

**The Marxist**  
**Vol. XII, No. 3,**  
**July to September 1995**

## **75th Anniversary of the Formation of the Communist Party of India**

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On October 17, 1920 the Communist Party of India was founded at Tashkent. On the occasion of the 75th anniversary of its founding, we attempt to make an analysis of the formation and growth of the movement.

Communist Party is a distinctive type of organisation as compared to all other political parties representing different classes in society. From a study of the evolution of society, Marx and Engels inferred that the antagonism and conflicts that exist in society lead to and determine the next stage of its development.

In the Communist Manifesto, Marx and Engels said that : "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.

"Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary re-constitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes".

They therefore concluded that the inherent contradictions of capitalist society would invariably lead to the establishment of socialism. Marx said that while force was the motive force of history and propels the society forward, unlike all earlier revolutions, the socialist revolution is of a qualitatively different kind. The Manifesto says that "The weapons with which the bourgeoisie felled feudalism to the ground are now turned against the bourgeoisie itself... not only has the bourgeoisie forged the weapons that bring death to itself; it has also called into existence the men who are to wield those

weapons -- the modern working class -- the proletarians." For, as the Manifesto asserts : "Of all the classes that stand face to face with the bourgeoisie today, the proletariat alone is a really revolutionary class. The other classes decay and finally disappear in the face of modern industry; the proletariat is its special and essential product.

The industrial revolution, which marked the transformation from the feudal stage to the capitalist stage had as its centre, England. It was marked by a very rapid growth and expansion of different industries based on a whole series of path breaking inventions. With the rapid development of industry and trade that the industrial revolution brought in, it also produced a class of rich capitalists who intensified the struggle against the feudal order. While establishing itself as a system, capitalism also gave birth to the class, the working class, which as Marx said will be the "grave digger" of capitalism. Here is a class, the working class, which organises itself, behind its party, the communist party, to seize power by overthrowing the bourgeoisie and putting an end to the exploitation of man by man.

Prior to the publication of the Communist Manifesto, the movement for socialism was a welter of confusion as far as its analysis of the capitalist system, the concept of the objective and goal and the forms and methods to be adopted to overthrow it was concerned. It was the Manifesto which swept aside all such idealism and unconcretised ideas and for the first time gave the socialist movement a scientific basis. Marx, Lenin described, "was the genius who continued and completed the three chief ideological currents of the 19th century, represented respectively by the three most advanced countries of humanity : classical German philosophy, classical English political economy, and French socialism combined with French revolutionary doctrines". Important among the basic elements of Marxism are : Philosophical materialism, Dialectics, the materialist conception of history, class struggle and the revolutionary role of the working class.

Lenin says that "The main thing in the teaching of Marx is the elucidation of the world-wide historical role of the proletariat as the builder of a socialist society." The leadership of the proletariat, therefore, is basic to the revolutionary working class policy. This fundamentally differs and counters the various schools that see and designate to the bourgeoisie, the peasantry or the petty bourgeoisie, a role, that the workers should follow. The Manifesto had outlined the necessity of a conscious, fighting and disciplined party for the

working class to triumph over the capitalists. It says "The Communists....are on the one hand, practically, the most advanced and resolute section of the working class parties in every country, that section which pushes forward all others; on the other hand, theoretically, they have over the great mass of the proletariat the advantage of clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement." The working class, Marx and Engels understood, would have to be prepared to meet the force that the ruling class would use to retain its power, with force. Marx said, "Force is the midwife of every society pregnant with a new one."

The contributions by Marx and Engels lay not only in developing a complete perspective for the transformation of society to the higher stage of socialism but also in taking note of the class struggle in various countries. They had analysed the role of different classes, the peasantry and the petty bourgeoisie in the struggle against capitalism, while pointing out that the working class is the most revolutionary class. It is on this sound foundation that they formed the Communist League, which succeeded the League of the Just. The Communist Manifesto was in fact the programme of the Communist League. In their effort to unite various forces working in the name of the working class and the emerging trade union movement, they formed the International Working Men's Association, popularly known as the First International. They therefore conceded that in the rules and objectives they could not place a clear revolutionary perspective. Prior to the founding of the First International, a significant historical event had taken place, the Paris Commune. They had characterised it as the first effort by the working class to overthrow the bourgeoisie. Though short lived from 1864 to 1876, the first International played an important role in popularising the ideas of Marxism. The coming into being of the Second International in 1889 saw a big struggle between the revolutionary ideology and revisionism. Despite the powerful opposition from the dominant and powerful leadership in the second international, Lenin developed Marxism to greater heights, corresponding with the new realities, in the imperialist stage of the capitalist system. The struggle within the RSDLP in Russia led to a split in 1903 and the formation of the Bolshevik and the Menshevik parties. Under Lenin's leadership, the Bolshevik party successfully carried out the socialist revolution, the October Revolution in Russia, in 1917.

During this entire period, the communist movement was confined to the European continent and America, with the colonial countries

being totally out of its orbit. It was only after the October Revolution that socialist ideas began spreading to the colonial countries. Lenin's analysis of imperialism, as moribund and as the highest stage of capitalism, led him to the conclusion that socialist revolution could succeed not only in advanced capitalist countries but even in comparatively backward economies where the imperialist chain was the weakest. Socialist revolution, according to Lenin, need not take place simultaneously throughout the world, but could succeed even in individual countries. The success of the October revolution, saw the translation of this theory into practice.

Enriching the understanding contained in the Communist Manifesto, Lenin concluded that though the working class is the only revolutionary class, other classes are forced to join hands with it, as they go on disintegrating and joining their ranks, despite their aspirations and desires being influenced by property instincts.

Within a year and a half of the success of the October Revolution, the third international came into being. Communist parties and groups from various countries were represented in the International.

The success of the revolution in Russia, provided a great inspiration and fillip to the world communist movement. Lenin observed : "To the workers the important thing is to distinguish the principle of the two trends. In so far as the bourgeoisie of the oppressed nation fights the oppressor , we are always, in every case, and more strongly than anybody else, in favor, for we are the strongest and most consistent enemies of oppression. But in so far as the bourgeoisie of the oppressed nation stands for its own bourgeois nationalism, we stand against.

Peoples of colonial countries struggling against domination, saw in the revolution a reliable friend and ally in their struggles for national liberation. The October Revolution profoundly stirred the national aspirations of oppressed peoples all over the world. Communist Parties began to grow in many parts of the world. In the period between 1918 and 1931 in nearly a dozen countries communist parties came into existence. These included, Turkey, Indonesia, China, India, Japan, Burma, Philippines etc.

Lenin was closely following the developments in India, even prior to

the Russian revolution. When textile workers in Bombay struck work in 1908 protesting against the arrest of Balgangadhar Tilak, Lenin proclaimed that the revolutionary class has emerged on the Indian scene with its political action.

Like their counterparts elsewhere, revolutionaries in India too were attracted and drawn towards the Russian revolution. Many of them, who were based in Germany, Afghanistan and other places had gone to Moscow. Lenin made himself available to them and impressed upon them the importance of the national liberation struggles in their country, while extending support. These Indian revolutionaries based in Germany and Afghanistan, with their headquarters in San Francisco, even prior to the October revolution, formed the Gadhar party in 1913-14 with the objective of liberating India from British rule. In the period of 1905-1907 a circle of Indian revolutionaries in exile, was set up in London and then in Paris. These emigres established close contacts with the Bolshevik Party.

The first world war had created a new awakening among the people everywhere, including India. The Gadhar Party had, during the course of the war, started organising infiltration into the ranks of the Army to organise a revolution. They were brutally suppressed. Many were sent to the gallows, while others were sent to the dark cells of the Cellular jail in the Andamans. The huge meeting at the Jalianwala Bagh was an expression of the mass discontent brewing against the British colonialists. It was to meet this growing challenge that the British came down heavily on the peaceful meeting and indulged in large scale massacre.

Though during his later days, he deserted the cause and was expelled from the Party, we cannot deny the role that M.N. Roy, played in the founding of the Communist Party of India. One of the initiators of the movement in India, he joined the Communist Party of Mexico. He was elected to the executive committee of the Communist International at its Congress and played an important role in the early days of the party. Roy, as a member of the revolutionary group, Anushilan Samiti (not the popularly known one), had gone to Mexico in search of arms, which the Indian revolutionaries lacked. It was in Mexico that he was drawn towards socialist ideas and became a member of the Socialist Party there and later was elected its secretary. It was under Roy, who after being attracted to Communist ideas, that the socialist party was converted into the Communist Party of Mexico. Com. Muzaffar Ahmad, in

"Myself and the Communist Party of India says that though Roy went as a representative of the Communist Party of Mexico, "The warm welcome and appreciation he received in Moscow was due really to the fact that he was a Indian and a Marxist. It had been decided that Lenin's Preliminary draft of Some Theses on the National and Colonial Questions would be presented, discussed and adopted at the Second Congress of the Communist International. Hence, the presence of an Indian Marxist in the Congress was of great value."

As observed earlier, these were the formative days for the movement all over the world, excluding the European continent. None of these parties had any mass base at that time and were also lacking in a clear cut perspective for the movement.

Most of the colonial countries were populated predominantly by the peasantry and the working class was still coming into existence. India, comparatively, was advanced as against other colonial countries. The British requirements to meet the war efforts had forced it to permit the Indian bourgeoisie to set up a network of industry in some spheres and simultaneously the British set up the superstructure of railways, communications etc

It was against such a background, when communist parties were still emerging in various countries that its Indian contingent, was formed in Tashkent on October 17, 1920. According to Muzaffar Ahmad, in *Myself and the Communist Party of India* : "It was M.N. Roy himself.....who took the real initiative in founding the Communist Party of India in Tashkent." The minutes of the meeting state that :

"Formed the Indian Communist Party in Tashkent on October 17, 1920..." With seven members attending the meeting, Mohd Shafiq was elected secretary. A subsequent meeting of the party was held on December 15, 1920.

The minutes of these two meetings can be found in the Archives in Tashkent. Yet there are people who doubt the veracity of this account. It is needless to say that the party was formed abroad, but it cannot erase the fact that it was formed by Indians for realising the objective of the movement in India. During those initial days of the movement, the primary aim was to popularise the ideas of communism. It was due to the efforts made by this Party that the

Manifesto of the Communist Party was distributed in the sessions of the Indian National Congress -- at the Ahmedabad Congress in 1921, Gaya Congress in 1922 and subsequent Congresses. These manifestos setting the goal of complete independence for the country, exhorted the Congress to take firm positions on this question.

Muzaffar Ahmad writes, : "In December 1921, a special event happened in the life of the Communist Party of India. The first printed Manifesto of the Party was distributed at this time. The Indian National Congress was holding its thirty-sixth session then at Ahmedabad in Gujarat. The first Manifesto of our Party was addressed to the Congress delegates and also distributed among them."

He adds : "The Manifesto was written and printed in Moscow. Manabendranath Roy drafted it." The Manifesto declared :

"If the Congress would lead the revolution, which is shaking India to the very foundation, let it not put faith in mere demonstrations and wild temporary enthusiasm. Let it make the immediate demands of the Trade Unions its own demands; let it make the programme of the Kisan sabhas (Peasant Unions) its own programme; and the time will soon come when the Congress will not stop before any obstacle; it will be backed by the irresistible strength of the entire population consciously fighting for the material interest" (India Today, R.P. Dutt, 2nd revised edition).

This was no mean task, considering the small nucleus that formed the party then.

Communist parties, in almost all countries, had very few members and existed as small groups when they were formed. This is the same in the case of the Communist Party of China also. At its founding congress hardly a dozen people were present. But it was this party which eventually led the powerful movement that was to lead to the revolution.

During this period, the Hijrat movement had started and many Mohajirs had left India towards Turkey. As they were unable to enter

Turkey, many of them went to Tashkent.

The Hijarat movement sprang from the Khilafat movement. The British government having failed to fulfill the pledge it had given to the Muslims in India whose help it had sought in its efforts in Turkey, gave rise to a campaign that India was no longer a fit country for the Muslims to live in. Muslims were exhorted to leave the country. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, in his History of the Indian National Congress says that around 18,000 Muslims left the country. These self-exiled (Hijrat) people were called Muhajirs. Though some of the muhajirs settled in Afghanistan, a majority of them wanted to go to Turkey to fight on its side. Unable to enter Turkey, the Muhajirs made their way to Turkestan, now in Uzbekistan. Many of these Muhajirs joined the Communist Party of India in Tashkent and Moscow.

After completing studies at the University of the Toilers of the East, the Muhajir members of the CPI decided to return to India. Ten of them left from Tashkent to proceed to India, in order to work underground for the Party. Four of them were arrested while entering India : Mir Abdul Majid, Rafiq Ahmed, Habib Ahmad and Ferozuddin Mansur. They were sent to Peshawar under police guard. Another batch of three Muhajirs surrendered to the Border office at Chitral. They too were sent to Peshawar.

Subsequently some other Muhajirs were arrested. These led to the launching of cases against the communists, The First and the Second Peshawar Conspiracy Case.

The launching of these cases in 1922-24 in itself sent the message that the working class and its revolutionary party had emerged on the Indian political scene. Under the impact of this Party various journals were brought out and distributed in the country. They were published from Lahore, Bombay, Calcutta etc advocating the ideas of scientific socialism, despite lacking clarity. This influenced the creation of various groups in the states at that time. Subsequently the Kanpur Conspiracy Case was launched. Muzaffar Ahmad S.A. Dange, Shaukat Usmani and others were implicated in these cases.

In December 1925, with Singaravelu Chettiar in the Chair, a conference of communist groups was held in Kanpur, which adopted



a resolution for the formation of the Communist Party of India with its headquarters in Bombay. As the British rulers were making it impossible for Communists to function, an open platform in the name of the Workers and Peasants Party was created. The All India Trade Union Congress had already come into being in 1920. Communists were to play a greater role in the organisation. The period also saw peasants organisations being formed in some parts of the country. Later, during 1935, the All India Students Federation also came into being and within a few years it came under the influence of Communists.

However, a Party with a centralised apparatus, came into being only after the release of the Meerut prisoners, in 1933. The Meerut Conspiracy Case, though launched to suppress the communist movement, provided the opportunity for Communists to propagate their ideas. It came out with its own manifesto and was affiliated to the Communist International in 1934.

The Communist movement from its very inception had to confront multifarious challenges. While there were constant attacks from its class enemies, within the movement itself, there were various deviations and erroneous understandings. Marx and Engels themselves had to wage a struggle against such ideas in their days also. Subsequent to this, the movement had to wage struggles against revisionism, Left adventurism and other alien trends.

The movement within the country had also to face these challenges. The British rulers had tried with all their might to suppress the movement. Despite the severe restrictions on publication and distribution of anything to do with socialism, the spread of the ideas could not be controlled. But such literature being rare, what existed were vague ideas and resultant confusion prevailed.

Nevertheless, the dedication and commitment, saw the Communists playing a significant role in developing the trade union movement in the country.

In the development of the Communist movement in India two other factors played an important role. First, was the conversion of revolutionaries who had taken the path of terrorism, renouncing it and joining the ranks of communists. Realising that terrorist methods

are not the solution, many of them influenced by communist ideas, joined the Party. These included members of the Anusheelan, Jugantar, Hindustan Socialist Republican Party of Bhagat Singh and some other groups. The Communist Party was therefore able to inherit the best revolutionary traditions of the Indian Freedom movement.

Within a few years of setting up a centralised leadership and apparatus, the communist Party was to play an important role in the movement for national liberation and popularising the ideas of scientific socialism. One cannot forget the role that the Communist Party of Great Britain, despite being weak, played in helping the Indian movement. They were in constant touch with the Communist Party of India from 1926 onwards. Many of them were directly involved in the movement. One of them was Rajni Palme Dutt. An important leader of the C.P.G.B, he wrote *India Today*, which remains a classic in understanding British India and the exploitation indulged in by the British. The British Party also influenced Indian students who were studying there. Many of these students joined the movement after returning to India. Many members of the C.P.G.B came to India (some were sent by the Communist International) to help us. Some came under assumed names and worked in the trade unions and other organisations. Some were even arrested by the British government. Among those who came here were Ben Bradley, Philip Spratt, George Allison etc. Some were implicated in the Meerut Conspiracy case also. It were all these trends that combined together to take the Communist Party forward.

The Communist movement, after this period, had to go through various trials and tribulations. It had to work underground for most part of the time in the 30s and in the beginning of the 40s. It was only in 1942, during the anti-fascist war that it was legalised. Even after independence of the country, it had to face severe repression at the hands of the new (Indian bourgeois) rulers. But despite all efforts to cow down the movement, it could not obstruct the growth of the movement.

If we look back to the formative days of the movement in 1920, it may seem that we have indeed come a long way since then. Seventyfive years is not a very big period, in historical terms, for a country like India, with diverse nationalities and ethnic groups. It was the Communist Party that played a major role in forging unity among these various groups

The movement, while confronting alien influences, distortions and deviations had also committed serious mistakes. For eg. in the pre-independence period, ignoring Lenin's analysis of the role of the bourgeoisie in certain period, it relegated the independent role of the Party of the working class to the background and were at times swayed to the rightist position. By the end of the second world war it was influenced by the revisionist school. It was followed by a period of mass upsurge in which communists were playing an active part. Mass demonstrations were going on for the release of the I.N.A prisoners. The Naval Revolt and the support of the workers to these actions sent panic waves within the Congress party. The bourgeoisie feared that with the rising tide of mass struggles, the initiative would pass on into the hands of the working class to lead the revolution. While not going into a detailed analysis of the tactics adopted by the Communists at that time, I would compare this with the experience in some other countries. In some countries where during the struggle for national independence, the communist parties were not able to assume leadership they have not succeeded in carrying the revolution forward to the socialist path. Once the bourgeoisie comes to power, the task becomes much more difficult.

After the Second Party Congress, we landed ourselves in Left deviation that cost us heavily. When we were in the process of making corrections, another variety, the rightist danger emerged. The struggle against the right, the dominant leadership's line, went on for 10 years inside the Party. Ultimately it resulted in the split. Subsequent events have vindicated the correctness of our position.

After the split and the formation of the CPI(M), we had to put up with challenges at the international level also. At varying times, the CPSU and the CPC attacked our Party. But we stood to our ground of not accepting dictates from any other party and charting our path on the basis of the concrete realities and conditions existing in our country. The ideological debate, the stand off with the giants of the international communist movement, the period when we were isolated at the international level combined with the struggles inside the country against the ruling classes, steeled the Party. It is precisely for this reason, that when communist parties were crumbling and many regimes were swept aside, the CPI(M) membership did not waver or seem confused. It stood firm in its resolve to carry the Indian revolution forward.