

Report From A Marxist

June 6, 1989

I am no longer a member of the Communist Party of India. Theologians insist there can be only one Communist Party in one country, but only God knows which is the real one. I prefer to remain just a Marxist, free to shoot arrows in all directions, even at the great Moor, who had scared Iqbal's Satan into calling him a trouble maker: "though not a Prophet, he carries a Book under his arm".

The Communist world is passing through a period of great churning. Mikhail Gorbachev and Deng Xioping have together begun a painful epoch of change and renewal, forcing every Party and individual to look back with a critical eye. However, this report is far from an ideological exercise; it is a personal view of some events connected with me directly or by observation. There is no justification for going into print except my own desire to share, and Patriot's indulgence. The report may become disjointed and lose logical

unity, for it only contains remembrances which seek an outlet.

I was sought out by a comrade in the illegal days of the late Thirties as ripe for recruitment. I became a regular member of the CPI in the legal period of early Forties.

A few years later Shafiq Naqvi, UP party secretary, sent me summons to join the Naya Zamana, the Central Committee's weekly Urdu Journal, published under Sajjad Zaheer's editorship. Thus began the flattering career of my party life at the highest political level, with many-faceted experience which I recall at this distance with a critical eye but never with regret. I remember the censures and commendations in a pensive mood at my ripe age, though I lose my temper even now when I confront what I consider dogged sectarianism.

The Party Headquarters (PHQ) was under an overall command of the stocky but ever active and charming General Secretary, P C Joshi, and consisted of members of the various strata of society. Mohan Kumaramangalam and Arun Bose from aristocratic families and me and a large

Joined CPI
(1937-39)
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number of colleagues from high to low middle class stock and a group of working class comrades, all living as a kind of joint family in the commune. British leader R P Dutt described it in a critical tone as an "ashram". So what?

Later, in my time a comrade from a prosperous family proposed that all PHQ members should be handed over a good living wage and allowed to live a normal life on their own. I remember B T Ranadive coming down on him like a ton of bricks, saying that the proposal meant to snatch milk from the mouths of PHQ children and special diet from the sick. The PHQ was the best centre for building a small party into a national organisation, conducting multifarious cultural and political work including writers' and theatre workers' organisations, press and publishing. Now, to the centre piece: politics. A small party, when national politics was in a highly critical phase of Lord Mountbatten's secret conclaves with the Congress and League leaders, Joshi issued appeal after appeal to Gandhi and Jinnah to "meet again" to preserve at least the geographical integrity of the country. Many people in and outside the party were amused at our futile effort, but Joshi was not the one to say die. What

had become inevitable happened and the country was divided in freedom.

But, was the freedom real? Had not the big bourgeoisie, now taking over power to govern the country, lost its "oppositional role" and was collaborating with imperialism to serve the common aim of fleecing the people?

Joshi and his supporters in the Central Committee believed that the bourgeoisie, supported by the entire nation, had won freedom

Was India's freedom real? The question precipitated a political tragedy, that has not yet ended.



Mr P Sundarayya with P C Joshi, in expecting an independent role of the bourgeoisie.



Mr E M S Namboodiripad: Where did he stand in the debate on the eve of Independence?

to rule independently of imperialism; and in opposition to it; it is interesting to note that P Sundarayya was with Joshi. B T Ranadive and his supporters thought that the big bourgeoisie had formed a bloc with imperialism and the so-called freedom was an illusion conjured by the compromisers.

Where was EMS Namboodiripad? I do not know even now; perhaps hovering some where in the middle. I hope he will forgive me if I recall here that he has always protected his position at the top, whoever, might be the General Secretary - from Joshi to Ajoy Ghosh in the united party and now he heads the CPI(M). An enviable record, indeed. But who am I to sneer, when I myself did not know where to stand in the battle of Titans raging at the PHQ?

In December of the year of freedom, hardly four months after August 15, which we celebrated like mad, BTR won a majority at a secret session of the Central Committee and Joshi was removed from all leading positions. The decisions and draft resolutions were to be placed before the Second Congress of the CPI at Calcutta. To consolidate

his position, BTR got the Colonial Theses of the Sixth Congress of the Communist International printed and distributed in the party, which made it plain that he had derived support from the sectarian departure of Stalin from Lenin's position against M N Roy at the Second Congress of the Comintern. A few years after Lenin's death, Stalin had arrived at the proposition that the Indian big bourgeoisie had managed to strike a deal with imperialism. This was elaborated in the Sixth Colonial Theses put together by O.V. Kuusinen, who added for emphasis that only the hegemony of the proletariat (read CPI) would ensure the success of the national liberation movement.

Kuusinen, after Stalin's death, admitted at the 20th Congress of the Soviet party that the Comintern's theses were sectarian. What BTR said after his defeat about his line, I do not know.

I accepted BTR's line as a logical conclusion following the premises laid down by the Communist International itself. This is the tragedy of intellectuals, who lack well-digested and thorough knowledge of the composition and inclination of the various strata of society. Their

realm is ideas and mental acrobatics, where they are time and again beaten by a superior intellect.

1949
With the natural impatience of a sectarian adventurer, BTR launched the party on an insurrectionist course with a call for an all India railways general strike. The entire leadership, except S A Dange and Ajoy Ghosh, who were arrested, was functioning from underground as also the State Councils and senior cadre all over the country. At the headquarters in Bombay, which worked openly, PHQ committee was nominated the General Secretary to keep liaison between the underground Centre and the open headquarter, through the convenor of the committee, an old hand at underground work.

At first, BTR was quite indulgent and ignored faults or pardoned them, even at the State level and frequently at the PHQ. As an honoured member of the PHQ Committee I remember with sorrow only one incident in this phase when he was too harsh.

On my initiative a devotee of Joshi, O P Sangal, had received pardon and was coopted on our

committee, when he was accused by an Agra comrade that in a personal conversation at his house Sangal held Stalin responsible for mistakes by the CPI. Sangal hotly denied the allegation, but the committee was called upon to judge a colleague in the light of the knowledge of his and the complainant's characters. The trend of discussion scared Sangal and he slipped away to Lucknow, joined an angry demonstration and got arrested. He was expelled for desertion, to be rehabilitated much later.

The raids on PHQ became so frequent that the PHQ committee was shifted underground and a subcommittee worked at the Spen headquarters. This was in the second phase when the railway strike had failed miserably, and there was dissatisfaction everywhere in the party when BTR thrashed right and left and named respectable comrades as cowards, who had failed to remain in the forefront of the strike. But where was the strike?

I received orders to marry my fiancée in Aligarh and proceed to the underground Centre's base to keep house and do translation work. I complied

without much delay and found at the base the chunk of a dissolved State committee and heard of other such reorganisations. BTR was preparing for a Central Committee meeting. I translated a scathing document, Strategy and Tactics, against Andhra Committee's "Chinese line". It simply mauled the Andhra leadership and gave a sharp dig to Mao, too, for after all he was the inspirer of a non-Stalinist position.

Just as the Central Committee was ^{to gather} together, a tiny editorial piece in the Cominform journal "For A Lasting Peace And People's Democracy", obliquely criticised the CPI line. This was enough to bring down BTR.

At the Central Committee session the angry Andhra contingent pushed through its line of initiating armed struggle on an all India plane. Dange and Ajoy were in jail and EMS (and perhaps Bhowani Sen) joined the winning side, while BTR and Dr Adhikari were suspended from the party.

The two came to live with us and contributed from their pocket money - absolving the smokers from

payment - to buy meat almost every week. BTR used to roar his characteristic laughter, while Dr Adhikari with his whimsy humor advised us to boil everything bought in the bazar to eat. Somebody murmured : and ice? The venerable 'Doctor' with a twinkle in his eyes said: sure, ice. and S G Sardesai, my old leader and mentor with a kind heart and brilliant mind, concentrated on chess and beat all with a self-deprecating smile. And my wife with her dimpled smile and her kind elder sister served us with the best food they could manage.

All of us, defeated men and women, were asked to go home and fend for ourselves. And the tale is done.

The political tragedy not yet ended is that the Communist Party of India and its breakaway formations have not been able to shed sectarian attitudes. Even now "democratic" alliances are only meant to secure partisan advantages in the coming elections; these will fail to educate the people. It is Left opportunism that dominates.