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Importance of Dutt-Bradley Thesis

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We are reproducing here "The Anti-Imperialist People's Front In India" written by Rajni Palme Dutt and Ben Bradley, popularly known as the Dutt-Bradley thesis. Both of them were leaders of the Communist Party of Great Britain. In this document, while giving an analysis of the situation prevailing in India at that time, they also project the strategic alliance that would be required in the struggle against imperialism as well as the tactical approach that will have to be worked out in different stages. The role of the various classes in this struggle against imperialism and the varied forms to be adopted, the role of the working class in the struggle as well as the necessity of its intervention enabling it to acquire the leadership of the struggle in the process, has been pointed out.

Though addressed to all the anti-imperialist forces and particularly to the Left inside the national liberation movement, in the form of fraternal advice, it was meant to make necessary correction to put the Communist Party of India on right rails.

The Communist Party of Great Britain had been playing an important role in the development of the working class movement and the Communist Party in our country since the days of its formation in 1920, vehemently supporting the cause of complete independence from British imperialism. It sent many comrades to work in the trade union movement and three of them were also implicated in the Meerut Conspiracy Case, which was aimed at suppressing the communist movement in the country. The role of both Rajni Palme Dutt and Ben Bradley was very significant in this context. In fact Rajni Palme Dutt had undertaken a deep study of the economic structure in India prevailing at that time and gave a detailed analysis of the classes that are interested in maintaining British imperialist rule as well as the conditions and role of the overwhelming majority of the Indian population -- working class, peasantry, intelligentsia,

other sections of the middle class, which though vacillating plays its role at different stages. His book "India Today" has been a classical text not only for the communists but for all progressive forces in India.

To understand the significance of the document being published here, one has to take a look at the background in which it was written.

The Communist Party of India was formed in Tashkent in 1920. It began addressing appeals to the Indian National Congress emphasising on the objective of complete independence from British rule. This was a big contribution the communists had made, as until the Lahore session of the Congress, the Congress had always demanded dominion status. While raising the demand for complete independence, however, the Communist Party, rather than taking note of the growing upsurge among the people, which the Congress Party was trying to channelise, was remaining aloof from the national movement headed by the Congress and was emphasising on demarcating itself from the bourgeoisie which perhaps to an extent was necessary in the initial stages with the masses coming into action it was not correct to take a negative attitude. However, in the absence of a centralised leadership, communist groups in Bombay and Punjab continued to participate in the Congress led national movement. With the rise of fascist tendencies in the background of developing capitalist crisis, communist parties in various countries had started raising the question of united front of the working class, making direct appeal to the workers and social democratic forces. But this was mainly confined to West European countries. Even in the colonial and semi-colonial countries initial efforts were made to unite with the national bourgeoisie fighting against imperialism has happened in China in the form of the cooperation between the Communists and the Kuomintang. But with the betrayal of Chiang-ke-shek forces and certain other developments in various other countries, when the 6th Congress of the Communist International met in 1928 and adopted the Colonial Thesis.

With regard to India, the Colonial Thesis states :

"In India the policy of British imperialism, which used to retard the development of native industry, evoked great dissatisfaction among the Indian bourgeoisie. The class consolidation of the latter which replaced its former division into religious sects and castes, and

which was expressed in the fusion of the Indian National Congress (organisation of the bourgeoisie) with the Muslim League effected in 1916, confronted British imperialists with a national united front in the country. Fear of the revolutionary movement during the war compelled British imperialism to make concessions to the native bourgeoisie which found expression in the economic sphere, in insignificant parliamentary reforms introduced in 1919". It points out that the first great anti-imperialist movement in India was the first non-cooperation movement of 1919-22, which it states "ended in the betrayal of the cause of the national revolution by the Indian bourgeoisie".

Further, the Colonial thesis points out that the attitude of the national bourgeoisie towards imperialism is not the same everywhere. "They do not adopt a uniform attitude in relation to imperialism". While there are comprador bourgeoisie that directly serve the interests of imperialist capital, the "remaining portions of the native bourgeoisie, especially the portions reflecting the interests of native industry, support the national movement and represent a special vacillating compromising tendency which may be designated as National Reformism". It further states that "In India and Egypt we still observe, for the time being, the typical bourgeois-nationalist movement -- an opportunist movement subject to great vacillations, balancing between imperialism and revolution."

Analysing thus, it concludes that to emancipate the working class and the toiling people from the influence of bourgeois parties, "it is necessary to reject the formation of any kind of bloc between the Communist Party and the national reformist opposition", though subsequently it was realised that this understanding of the 6th Congress of the Comintern, as was stated later "bore a definite shade of sectarianism". Subsequently, 11th plenum of the E.C.C.I in 1931 nailed down the policy of right reformist leaders of the social democracy during the world economic crisis. It also showed that social democracy did everything in its power to counter the development of the workers revolutionary struggle. It was for this very reason that discontent began growing amongst the rank and file against the line which the leaders pursued, the Left groups alone demanding a more acute struggle against fascism. The 11th Plenum of the E.C.C.I stated that the entire development of social democracy "is an uninterrupted process of evolution towards fascism" and that this line was an obstacle in the way of rallying all the anti-fascist forces. At the same time, the experience of the Communist parties was asserting itself in different forms.

Communist Party of India, in those days was not able to organise any centre. The main leadership was behind bars accused in the Meerut conspiracy case. The bold statements made by them before the court, popularized the ideas of socialism and communism. In fact until 1933 the communist movement was virtually deprived of an all India Centre. In 1933, a new central committee was elected which took over the leadership of the Party on a national plane. The Party also joined the Comintern in 1933.

Under the impact of these policies, the Communist parties in the countries of the East, while carrying on their struggle came forward with radical programmes. Basing themselves on exaggerated evaluations of the readiness of the masses for a democratic revolution, they gave the slogan of workers and peasants government, which was considered to be the beginning of the development of socialist revolution. The draft platform of the Communist Party of India demanded the "establishment of a Soviet government", the "creation of an Indian Federal Workers' and Peasants' Soviet Republic", while rejecting the possibility of the participation of the national bourgeoisie in the anti-imperialist struggle.

This was a period when faced with the rise of fascist forces in Germany and other countries the demand was being raised for the formation of popular front against fascism and appeals were made to the working class and other forces of social democracy to join hands. The French and German Communist parties had taken initiative in this direction. In India, though the platform of action contained the sectarian approach, practically after the withdrawal of the civil disobedience movement discontent was growing among the Left inside the Congress and the Congress Socialist Party came into existence in 1935 and in many places communists in tune with the mass mood started working inside the Congress. It was during this period that the All India Kisan Sabha, the All India Trade Union Congress and the All India Students Federation were formed. Communists and socialists had gained considerable influence and they were also working inside the Congress, though they were yet to come forward with a clear cut analysis of the political situation prevailing then and the class alliance to be built for achieving the goal of complete independence and the importance of various means to mobilise the people. It was against this background when the Congress decided on the Constitution in 1935 which had very limited

powers that this thesis came.

It emphasised on the role of the Congress party in the national liberation struggle though it had given up for the time being the attempt to direct the struggle. This document, highlights the need for unity in the struggle against imperialism. It correctly analysed the two wings working inside the Congress at that time -- Babu Rajendra Prasad advocates unity with the moderate who are outside the Congress, with "the friends and allies of the British rulers, whose programme is one of cooperation with imperialism and entry into office in order to assist the slave constitution to function successfully." The document states that unity in the struggle against imperialism cannot be an abstract one involving the entire Indian population. It points out that certain "sections have their interest bound up with imperialism, e.g. the princes, landlords, moneylenders, reactionary religious and political elements which live on exploiting communal differences, elements among the merchants and wealthy classes who favour cooperation with imperialism etc." It calls for taking into account these realities the class structure and for uniting the overwhelming majority of the population against imperialism. Keeping this in view, it advanced the common platform for such unity :

- i) "a line of consistent struggle against imperialism, and against the existing slave constitution, for the complete independence of India;"
- ii) "active struggle for the vital needs of the toiling masses."

This was characterised as United Anti-Imperialist Front for the struggle against imperialism. It details the role of the Indian National Congress and states that the Indian National Congress can play a great part and a "foremost part in the work of realising the Anti-Imperialist People's Front", while at the same time pointing out that "as it exists at present, is not yet the united front of the Indian people in the national struggle" as its constitution leaves out the broadest sections of the masses. It points out that the programme of the Congress does not clearly express the programme of the national struggle and that "It does not at present draw out and guide mass activity, but rather acts as a brake upon it."

To make the anti-imperialist front effective and broad based drawing in the overwhelming majority of the people, it calls for combining the struggles of the mass organisations of the workers, peasants and

other such organisations and the Congress. While stating that a clear cut programme of complete independence has to be there, it criticises the tactics of "non-violence" as a dogma being at variance with ground realities. It also points out to the ideological struggle that has to be carried on simultaneously and for the consolidation of the unity of Left in the Congress, while at the same time not forgetting the leading role to be achieved by the Party in the struggle for the united front.

This document played a very important part in the working out of the strategy and tactics of the struggle for independence at that stage. The Communist Party working on the basis of this document came to the forefront of the national struggle, influencing it. The resolutions adopted at the subsequent Congress sessions vindicates this position. Many Congress committees came into the hands of the communists, contributing to radicalising the whole movement. This document had played a big role in giving a correct orientation to the Communist movement in India enabling it to radicalising the Congress led movement as well as in developing independent class organisations of the peasantry and other sections of the toiling masses.