

CHAPTER \_ IV

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REVOLUTION IN INDIA : THE INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS  
AND THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT.

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CONGRESS AND THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT :

It has been rightly pointed out that Roy's Indian background had much to do with his ideas on the problem of strategy and tactics of revolution in the colonial and dependent countries. Roy's views on the perspective of revolution in India can now be easily followed, for in regard to many essentials it was assumed to be as is usual in communist thinking, analogous and parallel to that in China and vice versa.

But in India, however, the comintern did not have the advantages which it had in China. There was no legal ban on the communist party and it soon built up a strong following. The conditions in India were quite different. The communists here were confronted with a strong and well organised colonial administration. Of course it can be said that the Indian National Congress formed a parallel body to the one that existed in China. But its leadership and ideology proved to be in very formidable stages.

When Roy and the Comintern turned their attention to India after the Second Congress (1920), the Indian National

Congress was getting transformed into a mass party under the leadership of Gandhiji. Roy reacted to the Gandhi's creed of non-violence, his intense religious bias in politics and his opposition to machine civilization etc., were palpably reactionary. Even before he became a Marxist, Roy as a militant nationalist believed in violent revolution. As a Marxist he considered Gandhiji's intensely religious, anti-materialist philosophy as outdated and reactionary. In particular, Gandhiji's opposition to machine production was retrograde for in Marxism it is the development of productive forces that is the crucial test of social progress. As to non-violence Roy said " British rule in India was established by force and is maintained by force; therefore it can and will be overthrown only by a violent revolution." Declaring that the Communist International was whole heartedly with the people of India in their struggle against British imperialism, he continued " The Economic, social and cultural progress of the Indian people demands the complete separation of India from imperialist Britain. To realize this separation is the goal of revolutionary nationalism. This goal however cannot be attained by negotiation nor by peaceful means." <sup>1</sup>

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1. Overstreet and Windmiller , Communism in India, p. 56.  
University of California Press, 1959.

If the Gandhian ideology was a formidable challenge, the concrete tactical and organizational problems posed by the congress party were no less formidable. The importance of the Congress as the biggest national party with a mass basis could not be denied. According to the Comintern line, already laid down, the task was to enter the Congress and consolidate and crystallize the forces opposed uncompromisingly not only to imperialism but also to the forces of native reaction - at first the feudal class and subsequently the big bourgeoisie which, alarmed by the growth of mass revolutionary movement would desert the national revolution. The Communist Party should, however maintain its separate identity. The implementation of this line presented many practical difficulties. With the threat of a ban there was no alternative to an illegal communist party. On the other hand the congress was a heterogeneous organization with no clear economic programme. Roy, therefore, would not consider it as a political party proper. " A political party is of no importance without a programme, because in that case it cannot count upon the conscious support of any social element."<sup>2</sup> If the Congress is to be a political party, it has to base itself on one or another of the three principal classes into which the present Indian society is

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2. Overstreet and Windmiller , op. p.p. 45-46.

divided. It must either be the party of the landlord or of the propertied upper and middle classes or of the exploited workers and peasants. Its programme will show which class it represents."<sup>3</sup> To convert the Congress into a real political party it was necessary to promote class differentiation in it.

How was this to be accomplished? Roy's advice to the Indian Communists (1922-23) was to organise a legal mass party with a 'non-offensive' name that would not raise the Communist bogey. The name proposed was workers and peasants party. All the members of the illegal communist party should be automatically the members of the WPP and communists should control the WPP. As "the custodian of the interests of the toiling masses, it was the duty of the communists to train and educate the elements representing the exploited peasantry and the petty bourgeoisie and to fight and eradicate the wavering and reactionary tendencies in them. The WPP should form the opposition bloc inside the congress, should rally the liberal and radical elements to its side and make a bid for the capture of the leadership of the congress.

From Roy's point of view the Gaya Congress of 1922 assumed great importance. Roy tried to influence the Gaya deliberations through his journal The Advance Guard. We may

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3. Ibid., p. 46.

note here one important part of his programme, proposed for the acceptance of the Congress. The programme, in essence, was the programme of democratic revolution, it was not only antifeudal but went beyond the typical capitalist programme. It called for : " complete national independence, universal suffrage, abolition of landlordism, nationalization of public utilities, full rights for labour to organise, minimum wages in all industries, profit sharing in industry, free and compulsory education, the abolition of the standing army, and arming of the entire people to defend the National Freedom.<sup>4</sup>

Roy did not hope that it would be accepted in toto or substantially. Undoubtedly he has a deeper tactical motive to test and expose the true nature of the Congress to show one and for all " which class it represents."

In his book The Future of Indian Politics; Roy set forth his position in greater detail. The compromise of the big bourgeoisie - "practically eliminated from the struggle for national freedom."<sup>5</sup> - With imperialism " was marked by two distinct stages, first divorce of the bourgeoisie nationalist movement from the most revolutionary social forces - workers and peasants. Second, the schism between the big bourgeoisie

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4. Ibid., p. 49.

5. Prof. North's article in Soviet Survey.



and the petty bourgeoisie.<sup>6</sup> To Roy, the organisation of the Swatantra Party (1923) was an expression of this schism. The social basis of the nationalist movement was, consequently; "shifted to the classes which have nothing in common with imperialism."<sup>7</sup> The proletariat however, will have to exercise its hegemony in the combination. "The objective programme of the proletariat ( Socialist programme ) will not be imposed on the movement, but the hegemony of the proletariat will inspire the struggle with the most advanced revolutionary democratic ideals, as distinguished from the hypocritical bourgeoisie democracy. Democracy is the end in itself for the class which converts the democratic state into an instrument of its domination. From the proletarian point of view it is a mean - a stem towards socialism."<sup>8</sup> He therefore declared, "Hence forth the fight for national freedom in India becomes a class struggle approximating to the final stage."<sup>9</sup>

Roy lost contact with the developments in India during the period (Nov. 1926-27) when he was in China. After his return he soon became engrossed in the Indian situation. However he had to face unfavourable developments in the Comintern

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6. Overstreet and Windmiller , p. 10.

7. Ibid., p. 95.

8. Ibid., p. 96.

9. Ibid., p. 96.

which before long resulted in his expulsion. The reason for his expulsion was the so called theory of decolonisation. Overstreet and Marshall say that " the Russians were clearly bent on making decolonisation an action word. To do this they ascribed to it a meaning which Roy certainly never intended, namely, the voluntary cessation of imperialist exploitation."<sup>10</sup>

Explaining the background of the theory in a document submitted to the Communist International after the Sixth Congress, Roy says : " While I was in China (1927) a new comrade from India came to Moscow. In his report he emphasized on the rapid development of modern industry in India."<sup>11</sup> In summarising the debate on the report of the Indian delegate, Bukharin suggested that the commission be set up for examining the question and should report on the process of such decolonisation.

Roy continues, " on my return I was charged to draft a resolution on the basis of the preparatory work accomplished by the commission."<sup>12</sup> He asserts that in this resolution which was subsequently, used as " the main weapon against me, " the term " decolonisation was used tentatively only by way

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10. Ibid., p. 118.

11. Roy, M. N. Our Differences, p. 29. Calcutta : Sarswati Library, 1938.

12. Ibid., p. 30.



of indicating a tendency and relatively, only in connection with the bourgeoisie.<sup>13</sup>

Roy declared his disagreement with the "mistaken line" laid down by the Sixth Congress and charged that by giving the United Front line and laying down the Ultraleftist line "the present leadership was running the International".<sup>14</sup>

When Roy resumed his political activities after his release from the jail, his perspective of the Indian National revolutionary movement continued to be the same. The Comintern International itself veered round to his position in 1935 after pursuing the disastrous Ultra leftist line for seven years. The Seventh Congress of the Comintern International again laid down the "United Front" line, which he claimed "must have been influenced by the facts reported" in his letter to the Comintern written in 1935, before the seventh congress. In his letter Roy drew the attention of the Comintern to the fact that the proletariat both numerically and organisationally was very weak. A vast majority of the exploited masses the peasants and the rural and urban petty bourgeoisie could not be mobilised under the banner of the Communist Party, because the bourgeoisie democratic stage of the revolution was still

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13. Ibid., p. 33.

14. Shiviah, Thesis, 1966.

unaccomplished. Only the National Congress, because of its broad class basis, could offer the rallying ground to the oppressed and the exploited classes in their struggle against imperialism, and could be transformed into an instrument of revolutionary ( democratic) struggle."<sup>15</sup> It commands the confidence of the masses. It is not a homogenous political party. It is a movement which expresses the highest degree of political consciousness of the masses.<sup>16</sup> He made a distinction between the reactionary leadership and the objectively revolutionary rank and file. He noted that " there is a process of radicalisation in the democratic bourgeoisie revolutionary sense." But he added, " the process is retarded by the prevalence of the reactionary utopian Gandhian ideology."<sup>17</sup> To fight the Gandhist ideology and to promote the process of radicalisation with a view to replace the existing leadership was essential, otherwise " the Congress would become a bourgeoisie nationalist party. The result of such an eventuality would be disastrous. The mass movement will be decomposed. The Congress will disintegrate and there will be new mass organisation to replace it."<sup>18</sup>

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15. Ibid., p. 123.

16. Ibid., p. 122.

17. Ibid., p. 121.

18. Ibid., p. 123.

In pleading for an alternative leadership Roy sought to focus attention on the perspective of revolution which could be carried out only by a different kind of leadership. The perspective of the Indian revolution was the same as that of the Chinese revolution. It was the " accomplishment of the belated bourgeois revolution, and the rapid industrialization of the country under democratic dictatorship." Democratic distaorship he added, " is the road to socialism in India."<sup>19</sup> The question of the proletariat leadership could arise only after the democratic dictatorship has achieved its task i.e. rapid industrialisation and the development of the protetariat itself as a strong revolutionary class. Arguing in this vein Roy introduced two concepts which secured Roy a place in his subsequent political thought " Jacobinism and radical democratic leadership." The revolution-ary leadership needed today as pointed by Roy " must raise the banner not of communism, but of Jacobinism."<sup>20</sup>

Roy believed that the social basis " for an alternative radical democratic leadership to replace the present outfit", was there. To bring about such leadership in the congress it was necessary to cverthrow Gandhist ideology and thus liberate from

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19. Ibid., p. 124.

20. Ibid., p. 124.

the bourgeois influence. Thus the Congress could be converted into a militant mass organisation."<sup>21</sup>

Roy apparently hoped that with the adoption of the United Front line there were no differences between him and the Comintern, he could rejoin the communist movement and guide it according to his perspective. Finding, however, that the door nearly closed, Roy set out to implement his plan independently, without being formally associated with the communist party. Both ideologically and organisationally he waged a campaign against the Gandhist leadership in the Congress. He formed the League of Radical Congressmen inside the Congress and his supporters, who included a number of intellectuals, came to be known as "Royists". Roy however, could not make much headway. Disappointed sorely, he decided to part company with the Congress and establish a separate party later named as the Radical Democratic Party. Isolated thus from the communist party on the one hand and the Congress party on the other, Roy embarked upon a lone political battle. Not a few of the Royists who were otherwise attracted to his general philosophical ideas questioned the wisdom and feasibility of his political course. But Roy, convinced that his perspective of the Indian revolution advocated by him still held good,

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21. Ibid., p. 128.

advanced elaborate arguments to justify his stand. To him the social and political situation in India left no alternative course. Consequently some tactical readjustments became necessary still professing to be a true Marxist, Roy restated his perspective of the Indian revolution and his tactical approach as part of a rather new theory : Twentieth Century Jacobinism.

#### Roy's Political Ideas And Jacobinism :

' Twentieth Century Jacobinism ' was admitted as a tentative name for what Roy thought was the suitable ideology and strategy for the ' impending ' revolution in India then. It is significant to note that Roy's exposition of this theory reveals the extent of his intellectual torment as a Marxist in doubt. His philosophical horizon had already broadened, and his main intellectual preoccupation was to show that his philosophy of materialistic monism was corroborated by modern science. His loyalty to science and scientific philosophy had grown firmer. He still professed Marxism because it was an activist materialistic philosophy. He puts it " it is nothing but a philosophical approach to politics, a scientific mode of solving social problems." <sup>22</sup> He had his own interpretations as far as Marxist theory is concerned.

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22. Roy, M.N. Scientific Politics, p. 155, Calcutta : Renaissance Publishers, First Edition 1942, Second Edition 1947.

As India was living in the 20th century the ideology and programme of the Indian revolution, Roy thought, could be called ' Twentieth Century Jacobinism '. He however argued that all this followed from Marxism - a reverse projection as it were of Marxism. Accordingly, what Roy regarded as the fundamental principle of Marxism - " our being is not determined by consciousness but our consciousness is determined by our being " - the appropriate ideology for India, which was socially and culturally in the pre-French Revolution stage was not Marxism but Twentieth century Jacobinism - a position which followed from the application of Marxism " to the social problems of the 17th and 18th Century."<sup>23</sup>

So the ideology of the Radical Democratic party was Twentieth century Jacobinism or simply Radical Democracy. The Radical Democratic party was a new version of the " United Front " of the workers, peasants and the petty bourgeois with proletarian hegemony. But the distinction is noteworthy. The workers and peasants are not different classes, but integral parts of the same class - the petty bourgeois. In this broad bloc of the petty bourgeois class, differences would be there ; but Roy advised that the cohesive tendencies should be emphasized to ensure unity against the " combination of the imperialist feudal capitalist forces."<sup>24</sup> To sharpen the class

23. Ibid., p. 207.

24. Ibid., p. 110.

struggle in the bloc was counter revolutionary because it would mean splitting the forces of revolution.

The hegemony of the proletariat was likewise given a new interpretation. The bulk of the workers being a part of the petty, bourgeois, and the proletariat in the technical sense still insignificant proletarian hegemony " must mean ideological influences, proportionately much greater than the physical strength.<sup>25</sup> And this was ensured by the fact that the revolution was guided by Marxism. There was at the same time a more explicit emphasis on intellectual ability, culture etc as requisites of leadership.<sup>26</sup> To conclude " .... The credit and the responsibility of leadership of the Indian Revolution will be neither of the proletariat nor of the bourgeois, but of the Jacobins - the petty bourgeoisie acting as the vanguard of the rising proletariat, together with the proletariat acting as an integral part of the petty bourgeoisie.<sup>27</sup>

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25. Ibid., p. 163.

26. Ibid., p. 113.

27. Ibid., p. 114.

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