

## XI. THE INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS

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During the Christmas week the Indian National Congress will hold its forty-third annual session. The principal task of the congress this year is to settle the controversy between its two wings advocating, respectively, self-government within the British empire and complete independence as the goal of the nationalist movement. The decision of this burning question will have historical significance. It will seriously influence the future development of the nationalist movement.

At present the nationalist movement is split into two distinct fractions, one representing the big bourgeoisie and the other the petty bourgeoisie. The reconciliation of the two fractions can take place only on the terms of the former. For the unity of the movement the big bourgeoisie will never support the demand for complete independence which will objectively commit them to the policy of revolutionary struggle against imperialism. Indeed, they advocate self-government within the British empire admittedly in order to avoid the violent forms of struggle that the demand for complete independence inevitably implies. As the petty bourgeoisie alone are not their dissatisfaction and revolt against the reformism of the big bourgeoisie are bound to fizzle out. They will never take up an actual struggle for the realisation of their demand for complete independence, until and unless they are brought into a fighting alliance with classes, more revolutionary, namely the proletariat and peasantry.

The outstanding feature of the nationalist movement during this year has been the process of class differentiation. Growing rebelliousness of the petty bourgeois left wing, on the one side, has been simultaneous with the concentration, on the other of all the political groups representing the big bourgeoisie. The political groups representing the big bourgeoisie, which left the congress in the revolutionary days of 1920-21, are today reunited with the right wing of the congress in a reformist bourgeois bloc outside the congress. For all practical purposes, this bloc of the big bourgeois political groups has become a rival of the National Congress which is overwhelmingly petty bourgeois in composition and outlook.

The adoption by the congress last year of a resolution declaring complete independence as its goal indicated the revolt of the petty bourgeois left wing against the reformism of the big bourgeoisie. The revolt has since gathered strength, and assumed an organisational form in the so-called Independence League. But in every sharp conflict with the big bourgeoisie the weakness of this revolt is revealed.

Last year the reformist leaders allowed the passage of the independence resolution evidently to placate the left wing opposition which represented widespread sentiment in the country. For, immediately after the National Congress had adopted the resolution, the right wing leaders began to work against the resolution. They met the representatives of the big bourgeoisie outside the congress in what was called the All-parties' conference which set itself the task of drawing up a constitution acceptable by all the political tendencies in the country.

As was to be expected, the All-parties' Conference, in August last, produced a constitution for India as a self-governing dominion inside the British empire. The sub-committee of the conference, which actually drew up the constitution, included four leaders of the National Congress, one of them being a left winger. This cynical disregard for the congress resolution on the part of its leaders sharpened the conflict inside the congress. The left

wing, for the first time in the history of the National Congress, openly criticised the action of the official leaders. But instead of having the entire National Congress as an organisation to stand by its own resolution as against the treacherous act of the bourgeois right wing leaders, it set up the so-called Independence League. The right wing leaders immediately seized upon that blunder, and generously admitted the right of those believing in independence to the expression of their opinion.

Politically also, the left wing leaders took up a very weak and equivocal position. For example, in the meeting of the All-parties' Conference, which adopted the draft constitution, the spokesmen of the left expressed their disagreement with the document, but did not vote against it as, they said, they did not want to obstruct the work of the conference! At the same meeting, the representatives of the big bourgeoisie, however, did not mince words in stating their policy. They said that they were opposed to the demand for complete independence because it could not be realised without disturbing peace and order. Besides, the status of a self-governing dominion is as good as independence. The failure of the left wing leaders to condemn the right wing of treachery for supporting this point of view.

The political weakness and tactical mistake of the left leaders eventually resulted in the endorsement of the Nehru report (the constitution drafted by the All-parties Conference) by the executive of the National Congress. Of course, the Congress executive qualified its endorsement by declaring that this did not affect last year's resolution as regards independence. But this is obviously a make-belief declaration to save the face of the left wing leaders. A convenient formula has been found to compose the controversy. It is that the status of a self-governing dominion and independence are not mutually exclusive. The one can be accepted as an advance towards the other. But in view of the fact that those advocating dominion status are of the opinion that it is as good as independence, the formula composes the controversy by eliminating one side

of it, namely advocacy of independence. The left wing leaders have been out-manoeuvred by the right wing leaders possessing greater political experience and a clearer class orientation.

The debacle of left wing leadership, however, does not alter the realities of the situation, which are a process of class differentiation inside the nationalist ranks, and a resulting radicalisation of the nationalist movement. Revolt of the petty bourgeois nationalist ranks against the compromising reformist policy of the bourgeois leaders is the characteristic feature of the situation. It breaks out on all sides in different forms. Independence League, Republican Party, Republican Army, Volunteer Corps, Workers and Peasants Party and such other organisations of minor importance represent this radicalisation of the nationalist movement taking place in consequence of class differentiation.

If the revolt of the petty bourgeois nationalist masses does not receive the leadership of a more revolutionary class, the right wing leaders will recover their control of the nationalist movement and temporarily obstruct the process of its radicalisation. Several months ago, when the left wing revolt appeared threatening, Motilal Nehru, the right wing leader of the National Congress and the president of the All-parties' Conference, warned his rebellious followers against whom he called "bogus advocates of independence among whom you will find some rank communists". A shrewd bourgeois politician, Nehru knows that he would recover his control over the petty bourgeois left nationalists, if only he could keep them clear of communist influence.

Had not the left leaders allowed themselves to be hopelessly out-manoeuvred, the coming meeting of the congress would have been the scene of the battle for the leadership of the nationalist movement. As the situation is at present, the right wing will retain its hold. Taking advantage of the political weakness and tactical blunders of the left leaders, it has gone over to the offensive. The right wing leader Motilal Nehru, who had previously been elec-

ted president of the coming meeting of the congress, took up the challenge of the left, and offered to resign, should the movement so desire. In view of the fact that he had acted in crass violation of the resolution of last year's congress, and had expressed his determination to stand faithfully by the All-parties' Conference, the left wing should have demanded the acceptance by the congress of Nehru's resignation. Indeed, the left wing should have demanded his resignation before he offered it himself. But, on the contrary, the left leaders were routed before Nehru's offensive. And the right wing leader will preside over the coming meeting of the National Congress with the authority, twice given, of the entire movement.

In this situation there can be but little doubt about the outcome of the congress. Of course, as the debacle of the left leaders does not represent the elimination of the process of radicalisation of the nationalist ranks, it is possible, if not probable, that in the congress the opposition will put up a stronger fight by demanding the rejection of the constitution drafted by the All-parties Conference. Nehru, as the main author and defender of the constitution, will no doubt press for its adoption by the congress. If necessary, some formula of compromise will be found, and, for all practical purposes, the policy of the bourgeois bloc, the majority of whose component organisation stand outside the congress, will be imposed upon the National Congress, in spite of the process of radicalisation in operation inside its ranks. Such an outcome will once again prove the inability of the petty bourgeoisie to play an independent political role, and show that the Indian national revolution can further develop only under the hegemony of the proletariat.