

# FORWARD BLOC — ITS JUSTIFICATION

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The evolution of a movement is analogous to that of a tree. It grows from within and at every stage it throws out new branches, so that there may be ever increasing progress. When no fresh branches sprout forth, the movement may be presumed to be in a process of decay or death. While every movement draws its sustenance from the soil from which it springs, it also assimilates nourishment coming from outside — from the atmosphere, environment, etc. Internal sustenance and external nourishment are both necessary for a living movement.

When the main stream of a movement begins to stagnate, but there is still vitality in the movement as a whole — a Left wing invariably appears. The main function of the Left Wing is to stimulate progress when there is danger of it being arrested. The appearance of a Left Wing is followed by a conflict between it and the main stream, which now becomes the Right Wing. This conflict is a temporary phase and through it a higher stage is reached, when the conflict is resolved. The solution of the conflict takes place through some sort of agreement or adjustment, whereby the Left Wing begins to dominate the Movement as a whole. Thus the Left Wing becomes, in time, the main stream of the Movement.

One may describe this process of evolution in philosophical language by saying that the "Thesis" throws up its "antithesis", and the conflict between the two is resolved in a "Synthesis". This "Synthesis", in its turn, becomes the "thesis" of the next stage of evolution.

This process of evolution — called the "dialectical process" — if properly comprehended, can give a new meaning and significance to the developments that have taken place within the Indian National Congress during the last few decades. We shall herein study the Gandhi Movement from the dialectical point of view.



We may observe at this stage that it would be an error to suppose that conflicts inside a movement are unhealthy or undesirable under all circumstances. It would indeed be more correct to say that conflicts which arise from the logic of history are essential to progress, whether in the sphere of thought or in the sphere of action.

There is no fixed rule as to when a movement or a particular phase of it should lose its dynamism and begin to stagnate. So long as it can assimilate from outside and go on creating something new, decay cannot set in.

To come now to a study of the Gandhi Movement. By 1919, after the close of the World War, a new situation arose in India and with it, new problems. The official Indian National Congress could not face this situation as it had lost its dynamism altogether, and a Left Wing was clearly necessary if the entire Congress was not to stagnate and die. At this juncture a Left Wing appeared in the form of the Gandhi Movement. Conflict ensued for a time and the old leaders were driven out of the Congress or voluntarily withdrew. Ultimately, a "Synthesis" took place. The Congress accepted the tenets of Mahatma Gandhi and the Left Wing then became the official Congress.

In 1920, Gandhism took possession of the Indian National Congress and for two decades it has maintained its hold. This has been possible, not merely because of Mahatma Gandhi's personality but also because of his capacity to assimilate other ideas and policies. But for the latter factor, Gandhism would have ceased to dominate the Congress long ago. During its twenty years' domination of the Congress, whenever revolts appeared, the Gandhi Movement took the wind out of their sails by accepting many of their ideas and policies — and only recently has it shown signs of failing to adapt itself to the changing environment. For instance, when the Swarajya Party arose in 1923, the conflict that followed continued only for a time. At the Cawnpore Congress in 1925, the Swarajist policy of carrying non-cooperation inside the Legislatures was accepted by the Gandhiites and was thereupon adopted by the Congress as a whole.



Again in December, 1928, at the Calcutta Congress there was a revolt against Gandhism sponsored by the Independence League on the issue of Independence. Mahatma Gandhi then advocated Dominion Status and he fought and defeated our resolution on Independence. But a year later, at the Lahore Congress, he himself moved the resolution declaring that henceforth Independence was to be the goal of the Indian National Congress.

By this process of assimilation, the Gandhi Movement was able to maintain its progressive character and prevent the emergence of any big Left Wing development. There was a temporary setback after the Gandhi-Irwin Pact in March, 1931, but Gandhiji recovered lost ground when he launched Satyagraha or Civil Disobedience in January, 1932.

The failure of this Civil Disobedience Movement and its abandonment in May, 1933, created a new situation which gave birth to a fresh revolt — this time from the Right. Disappointed at the failure of the Movement, a large section of Gandhites urged the revival of the parliamentary programme which had been scrapped by them at the Lahore Congress in December, 1929, before the launching of Satyagraha by Mahatma Gandhi in 1930. Gandhiji surrendered to this demand in 1934, ostensibly because he had no alternative plan for the Congress. This incident was an indication that stagnation in the Gandhi Movement had set in and this was confirmed when a big Left Wing revolt arose through the medium of the Congress Socialist Party which was inaugurated in 1934, almost contemporaneously with the swing towards parliamentarianism.

The Gandhi Movement did not lose its elasticity and adaptability in a day and the attitude of the Gandhites towards the Congress Socialists and other Leftists remained benevolent on the whole in 1934 and after. As a matter of fact, the Congress Socialists were offered seats on the Congress Working Committee in 1936, 1937 and 1938. (They did not accept the offer in 1938). In January, 1938, the Gandhites, at the instance of Mahatma Gandhi himself, supported my candidature for the Congress Presidentship.. And at the Haripura Congress in February, 1938, when I



was to nominate the Working Committee for the year, Gandhiji was clearly of opinion that there could be no objection to having Socialists on the Working Committee.

A distinct — and what has still remained inexplicable — change in Mahatma Gandhi's attitude came in September, 1938, after a meeting of the All-India Congress Committee at Delhi, at which there was a walk-out of the Left Wingers over a controversial issue. It was then that one heard Gandhiji saying that there could be no compromise with the Leftists in conducting the affairs of the Congress. A few months later, in January, 1939, he gave proof of the same mentality by opposing my re-election as Congress President.

Since September, 1938, Gandhism has tended to become increasingly static and hide-bound. At the Haripura Congress in February of the same year, the two most important resolutions passed were on the questions of Federation and the coming War. Though the resolution on Federation was one of uncompromising opposition, throughout that year the air was thick with rumours that negotiations for a compromise between the Gandhiites and the British Government were going on behind the scenes. My attitude of uncompromising hostility towards Federation was the first item in the Gandhian charge-sheet against my Presidentship. The second item was what the Gandhiites regarded as my unduly friendly attitude towards the Leftists. The third item in the charge-sheet was my sponsoring and subsequent inauguration of the National Planning Committee which, in the view of the Gandhiites, would give a fillip to large-scale production at the sacrifice of village industries, the revival of which was a very important item in the Gandhian constructive programme. The next charge against me was that I advocated an early resumption of the national struggle for Independence, to be preceded by an ultimatum to the British Government.

By September, 1938, any intelligent person could have foreseen that in future the relations between the Gandhiites and the Leftists would cease to be cordial. As already indicated above, Gandhiji himself gave a frank expression to the change in his mentality. Furthermore, it became clear to



esoteric circles in the Congress at the time of the Munich Pact that in the event of a War-crisis overtaking India in the future — an open rupture between the Gandhiites and the Leftists would become unavoidable. It is true that from 1927 (Madras Congress) to 1938 — the War-policy of the Congress was clearly enunciated in successive annual sessions of the Congress and one would not under ordinary circumstances have expected any divergence of opinion, not to speak of a rupture, among Congressmen on the war issue. Nevertheless, discussions among important Congress leaders during the international crisis preceding the Munich Pact left no room for doubt that the Gandhiites cherished no enthusiasm for the war-resolutions passed by preceding sessions of the Congress and they would not hesitate to circumvent them should they find it necessary or convenient to do so. Now the two questions on which the Leftists were tremendously keen and on which they would not countenance any compromise were those of Federation and the coming War. Consequently, the vacillating and compromising attitude of the Gandhiites on these two issues presaged a breach between them and the Leftists in the days to come.

Though the Munich Pact staved off the war in Europe for the time being, students of International Politics could not but feel that the War was nevertheless unavoidable and imminent. The conviction began thereafter to grow within me that in view of the international situation, the British Government would give up the idea of forcing Federation down the throats of the Indian people. Federation being no longer a live issue for the Indians, it was necessary for them to decide about their future political plans. Since the much-expected battle royal on the Federation issue was off, how were they to continue the fight for Independence?

In November, 1938, when I began my North India tour, I put forward a solution of this problem. I urged that it was no use waiting for the Government to take the initiative against the Indian people. Federation being dead, at least for the time being, and war being ahead of us in the not-distant future, it was time for the Congress to take the initiative. The proper method for doing so would be to send an ultimatum to the British



Government demanding Independence within a certain period and start preparing the country for a national struggle. This idea was widely propagated by us from November onwards and it came before the Tripuri Congress in March, 1939, in the form of a resolution — but it was defeated at the instance of the Gandhiites. That resolution stated, *inter alia*, that after the ultimatum was sent to the British Government, a period of six months would be given within which a definite reply was called for. Six months after the Tripuri Congress when war broke out in Europe, the political wisdom underlying our resolution was admitted even by the Gandhiites who were so much against us at Tripuri.

Soon after War was declared in Europe, Mahatma Gandhi who was then the unofficial Dictator of the Congress, issued a public statement advocating unconditional cooperation with Great Britain in the prosecution of the War. The resolutions repeatedly passed by the Congress during a period of eleven years were conveniently forgotten. (Federation was officially postponed by the Government after the War broke out).

Since 1938, the issues on which we Leftists have found ourselves at loggerheads with the Gandhiites and on which no compromise has been possible — are the resumption of the national struggle for Independence and the correct war-policy of the Indian people. It is to be noted that till November, 1940, Mahatma Gandhi consistently declared in private and in public, that any Satyagraha or Civil Disobedience was out of the question and that anybody who launched such a movement would be doing harm to his country. It is true that in November, 1940, Individual Satyagraha was started under his auspices. But as Gandhiji himself has declared and as we all know very well, it is not a mass struggle for the attainment of Independence. As responsible British officials in India and in England have already declared, this movement has not embarrassed the British Government to any appreciable degree. In conformity with his desire that Great Britain should win the War, Mahatma Gandhi has refrained from creating an embarrassing situation for the Government which a mass struggle for winning Independence would naturally have done.



In September, 1939, Mahatma Gandhi advocated unconditional cooperation with Great Britain in the prosecution of the War, but in November, 1940, he demanded liberty to carry on anti-war propaganda. Since 1938, he consistently denounced all attempts to resume the national struggle for Independence, but in November, 1940, he modified that stand so far as to actually launch the Individual Civil Disobedience Movement. Would it not be a moot question to ask as to what could explain this change however small? And would it be wrong to say that this change has been due entirely to the pressure from the left?

That Gandhiji could, even at his present age, alter a position consistently and tenaciously advocated and upheld by him for a fairly long period — though this change may be due to pressure and be only partial — is evidence of his adaptability and mobility. Nevertheless it is not adequate for the needs of the times. We are now living in the "Blitzkrieg" period of history and if we do not move with the times, we shall have to go under. So far, Gandhiji has been unable to prove by his action that he can keep abreast of the times and lead his nation — and this accords with our belief which we have already stated that the Gandhi Movement is becoming static and hide-bound.

The uncompromising attitude towards heterodox thought which the Gandhites have been evincing since September, 1938, and their increasing desire and endeavour to expel dynamic and radical elements from the Congress — not only prove that they are losing their adaptability and mobility but will, like a vicious circle, make them more and more static. The various non-political organisations which Gandhiji has started for the Gandhites (e.g., the All-India Spinners Association, the Gandhi Seva Sangh, the Harijan Sevak Sangh, the All-India Village Industries Association, the Hindi Prachar Samity, etc.) will also undermine the political dynamism of the Gandhi Movement in future by creating non-political vested interests, as it has already been doing. And more than anything else, peaceful parliamentary life and ministerial office has been, and will be, the political grave of Gandhism.



Whatever revolutionary fervour the Gandhi Movement had, was sapped more by the acceptance of ministerial office than by any other factor. It would be no exaggeration to say that under the influence of this factor, a large number of Congressmen have definitely turned from the thorny path of Revolution to the rosy path of Constitutionalism. Congress Ministries in the provinces were formed in 1937 and neo-Constitutionalism reared its head in a menacing form within the Congress in 1938. Ever since then, the main task of Leftism has been to fight this "Frankenstein" created by the Congress itself. How to stem this drift towards Constitutionalism, how to create afresh a revolutionary mentality among the people in place of the neo-constitutionalist mentality, how to face the war-crisis in a bold and adequate manner, how to bring the Congress back to the path of uncompromising National Struggle and how ultimately to establish Leftist ascendancy in the Congress — these have been the main problems for the Leftists since 1938.

The Gandhi Movement today has become a victim of not only Constitutionalism but also of Authoritarianism. A certain amount of Authoritarianism is permissible and natural in a militant organisation. But the excessive Authoritarianism that one finds today is traceable to the same cause as Constitutionalism. Since the acceptance of Ministerial office, the Gandhites have had a taste of power and they are anxious to monopolise it for themselves in future. What has been going on within the Congress of late, is "power politics", though of a sham kind. The fountain-head of this "power politics" is Wardha. It is the aim of this "power-politics" to beat down all opposition within the Congress so that the Gandhites may comfortably rule the roost for all time. But this game will not succeed. Real power has yet to come and it will never come if we travel along the safe path of Constitutionalism. It is certainly possible for the Gandhites to expel all discordant elements from the Congress and make it a close preserve. But that does not mean that they will be able to win liberty for India. And without real power, there cannot be real "power-politics". What we see therefore today is sham "power politics".



Personally I would have no objection to the Gandhiites trying to monopolise power for themselves or acting in an authoritarian manner, if they had been a revolutionary force. But unfortunately, Gandhism has ceased to be revolutionary. There is no hope that it will succeed in carrying the nation towards its goal of national independence. Consequently, the more our Gandhiite friends try to consolidate their power, position and influence, the more stagnation they will bring into the Congress. Liberal doses of disciplinary action against non-conformists may make the Congress a more homogeneous body than at present, but that process will only create more enemies outside and in the end will strike at the "mass-basis" of the Congress and undermine the hold which the Congress has over the country at large.

The efforts of the Gandhiites to consolidate themselves is nothing else than "Right-consolidation" within the Congress. This had gone on slowly for a long time and unnoticed, till it was accentuated with the acceptance of Ministerial office. When the danger was detected and the Leftists began to organise in self-defence, a furore arose in Gandhian circles. For the latter, self-consolidation, i.e., Right-consolidation, was right and natural; but Left-consolidation was a crime.

Ever since Gandhism has begun to stagnate and a big Left Wing has emerged in opposition to it, the Gandhiites have become Rightists and Gandhian-consolidation has come to mean Right-consolidation.

Philosophically speaking, Right-consolidation is the "thesis" which demands its "anti-thesis" in Left-consolidation. Without this "anti-thesis" and the conflict following in its wake, no further progress is possible. All those who believe in progress and desire it, should therefore actively assist in this task of Left-consolidation and should be prepared for the conflict resulting therefrom. For bringing about Left-consolidation, the Forward Bloc was born in May, 1939, soon after a momentous Session of the All-India Congress Committee in Calcutta, at which I tendered my resignation of the office of President.



Left-consolidation could have been achieved in either of the following ways:

- (i) By forming one party and rallying all the Leftist elements therein. This, however, was not possible because several parties, claiming to be Leftists, already existed, and they were not prepared to liquidate themselves in favour of one Party.
- (ii) By organising a new Bloc which all Leftists and existing Leftist parties would join, while retaining the separate identity of their respective parties, if they so desired.

This was the first aim and endeavour of the Forward Bloc when it was launched. It did not want to start rivalry with the existing Leftist parties, nor did it want to undermine any of them. If the Bloc's proposal had been accepted and all Leftist parties had joined the Forward Bloc, while retaining their separate identity — Left-consolidation would have been easily and promptly achieved and the Rightists would have been faced with a formidable force. But unfortunately for the Leftist cause, this also was not possible, because some of the existing Leftist parties prohibited their members from joining the newly formed Forward Bloc. What accounted for this inexplicable attitude on the part of these parties, need not be discussed here.

- (iii) In the above circumstances, a fresh attempt at Left-consolidation was made in the following manner. The existing Leftist parties and the Forward Bloc agreed among themselves to form a new Committee to be called the Left-consolidation Committee. This Committee was to function as the organ of the entire Left — but it would act only when there was unanimity among the component elements of the Left-consolidation Committee.

The Left-consolidation Committee was formed in Bombay in June, 1939, and the effect was immediate and striking. For the first time, the entire



Left presented a united and organised front at the meeting of the All-India Congress Committee which was being held at the time. Though numerically in a minority, the Leftists were thereby able to prevent several changes being enacted in the Congress constitution, on which the Rightists were known to be very keen. That meeting of the All-India Congress Committee was a moral victory for the Leftists and on the surface, it seemed to augur well for the Leftist Cause.

But on the 9th July, 1939, the first blow at the Left-consolidation Committee was struck and by Mr. M. N. Roy. The Committee had decided to observe the 9th July as an All-India Day for protesting against two resolutions of an anti-Left character which had been passed by the All-India Congress Committee at its Bombay meeting in June in the teeth of Leftist opposition. The Congress President, Babu Rajendra Prasad, issued a statement in July calling upon Leftists to abandon the All-India Day on pain of disciplinary action. As a result of this threat, Mr. M. N. Roy made an announcement at the eleventh hour to the effect that his Party, the Radical League, would not participate, in the observance of the All-India Day. He also telegraphed to Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru requesting him to use his influence with the Congress Socialist Party and dissuade them from participating in the All-India Day. Since Mr. M. N. Roy was then looked upon as a Leftist leader and his Radical League was one of the component units of the Left-consolidation Committee, his action amounted to a betrayal of the Leftist cause and was warmly acclaimed by the Rightists.

Though handicapped by the defection of the Radical League, the other members of the Committee carried on as usual, and their determination to hold together increased when the War situation overtook the country in September, 1939. But in October, a new crisis appeared when the leaders of the Congress Socialist Party announced in Lucknow that in future their Party would act on its own and would not follow the direction of the Left-consolidation Committee. Nevertheless, consultations between them and other members of the Committee continued for a time.



The next blow struck at the Left-consolidation Committee was in December, 1939, when a breach between the Forward Bloc and the National Front took place. The relations between the two had hitherto remained close and cordial. For instance, when the Anti-Imperialist Conference was held at Nagpur in October, on the eve of the meeting of the Congress Working Committee at Wardha, the National Front enthusiastically participated in it, along with the Forward Bloc, Kishan Sabha and others, though the Congress Socialists from other provinces outside C. P. and Berar did not. And after the Congress Socialists withdrew from the L.C.C. later in October at Lucknow the Forward Bloc and National Front continued to collaborate. It was, however, brought to the notice of the Forward Bloc that the National Front had been carrying on propaganda against the former, while outwardly collaborating on the Left-consolidation Committee. What is more, it appeared that in an official journal of the National Front, an official article had appeared painting the Forward Bloc as a counter-revolutionary organisation and adversely criticising it in many ways. This matter was brought up at a meeting of the leaders of the Bloc and of the National Front held in Calcutta in December, 1939. The latter refused to disown the above article or to withdraw it. Thereupon they were told by the Forward Bloc leaders that a "counter-revolutionary" organisation could not collaborate with the National Front on the Left-consolidation Committee.

The attitude of the National Front leaders showed that they wanted to use the platform of the L.C.C. for popularising their organisation, while carrying on reprehensible propaganda, both secret and open, against the component unit of the Committee.

When the breach took place at Calcutta in December, 1939, the National Front openly informed the Forward Bloc that if a national struggle was launched by the latter independently of the Congress, the former would openly denounce it and resist it.



This breach was further accentuated by a conflict between the Bengal Branch of the Forward Bloc and of the National Front over some other issues.

Even before the Left Consolidation Committee was started, there was in operation something like a L.C.C. in Bengal. As a result, the Leftists were in an overwhelming majority in the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee, the dominant partner in the Leftist Combination being those who later on joined the Forward Bloc when it was formed. The Leftist Combination naturally became stronger when the Left Consolidation Committee was started on an All-India basis.

After the 9th July, 1939, disciplinary action was taken against the President of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee (i.e., myself) by the Congress Working Committee for participating in the All-India Day. This was resented by all the Leftists in the B.P.C.C. including the National Front and a united protest was made by them. It soon became apparent that the above action of the Working Committee was but the beginning of a long chain of unwarranted interference and persecution on the part of that Committee. All the Leftists in the B.P.C.C. then resolved not to submit meekly to the Working Committee but to continue their protest. After a few months, it became evident that the Working Committee was determined to go to any length, including the suspension of the valid B.P.C.C, and the setting up of an Ad Hoc Committee instead. At this stage the National Fronters in the B.P.C.C. began to show signs of weakness as well as reluctance to continue their attitude of protest against the high-handed action of the Working Committee. This was regarded by other Leftists as something like an act of betrayal in the midst of a grim fight and it looked as if the National Fronters were frightened at the prospect of disciplinary action. But the National Fronters wanted to cloak their real motive and they tried to side-track the issue by saying that instead of engaging in an organisational conflict with the Working Committee, the B.P.C.C. as a Leftist body should launch a struggle against the Government on the issue of Civil Liberty. The other Leftists were quite prepared to do this, but they wanted to continue their organisational protest against the



Working Committee simultaneously. Ultimately, after a period of tension, an agreement was arrived at between the National Fronters and all the other Leftists in January, 1940, whereby the B.P.C.C. was to launch a struggle on the issue of Civil Liberty and the National Fronters were to join the other Leftists in continuing the protest against the Working Committee. Towards the end of January, 1940, the B.P.C.C. launched the movement as agreed upon and public meetings began to be held in defiance of the official ban. But after some time it was noticed that when the National Fronters held any public meeting, they did so after obtaining the permission of the authorities. In July, 1940, when the B.P.C.C. launched the Holwell Monument Satyagraha, not only did the National Fronters not join it — but some of them actually opposed it. Furthermore, after the All-India Anti-Compromise Conference at Ramgarh in March, 1940, when the Forward Bloc announced the launching of a nation-wide struggle, the National Fronters did their best to resist that move as well.

So much about participating in a struggle. With regard also to joining in the protest against the Congress High Command, the National Fronters did not fulfil their part of the agreement and they began to drop off. When the Working Committee in an unwarranted and illegal manner suspended the valid B.P.C.C. which had been dominated by the Leftists and set up an Ad Hoc Committee instead, the National Fronters quietly parted company with the other Leftists. The latter decided to ignore the fiat of the High Command and the valid B.P.C.C. continued to function. The National Fronters at first made a show of neutrality by declaring that they would not join either side. A little later, however, they began to apply to the Ad Hoc Committee for the recognition of their membership. Today they have cast off all sense of shame and openly declare that they cannot sever their connection with the Congress Working Committee.

The behaviour of the National Fronters in Bengal towards the Forward Blocers and other Leftists there, had repercussions in the All-India field and served to widen the breach between the two organisations which took place at Calcutta in December, 1939, on All-India issues.



After the events of December, 1939, all that remained of the Left Consolidation Committee was the Forward Bloc and the Kishan Sabha. Their collaboration became closer and closer with the passage of time. It was owing to their cooperation and initiative that the All-India Anti-Compromise Conference was held at Ramgarh, in March, 1940, contemporaneously with the annual session of the Congress and proved to be such a remarkable success.

The question may very well be raised as to why the Forward Bloc was at all started and why the existing Leftist parties were not charged with the responsibility of bringing about Left-consolidation. The experiment was in fact tried but it failed and then there arose a situation in which it became imperative to start the Forward Bloc, if the Leftists were to be rallied under one banner and the menace of Right-consolidation was to be countered.

With the formation of the Congress Socialist Party, Radical League and similar organisations in 1934 and after, and the decision of the National Front to join the Congress — the Leftists in the Congress began to gain appreciably in influence and in numbers. This continued till 1937 but in 1938 the process suffered a check and it was quite noticeable at the Haripura Congress in February, 1938. After Haripura, Leftists belonging to different parties began to put their heads together with a view to devising ways and means for increasing the Leftist strength. These efforts continued from February, 1938 to April, 1939. The proposal then was to form a Left Bloc and the Congress Socialist Party and the National Front were requested to take the lead in organising it. I took an active part in these efforts and many individuals like myself who had not till then joined any of the existing parties — pledged their support to the Leftist Bloc. Both the C.S.P. and the National Front at first took the idea of the Left Bloc with great enthusiasm, but they ultimately gave it up. Why they did so, remains a mystery to me up to the present day. Perhaps they thought that if the Left Bloc was organised and if it began to flourish — the importance of their respective parties would wane. Be that as it may, there is no doubt that if the Left Bloc had been launched in time, it would have taken the place of



the Forward Bloc. The failure to start the Left Bloc belonged primarily to the C.S.P. and the N.F.

Now why did the existing parties fail to serve the Leftist cause adequately and why was a new organisation necessary? The answer evidently is that for some reason or other they failed to rally all those who should and could have been brought into the Leftist fold. Perhaps they were too keen on propagating Socialism — a thing of the future — whereas the immediate task was the widening and strengthening of the anti-imperialist front and an intensification of the anti-imperialist struggle. There was a large number of Congressmen who viewed with dismay the growth of Right-consolidation and the consequent drift towards Constitutionalism, following the acceptance of ministerial office in the provinces. They were naturally more interested in widening and strengthening the anti-imperialist front than in any thing else. It was with the help of these men that we could hope to resist the onslaught from the Right and establish Leftist ascendancy in the Congress. It had therefore been decided that the programme of the Left Bloc would be a minimum anti-imperialist programme, on the basis of, which we could hope to rally all genuine anti-imperialists under one banner and give battle to the Rightists.

This was also our idea at the time we launched the Forward Bloc. Our immediate task was to fight the increasing drift towards Constitutionalism, reconvert the Congress into a revolutionary organisation and bring it back to the path of national struggle and prepare the country for the coming War crisis.

Since its birth, the Forward Bloc has developed greatly, along with changes in the Indian political scene. But it has failed to bring other parties together on one platform, as originally intended. Does that mean that there is no hope of Left-consolidation? No. It only means that Left-consolidation will be achieved by some other means.



A word is necessary here as to what exactly is meant by Leftism. When different individuals and organisations claim to be Leftists, how are we to decide who are — and who are not genuine Leftists?

In the present political phase of Indian life, Leftism means anti-Imperialism. A genuine anti-imperialist is one who believes in undiluted independence (not Mahatma Gandhi's substance of independence) as the political objective and in uncompromising national struggle as the means for attaining it. After the attainment of political independence Leftism will mean Socialism and the task before the people will then be the reconstruction of national life on a Socialist basis. Socialism or Socialist reconstruction before achieving our political emancipation is altogether premature.

Genuine anti-imperialists i.e. Leftists have always to fight on two fronts. So also in India, they have to fight on one side, foreign Imperialism and its Indian allies, and on the other, our milk-and-water nationalists, the Rightists, who are prepared for a deal with Imperialism. Genuine anti-Imperialists should therefore anticipate persecution not only at the hands of the known agents of alien Imperialism but also at the hands of their Rightist friends — and at times it may be difficult to say which persecution is more severe and trying. In the case of present-day India, the Rightists will stoop to any degree of ruthlessness in their persecution of the Leftists, because they have had a taste of power and are determined to monopolise it for themselves in future by rooting out 'all opposition.

To carry on a struggle on two fronts simultaneously and to face the above two-fold persecution is not an easy affair. There are people who may stand up to one type of persecution at a time, but not to both. There are others who can stomach persecution at the hands of an alien Government, but who quail when it comes to a question of fighting their Rightist friends. But if we are genuine anti-imperialists and want to function as such, we must muster courage to fight on a double-front and face all the persecution that may come our way.



In India we often come across people who pose as Leftists and talk big things, including Socialism — but who manage to shirk a struggle when they are confronted with it and spin out ingenious arguments for buttressing themselves. Thus we see pseudo-Leftists who through sheer cowardice avoid a conflict with Imperialism and argue in self-defence that Mr. Winston Churchill (whom we know to be the arch-Imperialist) is the greatest revolutionary going. It has become a fashion with these pseudo-Leftists to call the British Government a revolutionary force because it is fighting the Nazis and Fascists. But they conveniently forget the imperialist character of Britain's war and also the fact that the greatest revolutionary force in the world, the Soviet Union, has entered into a solemn pact with the Nazi Government.

Those who are prepared to face Imperialism but shrink from a clash with the Rightists, take shelter under a different argument. They hide their weakness under the plea of unity. But this is a specious plea which often results in self-deception. One should always distinguish between unity and unity — between the unity of action and the unity of inaction. And one should never forget that to talk of unity between those who are genuine anti-imperialists and those who are not — is mere moonshine. If unity under all circumstances is an end in itself, then why not establish unity between Congressmen and those who are outside the Congress or are against it? The argument of unity should not be carried beyond a certain point. Unity is certainly desirable, but only when there is agreement in principle and in policy. Unity at the sacrifice of one's principles or convictions is worthless and leads to inaction, while real unity is always a source of strength and stimulates activity. To avoid a clash with the Rightists by putting forward the plea of unity is nothing but weakness and cowardice.

In the light of these observations it should be easy to decide who are, and who are not, genuine Leftists and as to whether the Forward Bloc has proved by its action and conduct to be a genuine Leftist organisation.



The question now is as to how Left-consolidation will ultimately be brought about. We have seen that three possible methods for achieving Left-consolidation have all failed. We also know that different individuals and parties have claimed to be Leftist. How then will the Left movement develop in future?

The answer to this question is that the logic of history will determine who are the genuine Leftists. History will separate the chaff from the grain — the pseudo-Leftists from the genuine Leftists. When this elimination takes place, all the genuine Leftists will come together and fusion will take place. By this natural or historical process, Left-consolidation will be achieved. For this purpose, the acid-test of a fight on a double front is essential. Those who pass the test will be the genuine Leftists and they will all coalesce in time.

Since the Indians are a living nation, their political movement cannot die. And since stagnation has overtaken the Rightists, the logic of history demands a big Left Movement so that progress may continue. Conflict is bound to follow, but only for a time. Ultimately, Leftism will establish its supremacy over the entire political Movement of the land.

Since its inception, the Forward Bloc has been, functioning as the spearhead of the Left Movement in India. Through its instrumentality, the Left forces have been gaining ground everyday and along with its ally, the Kishan Sabha; it will be largely responsible for bringing about Left-consolidation in future. By waging a fearless fight on a double-front and by welcoming simultaneous persecution at the hands of alien Imperialism and of the Indian Rightists it has established its claim to be a genuine Leftist organisation. It has therefore succeeded where other parties have failed.

The Forward Bloc is to the Left Movement what the Gandhiites are to the Right Movement. Philosophically speaking, the former may be regarded as the "anti-thesis" of the latter. Though the Forward Bloc has always desired to work in close cooperation with the Gandhiites on the anti-imperialist



front, the differences between the two are deep and fundamental. Gandhism envisages an ultimate compromise with Imperialism for Gandhian Satyagraha (or Civil Disobedience) must end in a compromise. But Forward Bloc will have no truck with Imperialism. Socially, Gandhism is intimately linked up with the "haves" - the vested interests. As the "have-nots" are becoming class-conscious, as is inevitable, the breach between them and the Gandhiites is widening. One therefore finds that unlike what was the position twenty years ago, today Gandhism does not appeal to large masses of the peasantry and factory workers, nor does it appeal to middle class youths and students, the vast majority of whom sympathise with the poverty-stricken masses. With regard to the future Gandhian ideas of post-struggle reconstruction which are partly medieval and partly anti-socialist are contrary to those of the Forward Bloc which has a thoroughly modern outlook and stands for Socialist Reconstruction.

Since its inauguration in May, 1939, the Forward Bloc has developed in its ideology and programme — and naturally too — but there has been no change in fundamentals, except that at the Second All-India Conference held at Nagpur in June, 1940, it was declared to be a party. Today, as it did yesterday, it stands for uncompromising national struggle for the attainment of Independence, and for the post struggle period, it stands for socialist reconstruction.

It would not be irrelevant to ask as to what the Forward Bloc has achieved so far and what potentiality it has for the future. Without indulging in exaggeration or in self-praise, we may make the following claim:

- (1) It has saved the Congress from stagnation and death at the hands of the Rightists by building up a Leftist force. It has thereby fulfilled its historical role to a large extent.
- (2) It has served to stem the drift towards Constitutionalism, to create a new revolutionary mentality among the people and to bring the Congress back to the path of struggle, however inadequately. Today nobody will gainsay the fact that but for the Anti-compromise Conference held at Ramgarh in March, 1940, the Forward Bloc propaganda preceding it and the



activities of the Bloc following it — Mahatma Gandhi would not have felt obliged to start the campaign of individual Civil Disobedience.

- (3) The analysis and the forecast of the War made by the Forward Bloc have been proved to be correct.
- (4) The propaganda and activities of the Forward Bloc have been responsible for inducing the Congress and Mahatma Gandhi to give the go-by to the original stand of the latter in September, 1939, with reference to the War and to return to the war-policy advocated by the Congress from 1927 to 1938.
- (5) In building up the Left Movement, the Forward Bloc has clarified the issues which separate the Left from the Right and has stimulated the intellectual and ideological progress of the Congress.
- (6) The Forward Bloc has been functioning as a watchdog for warning the Congress and the country against any back-sliding on the part of any individual or party — particularly with reference to the major issues of the war-crisis and national struggle.

With reference to the future it may be confidently asserted:

- (1) That the Forward Bloc will in the fulness of time succeed in establishing Leftist ascendancy in the Congress so that the future progress of the latter may continue unhampered.
- (2) It will prove to be the party of the future — the party that will give the proper lead in bringing the national movement to its fruition and will thereafter undertake the task of national reconstruction. Having sprung from the soil of India as a product of historical necessity and having at the same time the capacity to assimilate what is healthy and beneficial in the environment and in the world outside, it will be able to fulfil the dual role of conducting the National Struggle to its cherished goal and of building up a new India on the principles of liberty, equality and social justice.



- (3) It will, by fulfilling its proper role, restore India to her proper and legitimate place in the comity of free nations.
- (4) It will thereby enable India to play her historical role so that human progress may be taken a few stages beyond the point it has so far reached.

The ideas that are now uppermost in the minds of the members of the Forward Bloc at the present time may be summarised as follows:

The Forward Bloc stands for:

- (1) Complete National Independence and uncompromising anti-imperialist struggle for attaining it.
- (2) A thoroughly modern and Socialist State.
- (3) Scientific large-scale production for the economic regeneration of the country
- (4) Social ownership and control of both production and distribution.
- (5) Freedom for the individual in the matter of religious worship.
- (6) Equal rights for every individual.
- (7) Linguistic and cultural autonomy for all sections of the Indian Community.
- (8) Application of the principles of equality and social justice in building up the New Order in Free India.

The Forward Bloc is a revolutionary and dynamic organisation. As such it does not swear by copy-book maxims or by text-books of Politics or Economics. It is anxious to assimilate all the knowledge that the outside world can give and to profit by the experience of other progressive nations. It regards progress or evolution as an eternal process to which India also has a contribution to make.

Regarding the future career of the Forward Bloc we may confidently say that if it is the product of historical necessity, it will not die. If it has a philosophical justification, it will surely endure. And if it serves the cause



Forward Bloc – Its Justification

of India, of humanity and of human progress, it will live and grow and no power on earth will ever destroy it.

Forward, therefore, and ever forward, my countrymen!

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