strength of the 2 communist parties was 42. Thenceforth the popularity of the CPM registered steady increase. In West Bengal, Tripura and Kerala in particular the CPM has been greatly popular in May-June 1991 elections. The party won 27 Lok Sabha seats and 187 West Bengal Vidhan Sabha seats. In 1983 elections the Left Front lead by the CPI (M) captured two third seats in the Tripura Vidhan Sabha. This victory continued till 2017 when the BJP ousted CPM government with a two third majority in the legislature. Ever since the formation of the Left Democratic Front in 1980, the CPM led governments have been continually assuming power in Kerala. But the just concluded 17th Lok Sabha elections and its results expose the weakening position and imminent fall of the communist parties all over India. Like the CPI, the CPM was also growing weaker and weaker after the 2004 General Elections. In 2009 the CPM won only 16 seats in the Lok Sabha. The combined strength of the CPI and CPM in the 15th Lok Sabha decreased to 20 from 53 in the 14th Lok Sabha. The 16th Lok Sabha election results again proved the decline of communist parties with a combined strength of only 10. In the 17th Lok Sabha the CPM has only 3 members and the combined strength

of the two communist parties is only 5. The communist parties were completely wiped out from West Bengal and Tripura. In Kerala the Left parties managed to win only 1 seat. Unless the communist parties had patched up electoral agreements with the DMK and its allies in Tamilnadu, including the Muslim League which was branded as a communal party and therefore untouchable, the communist parties might have been miserably circumscribed to one seat, won by CPM in Kerala and the CPI might have been wiped out from the Parliament.

#### NOTES

1. The Physiocrats were a group of writers who developed a body of economic theory in France in the eighteenth century. They were opposed to almost all forms of government restrictions. They advocated “laissez-faire”. It means “let things alone, let them take their own course”. In effect it means freedom of business enterprise at home and free trade abroad.
2. The appraisal on the role of the national bourgeoisie was a distinct Soviet innovation. The Chinese communists did not explicitly reject the concept of the national bourgeoisie in the countries like India.
3. Denigration of Gandhi by the early communists of India continued even after the debate between M.N.Roy and Lenin. Pro-communist publication ‘Unmasked Parties and Politics’ published cartoons in 1940, criticizing Gandhi, Bose and Jaya Prakash Narayan.

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