

MY CRIME

*(An open letter to the Members of the
Communist International)*

For some time I have been standing before the "sacred Guillotine" the mad application of which is causing such a havoc to the International Communist movement. I have stood in that position for nearly a year, not shuddering with the fear for my head, but aghast at the incompetence of those who have usurped the leadership of the movement, and amazed at the temerity with which this incompetent and irresponsible leadership is driving the movement to rack and ruin. At last has come my turn, so inexplicably delayed. At the Tenth Plenum of the Executive Committee of the C. I. my humble head was demanded by the gentle Kuusinen in his characteristic manner of shirking responsibility. Referring to my latest "crime"—contribution to the press of the German Opposition—he wondered if after the commission of such a heinous crime

one could still deserve to be a comrade of those whose views he represented. The stage was set for the purpose. The "masses" responded. The prompted cry—"a la guillotine" was raised from the obscure corner, and one connected with the Communist International nearly from its very foundation, active in the revolutionary movement for years previously, hitherto suspected of and criticised for alleged "left deviations," was placed automatically outside the pale of the C. I. After some unfounded attacks by Losowskys and Schubins, obviously with the authority of the Russian delegation, Manuilsky clinched the affair by damning me as a "renegade." It was a very simple procedure. No evidence whatsoever was produced to show how a traditional "leftist" has become a right opportunist, how one suddenly becomes a "renegade" after more than twenty years' active service to the revolution. Kuusinen simply asserted that I proposed the policy of making a block with the Indian Nationalist Bourgeoisie, and Manuilsky roundly called me a "renegade."

This itself may not be sufficiently important to arrest the attention of the entire International. But it is important,

and deserves attention as a symptom of the state of affairs at the top of the movement. Therefore, I consider it necessary to place before the C. I. the facts of the case.

The attack upon me suddenly began at the Sixth World Congress in which I was not present, owing to illness. In his report on the Colonial Question Kuusinen attacked me as the father of the so-called theory of "de-colonisation." According to him, I had put forward the view that British Imperialism would gradually lead the Indian people to freedom. On that allegation I was characterised in the report as well as in the thesis (the tone was modified in the corrected stenogramme of the report and final version of the thesis) as "lackey of imperialism". The characterisation would be perfectly correct, had the allegation been proved. That, however, was not done, although Kuusinen went to the extent of asserting that in the columns of the "Vanguard" and the "Masses," which I edited, I had for years propagated this "Social democratic theory". The utter unfoundedness of the assertion is proved by the files of those journals. I challenge anybody to find one

single passage in them which bears out Kuusinen's allegation. Then, those journals were published under my editorship as the central organ of the Communist propaganda in India from May 1922 to the beginning of 1928. (I am not responsible for the first eight months of 1927 when I was away in China). During all that time, I was not once censored for right deviation. Indeed, criticism made occasionally by minor comrades was rather from the point of view groundlessly ascribed to me now, namely, overestimating the revolutionary rôle of the nationalist bourgeoisie. In short, for nearly five years the leadership of the International considered my point of view, on the whole correct ; otherwise I should have long ago been removed from the position I occupied. Now it is discovered that all the time I have been a Social Democratic lackey of imperialism. Logically, then, it must be admitted that until the Sixth Congress, the C. I. had had a wrong point of view as regards India. If the report and the thesis of the Sixth Congress contain the highest wisdom of Leninism, then, as far as the colonial, (particularly Indian) question is concerned, Lenin, Zinovieff, Bukharin, Stalin,

all in their respective turns, have been anti-Leninist, Social Democratic lackeys of imperialism. And this is precisely the purport of the resolution on the Colonial as well as on other questions of the Sixth Congress. They represent a serious deviation from the tactical teachings of Lenin. Therefore, I expressed my disagreement with them. This is one of my crimes for which I am sentenced to the "Guillotine" of expulsion as a "renegade" to Communism.

To revert to the theory of "de-colonisation", the fatherhood of which is the ostensible cause of my victimisation. The unfortunate term has a little history. While I was away in China (1927) a new comrade from India came to Moscow. In his report he emphasised on the rapid development of modern industry in India. Such a development, which all along I had pointed out as a basic feature of the situation in post-war India, inevitably produces two tendencies, which must be carefully observed by us for the purpose of adjusting our tactics to the realities of the situation. These tendencies are the sharpening of the class antagonism inside the nationalist movement, on the one side, and

compromise between the nationalist bourgeoisie and foreign imperialism on the other. Industrialisation of the country, even if it were done mainly with imperialist capital (which is not the case in India), is advantageous to the native bourgeoisie. These fight against imperialism because it obstructs the free development of their class. Consequently when imperialism, forced by its inner contradictions, permits, even encourages (as lately in the case of India) partial industrialisation of a colonial country, the basis of antagonism between the native bourgeoisie and foreign imperialism narrows down. The nationalist united front tends to break up, and a new united front of the native bourgeoisie with foreign imperialism is formed as against the working class. In such a situation, the native bourgeoisie outgrow the previous state of absolute colonial oppression. In summarizing the debate on the report of the Indian delegate, Bukharin suggested that the Commission set up for examining the question should report on the process of such "de-colonization". (He used the term for the first time, evidently in a tentative and and relative sense).

On my return I was charged to draft a resolution on the basis of the preparatory work accomplished by the Commission. The resolution drafted by me, which was never formally accepted (not because there was any serious objection to it, but because of the waning of interest in the subject), subsequently became the main weapon against me. It was in that document¹ that all my heresies were discovered, when subsequently it became necessary to find evidence in support of a verdict already secretly pronounced against me for some unknown crime. If the document contained the testimony of my crime, why was it not published? It was never done, because the very document proves how atrociously groundless are the allegations against me. Space does not permit extensive quotation, and I have not the means to publish such a lengthy document. Therefore I must be content with citing the most vital passages. After analysing the economic conditions of the country and giving facts marking the new tendencies of post-war colonial

1. This document is not in my possession, but must be found in the archives of Communist International. Vide the Preface to this book.

exploitation, I came to the following conclusion :

“Imperialism must proceed very cautiously in this new path which is as likely to lead it out of the post-war crisis, as to destruction. The implication of the new policy is gradual “de-colonisation” of India which will be allowed eventually to evolve out of the state of “dependency” to “Dominion Status”. The Indian bourgeoisie, instead of being kept down as a potential rival, will be granted partnership in the economic development of the country under the hegemony of Imperialist finance. From a backward agricultural colonial possession, India will become a modern industrial country—member of “the British Commonwealth of free nations.” India is in a process of “de-colonization” in so far as the policy, forced upon Imperialism by the post-war crisis of capitalism, abolishes the old, antiquated forms and methods of colonial exploitation in favour of new forms and new methods. The forces of production which were so far denied the possibilities of normal growth, are unfettered. The very basis of national economy changes. Old class relations are replaced by new class relations. The basic

industry, agriculture, stands on the verge of a revolution . . . ; the native bourgeoisie acquire an ever increasing share in the control of the economic life of the country. These changes in the economic sphere have their political reflex. The unavoidable process of gradual “de-colonisation” has in it the germs of the disruption of the empire.

“The Indian bourgeoisie outgrow the state of absolute colonial suppression. . . . In order to stabilise its economic basis, strengthen its position in India, British imperialism is obliged to adopt a policy which cannot be put into practice without making certain concessions to the Indian bourgeoisie. These concessions are not conquered by the nationalist bourgeoisie. They are gifts (reluctant, but obligatory) of imperialism. Therefore, the process of “de-colonisation” is parallel to the process of the “de-revolutionization of the nationalist bourgeoisie.”

It is obvious from the above quotation (of course only for the unprejudiced readers) that the term “de-colonization” is used tentatively by way of indicating a tendency, and relatively, only in connection with the bourgeoisie who constitute a very small fraction of the

entire population. Nowhere is it stated that the tendency affects the entire people. Much less is it even implied that there is the least possibility of the Indian people being free with the sanction of imperialism. On the contrary, it is clearly asserted that the process of certain improvement in the condition of the bourgeoisie is the result of a plan to intensify the exploitation of the nation as a whole. Nevertheless, this is the cross on which I was crucified before the Sixth Congress of the C. I.

Now about the perverse love that according to Kuusinen I have suddenly developed for the Nationalist bourgeoisie. Here again my entire past record ever since the Second Congress of the C. I. (1920) gives lie to the assertion made by Kuusinen. In the Second Congress I disagreed with Lenin about the rôle of the bourgeoisie in the colonial revolutionary movement. My views on the question are recorded in the thesis adopted by the Second Congress as supplementary to those drafted by Lenin. I can simply ask everybody who wants to judge me on the basis of my own views and actions, to read my writings. In the draft-resolution referred to above I wrote in September, 1927 :

“All these factors taken together determine the character of the Indian Nationalist bourgeoisie. They are no longer a revolutionary force. Not only from the point of view of the internal conditions of India, but also from the point of view of present world conditions, the Indian bourgeoisie are rallied on the side of counter-revolution. They cannot and do not lead or participate in the struggle for national freedom (completely outside the British empire) . . . Indian revolution must still realise the program of bourgeois democracy, but it is no longer a bourgeois revolution ; because it can and will succeed only by breaking the bound of capitalist society.”

Still the Tenth Plenum of the International Executive puts me outside the pale of the C.I. on the ground that I advocated the opportunist policy of a block with the nationalist bourgeoisie. The present leadership of the International obviously has a very low opinion about the intelligence of the rank and file. In the Tenth Plenum a new charge could be brought against me—writing in the press of the Brandlerist renegades (Opposition to the Communist Party of Germany). This

made the thing easier for the ruling clique. It was no longer necessary to examine what was written ; the fact that it was written in the Opposition Press was enough to damn the writer, irrespective of what he actually wrote.

Kuusinen made a feeble effort to answer my criticism of the resolution of the Sixth Congress, and of the catastrophic, ultra-left, sectarian, Trotskyist line followed on the strength of that resolution. What he did, however, was not to reply to my criticism. That he could not do, for my criticism consisted mostly of pointing out facts proving that the Sixth Congress resolution was based upon a false interpretation of the situation. He simply distorted what I said. He did not quote me. He simply told the Plenum what he read in my writing. In an article to the organ of the German Opposition I had pointed out that just when the Swaraj Party was putting up a parliamentary resistance to imperialist autocracy in connection with the Public Safety Bill, a manifesto of the C.I. ended with the slogan : "Down with Imperialism : Down with the Swaraj Party." To point out the tactical blunder of issuing the

slogan at the moment, did not mean that I considered the Swaraj Party as friendly to Communism. On the contrary, for years, I had combated the illusion entertained by the C.I. leadership regarding the revolutionary rôle of the Swaraj Party. Here, again, I can only refer to the records for evidence. Unable to justify the grievous mistake of issuing such a stupid slogan against the Swaraj Party at that very unfortunate moment, Kuusinen resorts to the cheap demagogy of ascribing to me opportunist illusion about the Swaraj Party. For example, he goes to the extent of asserting that I have now "re-baptized the Swarajists as Independents". If he were honest in his manner of conducting a political discussion, he would not make such absurd assertion ; for, nowhere is there the least ground for it. The nationalist bourgeoisie cannot be effectively exposed in their compromising rôle by simply shouting stupid, provocative slogans. For this purpose, the Communists must follow the policy of class differentiation. The petty bourgeois masses must be supported in their revolt against the reformist leadership of the big bourgeoisie, notwithstanding that this revolt is

often weak and vacillating. And precisely on this crucial point the present line of the C. I. goes far over the head of the situation. The policy of isolating ourselves on the Olympian heights of sectarianism drives the petty bourgeois masses in the direction of Fascism. The Indian experts of the C.I. apparatus would do well to observe this dangerous tendency of the situation. A Leninist policy of United Front would have transformed the petty bourgeois League of Independence into a powerful weapon to develop the revolution. This is a valuable lesson of the experience in China. Kuusinen's incoherent philippics against me do not in the least change the tragic fact that the present leadership of the C.I. advised the young, inexperienced Communists in India to withdraw into their very small shell, precisely when the petty bourgeois masses were coming towards the working class, to be led in the national revolutionary struggle. Kuusinen could not possibly dispute the fact that the petty bourgeois masses "remain revolutionary", but he would not have anything to do with their organisations nor would he permit the proletariat to establish any organisational connection with them. My criticism of this

sectarianism is interpreted as a demand for an opportunist block with the *entire bourgeoisie*.

The Sixth Congress attributed to me a Social Democratic theory without presenting before the International the document in which the heresy is supposed to be contained. Not being present at the Congress, I could not defend my position, and explain my point of view as it really is. Soon after the report and resolutions of the Congress were published, I submitted to the Executive Committee of the C.I. a comprehensive statement of my views.² The statement also contained the criticism of Kuusinen's report and disagreement with the tactical line laid down by the Sixth Congress on the basis of that report. Why did not the International Executive publish that document? If it contained the evidence of opportunist deviation on my part, its publication would have been sufficient to condemn me. It is another long document. Is it not logical to believe that the present leadership of the C.I. suppressed the document, because they are not able to dispute the facts and arguments stated therein proving the incorrectness of the report and thesis of the Sixth Congress?

2. See the following chapter.

The two main deviations attributed to me contradict each other. I could not possibly maintain them both unless I were a lunatic. To point out that the Indian bourgeoisie are outgrowing the condition of absolute colonial suppression, is not a Social Democratic deviation. On my part, I simply point out a tendency which characterises the situation. The term "de-colonization" is a secondary issue. A Marxist must deal in facts, not in terms and catch-phrases. The point at issue at the Sixth Congress is whether the forms and methods of colonial exploitation in the post-war period of capitalist decline must necessarily be the same (are the same) as in the pre-war days of capitalist prosperity and expansion. I maintain they are not. This I proved exhaustively in the statement on the discussion of the Indian question in the Sixth Congress. If I maintain this point of view, I cannot possibly advocate a policy of block with the nationalist bourgeoisie, unless I proposed a counter-revolutionary block, and I have not yet been accused of having done so. What I proposed and still propose, is that in the given conditions, Indian Communists must take the initiative in organising the broadest

possible United Front of all the oppressed and exploited social elements under the hegemony of the proletariat, with a revolutionary democratic programme, to conduct the fight simultaneously on two fronts—against foreign imperialism and the native bourgeoisie. The resolution of the Sixth Congress, in principle, does not reject such united front ; but practically does so by prohibiting the Communists to enter into any multi-class party. The resolution is full of glaring contradictions. On the one hand, it is maintained that imperialist exploitation of *the entire nation* is intensified ; on the other hand, it is stated that the nationalist bourgeoisie are counter-revolutionary. Why have these deserted the struggle against imperialism? Obviously the latter is somehow accommodating them within the framework of colonial exploitation of the country as a whole. If they are still as oppressed as ever, and there is no prospect of their position being improved, they must remain a revolutionary factor. So, behind the radical phrases of the present leadership there still lurks the shadow of past opportunism. Ultra-leftism is likely to degenerate into opportunism any day when put to severe revolutionary test. If the

Quixotic Soviet Republic of India is not realised through the magic method of mouth-ing catch-phrases, the pendulum may swing again to the other extreme, and the policy of opportunist alliance with the counter-revolutionary nationalist bourgeoisie," be revived.³

The crimes attributed to me I have not committed. My offence is that I lay claim to the right of independent thinking, and this is not permissible in the present critical period through which the C.I. is passing. I was not declared a "renegade" and placed outside the pale of the official International, so long as I did not speak out my disagreement. The gag of silence was imposed upon me, the all-mighty apparatus depriving me of all the means of expression. In other words, for the unpardonable crime of independent thinking, I would have been quietly buried into

3. Up to 1924, I had to combat the idea that the nationalist bourgeoisie was a revolutionary class, and therefore the Communists must make an alliance with them. After four years of fruitfully correct policy, the pendulum swung towards extreme leftism. When that happened, I was afraid that before long the swing may be again to the other direction. What was feared is actually happening to-day. We are again hearing about the "revolutionary rôle of the nationalist bourgeoisie." I do not know if the leaders of the C.I. have actually reverted to this view. Some of their Indian followers, however, are preaching it to-day.

oblivion, had I not dared raise my voice. But the duty of a revolutionary sometimes transcends the narrow limits of arbitrary discipline, . . . I was placed in a position where I found it was my revolutionary duty to join the Opposition against the present leadership which is ruining the International.

I disagree with all the resolutions of the Sixth Congress, not only with that on the Indian Question. If the mistake were on one particular question, it might be advisable to wait hoping that it would be corrected in course of time. But the mistaken line pursued in India is but a small part of a huge blunder. Therefore, it is not permissible to keep quiet. The International is in a crisis which is manifested by the composition and exercise of its leadership.