

II. FIRST PHASE OF WAR, IMPERIALIST WAR

WE HAVE A POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY TO GUIDE US AND we are members of a disciplined revolutionary political party; therefore unlike most other Congressmen, we do not just wait for a lead to come from you. We endeavour to do some independent thinking and place our analysis and conclusions before the people and our fellow Congressmen.

When such a major historic event like the World War broke out, everyone had to do some fresh and hard thinking. We thought out whether the war was a greater opportunity or a greater danger to our freedom struggle and came to the conclusion that it was a greater opportunity. We thought out if we must change our methods to suit the new situation and we came to the conclusion that we must.

We did not call it an imperialist war just because our imperialist enslavers were engaged in it and therefore conclude that a war in which Britain was engaged could not be India's war and could only provide an opportunity for us to revolt. That was the way in which the national revolutionaries in the much simpler world of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries used to think. Those ideas have come to us as a heritage but if we stick to them in the world of today, we become national chauvinists who seek allies whoever they may be, even including reactionary fascists, and thus consciously or unconsciously betray our own country to rival imperialists.

Among the national organisations of suppressed colonial peoples, the Indian National Congress is not only the oldest but also the greatest. It is the pride of our ancient and freedom-loving peoples. On the initiative of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and supported by younger progressive elements within it all its declarations of international policy have been based on and have popularised the following ideas:

World Imperialism as a whole is one oppressive system of enslavers and aggressors.

World peoples form another camp of peace, freedom and democracy. The Congress has always identified its ideas with this camp and also recognised and welcomed the existence of the Socialist Soviet Union and Nationalist China in the same.

As a section within the Congress and as an independent political party, we had to define our attitude towards the war. And we called it an imperialist war.

Why Imperialist War?

We based ourselves on two basic factors when we characterised it as an imperialist war.

(1) We examined the character of the two contestants and found they were two *imperialist* rivals, the Anglo-French imperialists on one side and the Hitler-Fascists on the other.

(2) We examined, not the formal and declared, but the actual living war aims of the two sides and found they were selfish imperialist aims.

The aim of the Hitlerites was fascist conquest of the world and their way the way of brutes and beasts.

The aim of the Chamberlainites was to save their ill-gotten imperialist possessions and switch the war against the USSR and their way the way of intriguing villains and selfish cowards.

Thus the partisans were the imperialists whom we loathed, their desired aim the logical and cruel working out of imperialist policies that we had pledged our lives to resist. This is why it was an imperialist war to us and we decided to oppose it.

Several middle-class democrats in Europe made fun of our analysis of "switching the war"; they thought that the Communists of their country were not putting their shoulder to the war because the USSR was not involved! They make no more fun of us now, the very development of the war has proved how right we were. And moreover now there are official documents of various Governments involved to prove that it was so.

Perhaps the most notorious of all the numerous examples of this anti-Soviet activity was the Finnish-Soviet war; who, today, believes that Chamberlain's loudly proclaimed desire to save the so-democratic 'little' Finland arose out of anything else

but anti-Soviet designs and aims? And a cursory study of the British Tory press of those days would tell you just how hard the imperialists did work to 'switch' the war.

In fact what to the "democrats" appeared then a far-fetched theory is now acknowledged by every honest man as the living reality of those days.

Stalin had forecast in time that the Anglo-French game would end "in a fiasco" and prove a gamble against themselves. He was denounced as a selfish opportunist then. No one dare recall that now.

Conflicting Views In Congress

The official Congress attitude had to reconcile conflicting views. These were broadly the following:—

(1) Gandhiji—whose abstract ethical ideas led him to offer unconditional co-operation.

Gandhiji met the Viceroy on 5th September and issued a statement saying that "Britain is fighting a just war. A Satyagrahi must support a just cause even when it is espoused by an enemy."

The Working Committee however rejected this line of "unconditional co-operation" by its resolution of 14th September, 1939 and Gandhiji commented on the Working Committee resolution thus:

"I was sorry to find myself alone in thinking that whatever support was to be given to the British should be given unconditionally. This could only be done on a purely non-violent basis. But the Committee had a tremendous responsibility to discharge. It could not take the purely non-violent attitude. It felt that the nation had not imbibed the non-violent spirit requisite for the possession of the strength which disdains to take advantage of the difficulty of the opponent. But in stating the reasons for its conclusion the Committee desired to show the greatest consideration for the English."

Harijan, September 23, 1939.

(2) The Ministerialists—who echoed the constitutionalists' desire to give the British Government a chance. They were against any mass movement. They were the dominant voice in the Congress leadership.

For instance, even after it was quite clear that the imperialists were rejecting the Indian demand and that even when hard-pressed they were offering only a consultative body for the war, and few seats in the Executive Council, if the Congress and the League came to prior agreement, Sardar Patel in a speech at Ahmedabad on November 5, 1939 said:

"that the next move of the Congress would depend on the action of the Government. The Congress would resist, if its ordinary activities were interfered with. There was no intention that the Congress should harass the British Government in its present plight."

Bombay Chronicle, November 6, 1939.

This was only putting in political language the constitutionalists' demand that there be no mass movement, a demand which Gandhiji had been putting forward in ethical moral language.

It will be clear that both Gandhiji's line of "unconditional co-operation" and the Working Committee's spirit of co-operation towards Britain meant a refusal to lead the Indian freedom movement to its goal, out of sympathy for the British in distress.

(3) The militant nationalist urge—that called for immediate action.

The Congress policy therefore suffered from duality. Sufficient room for co-operation was left in the resolutions passed but the general bias was towards its recognition as an imperialist war.

"The Committee cannot associate themselves or offer any co-operation in a war which is conducted on imperialist lines and which is meant to consolidate imperialism in India and elsewhere."

Working Committee Resolution, September 14, 1939.

This was good enough for us. It did not come in the way of our explaining to the Congressmen and the people in general how it was really an imperialist war. And we hoped events themselves would make you live down your illusions. Your stand unfortunately also suited the British Government. They knew you were not going to start a mass movement and that was good enough for them.

We will briefly remind you of the zigzag course you followed.

Your Zigzag Policy

This zigzag course was dictated by the very policy that you followed, a policy of faith in Imperialist justness and fear of the people's movement.

Gandhiji met the Viceroy on 5th September 1939 and declared that Britain was fighting for a "just cause", that we should give "unconditional co-operation," and said :

"I am not therefore just now thinking of India's deliverance. It will come, but what will it be worth if England and France fall, or if they come out victorious over Germany ruined and humbled?"

Harijan, September 9, 1939.

Gandhiji thus wanted to offer unconditional moral support to Britain.

The Working Committee however rejected this position.

It condemned "the ideology and practice of Fascism and Nazism, of their glorification of war and violence and the suppression of the human spirit. . . . It has seen in Fascism and Nazism the intensification of the principle of imperialism against which the Indian people have struggled for many years." While condemning the Nazi aggression on Poland it declared that "the Committee cannot associate themselves or offer any co-operation in a war which is conducted on imperialist lines and *which is meant to consolidate Imperialism in India and elsewhere.*"

Working Committee Resolution, September 14, 1939.

The policy adopted was to invite the Chamberlain Government to declare its war aims in regard to democracy and the "new world order that is envisaged" and to bargain for concessions by a threat of non-co-operation. The Congress members of the Central Legislature had already been asked to keep away from the Assembly.

The Chamberlain Government however was entirely innocent of any progressive aims and was clearly working its hardest to use Hitler to re-establish the old order, even on Soviet territory. It therefore instructed the Viceroy to interview Indian leaders ; he discovered fully fifty-two of them and finally declared that the most the British Government could do was to form a "consultative body" presided over and convened by himself and composed of persons chosen by him from panels submitted by the Indian parties.

At Wardha the Working Committee regarded this "as in every way unfortunate" and declared that "in the circumstances the Committee cannot possibly give any support to Great Britain" for it would amount to an endorsement of Imperialist policy. As a first step in its policy of non-co-operation it called upon Congress Ministries to resign.

To wait for the Chamberlain Government to declare war aims was to wait for the wolf to go vegetarian.

Inaction And Waiting

Throughout the period from October 1939 to March 1940, it appealed to the British Government to transfer power and to the people to keep quiet, show "restraint in word and deed" (A.I.C.C. Resolution). Whenever the people took the initiative and launched partial struggles against the war and in defence of their rights, it frowned upon them. For instance we organised a huge anti-war political protest strike in Bombay on October 2, 1939 in which 90,000 workers participated.

The Working Committee did not welcome this readiness on the part of the working class to fight for freedom ; on the other hand it warned Congressmen "against any hasty action

in the shape of civil disobedience, political strike and the like.”

Working Committee Resolution, October 22, 1939.

In November 1939 the Viceroy made it clear that beyond expanding his Executive Council to include Congress and League representatives provided they agreed beforehand, the British Government would not make any change in the Government.

The Working Committee met at Allahabad. It had to undertake a struggle. This it wanted to avoid. So it passed a resolution welcoming the readiness shown by the people for civil disobedience but warning them that the “true test of preparedness” for civil disobedience lay in vigorous spinning, promoting khaddar and bringing about communal unity by personal service and fraternisation.

Working Committee Resolution, November 23, 1939.

Inside the A.I.C.C. itself discontent at this policy of inaction was rising. At the Wardha A.I.C.C. meeting no less than 58 members voted against the official resolution which declared that “the A.I.C.C. however does not wish to take any decision precipitately”. The answer of the leadership was to postpone the annual session of the Congress, take full powers to itself and wait and watch. The *Bombay Chronicle* of October 11, 1939 headlined it thus :

“DICTATORIAL POWERS TO WORKING COMMITTEE.

AICC ENDORSES HIGH COMMAND'S MOVE.

WE WILL KNOW WHERE WE STAND IN A FORT-NIGHT'S TIME SAYS NEHRU.”

This policy also did not yield any fruit.

In February 1940, Gandhiji met the Viceroy again only to find “no prospect whatsoever of a peaceful and honourable settlement”. The more a struggle seemed inevitable, the less the Congress leadership liked it.

Threat Of 'Struggle'

At Ramgarh, in March 1940, this policy reached its final culmination. The leadership declared that nothing short of complete independence and the convening of a Constituent Assembly on the basis of adult suffrage would satisfy India.

It stated that the Congress would “unhesitatingly resort” to civil disobedience “as soon as the Congress organisation is considered fit enough for the purpose, or in case circumstances so shape themselves as to precipitate a crisis.” It drew the attention of Congressmen to Gandhiji's declaration “that he will declare civil disobedience *only when he is satisfied that they are strictly disciplined and are carrying out the constructive programme.*”

In his speech Gandhiji made it clear that he considered that the Congressmen were unprepared for the struggle. His speech is remarkable and we reproduce it :

“I feel you are not prepared. It is true that we all know and realise that we are slaves in our own land. We also realise that freedom is essential for us. Further, we realise that we will have to fight for freedom. I may also join you in applauding the speakers who have demanded immediate launching of civil disobedience. A thief has come and turned me out of my house. I will have to fight him and get it back, but before I can do this, I must be prepared (*applause*). Your claps only demonstrate that you do not understand what this preparation means. *Your General finds that you are not ready, that you are not real soldiers and that if we proceed on the lines suggested by you, we are bound to be defeated.*”

After this dispiriting opening, he wound up by saying :

“Without full faith in truth, non-violence and the charkha, you cannot be my soldiers. And I repeat again that if you do not believe in this, you must leave me alone and you can try your own methods.”

Indian Annual Register, p. 230, March 1940.

Circulars were sent round containing strict instructions to weed out as many people as possible : Satyagrahis were divided into two classes, active and passive. The active must spin regularly, wear khaddar habitually etc. The passive Satyagrahis were those who "wish well to the struggle." They should not court imprisonment, aid or precipitate strikes of workers, students etc. ; and so on. Circular No. 4 (of the 29th March from the General Secretary, AICC, to all Congressmen) calls on all who are earnest to either become active Satyagrahis or "help the movement by remaining passive." Since Congressmen might not take this advice seriously the circular goes on to assure them that "they also serve who stand and wait."

Indian Annual Register, p. 239, March 1940.

While the leadership had made the words better, the practice had remained unchanged.

While the leadership was declaring that the country was unprepared for struggle, the imperialists were using the Defence of India Rules to decimate the fighting vanguard of the Congress. The AICC asked the various PCC.'s to send lists of repression and fully 24 pages of the *Indian Annual Register* for 1940 are filled with arrests, searches, convictions and this is a very incomplete list. Those who were demanding a mass movement were being locked up.

Conditional Co-operation

Those who were opposed to it, the Ministerialists, were looking round for a chance to avoid a struggle while winning some concessions. The fall of France provided them with the opportunity. Once again hopes of striking a bargain with the Imperialists were revived. Britain was in a tight corner, the tightest since the war began. If the Congress offered to help militarily, the trick might be pulled off. And so came the Poona Offer. Military help would mean throwing non-violence overboard and so, on the eve of the Poona Session of the A.I.C.C., the Working Committee did so.

Maulana Azad in his presidential speech at the Poona A.I.C.C. said :

"Most of us felt that we were not able to take up the grave responsibility of declaring that we would completely eschew violence when we had to deal with widespread internal disorder in this country or external aggression. But we all were quite clear in our minds that so far as the struggle for winning our independence was concerned non-violence would continue to occupy the same place in the Congress programme that it had occupied all these 20 years. We all felt that the slightest deviation in this respect will mean political suicide for the Congress."

This was a curious statement to make. There was no external aggression that threatened India at that time, no widespread internal disorder which the Congress Ministries had to put down. In fact the Congress Ministries were not there at all. The real meaning was that there will be no mass movement for freedom, that from non-co-operation the Congress leadership was moving to conditional military co-operation in a war they themselves had characterised as Imperialist.

But the Imperialists arrogantly rejected this offer and in the Declaration of August 1940 the Viceroy made it clear that all that he was prepared to do was to enlarge his Executive Council with representative Indians and to set up a War Advisory Council. The representatives of the main parties could engage themselves in constitution-making if they so chose. This was a decisive rebuff which meant that again struggle was inevitable.

At the Bombay A.I.C.C., 15th September 1940, Gandhiji was once again asked to take up the leadership of the Congress for the struggle and he forthwith declared :

"There is no question of mass civil disobedience. There may be—I am still not sure—individual civil disobedience. I am still searching for something. So far, I have not been able to find anything."

Indian Annual Register, p. 26, September, 1940.

All the amendments which demanded the immediate launch-

ing of mass civil disobedience were rejected, not more than five voting in favour of them. Those who would have voted in favour of them had all been put behind the bars by Imperialism. Gandhiji declared that he knew when to start mass civil disobedience. "The country," he said, "was not in a position to launch such a movement."

Every honest patriotic Indian was dissatisfied with this persistent refusal to lead the movement for freedom. Only M. N. Roy who had already put forward the thesis that Imperialism had turned progressive and urged unconditional co-operation criticised even this severely limited and halting proposal for a struggle. He said "It will only please Berlin and Rome. It is beyond mortal understanding."

In September 1940, Gandhiji met the Viceroy again. At the Bombay A.I.C.C., Gandhiji disclosed what he was going to tell the Viceroy :

"I propose to approach the Viceroy with a request that he will be good enough to see me, and I have no doubt that he will. *I will place my difficulties before him ; I will approach him in your name. I will tell him that this is the position to which we have been reduced.* We do not want to embarrass you and deflect you from your purpose in regard to war effort."

Halting Steps Towards Struggle

He was to ask the Viceroy to let Congress have the civil liberty to carry on anti-war propoganda. The Government could put across pro-war propoganda. Let the people decide. Gandhiji appealed to the Viceroy :

"It will be honourable of you, although you are engaged in a life and death struggle that you have given us this liberty. It will be honourable of you that you take this great step, although you have limitless powers to choke our voice, and that you give us the fullest possible freedom, consistently

with the observance of non-violence, to tell the people of India not to join the war effort."

Indian Annual Register, p. 218, September 1940.

From a demand for complete independence of India it had now come to a limited demand for verbal opposition to the war. This was of course justified by the statement that "Freedom of speech and pen is the foundation of Swaraj. If the foundation stone is in danger, you have to exert the whole of your might in order to defend that single stone. May God help you."

Gandhiji met the Viceroy on 27th September 1940 and the inevitable happened. The Viceroy rejected the request. Gandhiji with pained surprise said in his statement of 5th October 1940 :

"He is not to be easily moved from his position. He meets you with his decision on the matter under discussion already made. He takes care not to let you think that it is so. *But there is no doubt about it that his decision is unchangeable.* He is not receptive. He has amazing confidence in the correctness of his judgment. *He does not believe in a gentleman's or any other agreement.*"

Gandhiji was only telling the people what they already knew and expected. But lest the people might think that the struggle for independence would start now, he warned :

"The immediate issue is not independence. The immediate issue is the right to exist, that is, the right of self-expression which, broadly put means free speech."

The plan of action had to be decided. Gandhiji and the Working Committee met. The plan was that direct action will be commenced by Shri Vinobha Bhave and would be limited to him. He would make an anti-war speech. Only two members of the Working Committee disagreed with Gandhiji's plan but, as Gandhiji said, even they would "yield to obedience so far as it is possible for them for the sake of discipline." To the obvious question of how this action was going to take the country to the goal of freedom, Gandhiji replied :

"One man's non-violent action would be despised and

ridiculed by the non-believer in it. While the effect of a given violent action can be reduced to mathematical terms, that of non-violent action defies all calculation and has been known to falsify many that have been hazarded."

Restricted Civil Disobedience

And thus the individual civil disobedience began after a great deal of hesitation. By this time the aim of the national movement had been restricted to freedom of speech, the scope of the national struggle was limited to individuals whose names were approved by Gandhiji. Severe care was taken to see that the public did not take part in the struggle and upset all the plans. Those who were to participate were asked to notify the police in advance where and when they were going to break the D.O.I. Rules. In most cases they were picked up from their homes and detained. They never even saw the people to whom they were to preach this moral anti-war sentiment.

On November 17, 1940 Sardar Patel gave notice to the District Magistrate of his intention to shout anti-war slogans on the day following. He was arrested at night and detained. In Christmas week, 1940 even this Satyagraha was suspended so as not to cause inconvenience to the officials and disturb the happy and jovial atmosphere of Christmas. But it was a pathetic one-way faith in the Imperialists. They replied to this delicate courtesy by arresting the Congress President, Maulana Azad, on December 30, 1940.

More and more people offered themselves for arrest and despite all the restrictions imposed by Gandhiji fully 25,000 were in jail. The Imperialists had already smashed up the vanguard of the freedom fighters. Arrests, restrictions and convictions had gone on from September 1939. The individual civil disobedience conducted by you amounted to nothing less than handing over those who remained outside to the Imperialists. Be it remembered that throughout this period no external peril faced India, that the war was being fought to consolidate Imperial interests and the people were looking to you for a lead to achieve the country's freedom.

But you did not lead your people. You did not decide your policy. Your faith in the Imperialists led you to leave the initiative in their hands.

The people wanted you to lead the struggle. The Imperialists wanted you to surrender. Your faith in them made you think you would get a settlement. You refused to rely on the strength of the people, you were afraid of using it. And the leader of the mighty organisation like the Congress had to go to the Viceroy and piteously appeal: "This is the position to which we have been reduced." It was a national shame. This is the state to which your policy had reduced our country.

Communist Policy

We will now give you extracts from our own Party documents which will explain our policy at that time.

Our Party was declared illegal in 1934. Our weekly organ, *National Front*, which we were able to bring out under the enlarged civil liberties in the days of the Congress Ministries was suppressed with the outbreak of the war.

We immediately came out with our illegal organ, *Communist*, and in the very first volume, dated November 1939, we placed before our people our analysis of the whole period—Imperialist strategy and what would be a really national policy. We quote the relevant portions from the resolution of our Political Bureau published in *Communist*.

CHARACTER OF WAR

"The war that is raging in Europe today is NOT a war of Democracy against Fascism. It is an Imperialist War—the second Imperialist war, the heir and successor of the last Great War of 1914-18." The German Fascists were characterised as the "chief instigators of war" but "the reactionary policy of British Imperialism, of aiding and abetting fascist aggression in the hope of directing it against the Soviet Union" was laid bare "as the most important factor accelerating the outbreak of a world Imperialist war."

WAR AIMS

“Britain and France are not fighting in defence of Freedom and Democracy. Their victory would not mean the destruction or even the weakening of Fascism. . . .

. . . Chamberlain and Daladier are using the anti-fascist sentiment of the people to pursue their imperialist aims, to entrench Fascism in their own countries. . . . They would bolster up reaction in every country of Europe. They would destroy the last vestige of democracy in their own countries. They would intensify political and economic exploitation of the colonies.”

We pointed out that world capitalism was in a crisis, that the revolutionary forces of peace, democracy and Socialism were immeasurably stronger and the defeat of Imperialism and Fascist reaction was on the agenda.

NATIONAL TASK

“Revolutionary utilisation of the war crisis for the achievement of National Freedom—This is the central task before the national forces in the New Period. . . . The war crisis brings out in the sharpest manner and intensifies a thousandfold the conflict between the British Government and the Indian people. . . . opposition to war measures grows. Struggle breaks out.

“Thus grows the possibility of the most rapid and widespread mobilisation against the Government, of drawing even the most backward strata into active struggle . . . of carrying the isolation of the Government to the extreme point. Thus opens up the perspective of transformation of imperialist war into a war of national liberation. This perspective must be brought before the *entire* national movement. This outlook must determine the action of every Congressman in this new period. Capture of power is an immediately realisable goal—a goal for which preparations must be begun in right earnest.”

IMPERIALIST STRATEGY

“It (Imperialism) wants to utilise India’s resources and manpower for the war. But more than anything else it wants ‘internal peace’. That peace it hopes to achieve by the most drastic measures against the revolutionary core of the national movement—Socialists, Communists and radical Congressmen, by nipping in the bud every movement. It would encourage forces of communal disruption—forces that would threaten to submerge the national movement in communal riots.”

This was proved correct by the months that followed. Attacks on the vanguard and communal riots became a reality.

We clearly said :

“Repression would not be the only nor even the main weapon of Imperialism if it can be avoided. Imperialism would try above all to keep the main body of the national forces out of struggle by ‘conciliating’ the national leadership—the leadership of the National Congress. *For that purpose however, Imperialism is not prepared to make any major concession—political or economic—even to the national bourgeoisie* . . . CONCILIATION WITHOUT CONCESSION IS IMPERIALISM’S WAY OF SOLVING THE CONFLICT BETWEEN ITS ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL NEEDS. . . . It relies on the weakness of our national leadership, on its fear of a mass movement. Hence it has dared to reject in the most categorical terms the demands made by the National Congress.”

POLICY OF NATIONAL LEADERSHIP

“The dominant leadership of the Congress does not want to use the weapon of mass struggles, it wants to utilise the war crisis for striking a hard bargain with Imperialism without struggle. . . . (Though Imperialism refuses to make any concession) compromise and not struggle continues to be the policy. *Even if the national leadership is forced, by mass pressure, to launch struggle its attempt would be to restrict*

the scope of the struggle so as to use it as a weapon of compromise."

Can we not justly claim that we were able to see things clearly and well in advance? Fully a year before the individual civil disobedience was started by Gandhiji, we told the people what it would be like.

"The stalemate continues—though in a different form. The initiative remains with imperialism. Attention continues to be focussed on Whitehall and Simla. (This policy would end) *"with the vanguard crushed in isolation; with the main body of the national force paralysed by inaction, the British Government would be in a position to dictate terms. . . ."*

WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

We did not believe that we alone could lead the country to freedom. We said:

"It must be clearly realised, however, that the movement against war and for freedom can acquire national dimensions and be really effective only when it is led by the Congress . . . (so) every attempt on the part of the compromisers to continue the present stalemate or to restrict the struggle must be sharply criticised and its underlying policy ruthlessly exposed. . . . Nor shall we be able to break through the stalemate by ourselves issuing 'call' for nation-wide direct action against war. All our anti-war activities today, *viz.*, protest strikes, literature, anti-war propaganda must have as their *main objective*, the creation of such powerful anti-war sentiment among the people in general and the masses of Congressmen in particular *as would move the Congress itself towards struggle.*"

We criticised the Congress Socialists and the Forward Blocists who advocated individual Satyagraha as groups which were defeatist and lacked faith in the people. We condemned M. N. Roy's line of support to British Imperialism and his policy of waiting till the war was over.

All these quotations are from our key document of the Imperialist war period, the political resolution passed by the Polit Bureau of our Party, as early as October, 1939.

We led the anti-war strikes of the workers, 1,50,000 in Bombay on a 40-day strike in 1940, we led peasant struggles against zemindar oppression as in Kayyur for which four of our comrades were subsequently hanged.

Anyone will see it for himself that ours was a more consistent stand. We think we have also been proved by subsequent events to have been more realistic.

We saw in our demand on you to initiate and lead a country-wide mass struggle not only the quickest and shortest route to our own national liberation but also India's contribution towards upsetting the balance of forces in Britain.

Our British comrades were running a campaign to make British Labour take an independent positive stand against the Chamberlain Government and for a People's Government that would put a stop to the policy of spreading the war, sign a pact with the U.S.S.R. and stop Hitler's aggression and bring about a people's peace.

Our Practical Activity

We put our policy into practice:

(1) We carried on as widespread anti-war propaganda as possible explaining the story of Hitler's domination over one European country after another, the miserable collapse of their reactionary Governments and how the British policy of isolating the Soviet Union and denying power to us was like selling the world to Hitler.

(2) In the rural areas we ran a mass campaign under the slogan "*na ek Pai na ek Bhai* (not a pie, not a brother) to this Imperialist Government."

(3) In the industrial areas we organised one of the most widespread strike-waves on both industrial and political issues that India has seen.

(4) Most of our leaders were arrested, but we carried on, not symbolically but with all our activities in full swing and our

organisation intact. We thus gave a demonstration of something *new* in our national life. that ours was a Party of a new type that could not be crushed by Imperialist repression but could keep its links with the masses intact by combining secret disciplined Party organisation with legal heroic mass activity.

In the formal sense of the word we went beyond the officially sanctioned policy of the Congress but at that time no one thought of presenting us with a charge-sheet.

We knew that most of the Congress leaders frowned upon our activities but patently they could not claim that their symbolic Satyagraha was better "struggle" than our forms of mass activity. We had very sharp differences with you about suitable methods of struggle at that time as unfortunately we have also had in the second phase of the war.

Whenever we used methods that went beyond those that the Congress had sanctioned, we never used the name of the Congress but did it all under the banner of our Party. This is in striking contrast to the doings of some of your present-day followers.

All our comrades who were Congress functionaries were arrested long before you were, or went to jail as individual Satyagrahis, or went underground under the direction of the Party and after informing and consulting their colleagues in the Congress.

We had no illusions that a single party like ours could start a national struggle. All our attention was directed to create the general *atmosphere* in the country and those *conditions* among the sections of the people we led that might help the Congress to take the lead. We resisted Subhas Bose's efforts to start a rival Congress as disruptive of national unity and stood up to him when he was exploiting national sentiment and his own just grievances against you. It needed some courage to stand up to Bose in Bengal. Yet our Bengal comrades called off his demagoguery and Bengali Congressmen had to admit that we had more devotion for the Congress than the "official" group within Bengal.

We have to remind you of these few facts because you suggest that our Party under-rates the role of the Congress and is really anti-Congress !

Great Opportunity Lost

You could not be as consistent as we were because you did not see the character of the war as it was being waged then as clearly as we did.

The mass of your followers felt that Britain's difficulty was India's opportunity and looked to you to do something decisive. In contrast the majority of the Working Committee came to exactly the opposite conclusion from Britain's difficulty, the conclusion that the longer they can sit tight upon the mass influence of the Congress, the sooner will Britain's growing difficulties make the British rulers yield.

It fell to Pandit Nehru to reconcile these two contrary pulls and draft resolutions in the ringing words for which he has become famous ; but words by themselves change nothing, they only sound good.

You asked your own people to do practically nothing and therefore nothing great happened in our country.

But Hitler was changing the map of Europe and inflicting defeats after defeats on Britain or her allies. Our people left with a vacant mind and nothing to do fell to gloating over Hitler's victories. National sentiment began expressing itself in ignorant and distorted forms, not heroic but slavish, not democratic but pro-fascist.

The result of your policy in this period meant that India had lost a great opportunity of striking for Indian freedom and world peace ; and in the vacuum of confusion left by you, pro-fascist and slavish sentiments grew apace. This is where your policy, or rather, lack of policy, led the country.