

Monograph # **25**

Mid-life crisis or terminal decline?

The Indian Communist movement

from its foundation to-date

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Abstract

The Russian Revolution moved the colonized peoples, for it demonstrated that it was possible both to overthrow a supposedly unshakable, almost divine power, and to build a society premised on the welfare of the masses at a time when most people struggled in poor living conditions. Its influence on sections of the intelligentsia of countries under the yoke of imperialism was undeniable. The propaganda of the Communist Party of India (CPI), inducing Indians to emulate the Soviet example, promised a future based on peace, equality and social justice.

“It was on this wave of idealism that Communism came to India. Here it mingled with another stream – nationalism – sometimes supporting it, sometimes opposing it. India was then waking from a long slumber into a new consciousness of its pride and dignity...” (Masani 1954, p. 19).

Manoochehr Rustom Masani, the author of these lines, was one of the outstanding figures of Indian socialism, which, in seeking the Communist alliance, saw much of its force diminished. Attempting, however, an impartial analysis of the events that shook the West following the fall of the Tsarist Empire., Masani stressed that the Communist ideology promoted by Moscow attested the existence of a doctrine of liberation from foreign domination and the harmful consequences of the capitalist model. The extreme poverty of the majority of the population, despite the latent wealth of the Sub-continent, was striking. The writings of Karl Marx seemed to provide a real answer to Indian political, economic and social problems. The speech of the new Kremlin leaders of the Kremlin, who declared their willingness to provide material assistance to the oppressed throughout the world, was – it is true – aimed at seducing enticing colonized peoples in search of dignity.

The Communist Party of India (CPI) long stood as the one authentic advocate for the most disadvantaged, even as this political group seemed undermined by internal disputes. The latter no doubt reflected both ideological quarrels that ran through the Communist International as a whole, but also less lofty struggles between leaders to gain control of the Party. In this study, we would like, first of all, to return to the birth of the Indian Communist movement and its first steps in the country: a period when its leaders had great difficulty in analysing the role of the Indian bourgeoisie. Then came the CPI split in 1964. The two main currents of CPI had diverged in their assessment of the Sino-Indian territorial conflict and the Sino-Soviet ideological confrontation in which India was itself a bone of contention. Such controversies, despite their importance, masked dissensions that undermined a Communist Party of India, which unwillingly accepted Soviet – and at times, Chinese-ideological choices. These were the circumstances in which the foundation of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) ([CPI(M)]) took place. The new Party sought to implement a specifically Indian Communism, quickly rejecting the armed path advocated by its leftmost fringe, from which it split in 1967. Most recently, we look at the experience of CPI(M) during its bruising period in power in West Bengal – which was ultimately a rather rough ride. Its reputation remains durably tainted while its leaders in Bengal as well as at the Centre refuse to engage in a genuine process of auto-criticism that might contribute to the regeneration of the Indian Communist movement.

Keywords: CPI (M), Indian Communist Movement, Russian Revolution, Comintern, Kremlin

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1. Introduction

1.1. India in the aftermath of a long British colonization

The events that followed the attacks of September 11, 2001 tended to promote the theses of supporters of a clash of civilizations of which the West was the victim. The media in this part of the world have followed suit, ever more critical that the ‘disinherited people’ of the Third World were seeking in large numbers to settle in societies that were deemed to be democratic and developed to a level that they themselves had been unable to bring about at home. Such a discourse erased a recent period of history that is important to the understanding of the economic and social well-being enjoyed by the West. It is, therefore, not uninteresting to recall that:

“At their heights during the 17th century, the subcontinent’s fabled Mughal emperors were rivalled only by their Ming counterparts in China. For their contemporaries in distant Europe, they were potent symbols of power and wealth. In Milton’s Paradise Lost, for example, the great Mughal cities of Agra and Lahore are revealed to Adam after the Fall as future wonders of God’s creation. This was hardly an overstatement. By the 17th century, Lahore had grown even larger and richer than Constantinople and, with its two million inhabitants, dwarfed both London and Paris” (Dalrymple 2007)¹.

British journalist and writer, William Dalrymple, adds:

“What changed was the advent of European colonialism... It was only at the very end of the 18th century, after the East India Company began to cash in on the Mughal Empire’s riches, that Europe had for the first time in history a favourable balance of trade with Asia... In 1600, when the East India Company was founded, Britain was generating 1.8% of the world’s GDP, while India was producing 22.5%. By 1870, at the peak of the Raj, Britain was generating 9.1%, while India had been reduced for the first time to the epitome of a Third World nation, a symbol across the globe of famine, poverty and deprivation” (ibid).

While the colonizing powers claimed the legacy of the spirit of enlightenment², yet refusing to the countries they held in subjection at least a political autonomy, the Bolsheviks overthrew in Moscow ‘a

¹Dalrymple points out that the history of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have been in a sense rewritten, because of *“the temptation felt by so many historians to interpret their evidence according to the stereotypes of Victorian and Edwardian behaviour and attitudes with which we are so familiar. Yet these attitudes were clearly entirely at odds with the actual fears and hopes, anxieties and aspirations of the Company officials and their Indian wives whose voluminous letters can be read with the greatest of ease in the fifty miles of East India Company documents stored in the India Office Library. It is as if the Victorians succeeded in colonising not only India but also, more permanently, our imaginations, to the exclusion of all other images of the Indo-British encounter.*

“Since the late-twentieth-century implosion of Empire and the arrival in the West of large numbers of Indians, most of whom have, as a matter of course, assumed Western clothes and Western manners, this East-to-West cross-fertilisation of cultures does not surprise us. But, perhaps bizarrely, the reverse still does: that a European should voluntarily choose to cross over—and ‘turn Turk’ as the Elizabethans put it, or ‘go native’ or ‘Tropo’, to use the Victorian phrases—is still something which has the capacity to take us aback” (Dalrymple 2002, p. 39).

²*“Lumières’, ‘Enlightenment’, ‘Aufklärung’, ‘Ilustracion’, ‘Iluminismo’, this metaphor covers the vast European movement that runs through the century. It cannot be reduced to a single approach. The lights oppose ignorance and propose a new form of rationalism facing the scholastic and metaphysical tradition. Newton imposes the search for laws born of experience. John Locke’s Essay Concerning the Human Understanding (1690) opposes Descartes’ innatism and states that man derives knowledge of the world from sensory experience.*

“The Enlightenment is linked to the image of a secularised world, governed by the notion of progress and perfectibility. European academies, correspondences and travels play their role in the philosophical debate. The latter is dominated by the concept of reason and sees in criticism the engine that allows to fight prejudices and presuppositions” (Gallica 2018).

colossus with feet of clay’: the Tsarist Empire. Seeking as much to spread the Communist ideology as to weaken the governments of Western Europe, they endeavoured to captivate the imagination of the peoples who were under the colonial yoke. The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) urged the colonies to revolt against imperialism³ and thus, to snatch a legitimate independence. Moreover, the Comintern⁴ (born of the Third International) chose to make British India a “field of experimentation for the application of the colonial line of the Comintern” (Gupta 1980, p. 1), as British India seemed to combine conditions deemed favourable to the Soviet hegemony. Indeed, this immense territory, vital to the British influence, was plagued by an extreme poverty, which denoted a particularly unfair foreign rule.

1.2. Outline of the study

Slowly shaping itself, the Indian Communist Party appeared in the subcontinent in the mid-1920s. Not only the British government, but also the Indian National Congress (INC) and the All-India Muslim League⁵ wondered about the inter-continental transplant that this political movement was trying to carry out. This is a dimension that we will explore in the first part of the study, using in particular the analysis of the French historian Annie Kriegel – author of a thesis entitled *The Origins of French Communism. 1914-1920* published in 1964. (Kriegel 1964). Indeed, the Communist Party of India (CPI) was also faced with such a question, especially since it was somehow born twice: the first time in Tashkent, a city then in Soviet territory, on October 17th, 1920; and the second in Kanpur (now located in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh) on December 26th, 1925. India’s independence would come in 1947 and with it the difficulty for the CPI to formally recognize it before January 23, 1955 – on the eve of the celebrations of Republic Day⁶. It is true that it tried, following the departure of the British colonizer, to apply Soviet revolutionary directives, which hardly took into account the state of its forces and the popularity enjoyed by the Congress Party (second part). The CPI, was left with no choice, but to adopt the parliamentary path (third part).

The peaceful coexistence that Moscow and Washington chose would draw the Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of China into looking favourably upon the Indian ‘socialist’ model. The CPI was,

³“Imperialism, state policy, practice, or advocacy of extending power and dominion, especially by direct territorial acquisition or by gaining political and economic control of other areas. Because it always involves the use of power, whether military force or some subtler form, imperialism has often been considered morally reprehensible, and the term is frequently employed in international propaganda to denounce and discredit an opponent’s foreign policy” (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2018).

⁴The Comintern, founded by Lenin in 1921, was an international assembly of workers. Any Communist Party wishing to be affiliated to it had to fulfill twenty-one conditions, including an unwavering loyalty to the Soviet Union.

⁵The Muslim League was more preoccupied with the creation of a Muslim homeland. However, it was aware of ‘the red peril’. Thus, its reaction following the outbreak of the mutiny of the Royal Indian Navy (RIN), on February 18th, 1946 in a training centre in Mumbai that the historian and French economist, Charles Bettelheim, relates in a book dedicated to the independence of the subcontinent (Bettelheim 1962, p. 17-19). The flags of the Congress and the Muslim League replaced the Union Jack. Demonstrations took place throughout the city behind the emblems of these two organisations which were, however, associated with red flags. Troops were immediately dispatched to Bombay, Karachi and Madras where similar unrest was occurring. The Congress Party and the Muslim League refused to support the insurgents, while the trade unions and the CPI decided (in Bombay) on a general strike that began on February 22nd. That day and the next one, Bombay was the scene of an insurrection, brutally repressed, killing more than 250 people.

⁶One can recall here the lack of preparation of the CPI as India proclaimed its independence. Moreover the party, applying the Soviet theory of nationalities, initially defended the justice of the creation of Pakistan: Muslims in India were one its seventeen nationalities. The CPI was of the opinion that once Muslims were reassured as to their future within the country, they would renounce any separatist claim. After the foundations of the two new countries, the Communist sections of East and West Pakistan were quickly cut off from a political party which aimed at strong centralisation.

once again, placed in a tricky position that, following the Sino-Soviet ideological quarrel and the Sino-Indian border conflict, would provoke (in 1964) a first split (fourth and fifth parts). The peaceful coexistence that Moscow and Washington chose would draw the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China into looking favourably upon the Indian 'socialist' model.

Not benefitting from any financial dividends from the Soviet and Chinese 'big brothers' – to borrow the expression of the historian H  l  ne Carr  re d'Encausse (Carr  re d'Encausse 1983), the Communist Party of India (Marxist) took pride in implementing what it claimed was a specifically Indian Communist path, of which West Bengal, unlike Kerala, has become a sad example (sixth part). This political formation continues to resort to an obsolete terminology reminiscent of the Stalinist years, when it attempts an evaluation (moreover, a rather timid one) of its reign of thirty-four years in West Bengal. Beyond the short-term political struggles, there is the question of future of an Indian Communism, defender of the parliamentary path and the inheritance of a Nehruvian, secularist and pluralistic democracy. Observers are right to be concerned about its durability, given the relative speed with which Hindu nationalists have managed, on the whole, to change the dominant collective mentality of a non-negligible part of the majority Hindu community.

2. First steps of the CPI on the Indian political scene

2.1. On the transplant of a foreign ideology in India

After the creation of the Soviet Union, European powers such as the United Kingdom and France worried that a 'red peril' might affect not only their own land, but also their colonial possessions. The use of a propaganda that opposed that of the Comintern seemed appropriate to convince the populations of Western Europe and those of the colonies of the validity of their political, economic and social model. The Raj, meanwhile, chose to stage conspiracy trials whose objective was to discredit the Communist ideology and its promoter in India: the CPI (Namboodiripad 1988, p. 15). Thus, the government of the Viceroy conducted conspiracy trials such as that in Meerut (now located in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh) whose objective was to discredit the Indian communist movement. Far from achieving its ends, the government of the Viceroy offered a platform of choice to the Communists, who were able to disseminate their theses across the country (ibid), even if the message reached few other than the numerically small intelligentsia.

Thirty-one communists⁷ were charged under Section 121-A of the Indian Penal Code during the trial held in the city of Meerut, which began on March 15, 1929 and lasted for nearly four and a half years (Agarwala 1993, p.110). They strongly rejected the accusation that they were unable to participate wholeheartedly in the national struggle of which the Congress Party was the leader. They declared:

“We have not disguised the fact that we are Communists and, therefore, internationalists, and that we work for the establishment ultimately of a world-wide all-inclusive federation without oppressors or oppressed, in which nationalism will have no place. But in the present stage in India or any oppressed country, we regard the movement for national freedom as a progressive force... We are ready, as we have said, to work with anybody else, even if it be a bourgeois

⁷Among them were S.A. Dange, S.V. Ghate, K.N. Joglekar, Shaukat Usmani, Muzaffar Ahmed, S.S. Mirajkar, P.C. Joshi, G. Adhikari, R.S. Nimbkar and Sohan Singh Josh, but also the Britons Philip Spratt and Ben Bradley whom the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) had sent to India (Dutt 1992, p. 415-417).

organisation, if it is pursuing a genuine national revolutionary policy...” (CPI(M) 1967, p. 113-114)

The imprisoned leaders each made a profession of faith, reaffirming their desire to promote a classless society and their commitment to the Soviet Union as the state that would come to their salvation. Gangadhar Adhikari, for example, stated:

“The Communist International is today a gigantic factory in world’s history, a factory which will reshape the destiny of human society and its civilization and save it from the catastrophe with which it is threatened under the present system...” (Dutt 1992, p. 421).

Adhikari added:

“The question is to defend the Party, its ideology, its right to exist, its right to affiliate to and be assisted by the Communist International” (ibid, p. 419-420).

The CPI, which was striving to combine its founding ideology and its loyalty to the Comintern, often ignored the issue of an ideological transplant. Yet this is a historiographical question which has been examined on a number of occasions, notably when countries of Eastern Europe, Africa and Latin America took the Communist path. The so-called Third World countries chose to ignore an important dimension: Karl Marx had stressed that only industrialized states – Germany, the United Kingdom or France – were able to make their revolution. Annie Kriegel, a long-time member of the French Communist Party, showed that Bolshevik ideas were far removed from the culture of the French working-class movement. Indeed, the latter adhered as much as to the ideals of the French Revolution as to those of the Second International, opposing the political voluntarism of Russian revolutionaries whose use of violence was a key characteristic. The introduction of Communism, in a largely rural India where the proletariat was still in its infancy, faced other obstacles, such as the pyramidal social structure of castes, whatever social changes were underway. Another important dimension was the pre-eminence of Congress Party which, like the CPI, aimed at eradicating endemic poverty and promoting an all-round development, while at the same time preserving the national, cultural and spiritual heritage. The Congress Party’s audience relied particularly on the aura of Mahatma Gandhi, whose message was antithetical to any form of historical materialism (Masani 1954, p. 234). If the CPI attracted some of the English-speaking intelligentsia and thereafter activists from less privileged social groups, “the masses” adhered, according to the deliberately naive reading of M. R. Masani, to the Mahatma’s message based on “God, Love, Truth, Brotherhood, Humanity and Equality Between the Untouchable Harijan and the proud Brahmin” (ibid).

2.2. A millennial Indian nation

The British colonizer had long opposed what it termed the erroneous transposition of the concept of nation to an Indian world where unity, to consider the diversity of races, religions and peoples, was impossible. During the twentieth century, the “British imperialist liberal school”, faced with the growing affirmation of the Indian national movement, tried to make it one of the greatest achievements of colonization, thus welcoming the fact that the United Kingdom had disseminated Western ideas (Dutt 1992, p. 284)⁸. While the Congress challenged such a reading, presenting itself as the heir to a thousand-

⁸The Indian elite, according to the CPI, was a British creation. His Majesty’s Government had introduced English education in its colony in 1833, giving birth to a “race of administrators” (Roberts 1939 in Kapur 1988, p. 316). In 1885, it decided to

year-old India, the CPI complied with Marxist analysis that India “was not a nation in the modern sense of the word” during the British conquest (ibid). It was – for British Communist leader Rajani Palme Dutt – “a historical truth”; neither “England nor France were modern nations before the development of capitalism” (ibid). In India, the birth and affirmation of the idea of a nation, according to Marxist analysis, had occurred during the struggle against foreign domination (Ranadive 1996, p. 8-10).

Communist denunciations were not lacking in eloquence: by way of proof, the Manifesto of the Anti-imperialist Conference which was held clandestinely in India in the course of October 1934. Gangadhar Adhikari, probably the main author of this text, began his plea with these words:

“The Indian people is groaning under the yoke and exploitation of British imperialism. Relying upon their political and economic supremacy and squeezing millions of rupees year after year the blood-thirsty imperialists have brought toiling masses of the people to the state of famine, helpless poverty and intolerable slavery. British imperialism retarded the economic development of the country in every way, supporting and relying upon all that is backward and reactionary in town and country” (CPI 1935 in Roy 1976, p. 8).

As to the non-violence which the Congress Party promoted, it urged the people to an unacceptable submission. Thus,

*“... the policy of Gandhism on which the programme of the Congress is founded uses the cloak of vague phrases about love, meekness, modesty and hard-working existence, lightening the burden of the peasantry, etc. but under this cloak it preached and preaches, defended and defends the interests of the Indian capitalists, the inevitability and the wisdom of the division of society of rich and poor-eternal inequality and exploitation”*⁹ (CPI 1935 in Roy 1976, p. 15-16).

2.3. A double birth

Today, the CPI and the CPI(M) seek to minimize the errors of analysis (and strategy) of the original Party. The latter sought, incidentally, to clear them by using a pirouette, making Manabendra Nath Roy sole responsible for the impossible hegemony of the Indian Communist movement. If the CPI (according to such a reading) dissociated itself from the national movement in the middle of the 1920s,

create the Indian National Congress under the pressure of A.O. Hume, a retired senior British civil servant (Chandra 1989, p. 73). It thus sought to separate very clearly “loyalist” elements from “extremist” ones (Dutt 1992, p. 316). The CPI invoked the episode of 1885 to accuse the administration of the Viceroy, Lord Dufferin, of having been at the origin of Congress’s adhesion to the doctrine of the passive revolution: aiming for only progressive reform of the system would result only in its survival (Lieten 1988 in Kapur 1988, p. 60).

⁹The Mahatma had nevertheless “crystallized the multiple aspirations” of the population “in a homogeneous desire for emancipation” (Poucheпадass 1975, p. 98). The Indian national movement had found “one of those leaders that American political sociology, using a concept of Max Weber, calls charismatic leaders, because the ascendancy they exert over the masses is based on the extraordinary virtues or individual powers. they attribute to them (ibid). Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi had “consciously abolished all barriers between his most intimate private life and his public life”, living “his life as an example for the people of India” (ibid, p. 98-99). His grip on the Indian population came largely from what it considered him to be “a man of God, one of those who had withdrawn from worldly affairs, who, in the Indian world, chose to live on the margins of common humanity to devote themselves to search and the preaching of salvation” (ibid, p. 99).

The message of the Mahatma leaned on two concepts: ‘swaraj’ and ‘satyagraha’. The ‘swaraj’ – which English translated by the two terms: self-rule and self-restraint (Dalton 1993, p. 2) – did not correspond to the word independence that Gandhi considered to be a negative word, because it suggested that all abuses were allowed. This term, borrowed from the Vedas, means that human beings govern their passions. As for the concept of satyagraha, the Mahatma forged it, when he was in South Africa, adding the word *satya* – truth – to *agraha* – hold firmly (ibid, p. 8). He was the first “to extend to the political domain this concept, borrowed from Jainism and which means absolute respect for life in all its forms” (Markovits 1981, p. 444). But his refusal of violence had another motive. He knew that the majority of the army remained faithful to His Majesty’s Government. And he wanted to avoid giving British repression the opportunity to dismantle “the nationalist network” (ibid).

it was because it conformed to the analysis of this leader who was, for a time, very listened to in Moscow. The reality is more complex and illustrates the difficulty of the Communist movement to analyze its past.

Opponents of the Communists have had many eloquent examples of how the CPI strategy was defined in Moscow. A careful study of the documents published as well as the confidential documents revealed, they argued, a monstrous Communist conspiracy aimed at undermining the foundations of Indian democracy. According to them, the Communist Party of India was ultimately a branch of the world Communist movement; it did not hesitate to change its political line in accordance with “the dictates of Moscow, while it remained indifferent to the “political aspirations of the Indian people” (Dandavate 1970, p. 1).

The CPI birth in Tashkent must nevertheless be put in context. Revolutionaries such as M.N. Roy chose to leave the Empire to obtain the help of the enemy powers of the United Kingdom. Roy’s journey – his real name was Manabendra Nath Roy (1887-1954) – is, in this respect, redolent of the path taken by several Indian intellectuals who took part in violent struggle before turning to Marxism. Towards the end of 1930, Roy, his wife Evelyn (a US citizen), Mandayam Parthasarathi Tirumal Acharya, Muhammad Ali, Muhammad Shafiq, Abani Mukherjee and his wife Rosa Fetingo – a Soviet citizen – proclaimed (in Tashkent) the founding of the Communist Party of India (Ahmed 1966, p. 6).

The CPI long found it difficult to accept Roy’s legacy, especially after December 1929 when the Comintern excluded him from its ranks. On August 19th, 1959, the Central Committee of the CPI announced that the Kanpur Conference had given birth to the Indian Communist movement (Adhikari 1982, p. vii)¹⁰; it emphasised the – legal – impossibility to create an Indian Communist Party outside the subcontinent. Moreover, it was believed that half a dozen expatriate Indian revolutionaries could not speak for the entire people (ibid).

In October 1971, Gangadhar Adhikari recalled that the Indian revolutionary movement of the early 1920s was divided into four distinct currents (Adhikari 1971, p. 1). Roy belonged to the first of the three revolutionary groups operating from outside the country¹¹. There was a fourth group in India, many of whose members had turned away from Gandhism after the failure of the 1920-21 campaign of civil disobedience. This group opted for the scientific socialism whose achievements in the Soviet Union seemed to prove its merit. Adhikari pointed out that he was not trying to deny Roy’s action. However, he underlined the official position of his party according to which the life of Tashkent’s party had been limited: when some of its members returned to India, they were imprisoned following the Peshawar Conspiracy Trial, which took place from 1922 to 1923.

Following its creation, the CPI(M) adopted a more nuanced position, emphasising that the Communists as a coherent group had existed well before 1925, since they circulated, during the 1921 session of the Congress Party, a resolution calling for the struggle for the independence of the subcontinent (Yechury 1996). The CPI also refers to this event with pride, declaring that the Communists were the first to propose such a text. Since 1970, it moreover emphasises that the Kanpur meeting took place on the

¹⁰The Kanpur conference aimed at unifying the various Communist groups, especially those of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras which were autonomous from each other (Farooqi 1996). The CPI, for its part, had been a clandestine movement until 1942. In 1934, the British government officially banned it.

¹¹The second group brought together revolutionaries of the Pan-Islamic Khilafat movement and the Hijrat movement, and the third Ghadar Party militants recruited among Sikh and Punjabi emigrants.

initiative of Communist groups from different regions, especially Shripad Amrit Dange, who was at that time in prison. This trade union leader narrated that during the Kanpur (Bolshevik) Conspiracy Case (1924), the Communist figures, who were like him on trial, invited those who were still free “to hold a conference and constitute a real Communist party” in India (Dange 1970 in Adhikari 1982, p. 5). Dange – leader of the centrists who (in 1962) acceded to the post of president of the CPI, while Namboodiripad became general secretary – declared that the CPI had thenceforth considered the Kanpur Conference as its founding event. The position of this political party was, it is true, delicate. Following the revolt of the Khampa tribes of Tibet, which began on March 10, 1959 and the flight and exile of the Dalai Lama in India, Sino-Indian relations had deteriorated. In addition, New Delhi decided in July 1959, to overthrow the Communist government of Kerala, which had been formed in the aftermath of the second Indian general election¹².

The leaders of the CPI(M) advocated the definition of a policy adapted to Indian society. Unafraid of the accusation of foreign agents, they paid homage to Roy who had taken the initiative to create the groups of Shripad Amrit Dange in Bombay, Muzaffar Ahmed in Calcutta, Malapuram Singaravelu Chettiar in Madras, Ghulam Hussain in Lahore and Shaukat Usmani in the United Provinces (Haithcox 1971, p. 31-32). They also observed that the original CPI adhered to the Communist International at the beginning of 1921.

3. Failure of the revolutionary path

3.1. Soviet strategies ill-adapted to Indian circumstances

In September 1947, Andrei Zhdanov presented to the Cominform a report which insisted on the division of the world into two blocs – one “grouped” around Moscow, the other dominated by Washington (Kapur 1986, p. 472). This text made a brief reference to colonial countries, observing that the Second World War had led to the emergence of a powerful national liberation movement in colonies and dependent states. The CPI General Secretary, Puran Chand Joshi, however, maintained his political line: CPI’s People’s Age, dated November 9th, 1947, portrayed Nehru as the man who had preserved “the traditions of the national movement”, wishing that he set India “on the path of socialism and prosperity” (Joshi 1947 in Sen Gupta 1972, p. 25). J.H. Kaustky, meanwhile, indicates that the CP’s leftist tendency interpreted Zhdanov’s thesis as a “call to a new strategy” (Kautsky 1968, p. 27). Zhukov, in *The Growing Crisis of the Colonial System*, published in *The Bolshevik* dated December 15th, 1947, “included this time expressly, the middle bourgeoisie within the united Communist front” (Zukov 1947 in Kautsky 1968, *ibid*). By contrast, Soviet theorists Balabuchevich and Dyakov continued to advocate a leftist strategy for India. However, Moscow seemed undecided, at least officially.

The Politburo of the CPI, which met from December 7th to 16th, 1947, consecrated the prominence of the Ranadive group, and endorsed the adoption of a new line, which emphasised the end of the progressive role of the bourgeoisie (CPI 1948.a). It declared that the partition had accentuated the hatred between religious communities, contributed to the communalisation¹³ of the army, and helped to

¹²In highly contested circumstances, New Delhi put an end to the first Communist-dominated state government within the federation that had come to power two years earlier. In effect, Article 356, known as ‘President’s Rule’, and Article 357 of the Indian Constitution authorise the central power to dismiss the elected government of a state and to take over its administration when there is a ‘threat to public order’, a dimension that leaves a wide scope for interpretation.

¹³The term communalism refers to the often bloody clashes between the Hindu, Muslim, and more recently Sikh and Christian communities.

reinforce imperialism. However, the draft resolution entitled '*On the Present Policy and Tasks of the Party of India*', of which Bhowani Sen was the author (Joshi 1950.b, p. 2), was not adopted unanimously, Joshi and "other members" of the Politburo opposing it (CPI 1947.b, p. 2). This was particularly the case of Puchalapalli Sundarayya, according to whom such a political line would cause the Party to deviate from the reformist path – during which the political party had notably celebrated the independence of the subcontinent¹⁴ – to a sectarian path (CPI 1947.a, p. 16).

The December resolution defined "the roles of the bourgeoisie and the Congress, as well as the new strategy of the democratic front" (CPI 1947.b, p. 1). The CPI proposed to apply the concept of a democratic revolution that favoured its alliance with left-wing parties, as well as labour, peasants and students' unions (ibid). The Indian Constituent Assembly, for its part, was drafting a constitution which, in spite of its democratic appearance, left the privileged classes free to "rule over millions of oppressed", protecting the interests of Indian and British capitalists as well as the property of the dominant classes¹⁵ (ibid, p. 1-2). It would not guarantee the fundamental rights of the working class and the masses, but it would limit industrial development, thereby avoiding to harm the interests of the British imperialists (ibid, p. 2). Finally, India's non-aligned foreign policy would keep it "far from the democratic camp", which ultimately predicted its adherence to the "imperialist bloc" (ibid, p. 3).

British diplomacy mirrored the Soviet attitude since 1947. That year, the Communist parties in Southeast Asia had been invited to the Harbin Conference, the centre of the Manchurian Communist administration, which was "more directly controlled by the Soviet Union than by the Chinese Communists" (The National Archives 1948, p. 31). Shortly after this meeting, chaired by Li Li-San, who had spent fourteen years in the Soviet Union, was held in Calcutta the Conference of Youth and Students of Southeast Asia Fighting for Freedom and Independence (February 19-23, 1948), which enabled Yugoslav theorists Vladimir Dedijer and Radovan Zogovic to appreciate the balance of power within the CPI, as well as the Indian political, economic and social situation.

Coincidence, the Second Congress of the CPI (February 28-March^h, 1948) also took place in this city. Dedijer and Zokovic presented the theory of the intertwined revolution that the Marxist (Yugoslav) theoretician Edvard Kardelj had elaborated in collaboration with Marshal Josip Broz Tito: these two men considered it possible to combine the national democratic revolution and the socialist revolution into one, which would allow the Communists to quickly proclaim the advent of a popular democracy.

Having assumed the leadership at the end of the Second Congress, the new General Secretary Bhalchandra Trimbak Ranadive urged the CPI to rally the majority of the population by building a democratic front of the people that would bring together the workers, the peasants, the petty bourgeoisie and the progressive intelligentsia (Overstreet, Windmiller 1960, p. 272), the goal being a national democratic revolution (Fic 1969, p. 17). Ranadive thus wished to promote an urban uprising, and extend the Telangana model of agrarian revolt to other regions of the subcontinent. However, the Communist influence on the working and peasant classes was very weak, even as the CPI found it difficult to

¹⁴One may note the lack of preparation of the CPI as India proclaimed its independence. Applying the Soviet theory of nationalities, the party initially defended the justice of the creation of Pakistan: Muslims in India were one its seventeen nationalities. The Party was of the opinion that once Muslims were reassured as to their future within the country, they would renounce any separatist claim. After the foundations of the two new countries, the Communist sections of East and West Pakistan were quickly cut off from a political party that strived for strong centralisation.

¹⁵However, the CPI quietly recalled the role played by the ruling classes when they had used popular struggles to promote an independence which notably allowed the industrialists to push through a development to which the Raj, anxious to protect the British production, objected.

communicate with its provincial and local units. The General Secretary was nonetheless convinced that the Indian state machine would collapse if the industrial sector went into an unlimited strike.

In June 1948, the Yugoslav Communist Party was excluded from the Cominform, while Moscow remained divided as to the analysis of the forces involved on the Indian scene. In an article published on June 2nd, the Soviet theorist A. Dyakov suggested that the Indian population, despite its “deep disappointment” with the administration of the Nehru government, would not opt for revolution in the near future (Dyakov 1948.a, p. 14, in Overstreet, Windmiller 1960, p. 281). M. Alexeev, in the June 1949 issue of *The Bolshevik*, claimed that the CPI was guiding the masses “for the ultimate destruction of the colonial government, the liquidation of the vestiges of feudalism and the dismemberment of the feudal system in India” (Alexeev 1948, p. 66, in Overstreet, Windmiller 1960, p. 272). He advocated the construction of a democratic front without, however, mentioning the middle class that Zhukov considered as a progressive force in some Asian countries.

In October 1948, the Soviet press reported on a Dyakov book published that year, which notably examined the “national composition” of India (Dyakov 1948.b, p. 311, in Overstreet, Windmiller 1960, *ibid*). For the author, the upper middle class of certain nationalities, not only the Gujaratis but also the Marwaris¹⁶, dominated the national movement. This group – allied to British capitalists, princes and feudal landowners – sought to monopolize the Indian market, preventing the development of other nationalities and that of rival businessmen.

CPI could be an ally of the middle and small provincial bourgeoisies whose fight against oppression gave them a progressive role (Dyakov 1948.b, p. 137, in Overstreet, Windmiller 1960, *ibid*). In early 1949, Zhukov repeated Dyakov’s analysis, observing that the Marwari and Gujarati bourgeoisies controlled the federal administration (Zhukov 1949, p. 123-124, in Overstreet, Windmiller 1960, p. 284). Nevertheless, he regretted that Dyakov did not condemn the feudal landowners, neglecting the agrarian aspect of the Indian revolution. He felt that the peasantry, despite the underdevelopment in which it was maintained, was more and more encouraged to struggle. The Soviets apparently intended to use two dimensions: the regional particularism in India but also peasant dissatisfaction. Perhaps were they already thinking of resorting to the Maoist strategy which had led to victory in China.

At a meeting of Soviet academicians in June 1949 that Zhukov presided, Lenin’s anti-imperialist strategy, “which, in its most modern version, was the foundation of the first Soviet definition” of popular democracy and Mao Zedong’s new democracy was promulgated for all of Asia (Overstreet, Windmiller 1960, p. 293). It was in Beijing that the new Soviet directives were officially announced on the occasion of the Asian and Australian Trade Union Conference which took place in November 1949 (Shaoqi 1950 in Overstreet, Windmiller 1960, p. 295). In his opening speech, Liu Shaoqi urged the colonial and semi-colonial countries, in their struggle for independence and the establishment of a people’s democracy, to apply the Chinese model, and therefore to rely on the anti-imperialist strategy combining the four classes – workers, peasants, intellectuals and the national bourgeoisie (*ibid*). He advocated the use of arms wherever possible, citing civil wars in Vietnam, Burma, Indochina, Malaysia and the Philippines as examples, and congratulated the Communist parties in those countries for their action (*ibid*). He also underlined that India had started its armed struggle for emancipation (Overstreet, Windmiller 1960, p. 295).

¹⁶The Marwaris, originally from the Marwar desert (Rajasthan), constitute a community of industrialists and traders.

The General Secretary Ranadive and some members of his entourage remained free despite the arrest warrants that threatened them. Their incitement to revolt became all the more pressing as the failure of revolutionary tactics became more evident (ibid, p. 291). Ranadive then presented the agrarian movement of Telangana¹⁷ as proof of the progress of the democratic revolution to illustrate the success of his policy. Yet he probably knew that the Telangana struggle was running out of steam. The local Communist leaders were the only ones responsible for this failure: they were determined to continue the fight after the intervention of Indian troops in Hyderabad (on September 15th, 1948), even though the majority was first and foremost in favour of joining the Indian Union¹⁸. On the other side of the border, in Andhra, the attempt to promote a Telangana-style rebellion had harmed the provincial section, which had decreased from 20,000 members in 1946-1947 to a thousand at the end of the year 1949 (Hsi-Hu 1972, p. 14). Nevertheless, the Andhra leaders could employ the new Soviet analysis to promote their leader, Chandra Rajeshwara Rao, to the head of the party.

3.2. Revival of the Central Committee

The Central Committee, after having removed Ranadive from his position, now only accommodated 9 members. Biresh Misra, Venkateswara Rao, and Moni Singh were admitted for the first time. The positions of Somnath Lahiri, E.M.S. Namboodiripad, S.V. Parulekar, M. Basavapunniah, Rajeshwara Rao and P. Sundarayya were renewed. As for the Politburo, it consisted of four members – Rao, Basavapunniah, Namboodiripad and Misra. The only account of this reconstruction we have is that of the Andhra group. Thus, during the first week of April 1950, members of the Politburo – with the exception of N.K. Krishnan who was ill – met. In an appeal to the Communists, this body admitted that it had committed “basic sectarian errors of Left Trotskyism”, and assured that it renounced its “Titoist opposition to the international Communist movement” (CPI 1950.b in Rao 1960, p. 713). It also intended to communicate to the members of the CPI two texts of which we did not find any trace in the Archives on Contemporary India¹⁹ – *Main Features of the Indian People’s Democratic Struggles and the Main Tasks of Communist Party*, a document Bhowani Sen wrote, and *Resolution of PB’s Criticism of Comrade Mao* of which Gangadhar Adhikari was the author. The Politburo aimed at appeasing the

¹⁷Communist leaders in Hyderabad, worried about the implications of Ranadive’s policy, studied Mao Zedong’s pamphlet published in 1940, ‘*On New Democracy*’, in which the leader of the Communist Party of China (CPC) underlined which classes his party was trying to unite, and to define the nature of the state which would be created after the revolution” (Zedong 1940 in National Archives 1950.b, p. 2). The ‘Andhra Letter’ (Andhra CPI 1948) was the first application of Maoism in India. Without commenting on the attitude towards the Nehru government, it urged the population to fight against feudalism and imperialism in accordance with the four-class strategy.

¹⁸The predominantly Hindu population of the princely state of Hyderabad believed that the campaign to overthrow the ruling regime and the agrarian movement were complementary: in its opinion, joining India would lead to the end of the regime of the Muslim Nizam and its pillar, the *deshmukhs*. The CPI of this area quickly emerged as the leader of the Telangana movement. Its program was at first moderate: it was in favour of an alliance between ‘progressive capitalists’ and the working class against feudalism. However, the poor peasants and agricultural laborers of Telangana, engaged massively in the struggle, became aware of their strength. As proof, the power of the movement of Nalgonda rested on its organisational and political independence. The Communist section of this zone, without renouncing the tactics of the united front, relied more and more on agricultural workers and poor peasants. At first, it allowed each family to hold a plot of up to 80 hectares, which allowed landowners to keep most their land. Shortly before the Indian armed intervention, the pressure exerted by the poor became more intense: the ceiling was then reduced to 40 hectares of unirrigated land or 4 hectares of irrigated land by extended family.

¹⁹Therefore, these documents will not appear in the References section.

“honest suspicions” of the grassroots, offering them a line that it qualified as correct (CPI 1950.b in Rao 1960, p. 712-713).

However, a clear majority²⁰ of the Central Committee was opposed to such an approach, arguing that acknowledging Trotskyist-Titoist errors would cause “unnecessary panic in the ranks of the Party” (CPI 1950.b in Rao 1960, p. 713). The Politburo therefore simply circulated the document entitled *Main Features of the Indian People’s Democratic Struggles and the Main Tasks of Communist Party* (suitably revised) and the *Resolution of PB’s Criticism of Comrade Mao*.

The representatives of the Andhra group, seeking to seize control of the Party, resorted to the same tactics that Ranadive had used during the 1948 Congress. They presented to the upper echelons of the CPI two documents – *Report on Left-Sectarianism* (ibid) and *Report on the Left Deviation* (CPI 1950.a) – in which they denounced both right-wing reformism and left sectarianism. They then invited the Politburo to dismiss Ranadive, while the Party’s governing bodies were reconstituted, with a limited membership because of the “white terror” (they borrowed this expression from Soviet Russian history) (CPI 1950.b in Rao 1960, p. 735).

3.3. The denunciation of Left-Sectarianism

It is necessary to dwell on the vocabulary used by the Communist Party of India during its short revolutionary period, examining a document of which the Andhra group was the author: the *Report on Left-Sectarianism in the Organisational Activities of the Polit-Bureau and the Main Organisational Tasks Before the CC and Directives for the Proper Functioning of the CC and PB in Future* (CPI 1950.b in Rao 1960). Indeed, the terms and expressions used in this long text are illustrative of the bitter and long-lasting struggles between the movement’s factions. Ultimately, these explain the 1964 split in the movement, as well as the situation that prevails to this day, of many small groups, each claiming to be the sole legitimate representative of the Indian Communist movement.

Stressing that Ranadive had decided on the revolutionary path without securing the capacity of the Communist ranks to respond to it, the Andhra group regretted that the General Secretary had dared to question the Beijing Conference Manifesto (Shaoqi 1950 in Overstreet, Windmiller 1960, p. 295) which had been adopted following the Asian and Australian Trade Union Conference (November 1949). The latter had enjoined the working class to rally the middle-class bourgeoisie which was working – according to this reading – in favour of the nation (CPI 1950.b in Rao 1960, p. 676). The Secretariat of Andhra was of the opinion that right-wing reformism had “practically liquidated the conception of the hegemony of the proletariat in the democratic revolution” (CPI 1950.b in Rao 1960, p. 673). This ‘deviation’ had made the Party conform to the position that the Congress bourgeoisie had defined in the period preceding the ‘People’s War’²¹, and to those adopted by the leadership of the Congress Party

²⁰The report of the Andhra group indicated that only two Communists from Andhra and another from Assam were absent. It omitted to mention that six members of this group were incarcerated, and that P. Krishna Pillai was dead.

²¹In the aftermath of the Soviet Union's entry into the war in June 1941, a debate opposed Joshi and his followers – probably in hiding – with the early Communist leaders imprisoned at the Deoli Camp (in Ajmer-Merwara). A correspondence was initiated between the first group (whose representatives sat in the Politburo), and the second one which had probably sent him (on July 13th, 16th and 30th, 1941) three letters, which are now known as ‘*Jail Document*’ (Intelligence Service 1941 in Roy 1976).

and the Muslim League from 1943 to the end of 1947. Even more serious: the CPI had supported British imperialism, because it believed that it would contribute to the construction of the “fatherland of the world proletariat” by their support to a worldwide anti-fascist front (ibid). Moreover, it had moved away from democratic centralism, since it had adhered to the bourgeois liberal organisational principles of federalism and formal democracy.

The authors of the *Report on Left-Sectarianism in the Organisational Activities of the Polit-Bureau* were of the opinion that right-wing reformism was responsible for the bureaucratic attitudes of the higher echelons which respected neither discipline nor democracy. Right-wing reformism resorted to liberal, faction-tolerant bourgeois methods, even though a central leadership manoeuvred to stay in power. Left-wing sectarianism employed bourgeois authoritarian methods: it repressed opposition groups, while it used the principle of the “balance of powers” as an auxiliary of terror, replacing democratic centralism with an “iron discipline” (CPI 1950.b in Rao 1960, p. 679). The *Report* then hailed the Moscow intervention of early 1950, which had allowed the CPI to avoid the “Titoist disaster” (CPI 1950.b in Rao 1960, p. 680).

On January 27, 1950, the Cominform had published an article – entitled *Mighty Advance of the National Liberation Movements in the Colonial and Dependent Countries* (Cominform 1950 in Rao 1960, p. 611) – which approved the Chinese programme, but altered the statements of Liu Shaoqi. Whereas the latter advocated the application of the *new democracy* to all colonial or semi-colonial countries, this text merely recommended it to many countries of such status. It devoted a paragraph to the application in India of the four-class strategy which it did not define, but it did not refer to the use of violent methods. The experience of the People’s Republic of China testified to the key role of the alliance of workers and other classes, parties, groups and organisations willing to “fight the imperialists and their mercenaries”; the formation of a united national front “led by the working class and its vanguard, the Communist Party”, would lead to victory (Cominform 1950 in Rao 1960, ibid; Overstreet, Windmiller 1960, p. 296). The Cominform called on the CPI to strengthen the union between workers and peasants and agitate for the immediate adoption of land reform. In the same way, the Party was to incite the population to fight against Anglo-American imperialism and its allies (namely the reactionary bourgeoisie and the feudal princes) and to promote national independence²².

A Politburo with limited members continued to assert that the war had broken out because of the exacerbation of rivalry between imperialist countries. It distinguished three phases during the period 1938-1941. The first phase was the prelude to the outbreak of war: the United Kingdom had attempted to defeat its German rival through clever politics. Forced into an armed conflict, it did not give up its main objective – the destruction of the Soviet Union – which it had tried to bring into the war in order to weaken it, and to secure victory over Germany. Finally, the third phase began on June 22nd, 1941: Adolph Hitler, anxious about the growing power of the USSR, attacked it as he tried to turn the world conflict into a war that was both ‘counter-revolutionary’ and, de facto, “anti-Soviet” (CPI 1941, p. 6).

The Politburo accused defenders of the thesis according to which the war was now anti-fascist and anti-Nazi (and so ‘popular’ in the term which the CPI, like the other world Communist parties, would employ) of interpreting the concept of a people’s united front opportunistically. The proletariat should block any plot which would seek to harm the USSR, thereby transforming the world conflict into a revolution.

In September 1941, the Soviet and British Communist parties reminded the CPI of its responsibilities: India, despite its colonial status, was to support the Churchill government. Lemin, in *The Role of the British Empire in the Current War* published in *The Bolshevik*, believed that the British Empire and the USSR occupied the same place in the “grand coalition of democratic peoples” fighting fascism (Lemin 1941 in Overstreet, Windmiller 1960, p. 192).

²²The Cominform’s editorial gave rise to divergent interpretations: the Kremlin, according to Chi Hsi-Hu, had prescribed to the CPI “not only the Maoist strategy, but more specifically the peaceful form of this strategy” (Hsi-Hu 1972, p. 24). Moscow thus indicated that socialism was not the immediate objective in India, the enemies being imperialism and feudalism and not capitalism or the whole bourgeoisie. Overstreet and Windmiller, for their part, consider that the article of January 27th, 1950

Following the ban of the Party in several states, the Politburo – according to the *Report on Left-Sectarianism in the Organisational Activities of the Polit-Bureau* – had not sent any circular to the provincial committees, and had required no organisational reporting. It had, however, found the time to write many reports condemning the opponents of Ranadive. The Politburo had adopted adventurous organisational methods which had provoked government repression. The analysis of Andhra’s group, however, was contradictory, since it pointed out that the Central Committee and the Politburo had not functioned properly, B.T. Ranadive and Bhowani Sen having been leading the party in the manner they saw fit. On the other hand, the *Report* pointed out that the Politburo had called for the “proletarianization of the Party”, claiming to speak “in the name of the working class and the working masses” (CPI 1950.b in Rao 1960, p. 695). It had called those who did not come from these social strata and who questioned its politics, “petty bourgeois ...chauvinists belonging to a small Kulak nation” (ibid).

In addition, members of the Politburo and the Central Committee orchestrated a defamatory campaign against the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) and Rajani Palme Dutt: they accused them of “misleading the CPI several times, and to have pushed it “into the quagmire of reformism” (CPI 1950.b in Rao 1960, p. 696-697). The General Secretary, therefore, opposed any interference by the British Party in Indian affairs, taking advantage of the fact that some Indian Communists felt that this party had been responsible for adherence to a faulty policy during the Second World War. In May 1950, the Andhra group had also defended the “valuable services” that the CPGB had rendered to the cause of the Indian revolution (CPI 1950.b in Rao 1960, p. 697-698). Ironically, the Rao leadership refused, once in power, to communicate to the Politburo a letter that Dutt had sent it and that it must have received at the end of September or early October 1950 (CPI 1950.e, p. 1). The British leader called on the CPI to abandon a strategy he described as erroneous.

The argument of the editors of the *Report on Left Sectarianism*, however, lacked coherence: they blamed Joshi’s policy during the People’s War, and at the same time condemned party cadres who did not immediately bow to it. They did not attack Joshi whom they preferred to present as a victim of Ranadive. They no doubt considered that the former Secretary-General did not constitute an obstacle to the affirmation of their power. They sought to discredit Adhikari, having apparently pushed him to make a self-criticism in which this leader had admitted to having long refused the slogan of the People’s War. In addition, they made him the main lieutenant of Ranadive in the implementation of his sectarian line and his Titoist methods of organisation. They pointed out, however, that Adhikari was not “personally responsible” for the crimes committed by the Politburo (CPI 1950.b in Rao 1960, p. 707). This was also the case of Sen who had, however, participated in the “harassment” by the Central Committee to force Gangadhar Adhikari into “submission” (ibid).

In fact, Bhowani Sen, after the Beijing Conference and the publication of the Cominform editorial, had no doubt sensed that General Secretary Ranadive would soon be removed from office. He had probably tried to get along with the Andhra group. The *Report on Left Sectarianism* noted that Sen was, in April

left the Indian Party facing a confusing ambiguity, since the USSR was not clear on the question of the use of violence (Overstreet, Windmiller 1960, p. 297).

It was, in fact, R. P. Dutt who wrote this text. When the Ranadive leadership published the document entitled - *Strategy and Tactics in the Struggle for People's Democratic Revolution in India* (CPI 1948.c), “containing an extraordinary slanderous attack” (Overstreet, Windmiller 1960, ibid), he realized that the situation of the Indian Communist movement was “extremely serious” (Masani 1954, p. 102). By expressing himself through the Cominform organ, he wanted to avoid giving the impression that he corrected the Indian Communist movement (CPI 1950.c, p. 2). This is at least the explanation he gave. He omitted, however, to point out that the CPI refused to take his opinion into account.

1950, the only one to have realised, at least implicitly, that the Politburo line was “fundamentally erroneous” (CPI 1950.b in Rao 1960, p. 712).

Rajeshwara Rao also made his self-criticism. But the *Report* insisted his behaviour had been exemplary: he had fought against the left sectarianism of the Politburo and in favour of the adoption of a correct line. He was not responsible for the Politburo’s crimes even though he had been opportunistic in approving the documents presented in December 1948. Back in his province, he had challenged these texts. Moreover, the Andhra Secretariat of which he was member had led the Telangana struggle, extending it to new areas, and had prepared the Andhra Party to eradicate left sectarianism.

3.4. B.T. Ranadive’s self-criticism

Eleven members of the Central Committee at least, successively elected in 1943 and 1948 (G. Adhikari, R.D. Bharadwaj, S.A. Dange, S.V. Ghate, A.K. Ghosh, N.K. Krishnan, Somnath Lahiri, E.M.S. Namboodiripad, S.G. Sardesai, P. Sundarayya and Ranen Nath Sen), were accused of left sectarianism after being condemned for right-wing reformism. Did their overzealousness to apply Moscow’s directives push them to excess? Perhaps they were above all anxious to preserve their position, leaving the General Secretary of the moment to act as he pleased. If the CPSU and the CPGB required it, or if the opposition within the CPI seized power, they admitted their mistakes and pledged to be more attentive to Moscow’s directives and to better analyse the Indian situation.

Basing his self-criticism dated May 20, 1950 on those then the norm within the Soviet bloc, Ranadive confessed that it was difficult for him to list his mistakes and his crimes (according to the Communist terminology in force) as they were too numerous. He had been the main spokesman for left sectarianism as well as “the initiator and the fanatical executor” of this line whose inspiration had been the Yugoslav Kardelj, since he was “responsible for the drafting” of the *Political Thesis of the Communist Party of India* the Second Congress of the CPI (February 28-March 6, 1948) (CPI 1948.b; CPI 1950.d, p. 1). He added that he had been in the past “guilty of left sectarian mistakes of the worst kind”: this behaviour had become natural to him (CPI 1950.d, *ibid*). The former General Secretary had thus denied the “teachings of Lenin and Stalin on the strict differentiation between a revolution in a colonial country” and that which took place “in a developed capitalist country” (*ibid*). His sectarian conception had led him to ignore the difference between ordinary peasants who were allies – even if sometimes unreliable ones, and rich peasants, spearheads of ‘the reaction’. Moreover, Ranadive had wrongly held that the industrialists represented the big bourgeoisie, not distinguishing the hoarders who collaborated with the imperialism from the middle bourgeoisie which opposed it.

Evaluating the “prospects for armed struggle” to be poor (*ibid*), the former General Secretary had not taken into account the advice of the ‘fraternal’ parties, especially that given in two articles: Liu Shaoqi’s *Internationalism and Nationalism* published in December 1948 (Shaoqi 1948 in Marxist Internet Archive 2019) – and the Cominform editorial (CPI 1950.d, p. 7). Ranadive pointed out that Robi’s intervention (Bhowani Sen’s *nom de guerre*) had been decisive since he had finally agreed to listen to reason.

From 1948 to 1950, the CPI had been the closed field of struggles which aimed to unify it in accordance with the 1948 decisions and to define the strategy and tactics of the struggle to be waged. It condemned Tito and the ideological struggle which had unfolded in all the CPs of the world. The Indian Communists had to learn from these world events and to critically examine the politics of their party, in order to promote a revolutionary movement in their country. The Andhra group, in the document entitled *Report on the Left Deviation Inside the Communist Party of India. Draft Critique Submitted by*

the Members of the Central Committee From Andhra and Amended and Approved by the Central Committee in its Recent Meeting, urged them to become aware of the seeds of left sectarianism contained in the *Political Thesis* (CPI 1948.b), whose writing had been influenced by the “erroneous formulas of Varga and the false theories of Tito’s agent, Kardelj” (CPI 1950.a, p. 2). The CPI had tended to consider that the revolution in colonial and semi-colonial countries would be similar to that in imperialist, capitalist and independent states. It had tried to induce Indians to believe that a conflict opposed the bourgeoisie to imperialism, giving India an economic status similar to that of a state benefiting from the Marshall Plan.

In the end, the Andhra group, following the pattern of confession in the Soviet bloc, pointed out that Ranadive had “committed the sin of revising the documents of the Communist International” (ibid, p. 7-8). He had first applied Zhdanov’s analysis in a subjective and mechanical way, reducing it to the existence of a single contradiction in the post-war world – the opposition between capitalists and the working class. He had thus portrayed the bourgeoisie as the spearhead of the counter-revolution, and relegated the other contradictions of the imperialist era to the background.

The Politburo, elected in 1948, had claimed to “clarify the Leninist concept of the two revolutions – one democratic and the other socialist – indicating that they were two links in the same chain” (ibid). In fact, it had insinuated that the “current phase of the Indian revolution” was a combination of the two stages of the Russian Revolution, that of February and October 1917 (ibid). The *Report* reproached the old leadership for betraying Lenin when it chose the combined revolution. In presenting the draft of the *Political Thesis* of 1948 (CPI 1948.b), Ranadive did not hesitate to assert that India was in the same situation as Yugoslavia. He also condemned Mao Zedong and launched “a demagogic attack on the Andhra Secretariat” which defended the Chinese theses (ibid, p. 9). The Report seemed to salute the courage of the Andhra Communist section. In fact, Rajeshwara Rao used the method that Ranadive had employed to ruin Joshi’s prestige. He also attacked his predecessor who had ignored the Andhra’s Letter (Andhra CPI 1948), trying to thereby demonstrate that he did not deserve the Kremlin’s trust. He also accused him of wanting to revise the Theses of National and Colonial Questions (Lenin 1920) of the Second Congress of the Comintern (July-August 1920), in which Lenin insisted on the need to support bourgeois democratic liberation movements in colonial or dependent countries.

4. From the revolutionary path to the parliamentary path

4.1. The CPI in search of a compromise, synonymous with survival

It is important here to emphasize the willingness of the CPI leaders (often from the highest castes) to get rid of the CPGB’s influence, even though they refused to acknowledge the independence their country had achieved. The British Party, for its part, used successive Muscovite strategies to maintain its grip on the Indian Communist movement. After a long silence to spare the sensibilities of the Indian Communists, the CPGB organised, at the end of July 1950, an Indian Communist Convention in which “Indian student comrades and some British comrades participated” (CPI 1950.c, p. 9). In his opening speech (on July 29), Rajani Palme Dutt welcomed the conclusions of the Calcutta Congress. The policy defined in February 1948 was, according to him, correct, but its application, as it happened to parties that were lacking in maturity, had gone from one extreme to the other. Dutt regretted that the CPI failed to use the betrayal by the Indian bourgeoisie of the popular struggle to seize power. On December 7, 1950, the CPI thanked the CPGB for asking the Cominform to publish an editorial on January 27, 1950, and for sending it a letter – probably sometime in August (CPI 1950.e, ibid).

Dutt's letter, which criticised Rajeshwara Rao's policy, was aimed at all Indian Communists, but they had learned of it late, through an Indian Communist traveling to London who had met with Dutt. On this occasion, the English leader had complained of the conduct of the CPI leaders who had not even deigned to acknowledge receipt of his mail. The Rajeshwara Rao leadership issued – on November 15th – a political resolution²³ that totally ignored the comments of the CPGB. Implicitly repeating the approach initiated by M.N. Roy, which envisaged a Party placed under the direct supervision of the Soviet Union, it had sent its own documents to the Cominform organ, hoping that they would be published. It was in vain that Dutt recalled that his party had authority over the colonial question and India.

The CPGB thus supported opponents of Rajeshwara Rao who met in a group called the Party Headquarters Units General Body (PHQ GB), and praised Dutt's intervention as "an event of decisive importance in the life" of the CPI (*ibid*). They advocated the convening of a third congress, and immediate measures to revive a paralyzed CP (*ibid*, p. 2, p. 3). As for Prabodh Chandra (in fact, Ghosh), Prabhakar (Dange) and Purushottam (Ghate), they had, as early as September 1950, sent a note to the Rao leadership in which they rebelled against the new Communist line they thought to be overly adventurous (Chandra, Prabhakar, Purushottam 1950, p. 23). They wanted the adoption of a "positive attitude", and thus the participation of the Party in the first general election (*ibid*, p. 42). They shed light on the attitude of leaders such as Rajeshwara Rao, Gangadhar Adhikari, N.K. Krishnan and Somnath Lahiri. They rejected the Rao group's argument that the CP's leaders should not be treated like "garbage" and that their experience should be respected (*ibid*, p. 30). Such a move was tantamount to disrespecting the other cadres "by imposing on them, in the name of the principle of reorganisation", the same old leaders who had destroyed the Party (*ibid*).

Ghosh, Dange and Ghate listed the crimes committed by the Politburo, namely the definition of a sectarian policy, the use of terror within the Party, favouritism, "the virtual liquidation of the Central Committee", the concealment of international documents as well as the distortion of the teachings of Lenin and Stalin (*ibid*). They called for the suspension of some leaders – notably the General Secretary – for at least five years. Joshi, for his part, considered the Ranadive and Rajeshwara Rao administrations to be identical, and deplored the fact that the CPI had produced them democratically (Joshi 1950.a, p. 2). Rajeshwara Rao was at least as dogmatic as Ranadive. He had ignored or misinterpreted international documents. He had been forced to denounce Ranadive's policy and his Titoist methods of organisation, the aim of which was to promote Trotskyism, but he had nonetheless adopted the same policy (*ibid*, p. 15).

The "Unified Central Committee", which was reconstituted in December 1950 following a compromise between the Rajeshwara Rao group and that of which Ghosh, Dange and Ghate were the leaders, could not function (Rao 1960, p. xiii-xiv). A trip to Moscow was necessary. Ajoy Ghosh finally emerged as the artisan of the 'reconciliation' of the Indian Communists, obtaining shortly after the endorsement of the Kremlin. But many Communists were indignant that the Central Committee was reconstituted again without democratic centralism playing a role. The new leadership reported that it had returned to their rightful place those members who had been elected during the Calcutta Congress and whose "reputation" was "intact" (CPI 1950.f, p. 1). The 13-member Central Committee comprised ten elected leaders in February 1948 (Muzaffar Ahmed, S.A. Dange, S.V. Ghate, Ajoy Ghosh, E.M.S. Namboodiripad, S.V. Parulekar, Rajeshwara Rao, Ranen Sen, P. Sundarayya and S.S. Yusuf), and three

²³This document will not appear in the References section as we could not find it in the archives.

elected in June 1950 (Bires Misra, D. Venkateswara Rao and Moni Singh). Basavapunniah, Jyoti Basu, Bires Misra and Somnath Lahiri had refused to sit on it. The Politburo was made of Dange, Ghosh, Namboodiripad, Rajeshwara Rao and Yusuf, while Rao remained General Secretary. Considering the unresolved conflicts over issues such as political strategy and organisational tasks, the impossibility of agreement on the guidelines of the Communist International, the Party concluded that it was necessary to seek the arbitration of ‘fraternal’ parties.

Puran Chand Joshi spoke of the shameless bargaining that took place during the Central Committee meeting of December 1950 between the Rao leadership and leaders such as Ghosh, Ghate and Dange (Sangal 1951, p. 2). The new management team, yielding to the easy path of opportunism, had accepted the thesis of Rajeshwara Rao according to which the fight of Telangana remained exemplary. Joshi, in a document written by one of his followers (O.P. Sangal) (Sangal 1951) recalled that following the intervention of Indian troops in the princely state of Hyderabad (September 1948), leaders of the Telangana movement such as Sundarayya had asked the national leaders’ permission to stop the fight. According to Rajeshwara Rao, the Ranadive leadership had initially remained silent, then sent a telegram containing only one word: “Resist” (Rao 1950 in Sangal 1951, p. 6). In fact, none of the members of the Politburo had wanted to settle this question. If one sticks to Rajeshwara Rao’s account, Adhikari – then in Bombay – had ordered him to make a decision and take full responsibility for it.

Joshi claimed that he had been accused of being a ‘Joshist’ and Reformist following an agreement with Ranadive and Rajeshwara Rao (Sangal 1951, p. 5). The latter had accepted the Trotskyist tactic, while the call for cessation of the Telangana fight had thus been ignored. Joshi took the opportunity to justify the approach for which he had advocated in *Letter to Foreign Comrades* (Joshi 1950.a): he had invited provincial and district committees to seize the initiative by sending a delegation of six to eight “honest, responsible and experienced” Communists to Telangana (Sangal 1951, p. 2). It was, according to the former General Secretary, the only way to land a decisive blow on Rao’s Trotskyist tactics and to free the CPI from the grip of “revolutionary demagogy” (ibid).

In a long indictment, O.P. Sangal reproached the Party leadership for not having sought a peaceful solution to the Telangana struggle, to save the popular gains (ibid, p. 8). According to the Rajeshwara Rao leadership, the “vast majority of the [Telangana] people” harboured “illusions” about the Nehru government (ibid, p. 10). It hoped that the Indian army would be an end to the Nizam army’s atrocities. The Party, however, refused to acknowledge that the people had faith in the Congress. Ghosh, according to Sangal, had been able to prevent the disruption of the Party by fighting against Titoism and Trotskyism. He had dissociated himself from the disciplinary measures Rajeshwara Rao had taken against his opponents, even though he had endorsed his line not to be himself accused of reformism. Released from jail in July 1950, Ajoy Ghosh symbolised the hope of the CPI’s renewal. But, he remained a “loyal colleague of the Trotskyist liquidator of the glorious Telangana” – Rajeshwara Rao – and of “the main propagator of Trotskyist influence” in the Party, S.A. Dange (ibid, p. 32).

However, Sangal and Joshi never answered one important question: did not the members of the Central Committee support Ranadive and Rao, albeit only tacitly by their silence? They had decided to criticise them when the assessment of their management of the party was negative. Concerned about their career, they had then demanded the application of the Cominform directives.

The Party issued a press release on December 18th, 1950 in which it publicly admitted that there was a conflict between the members of the new Central Committee (CPI 1951.c, p. 13). At the beginning of 1951, a Communist delegation went to Moscow; S.A. Dange and A.K. Ghosh represented the right of the Party, while Rajeshwara Rao and M. Basavapunniah were the spokespersons for the left. S. V.

Ghate, for his part, stated that the CPSU had summoned these four men (Gupta, Sharma 1970, p. 198). In any case, the Kremlin complied in undertaking the arbitration the CPI needed. It mainly confined itself to endorsing the agreement reached by the Indian Communists in December 1950. It took this opportunity to contribute to the elaboration of the CPI *Tactical Line*, which remained secret until it was published by Mohit Sen in 1977 (CPI 1951.b in Sen, 1977). In addition, the Soviet Communist Party apparently instructed Basavapunniah and Rajeshwara Rao to visit Telangana's combat zones and persuade the Communists of the need to abandon the struggle. Barry Pavier, meanwhile, emphasises that this trip to Moscow was "one of the most bizarre episodes in the history" of the CPI (Pavier 1964, p. 166).

Viatcheslav Molotov, Georgy Malenkov, Mikhail Suslov and Joseph Stalin met with the Indian delegation. According to Basavapunniah, the Soviets indicated that the Indian Communists should have ended their fight after the fall of the regime of the Nizam of Hyderabad, because the balance of forces between classes at the time meant that an armed struggle that would lead to the establishment of a popular democracy was not possible (ibid). In any case, the CPI had to engage in negotiations with the Nehru government over its legislative programme, even though it tried to defend the achievements of its struggle. The 'Soviet big brother' probably pretended to give the verdict that part of the Indian CP was demanding without giving any real direction.

In February 1950, the Party announced a change of policy: the new line provoked dissension within the Party between the defenders of peaceful methods and the partisans of the revolution. However, no one was unaware that the CPI was threatened with irrelevance: the peaceful way was the only realistic strategy. The new General Secretary Ajoy Ghosh, who took office in May 1951, spent a long while asserting his authority, as evidenced by the proceedings of the *PHQ GB* and the reaction of the provincial sections.

4.2. The CPI fitting into parliamentary politics

4.2.1. India's first general election

The organisation of elections was a challenge. Tibor Mende, who visited in India shortly after independence, noted that the population knew almost nothing about the country's political history with the exception of the name of Mahatma Gandhi (Mende 1950, p. 211). The introduction of universal suffrage would open "the doorway through which Indian politics would penetrate the countryside, allowing the silent majority (the peasantry) to express themselves.

"In the immediate future, it is unlikely that the 180 million voters²⁴ – nine-tenths of whom are illiterate – will overthrow the Congress government... During an election campaign in which images and symbols will have to play the role of argument-covered posters, Gandhi's lithographs will be widely used to impress the illiterate voter. The big industrialists and the rich traders will provide all the necessary funds, for fear of seeing their situation compromised by the defeat of the Congress. Last but not least, Patel's ruthless police will take care to defend Congress against all the looming threats" (ibid, p. 211-212).

Disunited, the opposition to the Congress put up few prominent candidates. In the States where the CP was still banned, the Communist candidates, opting for the label of independents, participated in

²⁴J.V. Bondurant and M.W. Fisher give the figure of 173 million voters (Bondurant, Fisher 1956, p. 1).

coalitions: in Hyderabad, they allied themselves with the Popular Democratic Front, which formed a United Front with the League of Socialist Workers, the *Sahakari Kamgar Paksh* (Workers' Association), the Hyderabad Trade Union Congress and the Scheduled Castes' Federation. In Travancore-Cochin, they participated in the United Left Front – which included the Kerala Socialist Party (KSP) and the Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP).

The Congress won 364 seats in Lok Sabha, Communists and their allies 27 (CPI 16, Peoples Democratic Front 7, and United Left Front 4) (Bondurant, Fisher 1956, p. 40, p. 44, p. 46), with the Socialists picking up 12²⁵. In 18 of the 22 provincial assemblies, the Congress had an absolute majority with a total of 2,246 seats (ibid, p. 40). In Bombay, the Party scored a crushing victory thanks to an efficient campaign and despite a lack of previous strength. But it also suffered serious setbacks: the Congress secured only a simple majority in the Legislative Assemblies of Hyderabad, Madras and Travancore-Cochin. In these three southern states, the CPI was nonetheless the largest party after the Congress. The People's Democratic Front (Hyderabad) took 42 seats, and the United Left Front (Travancore-Cochin) 32²⁶ of 108 seats as against 44 for the Congress (ibid, p. 40, p. 46). In Madras State, the CP joined the Toilers' Party and the Dravida Kazhaghham. Together, they won 62 seats²⁷ out of 375 seats, while the Congress took 152 (ibid). In Bengal, where it had formed an alliance with the Marxist Forward Bloc, the CPI was victorious in 28 seats (Fic 1969, p. 57)²⁸.

Just as India was astonished at the poor performance of the Socialist Party, which appeared to be the “strongest” opposition party (The National Archives 1952, p. 3), the Communist success surprised it: the Indians seemed to refuse moderate parties, preferring a more radical ideology. Voters in the non-Hindi speaking areas (Hyderabad, Travancore-Cochin, Madras and West Bengal) were seduced by the CPI's message, notably because it defended regional particularism by advocating for the creation of states along linguistic lines; the Congress remained reluctant to this, fearing it might strengthen separatist groups.

“Some observers did not hesitate to assert that an “Indian Yunan” had taken root in southern India, notably in the states of Travancore-Cochin, Madras and Hyderabad, thus creating a geographical base that could potentially allow the CPI to seize power at the national level” (Hsi-Hu 1972, p. 38).

The CP's popularity in Hindi-speaking areas was low. Moreover, its influence, important in industrial districts, remained weak in the villages. Lastly, it had been unable to form alliances with parties of national importance.

Nevertheless, the Party's electoral results were remarkable: it campaigned in difficult conditions with a limited number of candidates, some of whom had been released from prison one or two months earlier, to allow them to campaign. Others were in hiding, while a third group remained in jail. The CPI Election

²⁵According to Bondurant and Fisher, the Socialist Party won 125 seats in provincial assemblies (Bondurant, Fisher 1956, p. 46). The PS won 23 seats in Bihar, 19 in Uttar Pradesh, 13 in Madras State, 11 in Vindhya Pradesh, Travancore-Cochin and Hyderabad, and 9 in Bombay, which it considered its stronghold (ibid).

²⁶V.M. Fic gives the figure of 44 seats (Fic 1969, p. 58).

²⁷This is the information given by Bondurant and Fisher (Bondurant, Fisher 1956, p. 40). Fic puts forward the figure of 42 (Fic 1969, ibid).

²⁸Bondurant and Fisher indicate that Communists won 101 seats in provincial assemblies (Bondurant, Fisher 1956, ibid). Bhabani Sen Gupta, for his part, gives the figure of 194, but he probably includes the seats obtained by Communist allies in the People's Democratic Front and the United Left Front (Sen Gupta 1972, p. 32).

Manifesto reported that in areas where the Party was most influential, “police and military terror” made taking part in the elections “virtually impossible” (CPI 1951.a, p. 62). The CP’s strategy of concentrating in the areas where it felt it enjoyed the support of the people proved wise: it managed to garner 3.3% of the votes for the Lok Sabha, while the Socialist Party mobilised 10.6% of voters (Bhalla 1973, p. 468; Singh 1959, p. 159). The latter presented far too many candidates – 256 candidates for the Lok Sabha, compared to 49 CPI candidates. Its resources were insufficient and its organisation deficient.

The Congress propaganda – from 1948 to 1950 – which sought to discredit the Communist movement, had been ineffective. But this may not have been the whole story: were the peasants of Telangana voting to renew their confidence in the CP, or were they rather paying tribute to an honest leader like Ravi Narayan Reddy, who collected 78.8% of votes cast in Hyderabad? Tellingly, Shripat Amrit Dange, elected to the Bombay Assembly in 1948, lost out in the Lok Sabha elections.

The British Foreign Office emphasised the great efficiency of the Communist electoral machine. In the state of Madras, especially in Malabar and Andhra Desa, were “well-established Communist pockets” (The National Archives 1952, *ibid*). In Travancore-Cochin, the high literacy rate allowed the Party to distribute anti-Congress leaflets. In addition, the Communists carefully selected the constituencies in which they would stand. They preferred “to exploit the political and economic grievances” of the people, making promises to all classes, rather than advocating, in accordance with the program of the Centre, the “liquidation” of all forms of imperialism in India (*ibid*). Communists in the state of Madras promised rice aplenty and cheap alcohol. In Andhra Desa, they advocated for the formation of a state that would include the Telegu-speaking areas of Hyderabad.

4.2.2. A new Communist strategy

The Kremlin could no longer ignore the dominance of the Congress; less than four years after independence, Nehru had kept his word and introduced universal suffrage, even though conditions in the country at the time did not seem to lend themselves to such a step. However, Moscow continued to consider that India was divided into two blocs: the first one – democratic – led by the CPI, the other – reactionary – under the leadership of the Congress. It made the CPI one of the key players in the 1951 elections; it disparaged the Socialist Party as an ally of the Congress and a traitor to the working-class movement. On March 28, 1952, the Cominform body published an article by Ajoy Kumar Ghosh (The National Archives 1956) – *For a Lasting Peace, for a People’s Democracy*. It was an honour that the USSR paid to the head of the CPI, since it had ignored the analyses of Ranadive and Rajeshwara Rao²⁹. It sought to support Ghosh whose power was disputed. The Indian Home Minister believed that the Communist Party was led by men such as A.K. Gopalan and P. Sundarayya who did not trust intellectuals – like Hiren Nath Mukherjee, a professor at Calcutta University and MP at Lok Sabha – which they held responsible for choosing the revolutionary path (*ibid*, p.3).

In his article entitled: *Concerning Result of General Elections in India*, Ghosh highlighted the panic of Indian and American ruling circles that were proposing loans to the Nehru government (Gosh.a 1956).

²⁹In August 1952, British diplomacy reported that the Kremlin was no longer relying on intermediaries, and “was only willing to open its heart to one or two important members of the Indian Party it had selected” (The National Archives 1952, p. 2). One can wonder whether the CPSU did not seek, for a time, to respond to the wish of the CPI by establishing direct relations with it. In any case, this period was very short: Harry Pollitt, General Secretary of the CPGB, went to India on the occasion of the Madurai Congress (State of Madras, December 27th, 1953-January 3rd, 1954) and informed the Indian Communists of new Soviet directives. To note that the choice of December 27th, the birthday of Mao Zedong, was symbolic.

According to the Central Committee which met in March 1952, there were three reasons behind the success of the CPI: the deterioration of Indian economic conditions; “the immense strengthening of the forces of socialism, democracy, freedom, independence and peace, led by the Soviet Union”; and the victory of the Chinese people who acted as a catalyst, making the Indians aware of the need to establish a people’s government (CPI 1952, p. 2-3). The Central Committee paid homage to the ‘big brothers’, respecting the hierarchy between them. In addition, the General Secretary observed that the Congress had benefited from unlimited financial resources and the support of the press; this formation had banned the CP in its bastions, and used its administrative machine to put pressure on voters, especially those from the Muslim community. The big landowners and the rich peasants had tried to intimidate the peasants. In addition, a psychological factor had contributed to the victory of the Congress: many wanted the defeat of this party, but did not believe it possible since the left was disunited. The Central Committee did not hesitate to proclaim that the Congress had suffered the “greatest political and moral defeat in all its history” (ibid).

Ghosh referred to the case of Telangana, where the police and the military had ruled for more than three years: almost all local Communist leaders were in prison; 2,000 workers were either imprisoned or in hiding. The Democratic Front held no less than 37 of the 46 seats in the region, with an overwhelming majority in the districts of Nalgonda and Warangal. Ghosh hailed the victory of Narayan Reddy; Nehru himself had only got 64% of the votes in his hometown of Allahabad. The situation in Punjab was hardly better. In Bengal, 250 Communists were still in custody. Arrest warrants were issued against such leaders as Sundarayya, Rajeshwara Rao, Basavapunniah, Namboodiripad, Chandrasekhar Rao, Srinivas Rao, Dasrath Deb Barman and Baba Gurmukh Singh. Ajoy Ghosh presented his party as the sole architect of the victory of the United Front and independent candidates. He blamed the Socialist Party for refusing the Communist alliance. As for the Congress, it had allowed the Hindu and Sikh ‘communalist reaction’, led by princes and landowners, to win 14 seats in Parliament and 119 in provincial assemblies; this grouping had, moreover, achieved remarkable results in Rajasthan, Madhya Bharat and PEPSU (Patiala East Punjab States Union).

The election results also showed the deep sympathy of the people for the Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of China, its desire to establish close ties with “democratic” countries, and its “hatred of Anglo-American aggressors, which drowned the struggles of colonised peoples in blood” (ibid). Indians were increasingly aware of the “absolutely shameful nature” of their so-called independence (ibid, p. 3). Ajoy Ghosh observed that the elections had revealed the unequal level of Communist influence on Indian territory. However, he remained optimistic: the CP was now a powerful force; the Democratic Front was able to challenge the Congress because it brought together all the progressive forces, favourable to the independence of their country and the elaboration of democratic reforms.

The Party, after accusing the Congress of being the cause of limited success of the Democratic Front, confessed its weakness, aiming to rid itself of a handicap that prevented the development of the Democratic Front: sectarianism (CPI 1952, p. 20). It admitted the inefficiency of his United Centre: the local sections had to solve the problems they faced on their own. The CP wanted “not to undermine the parliamentary system from within”, but to use it to promote the revolution (Sen Gupta 1972, p. 35). It could not draw inspiration from any example: Lenin and Mao Zedong contented themselves with not rejecting the “theoretical possibility” of Communists working “under certain circumstances” in a bourgeois parliamentary democracy (ibid).

“Both, however, decided that such conditions did not exist in their countries. Mao found in the early 1940s that the CPC could not even make a “Leninist” use of parliament, because conditions in China were so different from conditions in Czarist Russia” (ibid, p. 34).

The CPI considered that a long period of struggle within the parliamentary system was necessary, not least to rebuild itself. This position suited the Kremlin. Indian Communists, who opposed it, complied waiting to be powerful enough to make their point of view prevail.

4.3. Moscow and Beijing: heavyweight but burdensome allies

4.3.1. Indian non-alignment, and the new evaluation of the Soviet and Chinese ‘big brothers’

The CPI was the leading national opposition party. However, its reduced membership in parliament prevented it from playing such a role effectively. Besides, it was soon in conflict with Moscow over the role of the Indian government.

The CPSU reconsidered its policy towards non-aligned India when New Delhi backed Beijing’s claim on the Chinese seat in the Security Council. It favoured the Indian mediation attempt to reach a negotiated settlement of the Korean conflict: on July 13, 1950, Nehru sent his proposals to the Secretary of State, Dean Acheson, and the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union Joseph Stalin. In October, he condemned the crossing of the 38th parallel by United Nations troops. The Prime Minister, at the Eleventh Conference of the Institute of Pacific Relations held in Lucknow from October 4th to 15th 1950, said that “many Western nations lacked subtlety when dealing with Asia”: Communism was not the only danger (The National Archives 1955). On November 14th, Stalin sent his “warm congratulations” to Nehru, who was celebrating his seventy-first birthday (ibid). On December 15th, with the death of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, a further obstacle to the establishment of friendly relations between the two countries disappeared.

The USSR appreciated the Indian refusal to participate in the San Francisco Conference (which took place from September 4th to 7th, 1951). Moscow, New Delhi, Prague, and Warsaw refused to sign the Treaty of San Francisco³⁰ (concluded on September 7th, 1951 between Japan and most of its former adversaries), because they judged that this agreement would not make for a stable peace in Asia. After the death of Stalin (March 5, 1953), the rapprochement between Moscow and New Delhi accelerated: India was an important ally for the new masters of the Kremlin as they aimed at ushering in a period of new relations with the non-Communist states of Asia. In addition, they had to quickly stymie Washington’s policy of striking new military alliances on that continent.

India was one of the first countries – newly independent and non-Communist – to benefit from Soviet economic cooperation. On December 5th, 1953, a five-year agreement was signed; the Soviets would provide the subcontinent with industrial capital goods in exchange for traditional Indian exports. Article VI of the agreement stipulated that trade between the two countries would be in rupees. The Communist bloc hailed the “first major agreement that India signed as an equal partner” (ibid). But as Radio Delhi

³⁰Japan renounced claims over Korea, the Pescadores, the Kuril Islands and Taiwan. However, no clause provided for the return of the latter to China. Lastly, foreign troops stationed on Japanese territory had to be withdrawn within ninety days of the signature of the treaty, unless further agreements were signed. On September 8th, Tokyo and Washington signed a security treaty: the US armed forces were to be maintained on the Japanese territory, since Japan could not ensure its own defence.

pointed out, the majority of India's trade would continue to be with the Commonwealth countries and the United States.

Soviet assistance was welcome: disagreements between India and the United States over East-West conflicts were increasing. On the other hand, the Lok Sabha wondered what would be Washington's reaction after it voted through the Resolution on the Directive Principles of the State Policy, which stated that the Indian people aspired to the establishment of a socialist society³¹.

Beijing, like Moscow, revised its position. On April 29, 1954, India and China signed a treaty relating to Tibet, in which, for the first time, *Panch Shila* – or *Panch Sheela* – were proclaimed. This Indonesian term – of Sanskrit origin – means “the Five Principles” or “the Five Bases”, which advocate (a) mutual respect for integrity and sovereignty, (b) mutual non-aggression, (c) mutual non-interference in the internal affairs of each country, (d) equality and mutual assistance, (e) peaceful coexistence (Conte 1965, p. 19, p. 22-23). On June 22nd, 1954, Chinese Prime Minister Chou En-lai, before leaving Geneva for India, granted an interview to an Indian journalist, during which he declared that “the Chinese people respected the struggle for national independence that had been waged by Gandhi” (Hsi-Hu 1972, p. 42)³².

From June 25th to 28th, the Chinese Prime Minister made an official visit to India³³. The CPI Politburo, in a statement to the press, welcomed Chou En-lai (CPI 1954.b in Sen 1977, p. 375). It was pleased with the rapprochement between the two countries and their adherence to *Panch Shila*. The summit of the non-aligned countries took place in Bandung from April 18 to 24, 1955. The following month, Nehru paid an official visit to the USSR. On this occasion, the Soviet Central Committee adopted a resolution which disapproved of the Indian government's internal policy but praised the Prime Minister's non-aligned foreign policy. The CPI had thus to participate “actively in Indian development projects” (Hsi-Hu 1972, p. 43).

The CPI gradually modified its analysis of Indian policy, in accordance with the requirements of Moscow and Beijing. The first general election had given it hope that it could soon overthrow the Nehru government. However, it was still relying on Moscow to elaborate its analysis, which made it fragile, as evidenced by the debates that followed the election and its Third Congress. The period 1954-55 illustrated to worsening antagonism dividing the Party. The 1957 elections and the victory of the Kerala Communist section strengthened for a time the trend towards a peaceful transition to socialism. Nevertheless, experience of Kerala showed the difficulty for a Communist government to remain in power.

4.3.2. The moderating influence of Ajoy Kumar Ghosh

It is necessary to return to the analysis that Nikhil Chakravarty presented at the Third Congress of the CPI. This leader (also a professional journalist) regretted that members of the Politburo did not comply with the regular meetings of this body; nor did they respect the rule that at least five of them should devote themselves to the work of the Centre; only two of them did (Chakravarty 1953, p. 2). This

³¹This resolution was passed in December 1954. The following month, the Congress held its meeting in Avadi (Tamil Nadu), and adopted a Resolution affirming the willingness of the Government to promote socialism.

³²Moscow hesitated a long time before paying homage to Mahatma. It did not adopt a favourable analysis to Gandhi until June 1955, following Nehru's official visit to the USSR (Hsi-Hu 1972, p. 43).

³³It was probably shortly after Chou En-lai's official visit to India that Beijing acknowledged the impossibility of exporting the Chinese revolution.

disinterest was shared by the members of the Central Committee, some of whom – particularly the parliamentarians – resided in Delhi. Some leaders spoke on behalf of the CPI: they tended to adopt “an individualistic mode of functioning” (ibid). The Central Committee met without adequate preparation, its members having no prior knowledge of the draft resolutions to be debated. It often instructed the Politburo to include in the official documents the different opinions expressed during the sessions (according to the term the CPI used). The links between all the Party organs were almost non-existent. In most cases, the provincial committees did not send their activity reports to the Centre, and did not pay much attention to the circulars it sent them. The Central Headquarters did not care much about the work of the provincial sections. Moreover, nothing had been done to allow the base to formulate its criticisms of party policy. Many did not dare to express their opinions in writing. Critics were often dismissed because they were considered to come from “particular tendencies” (ibid). Nikhil Chakravarty pointed out that the unity achieved in 1951 was artificial. The Party resembled a federation, each of whose components formally accepted the “role of the higher committee” (ibid, p. 3). Chakravarty, however, merely enjoined the superior bodies of the CPI to improve their collective functioning, which would be reflected at all levels.

The Indian Communist Party, aware that its audience was limited to a few \$ states, was in a delicate position. Admittedly, Nehru’s foreign policy demonstrated the country’s willingness not to be placed under the tutelage of the United States, and to engage in a dialogue with the Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of China. Nevertheless, the CPI was of the opinion that the Congress Party had done nothing to promote the country’s development or a more equitable division of wealth. It faced a choice similar to that of 1941: should it first take into account the interests of the USSR or those of the Indian people? The world of the mid-1950s seemed more peaceful than in 1941: it was not essential to give priority to the international dimension. The ‘big brothers’, for their part, did not care much about the credibility of the CPI on the Indian political scene. They emphasised the danger of imperialism, responsible for the outbreak of the Korean War, and assigned the CPI a difficult task: to sensitize the Indian population, which had never experienced such a conflict on its soil, to the danger of the war and the risk that American policies posed to the world.

The method employed by Ghosh was questionable: he used the democratic centralism to impose his authority, even though his rise to the post of General Secretary had been a negation of this principle. Moreover, the application of international guidelines militated against respect for democratic centralism. If the CPI leadership intended to apply them, it could not, even if it wanted – which is unlikely –take into account the wishes of the grassroots.

The General Secretary’s personality played a large role in the Party’s – admittedly artificial – unity. Researchers, who have studied the Indian Communist movement, have echoed the widely held belief that Ghosh spent nearly eleven years as the head of the CPI for three reasons: the support he enjoyed from Moscow; his moderating influence; and his great power of persuasion. This analysis fails to factor in the Communists’ attachment to their party. Moreover, the latter were satisfied with the lack of charisma Ghosh who, unlike a leader like Dange, never attracted big crowds. Indeed, they were still marked by the revolutionary period when some men had reigned supreme without concession to wider party opinion. The General Secretary was an apparatchik who acted cautiously, occupying a position of referee who tried to define an acceptable palatable to both the ‘right’ and the ‘left’ of the CPI, and to the two ‘big brothers’. His management, compared to that of his predecessors, was innovative. Under his leadership, the CPI allowed internal opponents to express themselves more openly, even publishing the latter’s analyses as evidenced by the Third Party Congress Bulletin (CPI 1953). This method was a

kind of safety valve that boosted the durability of a seemingly united party. The Joshi Archives (named after P.C. Joshi who gave his personal archives to Jawaharlal Nehru University - JNU) in New Delhi, now known as Archives on Contemporary India) show that a real debate of ideas opposed Party leaders. Ironically, Puran Chand Joshi, Ranadive and Rajeshwara Rao used extensively the freedom of expression they had denied their opponents when they had occupied the post of General Secretary. Moreover, the Centre was trying to trace a political line that would meet at least partially the wishes of the Kremlin and a large majority of the CPI. Nevertheless, the demands of Moscow and Beijing were increasingly incompatible with the Indian situation: they pushed the Party's cadres to question the essence of its analysis. The middle path chosen by the Central Committee did not fully satisfy anyone, as shown by the period 1954-55. However, it did not necessarily prove that the Communist leadership was irremediably divided: a weakened direction was the price to pay for what the Times named the international responsibilities of the CPI (The Times 1954).

5. The divergent positions of the 'right' and 'left' of the Party

5.1. The CPI facing the new Kremlin's orientations

The Fourth Congress (April 19-29 1956) of the CPI met after the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU (February 1956). Ajoy Ghosh, head of the CPI delegation in Moscow, tried to hide what he had learned in Moscow; however, Khrushchev sent a copy of the Soviet revelations to Nehru (Chakravarty 1996). Once again, the CPSU paid little attention to the CPI's difficult position. The Indian Communists discovered the abuses of the reign of Stalin in articles published in the Indian press, which they had always accused of wanting to harm the USSR. The Fourth Congress minimised the importance of the revolutions; it sought to find a compromise that would satisfy the right and left tendencies. Only a third of the delegates approved the strategy of a united front with the Congress.

"As neither right nor left was in a position to dominate, and as neither side was prepared to resort to serious disciplinary action against its opponents, the centrists were able to use their balancing influence to effect temporary compromises" (Mallick 1994, p. 34).

On March 25, 1956, *New Age* (the CPI's weekly newspaper) published an article by Ajoy Ghosh defending the thesis of the 'peaceful transition to socialism' defined by the Twentieth Congress (Ghosh 1956.b). Ghosh, in his report to the Fourth Congress, stressed that "the disintegration of the colonial world" would contribute to peace (Ghosh 1956.a in Sen 1977, p. 459). In accordance with the new Soviet analysis, the General Secretary hailed the role of some non-socialist countries "in humanity's march toward socialism" (Ghosh 1956.a in Sen 1977, p. 499). Imperialism, according to Ghosh, no longer had the same resources and was therefore unable to engage in military adventures against the socialist bloc. Moreover, a large number of states, formerly members of the imperialist camp, defended their freedom, contributing to the consolidation of the socialist camp. India, in this respect, was an exemplary case. The General Secretary felt it necessary to reconsider a phenomenon that had emerged at the end of the Second World War: the assertion of the value of neutrality (Ghosh 1956.a in Sen 1977, p. 501). According to a "doctrinaire" and "dogmatic" conception, every neutral country was helping warmongers. In reality, neutrality expressed an aspiration for peace. Some schools of thought judged that the socialist and imperialist were in fact two blocs essentially similar in character, thus implicitly condemning the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, the strengthening of the socialist countries, in particular

the Soviet Union and China, had given rise to a new situation. Moreover, the Movement for Peace³⁴ was probably able to prevent any conflict from breaking out, or even inflict a fatal blow on the capitalist system. The CPSU reconsidered the inevitability of the inter-imperialist war, proclaiming the possibility of the peaceful transition to socialism due to the new international equilibrium. Ghosh echoed Khrushchev's statement that a stable parliamentary majority supported by the revolutionary movement of the proletariat and the working class would allow "the working class of a number of capitalist countries and former colonies" to carry out fundamental social changes (Ghosh 1956.a in Sen 1977, p. 505).

Ajoy Kumar Ghosh referred to the 1936 Spanish Civil War which broke out following the attempt by the reactionary classes, helped by the army, to oppose any reform. But India could escape such fate:

"If the working class heading the people is able to develop a powerful mass movement and secures a parliamentary majority, if the position of the reactionaries in the state apparatus is weakened through a series of measures and through extension of democratic rights for the people... then it is quite possible that fundamental changes will be effected in a more or less peaceful way" (Ghosh 1956.a in Sen 1977, p. 508).

The Communist parties had to strengthen democracy in all spheres, to oppose the arbitrary powers enjoyed by the bureaucracy and the police, to demand the extension of the prerogatives of local organs such as *panchayats* (village councils), and lastly to democratise the state apparatus by ridding it of its most reactionary elements. The General Secretary stressed that the peaceful transition to socialism, which was an important instrument in the struggle of the CPI, was not a reformist concept.

Ajoy Ghosh was the principal editor of the Political Resolution (CPI 1956.a in Sen 1977) that the Party adopted in Palghat (Kerala) (Sen Gupta 1972, p. 43). This text praised neither Nehru's personal role nor the originality of Indian foreign policy. It noted that the great victories and the phenomenal advance of the liberation movement of the colonial and semi-colonial countries had destabilised the "imperialist colonial system" (CPI 1956.a in Sen 1977, p. 523).

The former colonies, which had put an end to imperialist domination to take "the path of independent development", had found "in the socialist world, a firm ally" in their struggle for the defence of independence (CPI 1956.a in Sen 1977, p. 523-524). The CPI welcomed, once again, the reduction of the sphere of domination of imperialism and the aggravation of the crisis of capitalism. The most aggressive imperialist elements sought to resolve the crisis of capitalism by reimposing their colonial rule over Asia through military alliances. They rejected any proposal to ban atomic weapons, pushed for the rearmament of West Germany, opposed the "peaceful unification of the German people", and

³⁴In mid-1948, the Kremlin had launched the Movement for Peace, which aimed to use the "humanitarian sentiments of intellectuals" and "to stimulate the direct action of workers against the defensive policies of Western governments" (The National Archives 1950.a, p. 1). The campaign for peace had opened in August 1948: French and Polish intellectuals convened a conference in Wroclaw (formerly Breslau) in Poland. However, the uncompromising language of the Soviet representatives and some representatives of the Eastern countries had quickly alienated the support of those who wanted an apolitical movement. Several delegates were indignant at the attitude of the Soviet representatives who manipulated pacifist ideals to gain political advantage.

This first meeting had decided to set up national committees for peace made of intellectuals, and an International Liaison Committee whose seat was in Paris. In April 1949, a second congress was held in this city, while another congress had taken place in Prague, following the refusal of the French government to grant visas to delegates known for their Communist sympathies. In the aftermath of the commemoration of the thirty-second anniversary of the October Revolution, on November 29th, 1949, the Cominform had declared: "*The struggle for a stable and lasting peace against the forces of war should now become the pivot of the entire activity of the Communist parties and democratic organisations*" (ibid, p. 3).

sabotaged the agreement for the unification of Vietnam (ibid). But their efforts were in vain: many countries had made the “non-participation in the military blocs” the principle of their foreign policy (ibid).

The CPI suggested that a zone of peace was born spontaneously. It praised the role of India, which had helped to defeat the warmongering designs. Peaceful coexistence and the principle of settling disputes by negotiation had thus achieved a historic victory. The forces of peace were aware of the need to remain vigilant, since they had undertaken to promote the union of pacifist parties and organisations. The CPI, for its part, had kept warning independent and sovereign India against the imperialist danger (CPI 1956.a in Sen 1977, p. 525). The United Kingdom remained one of the leading colonial powers. The Party used an ambiguous formula, suggesting that it did not wish to express itself as to the date of Indian independence: it indicated that it had “from the beginning” called for a foreign policy based on friendship between all nations and opposed to “colonial conquest and war” (ibid). It reaffirmed the validity of its analysis: the Nehru government had championed world peace, Asian solidarity and the independence of the subcontinent after becoming aware of the imperialist danger and the growing influence of peace forces. The prestige of India was enhanced and aroused the pride of all patriots. The CPI mentioned neither the USSR nor China, but stressed the importance of Indian sticking to the principles of *Panch Shila* and the significance of the Bandung conference. The visit of Jawaharlal Nehru to the Soviet Union (June 1955) and that of Nicolas Bulganin and Nikita Khrushchev to India (November), and the agreements between the two countries, had shown that differences between political systems did not constitute an obstacle to the friendship between peoples.

The peaceful policy of the Nehru administration was “a true national policy, an anti-imperialist policy”, which was in keeping with the traditions of the Indian democratic movement (CPI 1956.a in Sen 1977, p. 526). The CPI drew on the analyses it had made in 1930 and 1940: the Congress enjoyed the support of a large number of democrats and adhered to an anti-imperialist tradition (Sen Gupta 1972, p. 42). The Party proclaimed, once again, that the struggles for peace and national independence were “inseparably linked”: it was necessary to fight imperialism as a whole (CPI 1956.a in Sen 1977, ibid). London that had initiated the Baghdad Pact. The United Kingdom was also a member of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO)³⁵, which supported Pakistan’s claim on Kashmir (CPI 1956.a in Sen 1977, p. 528). The American position was much worse: by signing a military agreement with Karachi, Washington was trying to change the military balance in Asia and aggravate the tension between India and Pakistan, in short to incite “Asians to fight Asians” (ibid).

The CP, while praising the Nehru government’s resistance to the blackmail of imperialism, called on the working class, the peasantry and the democratic masses to be vigilant. It blamed the ruling sections of Congress for calling for a change in Indian foreign policy. It considered it essential to organize a national movement uniting all parties – including the Congress – to defend the country’s pacifist policy, independence and security, as well as peace and disarmament. National campaigns would denounce the military pacts, in particular the SEATO and the Baghdad Pact³⁶. They would plead in favour of Asian

³⁵SEATO, signed in September 1954 in Manila, was mainly composed of countries which had an interest in the region: Australia – which (according to the term then used) ‘administered’ Papua New Guinea, France (which had been left with no option but to leave French Indochina), New Zealand, Pakistan, the Philippines, Thailand, the United Kingdom (which administered Hong Kong, North Borneo and Sarawak) and the United States of America.

³⁶In 1955, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Turkey and the United Kingdom, following a US initiative, signed the Baghdad (Military) Pact which was renamed Central Treaty Organisation (CENTO) after Iraq’s withdrawal in March 1959. CENTO and SEATO both sought to contain Communist influence.

solidarity and the signing of a peace treaty between the countries of Asia and the Pacific region. They would support the right of the People's Republic of China to occupy the Chinese seat in the Security Council. Lastly, they would advocate the strengthening of ties between New Delhi, Moscow and Peking, and would call for the withdrawal of India from the Commonwealth.

5.2. The analysis of the Nehru government's domestic policy

Taking into account the criticisms of Basavapunniah, Singh Joshi, Hanumantha Rao, Prasada Rao, Sundarayya and Singh Surjeet (CPI 1955.b), the Party analysed the economic policy of the Nehru government in detail. It admitted that most of the Indian states had abolished the *zamindari* and *jagirdari* systems (CPI 1956.a Sen 1977, p. 533). These big landowners had been allowed to retain large estates, and had benefited from a huge compensation for surrendered lands, but overall, feudal exploitation had diminished. The government wanted to develop capitalism by compromising with feudalism and protecting the big landowners (CPI 1956.a Sen 1977, p. 535). In the same way, the First Five-Year Plan had sought to develop the economy without suppressing feudalism and endangering the positions of British capital (CPI 1956.a Sen 1977, p. 537). It thus did not bring about the participation of the productive forces of the country.

Turning to the Second Five-Year Plan, the CP by and large repeated its analysis of June 1955. It still hoped to establish a popular democracy, but no longer mentioned the overthrow of the Nehru government (CPI 1956.a Sen 1977, p. 550). It did not indicate whether it was rejecting the programme – *Programme of the Communist Party of India* – it adopted in April 1951 (CPI 1951.d). However, it presented another one which was composed of two parts: an immediate program dealing with the international duty of the CPI, and a program entitled *National Reconstruction and Strengthening of our Independence* (CPI 1955.b).

In this second programme, the Communists advocated the democratisation of the state structures, the introduction of proportional representation, respect for secret ballot, restrictions on police powers and the abolition of repressive laws that prohibited demonstrations. They also intended to rally leftist parties, mobilise mass organisations, and provoke a split in the Congress in order to obtain the cooperation of its left wing. The CPI was of the opinion that its program of national reconstruction would enable it, if it came to power in some States, to transform the Parliament and the State apparatus into an instrument of the dictatorship of the proletariat, thanks to the support of the revolutionary movement of mass organisations.

The Political Resolution was adopted, but several delegates disagreed with many of its assessments. This is at least the version given by the Central Committee in 1957 (CPI 1957, p. 33); it does not explain why the Communists divided the previous year, had approved a text very similar to the June 1955 resolution (CPI 1955.a). Bhabani Sen Gupta, on the other hand, believes that the tactics of peaceful transition support the position of the 'right', which has been advocating such a path since 1954 (Sen Gupta 1972, p. 42). In fact, this grouping was not satisfied by the resolution adopted at Palghat. It vainly attempted to impose its position: Romesh Chandra; K. Damodaran, L.R. Khandkar, S. Lahiri, P.C. Joshi, C. Rajeshwara Rao, R. Narayan Reddy, Bhowani Sen, H.K. Vyas and S.S. Yusuf drafted another resolution which advocated for a union between the CPI and the left of the Congress in order to achieve, one day, the creation of a government of national unity (Fic 1969, p. 255-256). Bhowani Sen summed up the position of this group: the Nehru government represented "the progressive, anti-imperialist and anti-feudal section of the bourgeoisie"; its progressive policy reinforced the popular forces (ibid, p. 255). The prime minister had renounced non-alignment and collaboration with imperialism to choose

the peaceful coexistence and cooperation with socialist states. He also sought to promote the economic independence of his country. Sen was therefore convinced that the united national front proposed by the CPI would favour the establishment of a national unity government that would oppose the “pro-imperialist and pro-feudal offensive” (ibid, p. 256).

A Central Committee document, drafted in 1957, implicitly condemned the right wing of the Party: some Communists, during the Palghat Congress, had tended to exaggerate the progressive nature of government policy (CPI 1957). They feared that the CPI, while remaining in the opposition and devoting itself to the union of the left, perpetuate left-wing sectarian tactics and move away from the population (ibid, p. 34). They had drafted another resolution, namely the formation of alternating governments in some states and the strengthening of the democratic opposition, in which they rejected the tactics advocated by the majority –. In areas where the democratic movement was strong, they wanted to establish coalition governments which, without excluding the Congress as a whole, would define a programme acceptable to all progressive parties and to the left wing of the Congress. Elsewhere, they hoped that the CPI would support the position of the defenders of a progressive policy – including that of progressive Congressmen – during the elections. The Central Committee condemned such a proposal, because it supported demagogic parties which used the slogans of the left and of ‘the reaction’.

5.3. The CPI and the ideological assessments of Moscow and Beijing in search of global dominance

The Indian Communists did not learn about the text of the revelations until July 1956, when it was published by the U.S. State Department. The Central Committee, meeting from July 1st to 11th, 1956, adopted a resolution which rejected the authenticity of this publication. Echoing the words of the CPSU, it noted that the revelations of the Twentieth Congress had moved Communists and progressives around the world. In addition, it advocated for the struggle against personality cults. But it agreed with the Soviet ‘big brother’ in emphasising that this phenomenon had developed in a particular context: the capitalist encirclement and the rise of fascism had forced the Kremlin to establish an iron discipline, to centralise power and to limit democracy (CPI 1956.b in Sen 1977, p. 580). Stalin was the main person responsible for undermining democracy and the Party’s rules; in the last part of his life the cult of personality had taken on enormous proportions. The CPSU considered it essential to develop an objective analysis of the whole work of this leader, in order to prevent the opponents of Communism from using the confusion of the masses. The CPI enjoined Communists to remain faithful to Marxism-Leninism and proletarian internationalism. The errors committed were due to a wrong application of Marxism-Leninism.

The interests of the USSR and China coincided as long as both countries had the same policy towards the United States. In elaborating the thesis of the peaceful transition to socialism without consulting the CPC, the CPSU changed its policy in defiance of the “vital national interests” of the Beijing authorities which were still claiming the Chinese seat in the Security Council, wanted to take possession of Taiwan and considered themselves threatened by U.S. military encirclement (Sen Gupta 1972, p. 46).

The beginning of the Sino-Soviet confrontation had a great impact on the CPI: during its Eighth Congress (September 15-17, 1956), the Chinese Communist Party questioned some Soviet theoretical formulations. The intervention of A.I. Mikoyan, head of the Soviet delegation and member of the Praesidium of the Central Committee of the CPUS, also attracted the attention of the Indian Communists for three reasons. This leader lauded the significant contribution of the CPC and Mao Zedong to

Marxism-Leninism (Mikoyan 1956, p. 6). He implicitly admitted that each Communist Party could define its path, acknowledging that the CPC had aroused the enthusiasm of the Chinese in complying with their millennial aspirations. Finally, he attempted to show that the Chinese and Indian paths were similar. Significantly Liu Shaoqi, reiterating the arguments Ghosh had employed in countering the analysis of Modeste Rubinstein, replied that there was no evidence to justify a conclusion that offended the CPI (Sen Gupta 1972, p. 49).

In the summer of 1956, *The New Times* had published an article in which the economist Modeste Rubinstein had paid tribute to Nehru and the Congress Party (Rubinstein 1956 in Sen 1977). The Kremlin considered that the Indian Government was able to initiate a process of transition to socialism; it wished to encourage the CPI to reconsider its position. It implicitly supported the analysis of the 'right' of this party, which had also taken advantage of the new Soviet directives, to require the revision of the policy set out in Palghat (Fic 1969, p. 261). Moscow again placed the CPI in an uneasy position. In October 1956, Ajoy Ghosh chose to be the spokesperson for the majority opinion of the Party (Ghosh 1956.c in Sen 1977). He declared himself stunned by Rubinstein's assertion that Nehru was the defender *par excellence* of the socialist path. Any observer of Indian reality knew that the Indian National Congress had never implemented an equitable sharing out of wealth for which it had advocated at its Congress in Avadi (1955). The intensification of the exploitation of the workers and the increase of the indirect taxes explained the profits made by the industrialists.

The government did not consider it necessary to compel the capitalists to pay workers decent wages. One had to determine which class benefited the most from the government's economic policy. In addition, the Indian patriots had welcomed the Second Plan, not because it aimed at the establishment of a socialist society, but because if it were applied, it would promote the economic independence of the country and would bring some improvements to the living conditions of the people. The General Secretary condemned the methods of the government which had increased the distress of the population. He blamed Rubinstein for not thinking of the millions of people threatened by malnutrition. In the same way, the Soviet economist had preferred to ignore the government's desire to repress the struggles of the working class. Rubinstein had not addressed the agrarian issue, which was essential. The Soviet economist, according to Ghosh, had confused two questions: the unpopularity of capitalism in the underdeveloped countries and the limited possibilities of this system; the non-capitalist path chosen by countries like India, which tried to promote an independent economy. Rubinstein's article gave "an incorrect picture of the Indian economic situation", using "certain erroneous concepts" relating to socialism to which "certain circles" adhered (Ghosh 1956.c in Sen 1977, p. 599).

Namboodiripad, who attended the Eighth Congress of the Communist Party of China, returned to India to report on his trip; he took the opportunity to assert the independence of the CPI. He denied the existence of an "international Communist leadership" and proclaimed that Communist parties shared their experience, which promoted their fraternal relations (Namboodiripad 1956, p. 8). As for the success of the CPC, it came from its application of the scientific principles of Marxism-Leninism to the Chinese reality (ibid, p. 5). Namboodiripad insisted on the specificity of the CPI, which aimed in particular at "defending and consolidating" the national independence as well as promoting "the democratic revolution", in order to lead India to socialism (ibid).

From November 14th to 16th, 1957, the CPI delegation led by Ajoy Ghosh attended the meeting of Communist and Workers' Parties³⁷. "The main battle" took place in the private preliminary sessions during which the CPSU and CPC delegations attempted to draft a joint statement (Fic 1969, p. 328). Mao Zedong, head of the Chinese delegation, requested the abandonment of the erroneous formulations of the Twentieth Congress; the Soviets remained inflexible. The original project only dealt with the peaceful transition to socialism that allowed the CPs to obtain a majority in parliament and to transform the latter, an *instrument par excellence* of the bourgeois dictatorship, into a tool of a real popular state power. Finally, a text – *Joint Draft Declaration of the CPSU and the CPC*³⁸ – was submitted to the other parties. The final text – *Declaration of the Communist and Workers' Parties of the Socialist Countries* (Marxist.org 2019) – contained two major changes from the text initially proposed by the Soviets. Even though it pointed out to the possibility of a peaceful transition to socialism, it insisted on the non-peaceful path, stressing that the ruling classes would not voluntarily give up power (Fic 1969, p. 329). This text evoked the possibility for Communist and Workers' parties to obtain an absolute majority in parliament, but stressed the need "to launch an extra-parliamentary mass struggle, to crush the resistance of the reactionary forces and to create the essential conditions for peaceful accomplishment of the socialist revolution (ibid)."

India's foreign policy was another issue that fed controversy. Unlike Beijing, Moscow maintained its positive analysis of the Nehru government's action. It advised the CPI to convene a congress quickly. This is at least the hypothesis put forward by Victor Fic (ibid, p. 333). The *Organisational Report* (CPI 1958.b), presented at the Congress of Amritsar in Punjab from April 6th to 13, 1958, gives another version: the Palghat Congress had planned to convene a special plenary session between May and October 1956, but the election campaign prior to the country's second general election had prevented it from doing so. The CPI decided to convene an extraordinary congress³⁹ to revise its constitution and formally adopt the concept of a peaceful transition to socialism.

In February 1958, Ghosh noted that the goal set by the Central Committee at the end of the previous general election – that is, to double Party membership – had been achieved (Ghosh 1958, p. 1). The CPI now had over 250,000 members⁴⁰. This increase proved that sectarian ideas, though deeply rooted, had been eliminated. The General Secretary made a clarification. Some observers (wrongly) thought that the attempt of the CPI to transform itself into a mass party stemmed from its choice of the parliamentary

³⁷The delegations of Albania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, China, North Korea, Mongolia and North Vietnam participated in the meeting (Hsinhua News Agency 1957, p. 1).

³⁸We did not find any trace of this document in the archives, and therefore are unable to give its references.

³⁹The constitution of the CPI required the organisation of annual congresses on a yearly basis; the Congress of Amritsar was held two years after that of Palghat. However, the Centre decided to consider the Amritsar Congress as extraordinary, since it served to reorganise the organs of the CPI and promote a better functioning of the Party (CPI 1961, p. 16). No doubt it also wanted to take advantage of the enthusiasm generated by the Communist victory in Kerala to impose its authority on the provinces, and to encourage all Communists to adhere to the peaceful transition to socialism.

With the exception of the Bombay Congress (1943), the Party had only convened congresses when it was constrained to do so by circumstances. The Ranadive group was at the origin of the Calcutta Congress (1948). The Second World War and the period 1948-50 when the Party was engaged in an insurrection explain the lack of regularity of these meetings. Once legalised, the CPI waited for 1953 before convening the Madurai Congress. The Palghat Congress was organised following the impossibility of reconciling the positions of the 'right' and the 'left'. The congresses, it is true, offered the groupings the opportunity to confront each other. Compromises were difficult; this explains the Centre's wish to avoid multiplying such meetings.

⁴⁰This figure had doubtless been increased, since the CPI had a membership of 100,606 in 1957 (CPI 1961, p. 4).

path or of the possibilities of a peaceful transition to socialism. The Party, far from adhering to the bourgeois ideology, intended to engage “the battle for power and the radical social transformation”, hence the necessary respect for democratic centralism (ibid, p. 1, p. 3). Ghosh hinted that the independence of August 15th, 1947 represented a great victory for India and a great defeat for imperialism. The bourgeoisie, which had led the independence movement, continued to preside over the destinies of the country. However, the CPI was now a major force in political life; it was the main opposition party in West Bengal and Andhra, and lead the government in Kerala. Thus, the conditions were more and more favourable to the establishment of proletarian hegemony. The optimism was, it is true, *de rigueur*, since the Party was happy to believe that the electoral results of Kerala testified to the radicalisation of the people. It also wanted to believe that it had acquired, after years of struggle, great prestige. It acknowledged, however, that the dissensions within its ranks were such that it was more by luck than judgment that it had managed to project a public image of unity during the general election.

The *Resolution on the Current Political Situation*, presented at the Amritsar, devoted its first pages to strengthening the peace forces that opposed the “dangerous conspiracies of the imperialist powers” (Fic 1969, p. 341). It welcomed the peaceful policy and the spectacular scientific advances of the Soviet Union. The unity of the Socialist camp had been strengthened, while India had played a “positive and vital” role “in changing the alignment of world forces” (ibid). The CPI was concerned about the importance of the United States’ contribution to the Second Plan, the White House aiming to “create an atmosphere favourable to its machinations” (ibid, p. 342). The Party did not, however, question its support for the government’s foreign policy, as it believed that India had accepted the US loans to cope with the current economic crisis.

The Party recalled that it continued to adhere to the criticisms it had made following the publication of Second Plan. It analysed the objectives of the plan “in a democratic way”, denouncing the designs of ‘the reaction’, and insisting on the necessity of nationalising the major banks and the trade in cereals (CPI 1958.c in CPI 1958.d, p. 5, p. 7). It reiterated its willingness to lead the struggles of the workers, the peasants and the middle class. Despite the Praja Socialist Party (Socialist People’s Party, PSP) which aimed at keeping the masses divided, it intended to unite the democratic forces and promote the unity of the left. It proposed to adopt “a friendly and fraternal attitude” towards independent progressive forces – the majority of whom were former Congress members who enjoyed considerable ascendancy (CPI 1958.c in CPI 1958.d, p. 11).

The radicalisation of the masses would have an impact on the Congress. Already some congressmen were indignant about the growing grip of landowners and reactionaries on the Congress, and blamed the decline in the values to which this Party had been a time attached. They also worried about the ascendancy of the communalist parties and the feudal ‘reaction’. As a result, the Communists had to engage in an ideological struggle that would be based on Marxism-Leninism and proletarian internationalism, because the Indians, still “under the influence of bourgeois, petty-bourgeois and feudal ideologies”, did not understand the need to establish socialism (CPI 1958.c in CPI 1958.d, p. 11-12).

5.4 First Sino-Indian clash: the Tibetan question

Chi Hsi-Hu believes that *Panch Shila*, to which India and China first committed themselves on April 29, 1954, probably could not survive for long beyond its five years of existence given the sharp turn to

the left “ that China took in 1958 “to make a shortened path to Communism” (Hsi-Hu 1972, p. 57). The author, after this reference to the great leap forward that the CPC launched on August 23rd, 1958, attests:

“This radicalisation of the Chinese revolution or the acceleration of the history desired by the Peking’s leaders to resolve certain contradictions both internally and externally would no doubt sooner or later have superseded the purely idealistic policy of the Hindi Chini Bhai Bhai [Indians and Chinese are brothers]” (ibid).

Chi Hsi-Hu added that “the fateful irony was that the mortal blow to *Panch Sheela* emanated from what had been, five years earlier, the fertile ground” for its elaboration – Tibet.

As they came to power, the Chinese Communists declared their intention to re-establish their country’s influence in Tibet. The Manchu Emperors had been, throughout the nineteenth century, suzerains of the Dalai Lama. They were represented by an Imperial Resident, but Lhasa, the capital of Tibet, decided on its internal affairs. At the fall of the Manchu dynasty (1911), Tibet had proclaimed its independence. The Beijing authorities had continued to consider it a vassal, but they were too weak to re-impose their authority in Tibet. With the end of the Kuomintang regime, Lhasa faced an alternative: to defend itself militarily, or to negotiate a certain autonomy. In July 1949, they expelled the Mission of the Chinese Nationalist Government in the hope of appeasing their neighbour. In October 1950, the Chinese army occupied Chamdo, the main city of Eastern Tibet; on November 10th, it invited the people to help it ‘liberate’ Tibet by peaceful means; the following month the Dalai Lama left Lhasa for Yatung – near the Indian border. The circumstances of the signing of the Sino-Tibetan Agreement of May 23rd, 1951, remain unclear. Four Tibetan representatives, apparently mandated by their government, had gone to Beijing. There was in that city a large number of Tibetans from Chamdo, of whom Ngapo Shape took the lead, but it is unclear whether their government had tasked them with negotiating with China. Shape and three of Tibet’s four representatives signed a treaty that allowed Tibet’s “peaceful liberation” (The National Archives 1959.b). This text stipulated that Tibet rejoined “the great family of the motherland – the People’s Republic of China” (ibid). The Beijing authorities defined Tibet’s foreign policy and stationed troops in this region; Lhasa formed the government and defined its domestic policy. China pledged to leave unchanged the Tibetan political system and not to curtail the status and prerogatives enjoyed by the Dalai Lama. It would allow former Chinese representatives, who had been pro-imperialist or supporters of the Kuomintang, to retain their posts if they renounced such ties. Lastly, it would establish in Tibet an Administrative and Military Committee and a Military Area Headquarters to ensure compliance with the Agreement.

The Agreement was disputed because it was suspected that the Tibetan representatives had signed it under duress. Ngapo Shape had apparently been captured or had surrendered to the Chinese army. However, the Dalai Lama returned to Lhasa on August 17, 1951, and in October he sent a telegram to Mao Zedong approving the Agreement. The Tibetan army was, it is true, insignificant; lamas and nobility were divided; Kam province (southeast of Tibet) was in revolt against Lhasa; and the Dalai Lama was only seventeen years old.

The Peking government quickly put an end to the March 1959 revolt, which according to its reading – was being fought for by the “reactionary clique” of the highest social stratum (Varkey 1972, p. 50). New Delhi adopted a reserved attitude. Nehru stated, in front of the Parliament, that it was “embarrassing to discuss events happening in a neighbouring country” (ibid). Several Indian leaders nevertheless felt sympathy for the Tibetans. The socialist leader Jayaprakash Narayan claimed that Tibet was the victim of a new form of imperialism, “much more dangerous than the old one”; he blamed

Chinese aggression and accused Beijing of fostering expansionist designs (ibid). A leader of the PSP, N.G. Goray, said:

“What we are witnessing today in Tibet is a planned annihilation of a simple people and their personality; a repetition of what happened in Hungary three years back” (ibid).

Goray condemned the reserved attitude of the Indian government, while the non-Communist parties set up Tibetan aid committees.

India, which had inherited the rights and obligations of the British Empire over Tibet, had lost them when it signed the treaty of April 29, 1954. This text contained a reference to the “Tibetan region of China” (The National Archives 1959.c, p. 1-2). New Delhi had recognised sovereignty rather than Chinese suzerainty over Tibet. It could not intervene in Tibet in 1959, acknowledge that the Dalai Lama and his advisers formed the Tibet government in exile, or support their wish to appeal to UN arbitration. The United Nations had discussed the Tibet issue after the signing of the Agreement. It felt that this region had full control over its internal affairs and maintained direct relations with other countries. Under Article 35 of the United Nations Charter, Tibet was a State. But since it is very likely the Dalai Lama signed the treaty, two questions arose: was Tibet still an independent state? Did the Dalai Lama and his advisers form a government in exile? The publication of a dispatch from the China News Agency on March 29, 1959, provoked Indian outrage.

“New China described some of the speeches of the Indian Parliament on the situation in Tibet as “rude and unseemly” and claimed that the Khampa tribes’ revolt had been controlled from the Indian town of Kalimpong in the northern West Bengal... With the exception of the Communist Party, all Indian political parties sided with Nehru when he issued a categorical denial as to the subversive role of Kalimpong alleged by the China New Agency; he also emphasised that the Indian Parliament was entitled to discuss whichever issues it saw fit” (Hsi-Hu 1972, p. 58).

Sino-Indian relations deteriorated further after the Dalai Lama fled Tibet at the end of March and India granted him political asylum. Jawaharlal Nehru informed Parliament that the ‘Living God’ had taken refuge in India voluntarily, contrary to Beijing’s assertions. On April 5, during a press conference, he declared that his government, in dealing with the Tibetan issue, took into account three factors: the security of the subcontinent, the desire to maintain friendly relations with Beijing, and the “Indians’ strong sensitivities towards Tibetan developments” (ibid).

On May 6, the People’s Daily and Red Flag published an article entitled *The Revolution in Tibet and Nehru’s Philosophy* (Peking Review 1959). The Beijing authorities did not give up the distinction they made between two currents of the Indian bourgeoisie, one progressive led by Nehru, and the other reactionary. But they judged that the Soviet evaluation of the India bourgeoisie failed to take into account the existence of classes. According to them, the Indian reactionaries maintained innumerable links with foreign capital, and were in great need of external expansion. In addition, the bourgeois capitalists were trying to defend the legacy of the British colonizer. Nehru, meanwhile, had tried to limit the demands of the expansionists, and was sincere in his desire to preserve friendship with China. However, he had no “scientific vision of history”, and had been unwittingly instigated by the imperialist alliance – which included the United States, the U.K. and the Indian reactionary parties – to play “an important role” in Tibetan events (Varkey 1972, p. 53). Nor had he been able to grasp the counter-revolutionary character of the Khampa revolt and supported it, which was “a very deplorable error” (ibid). However, the “great Indian people” did not approve of the attitude of his government (ibid). China had never intervened in Indian affairs, only reacting to intolerable provocations.

In reality, more and more Indians supported the Tibetan cause. By the end of May, the spirit of *Hindi Chini bhai bhai* was dead. The CPI was in a dilemma: should it support the Nehru government or the Chou En-lai government? Should it rely on the propaganda of the Indian bourgeoisie or on the Chinese theses? The Party first chose to side with the Beijing authorities as the Kremlin, at least initially, supported them. It only took position on March 31, 1959; its Secretariat⁴¹ made a statement in which it commended the “honest people” who had been extremely distressed by the Tibetan events (CPI 1959.a in CPI 1963, p. 1). Reactionaries and feudal lords controlling bonded labour had taken advantage of Tibet’s status to inflict great suffering on the Tibetan people. They had opposed the implementation of agrarian reform and any other progressive measures. However, they could not have fomented “a reactionary rebellion” without the US help (ibid). India should rejoice that China was able to put an end to imperialist intrigues, for it was itself a victim of it in Kashmir or on its borders with Pakistan (ibid). The Secretariat seemed to insinuate that the subcontinent could have been threatened by the imperialist plot in Tibet. It observed that India had always considered that Tibet was part of China. Moreover, Beijing and New Delhi, by signing the agreement of April 29, 1954, had affirmed their attachment to the principle of strict neutrality and non-interference into each other’s internal affairs. Consequently, India should not allow its territory to be used to commit acts prejudicial to its neighbour. China had brought the rebel command post of Kalimpong to the Nehru government’s attention. The Secretariat

⁴¹At its Amritsar Congress, the Party adopted a new constitution (CPI 1958.a) which modified its institutions, giving birth to the National Council, the Central Executive Committee (CEC) and the National or Central Secretariat. Congresses appointed members of the National Council (whose number was not to exceed 101) from a list of candidates. The National Council represented the highest authority between congresses; it ensured respect for the constitution and made sure that decisions adopted during these meetings were implemented. It nominated – from among its membership – the members of the Central Executive Committee (CEC) who were up to 25 in number. The General Secretary (who was to execute decisions taken by the governing bodies) and the secretaries (who formed a Secretariat of 6-8 members) were chosen among the CEC.

The National Council met every six months, as well as when a third of its members so requested; the CEC met once every two months. It convened the National Council and prepared the reports and resolutions which the latter examined; it determined the Communist parliamentary and national action; moreover, it defined the relations the CPI maintained with ‘fraternal parties’. The National Council convened a congress every two years. This gathering examined the reports on the policy and organisation of the CPI elaborated by the National Council, revised the Communist program and constitution when necessary, and debated the reports of the Central Control Commission. The members of this Commission were elected during congress at the proposal of the National Council. Like the National Council, the Commission appointed its own president, who was an *ex officio* member of the CEC, while its members took part in meetings of the National Council.

Regional institutions were modelled on national institutions. The Provincial or State Conference nominated delegates to represent it at the National Congress, the Provincial Council and the Provincial Control Commission. It designated a Provincial Executive Committee of up to 25 members and a Secretariat of 7 to 9 members. This latter body met once every four months, as well as when a third of its members so requested.

One may wonder whether the reform of the Party’s institutions served a useful purpose. Did the CPI seek to differentiate itself from the two ‘big brothers’? In any case, the Amritsar Congress, in establishing the National Council, undoubtedly sought to give all the Communist leaders an honorary post, and to create an organ in which they expressed themselves freely, thus reining in both left sectarianism and right-wing reformism. As for the National Secretariat, it included eight members: Ghosh (who remained General Secretary), Z.A. Ahmed, Basavapunniah, Dange, Gopalan, Bhupesh Gupta, Joshi and Ranadive (Gupta 1958, p. 1). Namboodiripad was not elected to this organ, probably because he wanted to devote himself to Kerala. This body seemed destined to be dysfunctional, because the three opposing views were represented. However, the members of the Secretariat showed their willingness to work together in deciding that no decision would be taken if the quorum of five was not met.

The Secretariat was divided into sub-committees. Ghosh, Bhupesh Gupta, Joshi and Ranadive were responsible for propaganda and agitation (Ibid, p. 2). The editorial board of *New Age* brought together Ghosh, Bhupesh Gupta and Joshi. Basavapunniah, Dange, Ghosh and Ranadive were in charge of Marxist-Leninist education (ibid). The finances were entrusted to Z.A. Ahmed, Dange, and Ghate who remained treasurer of the Party (ibid). Dange also directed People’s Publishing House and the trade-union activities of the Party (CPI 1958.e).

concluded its analysis by praising China for guiding the Tibetan people, earlier subjected to medieval obscurantism, towards prosperity and equality.

In mid-April, the CPI analysis became more nuanced. Its leaders refrained themselves from any reference to Kalimpong, probably because they had noticed “that the Soviet press, after having supported Beijing on this point during the first days of the crisis, limited... its attacks to the Tibetan reactionaries”, “western imperialists” and Chiang Kai-shek (Hsi-Hu 1972, p. 60). In May, it was the Central Executive Committee’s turn to take a position. It noted that the latest Tibetan events had undermined the Sino-Indian friendship whose role in defending peace, Asian solidarity and the struggle against colonialism and imperialism was undeniable (CPI 1959.b in CPI 1963, p. 3). A handful of feudal lords and fanatical lamas had organised a rebellion “in the Tibetan region of the People’s Republic of China” to “perpetuate brutal oppression and tyranny” (ibid). They refused to the Tibetan people “the light of modern civilisation”, confining them to archaism, servitude and indescribable misery (CPI 1959.b in CPI 1963, p. 3-4). Assisted materially by imperialism, they had pushed the Lhasa government to override the broad prerogatives it enjoyed, and fomented a rebellion in violation of the 1951 Agreement.

The CEC condemned anti-Communist parties such as the PSP, the Jana Sangh and the Hindu Mahasabha, which advocated Tibetan independence and urged New Delhi to interfere in Chinese internal affairs. These political parties also demanded that the instigators of the revolt who had taken refuge in India be allowed to act as a government in exile from Tibet, and to carry out their so-called struggle for independence. They were actually trying to ruin India’s non-aligned foreign policy. The Central Executive Committee regretted that Pandit Nehru took positions that went against *Panch Shila*. It blamed the manoeuvres of imperialism aimed at breaking the Sino-Indian friendship, and underplayed the bilateral antagonism that was merely a controversy between two friends. This dispute could be easily resolved by the strict application of one of *Panch Shila*’s principles: peaceful coexistence. The national patriotic forces therefore had a major role to play in defending the restoring of good relations between the two countries and the non-aligned Indian foreign policy.

The argument of the CEC was not without danger, because it still seemed to side with a foreign power: China. It thus risked harming the image of a national party the CPI had patiently built up. It is true that the Party was of the opinion that nationalism did not imply blind adherence to an ‘erroneous’ bourgeois position.

5.5. Ajoy Ghosh, the defence of the Soviet theses and the Indian nation

The years 1959-1964 were rich in events: apart from the Tibetan revolt and the aggravation of the Sino-Soviet ideological conflict, the border dispute between India and China broke out after the incident, on August 7th, 1959, of Khinzemane (located in Ladakh – in the western area of the McMahon border). The antagonism between the left wing of the CPI, in favour of unconditional support for China, and the right wing, which advocated the adoption of a neutral or even pro-Indian stance, worsened. The Congress of Vijayawada (Andhra Pradesh), which took place from April 7 to 16, 1961, found a new compromise between the CPI’s groupings which was, however, called into question by the outbreak of the Sino-Indian war on October 20th, 1962. A split appeared inevitable, especially since Dange seemed to want to reign supreme.

On June 8th, 1960, during the Council of the World Federation of Trade Unions in Beijing, Liu Chang-sheng, Vice President of the Chinese Trade Union Federation, declared:

“It is wrong to believe that war can be eliminated forever as long as imperialism exists. Spreading such illusions... will lead to unfortunate consequences and in fact, we can already see these” (Fontaine 1983, p. 386-387).

5.5.1. The CPI and the Bucharest Conference (June 21st-26th, 1960)

On June 21st, 1960, at the opening of the Third Congress of the Romanian Workers’ Party in Bucharest, the General Secretary of the CPSU Khrushchev stated that “Lenin’s theses” on imperialism were “still valid”; they had nonetheless been “formulated... decades ago”; it was therefore necessary to look at “the changes in the balance of power of world forces” (ibid). No socialist country had so far dared to assert that Leninism was out of date. The following day, Peng-Chen, Chinese representative and also mayor of Beijing, insisted on the “aggressive and rapacious nature of imperialism”; US imperialism was the enemy of world peace (ibid). Khrushchev replied by repeating, in a private session, the themes mentioned in a newsletter that his delegation had communicated to the various representations the day before. He denounced the CPC’s folly and Trotskyism, accusing it of “wanting to start a war” (ibid). For *People’s Daily* dated February 27, 1963, someone made “a sign with his wand”: the Chinese CPC was “surrounded on all sides and subjected to a violent surprise attack”; only the Albanian delegation “categorically defended” the Chinese Party (ibid, p. 387).

On June 26th, the Chinese gave all the delegations a statement in which they accused Khrushchev of having, during the Conference, “completely violated the principle of the settlement of common problems by consultation between brother parties”, adopting a “patriarchal”, “arbitrary and despotic” attitude (ibid). “Divergences over a series of fundamental principles of Marxism-Leninism” pitted the CPC against the CPSU. However, such disagreements had a “partial character” that a friendly discussion would eliminate. The “echoes of this quarrel” spread quickly (ibid), but the *Communiqué of the Communist Parties and the Workers’ Parties* issued at the end of the Conference made no mention of it.

5.5.2. Ajoy Ghosh’s analysis

In a note dated September 3rd, 1960, Ajoy Ghosh presented the essence of a speech he delivered to the Central Executive Committee on August 16th (Ghosh 1960 in CPI 1960). He criticised the Indian Communists who did not take a stand in the Sino-Soviet controversy, arguing that the CPI should focus on its own tasks and consolidate its unity. Yet the Sino-Soviet conflict was of vital importance to the International Communist movement; it was linked to the question of the preservation of peace, the forms of transition to socialism, the attitude to adopt towards the governments presided over by the Afro-Asian national bourgeoisie, the unity of trade unions and mass organisations, and finally the principles which governed relations between fraternal parties. Ghosh was of the opinion that all Communist parties should support the CPSU against the CPC. He was convinced that China, under cover of the struggle against Yugoslav revisionism, had engaged in “an ideological war” on some major conclusions of the Twentieth and Twenty-First Congress of the CPSU as well as of the *Communiqué of Communist Parties and Workers’ Parties* (Ghosh 1960 in CPI 1960, p. 2). He invited the CPI to examine the Soviet and Chinese positions before taking any decision.

The General Secretary tried to minimise his condemnation of China. He noted that “several Western Communist parties” had, in the past, hesitated to give unconditional support to the liberation movements of colonized peoples; they were afraid of alienating the sympathy of supporters of peace who were not in favour of the eradication of colonialism (Ghosh 1960 in CPI 1960, p. 3). The CPC, in contrast, had taken a firm stand: it had helped the Movement for Peace to correct its position, defending the cause of

the Afro-Asian countries. Ghosh quoted excerpts from the Chinese article *Long Live Leninism* (Foreign Languages Press Peking 1960), published shortly after the withdrawal of Soviet technicians from China. This document emphasised the inevitability of war as long as imperialism existed. It stressed that the imperialist system was the source of modern wars. Marxism-Leninism should not sink “into the quagmire of pacifism” (Ghosh 1960 in CPI 1960, p. 4). The world would be freed from the threat of war only after the victory of the revolution. The General Secretary expressed his indignation at the “puerile and dogmatic arguments” used by Beijing to prove the inevitability of war (Ghosh 1960 in CPI 1960, p. 7). The nature of imperialism had not changed, but the course of events since the Second World War was radically different from that of the interwar period: world democratic forces were now able to oppose imperialist designs.

The Chinese delegation, during the meeting of the Peace Council of Stockholm – July 9 to 11, 1960 – had presented a list of peace-loving countries that omitted the governments of the nations of Asia and Africa, even those whose foreign policies were independent. It had even pointed out to the CPI’s delegation that the national bourgeoisie had a “reactionary side to it” (ibid, p. 8). It was in its approach towards India that the new Chinese analysis had found its “most devastating expression” (ibid). The role of New Delhi during the “Tibetan reactionary revolt” was unforgivable (ibid). However, the subsequent Chinese position, especially on the border issue, was wrong: it was not what was to be expected of a socialist state.

India and China belonged to the peace camp; the dispute between them was quite different from the conflicts between imperialist countries. Ghosh reminded the CPC of its duty towards the CPI: by strengthening its ties with developing countries, the socialist world was helping their ‘democratic forces’ fight ‘the reaction’ and ‘anti-popular’ politics of their government. China was wrong to proclaim that if it adopted a conciliatory attitude, the Nehru government would move closer to imperialism. Its strategy endangered India and the socialist camp. It weakened the democratic movement and the CPI, strengthened the Right’s hold on the Congress and the government, and encouraged the assertion of the far right. The Indian ruling class could thus take advantage of the Chinese position to plunge the masses into confusion and disrupt popular struggles. The General Secretary condemned the Communist Party of China, which sought to minimise the transformation of the global scene since 1917, virtually negating the possibility of new forms of transition to socialism. He praised the USSR: Indian rancour against China would have spread to the entire socialist bloc if the Kremlin had supported Beijing.

6. The circumstances of the split

6.1. Choosing a successor to Ajoy Kumar Ghosh

6.1.1. The CPI and the Third General Election of 1962

As of in 1957 general election, the CPI obtained 29 seats in the *Lok Sabha* in 1962, but its percentage of the vote fell slightly from 10.5% to 10% (Varkey 1972, p. 167). The death of Ajoy Ghosh on January 13, 1962 did not prevent the relative success of Communist groups in many provinces, which showed their autonomy from the Centre. The CPI consolidated its position where its ‘left’ was the most influential, particularly in West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh; it improved its position in Bihar, Punjab, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh; it suffered setbacks in Assam, Madhya Pradesh, Madras State and Maharashtra – where Dange was not re-elected.

The election results of the CPI in 1957 and 1962 (ibid, p. 166; Lal 1972, p. 156)

State(s)	1957		1962	
	No. of seats	%age	No. of seats	%age
Andhra	35	29.45	51	19.31
Assam	4	7.7		6.29
Bihar	7	5.1	12	6.34
West Bengal	46	18.1	50	25.3
Gujarat				0.18
Kerala	60	35.28	26	36.8
Madhya Pradesh	2	1.4	1	2.3
Madras	4	7.4	2	7.75
Maharashtra	19	6.4	6	6
Mysore	1	2.9	3	2.28
Orissa	9	8.5	4	8.37
Punjab	6	14.7	9	7.14
Rajasthan	1	3	5	5.4
Tamil Nadu	2	10.7	2	10.3
Uttar Pradesh	9	3.8	14	5.40

The general election allowed the ‘right’ and ‘left’ to gauge their level of support, and to attempt to seize the post of general secretary. The Indian Communists do not appear to have sought arbitration from Moscow: they intended to decide the future of their movement alone. The Kremlin, for its part, may have thought the CPI would be able to nominate a successor to Ghosh; most probably, it focused its attention on more important issues.

6.1.2. The analysis of the French Embassy in New Delhi

On April 5, 1962, the French Embassy in New Delhi noted that the CPI leaders had decided to “live with the coexistence of antagonistic groups” (Archives du Quai d’Orsay 1962, p. 1). The ‘right’ and the ‘left’ seemed to have “concluded that it was impossible to impose the candidate of their choice” – S.A. Dange for the former and Bhupesh Gupta for the latter – as General Secretary, or “to put a common minimum program” (ibid, p. 1-2). Thus, the CEC proposed to submit to the National Council, set to meet on April 23, “a transactional solution that had already been advanced without success” (ibid). Dange would become president and Namboodiripad general secretary, unless it was Bhupesh Gupta, “more directly representing the extremists” (ibid, p. 2). Communist leaders

“had to resort to a formula of coexistence similar to that which for some time past, and probably for a while to come, has been regulating the relations between Beijing and Moscow. They reject any reconciliation but still take care not to aggravate the split and especially to avoid making it all too obvious” (ibid).

The French Embassy added that:

“The recommended arrangement would reflect a success of the pro-Chinese group⁴² which although in minority, with probably only a third of the votes in the National Council, have managed – at least for the moment – to avoid that the CPI be led by a supporter of Khrushchevian politics” (ibid, p. 3-4).

French diplomacy reckoned the Party was divided into three groups of equal importance: the Maoist group led by Namboodiripad, the “pro-Soviet group following Mr. Dange” and the pro-Soviet group loyal to P.C. Joshi who continued to be the editor of *New Age* (ibid, p. 4).

6.1.3. The account of P.C. Joshi

Here we need to report on the – partisan – narrative of Puran Chand Joshi about the negotiations that were to bring about a new direction (Joshi 1962.b in Joshi 1962.a). The former General Secretary noted that the election results and the lack of a functioning central leadership had triggered a major crisis. The Secretariat still refused to convene the Central Executive Committee or the National Council, attributing this to organisational difficulties. Moreover, it had waited two weeks after the publication of the election results before meeting. The Central Executive Committee, however, had to give directives to those who had been elected to seats in the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha – which were about to hold their first session, to discuss the decisions of the Twenty-Second Congress of the CPSU⁴³ and national issues – including the results of the polls, the definition of the CPI programme and the election of a General Secretary, finally to contribute to the renewal of the Sino-Indian negotiation process. It was also a question of reviving the Centre: between the Vijayawada Congress (April 7-16 1961) and the National

⁴²The government and the Indian non-Communist press described the ‘left’ as pro-Chinese because of its refusal to condemn China which India, following the border dispute, accused of aggression.

⁴³At the Twenty-Second Congress of the CPSU (October 17th-31st, 1961) – entitled “Congress of builders of Communism” – the USSR adopted a program in which it defined the political and economic modalities of the establishment of Communism, as well as the society and the ‘new man’ it intended to usher into being over a period of twenty years. The principle of ‘to each according to his work’ would cede its place to that of ‘to each according to his needs’. The intervention of the state – which would become an ‘organisation of the people’ – and the CP – which would be the People’s Party – was essential to the development of society: the ‘new man’ would not need constraining institutions to contribute to the development of society.

The Twenty-Second Congress – to everyone’s surprise – resumed the examination of the cult of the personality. On October 27th, 1961, Khrushchev informed the Soviet delegates and the representatives of the Communist and Workers’ Parties that it was time to establish the truth about Stalin’s ‘crimes’. He stated that this leader had not only undermined the Party but all groups of society; he proposed the construction of a memorial to the victims, and demanded the removal of the remains of Stalin from the mausoleum dedicated to Lenin. However, the resolution dealing with Stalinist crimes – drafted by the 91-member Commission and adopted on the evening of October 31th – was cautious. It did not endorse the idea of a monument to the victims of Stalinism; to the word ‘crimes’, it preferred the terms ‘faults’ and ‘deviations’. Finally – unlike Khrushchev for whom it was necessary to shed light on the whole of Stalin’s ‘reign’, the resolution pointed out that the CPSU had informed “the people” of “the whole truth about the abuses” committed during the period of the personality cult (Carrère d’Encausse 1984, p. 128).

The Moscow initiative increased the antagonism which opposed the Soviet and Chinese CPs, especially since Khrushchev portrayed “the Albanians and those who supported them” as “conservative sectarians” and “dangerous leftists”, and reproached them with being locked up “in a nationalist dream foreign to Communism” (ibid, p. 130-131). By mobilising his supporters against a small isolated country, the Soviet leader sought the CPC’s condemnation and aimed to strengthen the authority of the CPSU over the international Communist movement. Chou En-lai, leader of the Chinese delegation, blamed the Soviet position on two grounds: its non-compliance with the norms that governed relations between “brother parties” and with the method of conflict resolution defined by the Conference of the Eighty-One Communist and Workers’ Parties (November 1960) (Statement of Communist Movement 1960), which had in particular recommended members of the international movement not to make their divisions public. Khrushchev had broken this rule since the Twenty-Second Congress brought together more than six thousand representatives. His attacks on Albania, according to the Chinese premier, were aimed at “imposing revisionist theses” that justified the Soviet deviations (ibid, p. 131).

Council of Bangalore (June 18-22, 1961), Ghosh had led the Party alone; each provincial section had interpreted the decisions made in Vijayawada as it saw fit. Where the left wing was the majority, it had deliberately re-interpreted the decisions of the Congress. Its opponents protested in vain to the General Secretary, but the latter was reluctant to “upset the leaders of the left for fear they would force him to make firm decisions” (Joshi 1962.b in Joshi 1962.a, p. 1). As for the Centre, set up in Bangalore following a compromise between the ‘left’ and the ‘centre’, it had practically not functioned; when it did, it took decisions favourable to the ‘left’. Joshi did not indicate what he meant by ‘Centre’, but underlined that the members of the Secretariat – between the Bangalore National Council and the elections – had never met, each focusing on his own constituency.

Following the death of Ajoy Kumar Ghosh, most of the leaders of the ‘left’ rushed to Delhi on the pretext of attending his funeral. They wanted, in fact, to establish a plan of action: they had met secretly, had raised money and defined the tactics they would apply at the end of the elections. They intended to elect Bhupesh Gupta as General Secretary. Joshi reported that their plan failed because of “the necessary threat” – probably that of the ‘right’ (Joshi 1962.b in Joshi 1962.a, p. 2). Joshi himself had spoken at length with Adhikari and Dange: he had suggested to them to mobilise a majority – which would not be based on an ideological and political compromise – against the ‘left’, in order to compel the latter to submit to an ideological debate based on the conclusions of the Twenty-Second Congress (Joshi 1962.b in Joshi 1962.a, p. 2, p. 5). He wanted to make the Dange group aware of the need to respect the principles and interests of the CPI. He urged the grassroots to demand the convening of a congress if the ‘left’ and the ‘centre’ seized power. He defined a platform in three parts which would unite “all honest comrades”; the latter would discuss the decisions of the Twenty-Second Congress of the CPSU – to remove ideological confusion – and adopt them (Joshi 1962.b in Joshi 1962.a, p. 5). Cadres who had rebelled against the Soviet condemnation of Albania or “the transfer” of Stalin’s body would travel to Moscow to study the facts and talk to leaders of the CPSU (*ibid*). Finally the Party, having examined the draft program of Adhikari, Dange and Joshi (Adhikari, Dange, Joshi 1961), would vote a resolution in which it would emphasise that this text, contrary to the program of Bhupesh Gupta and P. Ramamurti (Gupta, Ramamurti 1961), was in accordance with the Statement of Communist Movement (International Communist Movement 1960), and made a correct Marxist-Leninist analysis of the Indian reality. The ‘right’ would gain the majority in the next congress through a struggle based on the principles of purification and unification of the Party. Already the ‘left’ and the ‘centre’ were discredited: the Twenty-Second Congress had denounced ‘leftist dogmatism’; ‘political centrism’ had suffered a serious setback during the general election; this was also the case with ‘leftist opportunism’ in Punjab, Tamil Nadu and Calcutta, and ‘rightist opportunism’ in Maharashtra (especially in Bombay).

Moreover, the former General Secretary insisted on the need to define the causes of the malfunctioning of the CPI; he did not, however, question the consequences of the division of the post occupied by Ghosh between a president who would be the spokesman of the Party and a general secretary who would be “the head of the organisation” – hence of the CPI (Joshi 1962.b in Joshi 1962.a, p. 2). He advocated for the establishment of departments with great powers, which would control the work of the president and the general secretary. These bodies would be headed by “two energetic comrades” – such as N.K. Krishnan, Rajeshwara Rao or Bhowani Sen – who would be responsible to the General Secretary (*ibid*). The former General Secretary reserved for himself the leadership of the propaganda department which he hoped would be a powerful organ. Indrajit Gupta or N.K. Krishnan would be general secretary of the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) and lead the trade union department; Bhowani Sen and Romesh Chandra would head the departments overseeing peasant and international affairs respectively.

Joshi took the opportunity to condemn Dange: the latter wanted to enjoy the same prerogatives as Ghosh, because he wanted to play the so-called ‘centrist role’ the former General Secretary had assumed (ibid). His prestige had been greatly affected by the electoral debacle of the Marathi Communists; he had decided to ally himself with the ‘left’ on the condition that it would no longer support Ranadive’s candidacy for the Secretariat (Joshi 1962.b in Joshi 1962.a, p. 3). Dange also wished that Basavapunniah, Joshi and Sundarayya be cast aside. As for the ‘left’, its poor electoral results in Punjab, Tamil Nadu and especially Calcutta had prompted it to move closer to Dange in order to have more seats in the Secretariat.

6.2. The Indian Communist Party at the crossroads

6.2.1. A compromise

After long negotiations, the National Council, meeting from June 26th to July 3rd, 1962, appointed a Secretariat of nine members which would meet once a month. In addition to Z.A. Ahmed, Jyoti Basu, P. Sundarayya and H.K. Surjeet, it had five permanent members of the Centre: Dange, Bhupesh Gupta, Namboodiripad, Govindan Nair and Yogendra Sharma (CPI 1962.a, p. 3). Basavapunniah, Gopalan, Joshi and Ranadive lost their position. The Council foresaw the renewal of secretaries by pledging to grant positions to Vasudevan Nair, Indrajit Gupta, Renu Chakravartty and Indradeep Sinha (Joshi.b 1962 in Joshi 1962, ibid).

The Secretariat was divided into three groups of equal importance. Gupta, Sundarayya and Surjeet were members of the ‘left’; Ahmed, Dange and Sharma belonged to the ‘right’; Basu, Nair and Namboodiripad – although closer to the positions of the ‘left’ than those of the ‘right’ – represented the ‘centre’. As for the membership of the CEC, it was increased in order – officially – to restore the unity of the Party: it included six additional members, three of which belonged to the ‘left’ and three to the ‘right’.

The CPI declared that the election of the new leadership had been unanimous. In reality, the elections were preceded by “four days of intense bargaining” which left a great deal of bitterness within the Party (Varkey 1972, p. 157). Members of the Madhya Pradesh Council – such as L.R. Khandker, Secretary of this provincial section, and Homi Daji – protested against the compromise that had led to the amendment of the Constitution and the recomposition of the Secretariat (Khandker 1962, p. 3), with Dange elected to the post of president and Namboodiripad to that of general secretary. Daji, for example, declared:

“This was the price exacted by some leaders to have their men to the Sectt. and the CEC in large numbers” (ibid).

The Madhya Pradesh Council, meeting from June 2nd to 4th, 1962, invited Govindan Nair, traveling to Bhopal, to explain the Centre’s position “without concealing anything” from what everyone knew (ibid, p. 2-3). The Kerala leader pointed out that no one was unaware that the CP functioned “like two parties”; he noted that just as there were “two international opinions” on major problems, there were “two opinions in all Communist Parties” (ibid). Referring to the case of the CPI, Nair stated:

“We are divided politically, ideologically... We should not underestimate the depth of the crisis in our Party. Somehow, we have always been missing the main problems that have confronted the Party from time to time” (ibid, p. 3).

6.2.2. A harsh Chinese analysis of India

It is worth pointing out, once again, the irreconcilability of the Soviet and Chinese analyses of India under Congress rule. Chi Hsi Hu noted that:

“The class structure of Indian society is probably the only one in the Third World for which the Chinese have consented to make an effort of reflection. This formidable privilege granted to India comes obviously from the fact that, since the Tibetan revolt and the Sino-Indian border conflict of 1959, the Chinese theorists, to satisfy the ideological requirements of the moment, tried to prove the fundamentally reactionary character of the Government of New Delhi. In their analyses of Indian society, they disagreed with Soviet specialists, whether about the impact of agrarian reform or the role of the bourgeoisie or the nature of state capitalism” (Hsi-Hu 1972, p. 72).

Until the border conflict, China merely noted that the Indian land reform had allowed the introduction of capitalism in the rural world. However, it insisted on the proletarianization of the peasantry and the aggravation of class contradictions. It never accepted the Soviet analysis according to which the progressive introduction of the capitalist system in the countryside had weakened feudalism. According to the reading it made, the big landowners of the subcontinent, when they consented to such a path, did not renounce privileges that derived from a feudal social stratification.

China was convinced that the proletariat was the only class able to preside over a real agrarian revolution. The bourgeoisie could only adopt reforms aimed at curbing peasant dissatisfaction, resorting to repression when the landowners called for help. Beijing did not subscribe to the idea of a “gradual disappearance of feudal and semi-feudal exploitation as a result of the Indian Government’s acquisition of land property” (ibid, p. 74). The big landowners constituted “the most reactionary class” of their society: they circumvented the law, monopolising the land and “the most important posts in the governments” of the subcontinent; they wanted to maintain the caste system, especially the status of untouchable, and intensify the exploitation of the peasantry (ibid). The agrarian reform had given birth to a class of rich peasants who were “at the same time traders, usurers and collectors of rents in the service of the feudal lords” (ibid, p. 75). It had also led the emergence of a class of smaller landlords who were at the same time usurers and controlled the black market. It affected the standard of living of the ordinary peasants, whose numbers were steadily declining, poor peasants who constituted “one-third of the rural population”, farm laborers “composed of poor peasants who had lost their land, bankrupt craftsmen, untouchables and people living in remote mountainous areas” (ibid). China ultimately considered that the Indian land reform had only led to “a redistribution of land within the ruling classes” (ibid).

Following the Sino-Indian border conflict of October 1962, the Chinese government denied any beneficial effect of this reform, even the introduction of capitalism in the rural world. It rejected the Soviet analysis that one third of the Indian peasantry was “salaried farm workers, a proof that capitalism had appeared in the Indian countryside” (ibid).

The publication, on May 6th, 1959, of an article in *People’s Daily* – entitled *The Revolution in Tibet and Nehru’s Philosophy* (Peking Review 1959) – was the beginning of a virulent campaign against the bourgeoisie of newly independent countries. Without denying the existence of progressive and reactionary sections in the Indian bourgeoisie, Beijing considered that the positive historical role of the bourgeoisie was over: this class which ruled the countries of Asia and Africa could decide to join imperialism as soon as it considered its interests to be threatened. It was therefore incapable of promoting a national democratic revolution, especially as the internal and external ‘reaction’ persisted

in its manoeuvres. The state capitalism that India was trying to promote would lead “to bureaucratic capitalism, complicit with imperialism and feudalism” (Hsi-Hu 1972, p. 76). Moreover, foreign capital controlled the key sectors of the Sub-continent’s economy, while Indian capital was dominated by small and medium-sized enterprises. Indian state capitalism was “only private monopoly capitalism which depended to a large extent on foreign capital, especially American capital” (ibid).

After the border conflict,

“The Chinese went so far as to assert that Indian state capital was in fact only one of the components of Indian private monopoly capital and that it could no longer escape the grip of foreign monopoly capital, and American monopoly capital in particular” (ibid).

By this argument, the authorities in Beijing sought to show that in India, “bureaucratic monopoly capital, comprador and feudal components”, had become the economic foundation of the regime of the Indian National Congress” (ibid, p. 77). More than twenty years after its independence, India remained a semi-feudal and semi-colonial country, hence the need for recourse to armed struggle.

The Indian Communists were placed in the “front line of the fight” that “Khrushchevians and Maoists” had engaged in (Archives du Quai d’Orsay 1963, p. 7). Moreover, the USSR, in its letter of January 28, 1963, to the International Communist Movement, accused China of having (at the end of October 1962) attacked India without any reason (The National Archives 1963.a, p. 3). It took the opportunity to indicate that these two States had a similar status. It complained that the Chou En-lai government did not inform it of this attack, and did not take into account the difficult situation in which it was placed. China had no reason to trigger a conflict that could only force India to move closer to the West. It was aware that the Nehru administration had been committed to promoting genuine independence, and since 1956 had maintained friendly relations with the Kremlin. It knew that Moscow provided the subcontinent with “means for self-defence”, which was “a terrible defeat” for the USA and the U.K (ibid). In addition, the Beijing authorities had not hesitated to ask for Soviet help in the conflict that they themselves had provoked. The USSR had even begged them to put an end to their offensive. It had also tried to stop New Delhi from turning to Washington. It could not, however, disassociate itself from China: it had stopped its deliveries of weapons to India, and had not resumed them until the conflict was over. In conclusion, the Kremlin was content to hope that China would settle the dispute in a peaceful and fair manner.

6.3 A party that had grown to maturity

6.3.1. The McMahon Line and the Sino-Indian border conflict

India pretended to be surprised that China no longer accepted the McMahon Line. This boundary was defined at the Simla Convention of 1914, taking the name of the British Colonial Administrator Henry McMahon, and had been endorsed by Tibetan Representatives at the time. On December 8th, 1958, Nehru had however informed the Indian Parliament that the maps of the People’s Republic of China were consistent with those that predated 1949 (The National Archives 1959.a, p. 1). Beijing had also indicated that it could choose a new way of drawing its borders according to the results of its consultations with the countries concerned, namely Burma, India, Japan⁴⁴, Korea, Nepal, North Vietnam, Outer Mongolia, Pakistan and the USSR.

⁴⁴China was of the opinion that Tokyo enjoyed “Taiwanese legal sovereignty” because no Sino-Japanese treaty had been signed (The National Archives 1959.d, p. 1).

The positions of the two countries remained antagonistic: China claimed that the border had never been demarcated, while India had gathered abundant documentation to support its thesis. For New Delhi, the Chou En-lai government had deliberately blurred the line of the McMahon border. After initially suggesting that Dhola was north of this border, it accepted the Indian coordinates, but pointed out that the McMahon Line was south of Dhola. In fact, the map scale of 1914 was too small to give a clear idea of the boundary defined by the Simla Conference. These inaccuracies continued to be reflected on the new maps which were published; those dating back to the Second World War – of which China apparently had a copy – showed the coordinates of the border between India, Bhutan and Tibet approximately 3 kilometres south of the coordinates New Delhi retained.

In August 1962, the National Council of the CPI adopted by 67 votes for, 3 against and 18 abstentions a resolution which was the result of a compromise between the ‘right’ and the ‘left’ (CPI 1962.b). It was alarmed at developments on the Ladakh border; it supported the Nehru’s position of striving for a peaceful and negotiated settlement of the dispute and of defending the national border as it stood at the time. It welcomed the Chinese government’s positive response to Indian efforts: Beijing wanted to start negotiations on the basis of the separate reports of officials of the two countries which had been handed over in February 1961.

Shrinivas Ganesh Sardesai advocated a firm condemnation of the Chinese position. In a note presented to the Council, he blamed “the dogmatic blindness” of the Chou En-lai government and defended the foreign and domestic policy of India (Varkey 1972, p. 174). He blamed the Chinese position towards the “American lackey Ayub” Khan, President of Pakistan⁴⁵, and the “feudal king of Nepal” (ibid). China, which claimed to be Marxist-Leninist, rejected India’s reasonable proposals, because it wanted to keep the areas it had occupied. Its behaviour could only provoke “shame, sadness, and indignation” (ibid, p. 175). Even if it thought that its claims were justified, the disputed areas belonged to India: it was aware that any questioning of their status would raise the emotion of the subcontinent. Reports submitted by Indian and Chinese officials showed that New Delhi’s position was the more authoritative.

The ‘left’ of the CPI refused any reference to the defence of the borders. But Dange retorted that if a socialist country adopted an ‘adventurous policy’, other socialist states might use force. The left wing was thus unable to make the Chinese analysis triumph; nor was it able to obtain the expulsion from the CEC of Sardesai and Adhikari, who were let off with a warning.

The CEC session from 12th to 18th January 1964 revealed that the opposition to Dange – which included the “left” and members of the “centre” – was divided into at least three groupings. The first, led by Namboodiripad, advocated neutrality in the Sino-Soviet dispute; the position of the second corresponded to that of Jyoti Basu – “no doubt shared by leaders such as Ramamurti and Sundarayya” – was favourable to the Chinese theses but prioritised the unity of the CPI; finally, “the most

⁴⁵A Sino-Pakistan border agreement that recognised the ‘traditional border’ between Pakistan-controlled Sinkiang and Azad Kashmir (Free Kashmir) had been concluded on March 2nd, 1963. The disputed area, which included three territories of a total area of 8806 km², belonged to the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir on which India claimed sovereignty. China obtained two of these territories, and Pakistan one – in the Valley of Oprang (or Uprand). Above all, Islamabad held control of the main passes – notably Kilik, Mintaka, Parpik, Khunjerab and Shimsal. The two sides, however, had indicated that as soon as the Jammu and Kashmir dispute was resolved, the “sovereign authority” – if it were not Pakistani – would hold negotiations with China on the delimitation of the border (The National Archives 1963.b, p. 1; The National Archives 1963.c, p. 1).

For the British diplomacy, the Chinese willingness to conclude a treaty which satisfied Pakistan was undoubtedly part of a process that had two objectives: to isolate the Nehru administration by showing that it did not want to settle the border conflict; to envenom Indo-Pakistani relations as the Security Council examined the Kashmir issue.

uncompromising” leftists “were apparently grouped around Basavapunniah and Muzaffar Ahmed” (Archives du Quai d’Orsay 1964.a, p. 9). The majority – the ‘right’ – was by no means united, but included serious differences of view.

On March 7, 1964, the Indian weekly *The Current*⁴⁶ published letters dating back to 1924 in which Dange – imprisoned as a result of the Kanpur (Bolshevik) Conspiracy Case – had offered Lord Reading, Governor General and Viceroy of India, his collaboration in exchange for his release. The Quai d’Orsay (the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs) observed that the weekly was based “on research allegedly carried out by opponents of the President” at the Indian National Archives (Archives du Quai d’Orsay 1964.b, p. 2). In a statement dated March 13, the Secretariat indicated that this letter “could have been fabricated at the time... by British officials”, and pointed out that Dange had not benefited from any additional reduction of sentence compared to the others convicted at Kanpur trial (CPI 1964.a in CPI 1964.d, p. 29).

6.3.2. The publication of *The Current*

The publication of *The Current* precipitated the crisis within the CPI. Basavapunniah and Ramamurti issued a statement to the press in which they claimed that the letters were authentic and that they proved that Dange did not have “the build” of a revolutionary (Archives du Quai d’Orsay 1964.c, p. 1). They felt that an accused could not preside over the National Council. As for the intervention of the Secretariat, it testified to the “factional tendencies” of this body (CPI 1964.a in CPI 1964.d, *ibid*). Basavapunniah, Ramamurti and Surjeet took the opportunity to advocate, in a Program of Action, the use of violence against the Nehru government accused of being a representative of the landed bourgeoisie, while the five-year plan was described as an instrument of capitalism (Archives du Quai d’Orsay 1964.c, p. 2). In addition, their Programme of Action regretted the disastrous effect on non-alignment of “the permanent confrontation with Pakistan” and “the absence of a settlement of the border dispute with China” (*ibid*).

On April 5, the opposition to Dange issued a statement that vehemently criticised the position of the Secretariat and the President, bringing a further charge against the latter. “He was said to have acquired, under a false name and using funds of unknown origins, shares to the value of Rs. 30,000 in the company” which edited *The Patriot*, a “far-left daily with anti-Chinese positions” (*ibid*). Jyoti Basu, “who was thought for a moment to be intending on preserving complete impartiality and playing the role of mediator”, had signed this declaration; Namboodiripad, who apparently did not attend the opposition meetings, indicated that he wanted to remain independent (*ibid*).

Shripat Amrit Dange returned from Moscow on March 28; two days later, the Secretariat convened the CEC and the National Council. On April 9, the CEC discussed the agenda of the session of the National Council. The ‘left’ wanted the National Council to first consider the question of letters, and that Dange “relinquish the chair for the occasion” (Archives du Quai d’Orsay 1964.d, p. 1). Not having won the case, twelve of the thirty members of the Executive – including the four leaders of the left wing (Basavapunniah, Gopalan, Sundarayya and Ramamurti) as well as Jyoti Basu, Namboodiripad and Bhupesh Gupta – “stormed out of the meeting room” (*ibid*, p. 1-2). The CEC decided to continue its discussions; it recommended the expulsion of the seven main leaders from the grouping it considered

⁴⁶We cannot include the article of this weekly in our section 'References', because we have not found the exact reference in the various archives that we have examined.

pro-Chinese – namely Basavapunniah, Gopalan, Promode Das Gupta, Konar, Sundarayya, Ramamurti and Surjeet.

In its resolution of April 9, 1964, which was to be submitted to the National Council, the CEC condemned the ‘left’ – qualified as “dogmatic and sectarian” – which continued to challenge the guidelines of the Centre: the activities of the “leadership of the dogmatist faction” responded to the split calls launched by the CPC during the last 16 months (CPI 1964.b in CPI 1964.d, p. 11-12). The Central Executive Committee recalled that it had, during its previous meeting, elected a commission to draft the documents to be examined by its Seventh Congress. Basavapunniah and Ramamurti had been elected members of this commission, but they refused to take part in its meetings. They had prepared another programme, and shared this with the mainstream press without waiting for the meeting of the National Council. From April 2nd to 9th, 1964, the leaders of the “dogmatic faction” – Basavapunniah, Gopalan, Promode Das Gupta, Harekrishna Konar, Ramamurti, Sundarayya and H.S. Surjeet – had convened a “separate conference” at the national level in Delhi, which had rallied their supporters, and had adopted the program mentioned above (CPI 1964.a in CPI 1964.d, p. 16; CPI 1964.c in CPI 1964.d, p. 7). Their goal was to set up a new Communist Party. The same rush to establish a new Party was seen in other countries: in recent months, “dogmatic and sectarian groups”, which adhered to the Chinese positions, had all adopted a similar approach (ibid). Admittedly, there had always been serious differences of view and sometimes even factions within the CPI. However, this antagonism had taken “a completely new character” following the adoption of the resolution of November 1, 1962⁴⁷: since then, “the leaders of international dogmatism” had made “the Indian Communist Party their target of choice “, and were looking to provoke a split (ibid).

The Executive emphasised the importance of Sundarayya’s speech on April 1st during the Silver Jubilee Celebration of the Ghadar Party in Jullundur. According to *Lok Lehar* – the Punjabi parallel Party’s newspaper – dated April 4th, the Andhra leader had stated that the time had come for “all patriots and revolutionaries” to form a CP capable of leading popular struggles and achieving the goals set by the initiators of the independence movement (CPI 1964.a in CPI 1964.d, p. 19). At a press conference held in Hyderabad on March 27, he had indicated that there were now two Communist parties, adding that the one to which he belonged was Marxist. He had denounced revisionism which had become the main danger threatening the Indian Communist movement; “the dominant leadership” had adopted a position that made the CPI “an appendage” of the Congress bourgeois government (CPI 1964.a in CPI 1964.d, p. 24).

The National Council, meeting from April 10 to 15 1964, tried in vain to find a solution to the antagonism between majority and opposition by the vote of a resolution which proposed that Namboodiripad and Basu join the Secretariat to define a compromise allowing an agenda to be set

⁴⁷On November 1st, 1962, the National Council – in an emergency meeting – had renounced “its loyalty to the International Communism movement” under the pressure “of the patriotic opinion” of the majority of Communists (The National Archives 1962, p. 1). After considering the draft resolutions Dange, Ramamurti and Namboodiripad had presented, it had adopted the text of the President.

In his resolution (CPI 1962.c), Dange unambiguously condemned the Chinese aggression, stressing the CPI’s unconditional support for the government and the acceptance of arms purchases from the West. He urged the Indian people to unite behind the Prime Minister and defend their homeland against the aggression of Chinese troops, which had crossed the McMahon Line – the international border between India and China – and had launched a major offensive against Indian positions in Ladakh. He supported Nehru’s conditions for the opening of talks – the withdrawal of Chinese troops from the positions they held on September 8th, 1962 – and defended the good faith of the Prime Minister who, far from being an agent of imperialism, had been constantly seeking a solution to the dispute. Finally, Dange denounced the attitude of Beijing which had strengthened reactionary parties and opponents of non-alignment in the subcontinent.

(Archives du Quai d'Orsay 1964.d, p. 2). On April 11th, 32 of the 96 participants – including Basu and Namboodiripad, but not Gupta – left the session and proclaimed that they now represented the CPI.

Was it Dange's intransigence which forced the left wing to withdraw from the CPI, or did the latter think itself powerful enough to bring another movement into being? Today, the position of the CPI(M) is that two factors pushed the thirty-two to this end: the attitude of Dange and the under-representation of the 'left' in the governing bodies. The departure of the thirty-two had another cause: disagreement within the CPI over the definition of the identity of the Indian Communist movement both on the domestic and international scene. Dange's charisma probably left his opponents, unable to dismiss him, faced with an alternative: give in or resign.

The Tenali Convention (Andhra Pradesh) (CPI(M) 1964) which, from July 7th to 11th 1964, gathered 136 delegates – representing 100,000 Communists opposed to Dange's leadership – marked the final break. Admittedly, it favoured unity, but demanded the resignation of the President. It accused the Dange group of taking advantage of the state of emergency to impose a strategy of unity with the Congress Party. The President did not hesitate to take disciplinary action against his opponents whom he sought to discredit by labelling them as pro-Chinese. In the end, the Tenali Convention decided that the Seventh Congress of the CPI the group of thirty-two claimed to represent would be held in Calcutta from October 24th to 31th, 1964. Shripat Amrit Dange did not intend to give way. The CPI thus brought together its Seventh Congress from December 13 to 23, 1964.

7. The CPI(M), heir to the Indian Communist movement?

7.1. The ideological orientations of the Tenali Convention

7.1.1. The CPI(M) newly born but already divided

No doubt the leaders of the original CPI (without publicly mentioning it) were soon to regret not having tried to reach a compromise with the left wing. Indeed, the latter – in choosing to initiate a new movement – benefited in particular from the support of Communist leaders active in two states of the Indian federation – West Bengal and Kerala – who enjoyed considerable popularity. The CPI made a much more serious mistake: in sticking to the directives from Moscow which declared the validity of the theory of 'peaceful transition to socialism', the original Party supported the proclamation of the state of emergency (June 1975-March 1977) decided upon by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. The CPI(M), for its part, opposed the state of emergency: indeed, many of its members were imprisoned, boosting the image of the party as one not afraid to make sacrifices while Indian citizens were being deprived of their democratic rights. Finally, the fall of the Soviet Union, according to rumour, left the CPI without the useful financial support the latter used to provide it with. The newly created Communist Party of India (Marxist), not having attracted support from the Soviet and Chinese 'big brothers', endeavoured to become part of the legal political scene, even though such an ideological orientation was one of the main causes of the split.

The ideological evolution of the Communist Party of India and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) on the Indian scene from 1964 to the present day will be the subject of another monograph; we will continue to question the fractious relations opposing the right, centre and left groupings of the original Indian CP at a crucial time for the international Communist movement as a whole that could no longer plead immaturity. The 'left' (and to a lesser extent) the 'centre' questioned the implementation of

proletarian internationalism, as they thought that the CPSU and the right wing of the CPI adhered to a nationalism they labelled as bourgeois. In our second monograph, we will also examine the Naxalite movement which – in 1967 – chose the path of armed struggle in the district of Naxalbari (Siliguri subdivision of Darjeeling in the northern part of West Bengal). What appeared at first sight to be a peasant movement trying to apply a Maoist model in India sparked the support of the Bengali youth intelligentsia, especially the students.

It must be emphasised that in 1969, the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist)(CPI(M-L)) was formed from a split within the CPI (M). Its left wing rejected the adoption of the parliamentary path, accusing the right wing of the Marxist Party of itself having yielded to revisionism. There were two radical groups within the CPI(M-L); the ‘theorists’ led by Parimal Das Gupta in Calcutta, and the ‘actionists’ of whom Charu Majumdar and Kanu Sanyal in north Bengal took the lead. The arguments of the latter rather than those of “the more theoretically advanced sections” came to dominate, since they answered the “prevailing political climate of youth and student rebellion” (Basu 2000, p. 92). However, the unity of this new Communist formation was short-lived, especially due to switches in tactics adopted by the armed path (what mainstream Communists termed ‘extreme sectarianism’); in Calcutta, for example, ‘individual terrorism’ took precedence over a broader armed struggle. The CPI (M-L) split into two groups: one led by Satyanarayan Singh who condemned the summary executions of ‘class enemies’; and the second of which Majumdar was the leader.

7.1.2. Bengali political life scarred by verbal and physical violence

In the last part of this monograph, we will look at the dominant position of the CPI(M) in West Bengal from 1977 to the 2011 legislative elections, noting that it won no Lok Sabha seats in the state in the 2019 elections. The future of the party is therefore in question: West Bengal sends 42 members to the lower house of Parliament, which meant the CPI(M) that held a majority in the state was assured of its status of ‘national party’. Critical views of the Left Front’s record in West Bengal, following its defeat in 2011, are now widespread – in sharp contrast to the near-consensus uncritically positive within the party that was prevalent prior to the victory of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, head of the Trinamool Congress (TMC). Before returning to it, we must first remind the reader that the governing coalition of the Left Front, which, from 1977 to 2011, had dominated West Bengal, a state of 68 million individuals, included, in addition to the CPI(M) and the CPI, the All India Forward Bloc, the Biplobi Bangla Congress (Bengali Revolutionary Congress), the Democratic Socialist Party, the Marxist Forward Bloc, the Revolutionary Communist Party of India, the Revolutionary Socialist Party, the Samajwadi Party (Socialist Party), and lastly the Workers’ Party of India.

It is, first of all, useful to quote an excerpt from a report on the work of the Left Front action written by the CPI(M) in mid-2007.

“The Left Front Government in West Bengal completes thirty years in office on 21st June 2007. The uninterrupted existence of a Left Front government in a State for thirty years is a remarkable achievement. This would not have been possible without the massive and unwavering support of the working people of West Bengal for the programme and policies of the Left Front Government. In the course of this long tenure, the Left Front government has set a shining example of pro-people governance by implementing land reforms and establishing a decentralised model of local self-government through a three-tier Panchayati Raj, which has empowered millions of rural poor and irreversibly changed their lives for the better. Its record in defending secularism, securing democratic rights and upholding probity in public life is also unparalleled. The Left Front Government in West

Bengal continues to be an inspiration and source of strength for progressive and democratic forces across the country” (CPI(M) 2007, p. 1).

Samir Sen Gupta contested such a reading, arguing in 2011 that the reign of 34 years of the CPI(M) in West Bengal “was characterized by terror, exploitation, crime, corruption and slavery of the masses unprecedented in human history in recent times” (Sen Gupta 2011, p. 2). According to the author,

“Long before they came to power the political party had established its reputation of criminal and horrible activities of murder, rape, extortion of money from common people, terrorizing the voters and all opponents” (ibid).

This is an account that supporters of the CPI(M) will challenge, notably because it was published in the aftermath of the 2011 legislative elections. However, it is supported by other writings. Thus, the weekly *Mainstream*, whose publisher Sumit Chakravartty, the son of the leader Nikhil Chakravartty, continues to affirm his attachment to Marxism, published a puzzling article. The former Land Reforms Commissioner, D. Bandyopadhyay, was considering a *Census of Political Murders in West Bengal during CPI-M Rule 1977-2009*. He indicated that:

“Much before they came to power heading the Left Front Government in 1977, the CPI-M leaders started experimenting with murder as a political instrument way back in 1970 when the party cadres murdered two important Congress leaders belonging to the Sain family of Burdwan town. The level of bestiality that they stooped down to was evident by the fact that they made the mother of the two Sain brothers eat rice drenched with the blood of her dead sons. As a result the mother lost her mental balance from which she could not recover till her death a decade later. Among the accused were Benoy Konar, presently one of the topmost CPI-M leaders in the State, Khokon alias Nirupam Sen, currently the Industries Minister of West Bengal besides being a member of the party’s Polit-Bureau, and Manik Roy (shown absconding in the police records) who, after changing his name a couple of times, emerged as Anil Bose and become a CPI-M MP by winning the Lok Sabha election with a record margin through massive rigging” (Bandyopadhyay 2010).

The author carried out fieldwork in West Bengal on several occasions, in particular during the run-up to the 2011 elections. She, twice, interviewed at length D. Bandyopadhyay, a very controversial figure who was close to Mamata Banerjee of whom he painted an almost hagiographic portrait.

The political life of West Bengal is, it is true, marked by physical violence of which the various adversaries accuse one another, as well as by strong doses of political propaganda. An illustration of this is provided by an anonymous political blog written in answer to Bandyopadhyay, which described “how and why a reign of terror in West Bengal” was “unleashed plan fully by imperialists, multinational company financed and supported Rainbow Alliance of Maoists, Naxalites, TMC, Congress, SUCI (Socialist Unity Centre of India), perverted anti-Communist and anti-Leftist so-called sold-out intellectuals, corporate media and NGOs of doubtful character” (Wbviolence.blogspot 2010). This blog was, at the very least, close to the Communist Party of India (Marxist), since its sources of information were “‘People’s Democracy’ (the national English weekly of the Marxist Party), ‘Ganashakti’ (the Bengali daily newspaper of the CPI(M)) and other Left oriented journals” (ibid). It did not hesitate to call Bandyopadhyay a

“political bastard... insane terrorist, fraud Maoist intellectual and former IAS [Indian Administrative Service] bureaucrat D. Bandyopadhyay... a former secretary of revenue and erstwhile secretary of rural development in the government of India who had in the meantime come into the service of ‘finance capital and imperialists” (ibid).

7.1.3. The rejection of the ideals professed by the CPI(M)?

Meeting (in 1995) with CPI(M) leaders while working on her PhD, *The political strategy of the Indian Communist movement (1936-1964). The impact of foreign influences* (Reynolds 2001), the author was under the impression that in West Bengal an Indianized Communism combined two important dimensions. It integrated the Nehruvian democratic and secularist model of which it had projected itself as a strong advocate with the role of spokesperson for the less fortunate, thereby engaging on a core value: the alleviation of poverty. However, it invoked the existence of the Indian Republican model in arguing as to why it would remain impossible to bring about Communism without the other states of the federation endorsing such a path.

In a publication of the West Bengal Information and Cultural Affairs Department, Jyoti Basu, Chief Minister of the state from 1977 to 2000, declared:

“The Left Front Government in the State of West Bengal has limited powers. It has to operate within a capitalist feudal economy. The Constitution, contrary to federal principles, does not provide for the needed powers for the States and we suffer from a special disability because the Union Government is ill disposed towards our Government. In such a situation, we have been explaining to the people why we cannot bring about fundamental changes even though the ideology and character of our Government are different from those that characterise the Government at the Centre. But we do hold that by forming the Government through elections it is possible for us to rule in a manner which is distinctly better and more democratic than the way followed by the Congress party at the Centre and in many other States. It is also possible to give relief to the people, particularly the deprived sections, through the minimum programme adopted by the Left Front... Our objective is to raise their political consciousness along with giving them relief so that they can distinguish between truth and falsehood and friends and enemies, and realise the alternative path which will free them from the shackles of Capitalism and Feudalism and usher in a new modern progressive society” (Basu 1985, p. 5).

The goal of the Left Front was to teach the masses across the country “the correct political consciousness”, freeing them from the “bourgeois influence and ideology” so that they could reach “the truth through experience and continuous struggles” (ibid). Basu added:

“The left and democratic State Governments can help and expedite this process even with their limited powers. It is with such a perspective and objective that we are functioning in West Bengal” (ibid).

To such speeches, Samir Sengupta retorted by pointing out that “the majority of the blind supporters of the CPI-M are... innocent people without any direct or indirect involvement in the criminal activities of the party... who foolishly gulp the propaganda” of the CPI(M) (Sen Gupta 2011, p. 8).

Opinions diverge as to the achievements of the Left Front in West Bengal. Despite the defeat of the Left Front, Bidyut Chakrabarty pointed out in the introduction to a book published in 2014 and entitled *Communism in India: Events, Processes and Ideologies*, “the growing importance of the left parties in India’s liberal democratic governance” (Chakrabarty 2014, p. 3). He continued:

“It is now evident that the parliamentary left parties, instead of emphasizing “class antagonism” as a means for the establishment of an egalitarian society, seem to have confirmed their clear antipathy toward violence by accepting election as a meaningful instrument of socio-economic changes... Drawing on a social alliance of apparently contradictory class forces, the reformist left parties sustain their viability as a democratically elected government within an economy that is not favourably disposed toward the classical ideological goal of the left” (ibid).

Referring without overt criticism (or at least sticking to a political scientist's role of observer or analyst) to the Stalinist mode of organisation, the author added that the consolidation of the left was a grass roots function that would be achieved "through legal and extra-parliamentary struggles" (ibid).

"While the party leadership is a significant determinant of success, its chances are also circumscribed by its organic relationship with the party managers at the grassroots. By a well-knit organizational network (sustained in a Stalinist way), the parliamentary left maintains and retains a support base that crumbles once mass disenchantment leads to the rise and consolidation of parallel power centres capable of challenging those in power" (ibid).

Ross Mallick had – in a book entitled *Development policy of a Communist government: West Bengal since 1977* that was published in 1993 – a more realistic argument, when he wrote:

"The Left Front justified any inaction as due to the impossibility of achieving genuine reform under capitalism. However, its claim to be taking reforms to the constitutional limits is doubtful. When compared with other states the Bengal achievement is average at best and often well below the national average, though a Communist government would have been expected to surpass all other states in reform implementation. A visit to the most backward district in Maharashtra confirmed this impression. One Maharashtra government official observed that while the Bengal Left Front government publicized all their achievements, in his own state they had achieved better results without the fanfare" (Mallick 1994, p. 10).

The political scientist reported an anecdote:

"The achievements appear less impressive when compared with international experiences. A Secretary of the West Bengal government on returning from a British posting realized that the CPM was less radical than the British Labour Party which at least had an orientation towards lower-class problems that the Left Front lacked" (ibid).

Mallick made a harsh judgment to which the West Bengal provincial section should have paid attention. Observers whom it hastily dismissed as anti-Communist were already denouncing its suspicious longevity in government. The CPI(M), simply content to preserve the status quo, agreed to "a major transformation for a party formed in 1964 as a revolutionary alternative to the "reformist" CPI, but which is now no longer reformist" (ibid).

"As there are no revolutionary or Social Democratic national parties, however, the lack of a serious radical alternative to the CPM enables it to maintain its inert position unchallenged from the left" (ibid).

It is therefore, in large part, on the Ross Mallick's study that we will rely in trying to provide a brief summary of the Left Front's achievements in West Bengal.

7.2 The CPI(M) and the choice of the parliamentary path

7.2.1 The centrist grouping and the reformist orientation

The Indian Communist movement remained ultimately confronted with a problem that had, in 1920, opposed Lenin to M.N. Roy during the Second Congress of the Comintern: that of the evaluation of the

role of the national bourgeoisie⁴⁸. The 1964 split, in addition to the Sino-Soviet ideological quarrel and the Sino-Indian border conflict, also reflected the question of collaboration with a bourgeoisie of which the Congress, according to the evaluation of the 'left' of the CPI, was the representative. Moscow, requiring of the Indian Party that it grant a support more and more unconditional to the party of Nehru, contributed to bringing about its fall. Centrists such as Jyoti Basu and Namboodiripad joined the Marxist CP, less out of conviction than since the latter's theses elicited the support of the Bengali and Kerala provincial sections. They would influence the ideological choices of a CPI which also adhered to the republican Congress legacy, pushing its left wing - favourable to a radical strategy - towards scission, as it was quickly confined to a marginal position. The 'left' refused to support the Party leadership when the latter joined the West Bengal United Front Government in 1967. It then launched an armed peasant movement in the district of Naxalbari. It

"probably expected that the new reformist government would not repress a peasant movement led by members of the CPM on whom the United Front government depended to stay in office. However, rather than side with their own Maoist members in opposition to the other parties in the coalition, the CPM decided to remain in office and acquiesced in the government's repression of the peasant movement" (Mallick 1993, p. 12).

The CPI(M) leadership chose the use of force against a Maoist movement that had poorly assessed its strength before engaging in combat. It was, moreover, the object of Chinese condemnation, with Beijing having launched the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). T. Nagi Reddy, one of the prominent proponents of the Maoist path in India, also leader of the opposition in the legislative Assembly of Andhra, estimated (like half of the CPI(M) members of this state) that it was premature to start an armed struggle. Charu Mazumdar, leader the Maoist forces in Bengal, was only able to mobilise 15% of the forces of the Andhra CPI(M) provincial section. He did, however, launch a short-lived revolt in Andhra.

In West Bengal, the Marxist Party did not hesitate to use police and paramilitary forces to defeat the Maoists.

⁴⁸Lenin, rapporteur of the Colonial Commission, had insisted on the need to support 'bourgeois democratic liberation movements' in colonial or dependent countries. Referring to the most archaic states, he called on the CPs to support any democratic bourgeois-inspired liberation movement, underlining that Communist aid to such movements would be conditional: a determined struggle would be launched against any attempt to "give them an artificial Communist colouring" (Lenin 1965, p. 145, in Gupta 1980, p. 17). In addition, support would be given to "elements of future proletarian parties" (ibid). The Soviet leader therefore enjoined the Communist parties to conclude a temporary alliance with the bourgeoisie of colonial and backward countries while taking care not to merge with this class. In addition, he gave the peasantry a central place, advocating to encourage its struggle against landowners and for it to formulate its demands in a revolutionary way.

Lenin's *Theses* aroused the dissatisfaction of many delegates to the Second Congress because of the role they gave to the bourgeoisie. It was, however, M.N. Roy's opposition that attracted the most attention. The latter, representative of the Mexican CP, judged Indian society to be deeply divided between a booming capitalist class and the rest of the population, part of which – the working class – had been able to organise rapidly since the early 1920s. According to him, Gandhism was "the acutest and most desperate manifestation of the forces of reaction, trying to hold their own against the objectively revolutionary tendencies contained in the liberal bourgeois nationalism" (Roy 1922, p. 205). The Indian bourgeoisie was not engaged in a class struggle. Roy wrote that: *"The basis of the national movement is the rivalry of a weak and suppressed bourgeoisie against its immensely stronger imperialist prototype controlling the state power. The present fight of the Indian bourgeoisie cannot be, therefore, unrelenting. Its growth and prosperity are not necessarily conditional upon the total destruction of its present enemy. Owing to this relative weakness of its social foundation, nationalism of the progressive tendency headed by the class-conscious bourgeoisie, is bound to be compromising. It is inherently more inimical to the possible revival of a social and political reaction than to the British rule which... promises protection to the advent of capitalist civilization in India"* (ibid, p. 206).

“Eventually the Maoist CPI-ML and the CPM indulged in mutual mass killing. With the central and state governments as well as the CPM killing thousands of Maoists they were virtually wiped out as a political force in West Bengal politics. Thereafter the CPM led the left in West Bengal politics from the early 1970s on, without having to worry about a left opposition” (ibid).

Thus, as Mallick points out, there were only two factions left within the Marxist Party. Namboodiripad headed the first and Basu the second; the two leaders, in addition to their desire to continue their career in the provincial section to which they belonged, disagreed, at the time of the 1964 split, with the analysis of the situation in India made by the right wing of the original CPI.

“Initially their centrist faction was the minority as the Maoists and other radicals dominated the party. Gradually this radical faction, to accommodate the centrists in the party, compromised their policies and the centrists slowly expanded their influence. When the Maoists left, over this turn to moderation, the remaining radicals were significantly weakened and eventually lost control over the direction of party policy” (ibid, p. 13).

Ross Mallick concludes that:

“It seems extraordinary that the centrists, the weakest of the three factions at the time of the CPI split in 1964, eventually came to dominate CPM party policy and the Left Front government of West Bengal from the 1970s. They did so due to Indian political events favouring a centrist position, the death or expulsions of some radical leaders, and the conservatism of the CPM’s class base” (ibid).

There were three phases to the assertion of the “centrist approach” (ibid). First, Namboodiripad and Basu “were clearly in the minority and in obvious disagreement with the party line” (ibid). Facing the rise of Naxalism, the Party withdrew into its shell, even as it also faced criticism from the CPC, which had initiated its Cultural Revolution. It was in such circumstances that the centrist wing gradually affirmed its pre-eminence.

“Rather than the Communist Party leading the middle and poor peasantry together through a united front towards a transition to socialism, the Party split over what strategy should be followed. The Maoists demanded that the poor peasant class interests have priority while the CPM wished to create multi-class alliances, and in effect postpone radical class struggle to a more opportune time. This conflict between former comrades escalated into all-out murder of each other’s cadre. The Maoists were decimated and the CPM survived as an even more moderate party with a rural base more closely tied to the middle peasantry than before” (ibid).

As the Marxist Party split, there was “no exact correlation dividing the middle and poor peasantry along CPM and Maoist lines” (ibid, p. 14). However, such trends influenced the Communist movement in West Bengal: back in power in 1977, the CPI(M) had “lost much of its impetus to press poor peasant interests” (ibid). It gave priority to its base, a “middle peasantry”, unwilling to adhere to “a revolutionary program”, as it evolved “in a competitive democratic environment, where there were other more moderate parties offering reformist solutions” (ibid).

“A party that in the 1950s seemed to have much potential as the official opposition and expected successor to the Congress government at the national level, lost this position to communal, regional, and rightist parties” (ibid).

Ross Mallick points out that the Communist Party of India (Marxist) opted for a “reformist orientation” during the period of the United Front (1967-1970). This diverse coalition, dominated by the Bangla Congress, “first major dissident Congress faction in West Bengal”, rallied parties which denounced the

long reign of a Congress Party undermined by corruption, while the Marxist Party was its main supporter (ibid). The latter gradually asserted its leadership “through mass mobilisation and splitting its opposing coalition partners” (ibid).

Following the lifting of the state of emergency in 1977, West Bengal began a long period of what could be described as a two-party system, with a CPI(M)-led Left Front in power and the Congress remaining in opposition. Maoism was by then a marginal phenomenon; the Marxist Party “no longer had to worry about a threat to its base from the left” (ibid, p. 15). The radicals within it (Muzaffar Ahmed and Harekrishna Konar had died in 1973 and 1974 respectively), “had no other party to turn to” (ibid). With the death in 1985 of Sundarayya, an Andhra Pradesh Communist leader who had resigned from the post of General Secretary in 1978, the centrists, favourable to “constitutional reformism”, consolidated their grip on the Party (ibid). As for the “lower classes”, in “the absence of any other national party willing to pursue their class interests as its top priority”, they were “effectively left out of politics” (ibid).

The CPI(M), at its foundation, had questioned the strategy of the CPI that had chosen to support the Congress in the hope that it could push the latter to implement progressive policies. It was of the opinion that:

“alternative popular governments with Communist participation could facilitate the advancement of the Communist movement towards a revolutionary conjuncture” (ibid).

The split undermined the chances of any gains for the Indian Communist movement at the national level; the Marxist Party, opting in turn for the parliamentary path, had to settle for a strong position in two states of the federation (Kerala and West Bengal).

“Only long hard grass-roots work needed to build up a base could produce results, though probably not for the present generation of leaders” (ibid, p. 16).

Besides

“Though there was discussion of developing into contiguous areas from existing bases, the cadre available for this were limited. Bengalis were generally disliked in neighbouring states, which they had often historically dominated, making geographical expansion difficult. The Bengali Communist experiment was therefore not easily translated into a following elsewhere” (ibid).

The domination of the Left Front years vanished in the face of the success of the Trinamool Congress. The CPI of Kerala, much stronger there than in West Bengal, contemplated with some irony the defeat of the Marxist Party, with the CPI provincial section in Bengal blaming the hegemony the CPI(M) had been exercising since 1977. Behind closed doors, the CPI(M), seemed to have little to say other than to ask its followers not to abandon it: the fear was that Mamata Banerjee would ensure her party enjoyed a similarly lengthy period in power, deploying the same kinds of means as the CPI(M) had.

There remains the record of the CPI(M) which, shortly after the 1964 split, chose at first what Marxist terminology would call a leftist path, only to end up contenting itself with preserving the status quo in Bengal. This ideological orientation aimed, it is true, to oppose any attempt by New Delhi to employ presidential rule to remove the Left Front government. The Marxist Party came to make abundant use of the argument according to which its margin of manoeuvre was limited, since the Centre restricted the autonomy of the states. Nevertheless, the Bengali Communist experience was testimony to the difficulty of putting forward uniform strategies that made sense across the diversity of India’s immense territory. Indeed, the county’s diversity was probably a main explanatory factor as to why it remained so challenging to build a united and Communist movement across the whole country. Thus, more

extreme political groupings such as the Hindu nationalists would be free to project themselves as spokespersons for Indians in search of a party that both resisted the increasingly widespread corruption marking the political world and stressed the importance of growth to eradicate inequality.

7.2.2 The sensitive record of the Left Front in West Bengal

7.2.2.1. *The bhadraloks and the CPI(M)*

Did the cadres of the future CPI(M) give hope to the poorest when they were the victims of arrestation in the aftermath of the Sino-Indian border conflict and the declaration of the state of emergency? In any case, they also adhered to the parliamentary path, consolidating an Indian democracy which combined “many of the institutions of an advanced capitalist state with cultural and economic conditions often not far removed from feudalism” (ibid, p. 21). The Marxist Party’s pursuit of parliamentary politics required mobilisation of class forces somewhat different from those traditionally associated with Communist movements elsewhere in the world” (ibid). Returning to the pre-partition and post-partition periods, Ross Mallick writes:

“The Bengal Communist movement grew as a primarily middle-class movement. This urban and rural middle-class involvement has shaped the policies of the Left Front, in a way that is unique in India. The economic downturn in Bengal created new underprivileged classes out of the traditional landed elite, providing an impetus for the spread of Communism. The old elite classes lost their landed property with the creation of Pakistan after the partition of India, becoming refugees in West Bengal. At the same time the expansion of education beyond the capacity of a sluggish economy to absorb it created acute unemployment and frustration for an aspirant middle class” (ibid).

The imprint of the Raj was heavier on Bengal than most other parts of India, especially once many Hindus took advantage of the benefits that Western education could bring. Those who had benefited from it joined the ranks of the administration, as civil servants across the Empire. Following the partition, part of the Bengali middle class which had enjoyed access to British education was deprived of such professional opportunities.

“A new generation of bhadralok⁴⁹ youth, predominantly urban in cultural outlook and shorn of the former ties binding the class to fragmentary remnants of landed property, now sought to forge new links with the masses in militant trade unionism, more radical programs of agrarian reform and a new vanguardism in political organization.” (Chatterjee 1984, p. 179-180).

It was this middle-class stratum which, in its majority, adhered to the nascent Bengali Communist movement, constituting the majority of its cadres since then.

Following the creation of East Pakistan, the claims the state of West Bengal to broader significance within the subcontinent were further weakened. It had only 42 seats in the Lok Sabha while Calcutta’s status as the leading industrial city passed to Bombay. The landed-owning class would come, like the middle class, to acquire a great influence in the political life of the state. In the end, the Hindu landowners (*zamindars*) of East Bengal who, after migrating to India, lost their property without getting any compensation, were unable to live without a professional activity; many joined the ranks of bureaucracy. The political scientist Donald S. Zagoria noted that:

⁴⁹*Bhadralok* “(literally 'gentleman' 'well-mannered person') is Bengali for the new class of 'gentlefolk' who arose during British colonial times (approximately 1757 to 1947) in Bengal” (Definitions.net 2019).

“In the urban areas of West Bengal, Communist strength does not appear to be based on any particular caste or community. Rather, one of the main bases seems to be the several million “declassed” Hindu refugees who fled their homes in East Bengal after partition. These refugees constitute about one-fourth of the West Bengal population and a substantial portion of the Calcutta population. They apparently vote for the Communists overwhelmingly. Here, it would seem is a classic example of uprooted and declassed individuals supporting an extremist party in accordance with the model put forth by the proponents of the concept of mass society. The uprootedness of the Hindu refugees in Calcutta is aggravated by the fact that many of them occupied positions of considerable power and influence in East Bengal, but are denied power or status in West Bengal. The absence of an effective and large Jana Sangh in Calcutta is probably the main reason why the Hindu refugees there have chosen left-wing rather than right-wing extremism. At least one Communist leader frankly admitted to the author that many of the followers of his party in Calcutta were the kind of declassed petit bourgeois who in the North belonged to the militantly communal Hindu party, the Jana Sangh” (Zagoria 1969, p. 115).

Mallick points out that these social groups, which were favourable to Communism, were most often “superficially progressive, being casteist and communal in attitude” (Mallick 1993, p. 25). They, nonetheless, claimed to belong to the “intellectual tradition of the Bengali Renaissance” (ibid).

In addition to these dimensions was the issue of the social organisation of labour: the traditional Bengali industries (based on the production of coal, cotton, iron and steel, paper and tea) hired workers from rural areas of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. By the mid-1950s, the establishment of new engineering, electronic, and chemical industries mostly employed cadres from educated classes, particularly those from Eastern Bengal who tended to support the Communist movement.

7.2.2.2 The Left Front playing a waiting game

The Left Front, beginning a long reign in one of the most industrialised states in the country, had to take the wishes of the most deprived into account. However, “rather than promoting the interests of the rural and urban lower classes”, it “gave primacy to the traditional rural and urban middle-class bases of the Communist movement” (ibid, p. 4). When publishing his work (in 1993), Ross Mallick was of the opinion that such an orientation “will likely make further change in both reformist and revolutionary direction more difficult, as these interests are more entrenched than ever, and are opposed to change in the status quo which would threaten the newly created privileges the Left Front provided them with” (ibid). In addition, the government, in ensuring “support of the lower levels of bureaucracy”, “alienated the officer cadre by its factional manipulation and political interference” (ibid, p. 5). As to its “attempt at encouraging corporate investment, while winning the support of big business”⁵⁰, it “has failed to give a boost to the state economy” (ibid). Thus, wages did not increase as much as they had during the period when the Left Front parties had been in the opposition (ibid).

“In short, the beneficiaries of the Left Front have been the rural landed middle class, the lower-level government employees, and the capitalist class... the lower classes largely received what had already been available to them under previous governments, or was being simultaneously offered in other states under central government-funded programs” (ibid).

⁵⁰The Bengali bourgeoisie preferred to invest in land rather than in industry, which it left to other communities, such as the Marwaris. West Bengal was a special case in allying a strong sense of regionalism with opposition to capitalism and outsiders, while the influence of Communism was also strong.

Thus, the Marxist Party, main component of the governmental coalition, left the reformist way to content itself with safeguarding its vote bank. The Left Front kept blaming the Centre, which only granted the states of the federation 38.9% of the taxes levied on their territory. Nevertheless,

“With 4/5ths of the state budget going to pay the salaries of government employees whose support has been fostered by Left Front pay increments, and with additional revenues from agriculture being blocked by its rural landowner supporters, the Left Front has little left for development expenses. In pursuit of short-term electoral gains, it has sacrificed both its revolutionary and its reformist options, and can do nothing but cling to office through the distribution of largesse, much of it supplied by the central government” (ibid, p. 4).

Proof of the wait-and-see attitude of the Left Front was its reluctance to carry out a true agrarian reform, even though this was something within the state’s jurisdiction and some 74% of the population was rural. The bureaucracy, it is true, held back any change in the balance of power in the countryside, because, sticking to its core task, it focussed on maintaining law and order. On May 8th, 1980, the Supreme Court regretted that there was “no substantial decrease in the limit” of ceiling [of land-holding] in West Bengal (Government of West Bengal 1981, p. 13, in Mallick 1993, p. 43).

“The ceiling limit of “6.18 acres in the case of an individual, and 12.35 to 17.29 acres of irrigated land, in the case of a family... in the Gangetic plains. of West Bengal, is not small by any standard” (Bhattacharyya 1981, p. 185).

Leaving landowners to enjoy their land, the Left Front simply distributed small plots of surplus land to the poor peasantry, generating their support at least temporarily. Rejecting the boasts of the West Bengal government that it could serve as a model for India as a whole, Mallick pointed out that:

“At the end of 1978 1,005,148 acres had been distributed under the Estates Acquisition Act and 117,428 under the Land Reforms Act. But by the end of 1984 only 1,049,220 acres and 184,049 had been vested indicating only 44,072 and 66,621 acres had been vested in the first six years of Left Front rule, a rate no better than under the previous Congress government. The Land Reforms Minister stated in the assembly that from the election of the Left Front till mid 1982 150,000 acres had been vested and 120,000 distributed, which meant that 1 million acres had been vested before the Left Front came to power and 630,000 acres distributed already. The 799,224 acres distributed by the end of 1984 went to 1,572,531 persons or about 1/2 acre per beneficiary” (Mallick 1993, p. 45).

West Bengal, faced with critics of its government policy who rejected its official figures, argued that:

“on central government delays in giving Presidential assent to land reform legislation and on previous Marxist governments having already distributed land in the 1967 to 1969 period. It neglects to mention that in these previous radical Communist governments the peasants were encouraged by the Communists to seize the land themselves without waiting for the administration” (ibid).

Mallick emphasises that it was “a mark of the political distance the CPM” had “travelled from its early revolutionary phase of the 1960s” (ibid).

The following table from the 1985 Proceedings of the Conference of the Ministers of Revenue, published by the Department of Rural Development, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, is illustrative.

Land reform in Indian states (in acres) (Government of India 1985 in Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development 1985, p. 131-133, in Mallick 1993, p. 46).

Table 2.8. *Land reform in Indian states^a (in acres)*

	Area declared surplus	Area taken possession	Area declared surplus but possession not taken	Area distributed	Area distributed as percentage of cultivable area
Andhra Pradesh	1,014,050	456,021	558,029	331,976	.88
Assam	450,918	376,445	74,473	373,020	5.21
Bihar	287,931	194,037	93,894	179,046	.67
Gujarat	182,138	87,020	95,118	51,133	.19
Haryana	30,757	22,796	7,961	22,591	.24
Himachal Pradesh	283,994	281,403	2,591	3,335	.12
Jammu and Kashmir	6,000	—	6,000	—	—
Karnataka	296,355	152,317	144,018	115,661	.38
Kerala	121,385	87,189	34,196	58,443	1.04
Madhya Pradesh	227,377	139,957	87,420	93,400	.17
Maharashtra	390,040	304,884	85,156	304,894	.62
Orissa	162,390	140,642	21,766	127,117	.74
Punjab	27,444	15,235	12,209	14,140	.13
Rajasthan	240,050	232,531	7,519	145,319	.29
Tamil Nadu	94,762	89,008	5,754	77,835	.39
Uttar Pradesh	301,561	275,226	26,347	244,208	.51
West Bengal	182,157	126,743	55,414	80,639	.55

^a West Bengal Land Reforms Act or equivalent legislation in other states

Source: Government of India, Department of Rural Development, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, "Proceedings of Conference of Revenue Ministers" held in New Delhi, May 1985, pp. 131–3.

Biplab Dasgupta, member of the Central Committee of the CPI(M), wrote that:

"During the brief United Front rule by the left-wing parties in 1967 and 1969-70, the village level committees of poor peasants and landless labourers helped to identify such benami land (that is land held illegally in excess of the permitted limit), took over 300,000 acres of such land and distributed it among the landless. While the legality of such action was disputable there was no denying the effectiveness of bringing about a change in the land relations in rural West Bengal. The beneficiaries of such populist land reform formed the hard core of the support which the Left Front received during the 1977 and 1982 elections" (Dasgupta 1982, p. 13).

Mallick indicated that the peasant struggles in "the 1960s achieved more through peasant land than the twelve years of Communist rule since 1977 (300,000 acres versus 80,000 distributed until 1985)", which represented at the date of the publication of his book, only 1.8 and 0.55 percent of cultivable land", a "distribution of 2.35 percent of the land under all Communist governments" (Mallick 1993, p. 47). During the Congress administration, with "the abolition of landlordism and intermediaries, the power in the countryside was transferred to small landlords and rich peasants" (Dasgupta 1982, p. 14). The Left Front did not challenge the position of

"the opportunist members in this class supporting the Left Front parties, though no reliable party-class membership survey exists. As the rest of the country is no better than Bengal in redistribution, the all-India land reform effort appears also to be cosmetic... The downsizing of reported land holdings is largely the result of generational subdivision and bogus transfers rather than state intervention" (Mallick 1993, *ibid*).

7.2.3 Towards the end of the ‘reign’ of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) in West Bengal

Evaluating the ‘reign’ of the Left Front in Bengal on the eve of the 2011 legislative elections⁵¹ was a risky exercise, given the polarisation marking the positions and discourse of two camps, with moderates able to offer an impartial viewpoint rare. ‘Shining India’ aimed, it is true, at eliminating any attraction of Communism and its appeal to a national construction, portrayed as outdated, notwithstanding indicators showing rising inequality. This aspect, however, does not wholly explain, as the Bengali Communists sought to emphasise, the slow descent into weakness and disarray of the provincial section. The latter argued that the fall of the Soviet Union and decline in popularity of Communist parties around the world had contributed to its poor recent electoral performance. The Party's governing bodies in New Delhi endorsed, or did nothing to counter such explanations. There remains, once more, the interesting case of Kerala. Thus,

“the former Chief Minister of Kerala, V.S. Achuthananda, who led the previous government, is one of the last members of this ‘old guard’. At 88 years of age, he enjoys an immense popularity. The Marxist party was to learn this the hard way. It settled a dispute between Achuthananda and the leader of the party in Kerala, Pinarayi Vijayan, by suspending both of them from the Politburo in 2007. Two years later, this body expelled Achuthananda, the last of the 32 founders of the CPM still alive. ‘V.S.’, as he was affectionately known, was initially not allowed to contest the elections. The central decision-making bodies, avoiding, at least officially, any investigation into the accusations of corruption made against Vijayan, made a clumsy attempt to put an end to the factionalism that marked the party in Kerala. They formally reminded members that quarrels and disputes should never be brought into the public domain. Taking into account the reactions in Kerala, however, they entrusted the Chief Minister with leading the CPI(M) campaign in the state.” (Reynolds 2011, p. 5-6).

Opponents of the Left Front in West Bengal predicted (at the time of the 2011 elections) a bitter defeat in particular of the CPI(M), thereby bringing an end to 34 years of dictatorship, and allowing Bengalis to once again enjoy the same rights as the rest of the country’s citizens. Moreover, the allies of the CPI(M) in the Left Front dared to challenge the political and ideological pre-eminence of the Marxist Party. To these aspects, one may add the sad episodes of industrialisation of Singur (Hooghly district) and Nandigram (Purba Medinipur district) where the Left Front aimed at carving out Special Economic Zones (SEZs).

“At Singur (2006) and then Nandigram (2007), the West Bengal government tried to put into practice an industrialisation policy that, based on efforts from other parts of India, permitted the establishment of ‘Special Economic Zones’. At Singur, the industrial group Tata was to produce the world’s cheapest car, the ‘Nano’. In Nandigram, the government wanted to invite the Salim Group, Indonesian investors whose financing, some argued, came from ethically questionable sources, to set up a chemical production hub. It was a challenge to convince the various categories of people – landowners included – whose livelihoods depended on the fertile land on the area.” (ibid, p. 4).

⁵¹The reader wishing to learn more about the balance-sheet the Bengali population made of the long administration of the Left Front and the rise of Mamata Banerjee and her Trinamool Congress may read the author’s articles published after two lengthy stays in West Bengal – one in 2010, the second during the 2011 legislative elections (Reynolds 2011; Reynolds, 2016).

These two areas quickly became synonymous with forced land acquisition, as a relatively large group of peasants wished to keep their land.

Undoubtedly the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, successor to the very popular Jyoti Basu, were not wrong to try to introduce a fresh policy of industrialization, considering the level of unemployment and the fragmentation of agricultural holdings over generations. There remains an important dimension: the Special Economic Zones (SEZs) deprived the peasants of any future. The latter did not have the skills that the new industries required; the industrialists involved in land grabbing targeted the most fertile lands, sources of intense speculation; in any event, they envisaged avoiding any opposition from trade union organisations, employing people who were not originating from West Bengal, while regional ties often supported any attempt to unite workers and employees.

The CPI(M) stressed that it had no choice but to comply with the demands of what it called 'big capital'. In effect Tata Motors, that had planned to build the Nano car (a compact city car) in Singur, finally chose Gujarat, which offered far more favourable conditions to industrialists. As was most of the time the case, the central party organs did not oppose the weak excuses put forward by the Bengali Communist Party. The latter, it is true, argued that it had been in power since 1977, while Communist comrades based at the Headquarters in the capital could not boast of having won any elections. However, the image of the Bengali provincial section, which sought to 'rectify matters' (an expression the Indian Communists like to use it) after CPI(M)'s activists had used violent means to enforce the Party's line, was lastingly tarnished⁵².

Another dimension (finally) mentioned in 2011 was the issue of funding the CPI(M) raised. Admittedly, this political group could boast of a strict discipline in its ranks which opposed any misappropriation. There remains the forced contribution of various groups of workers, although the Party boasted of enjoying freely given popular support.

"By way of example, one can mention the contributions that groups of workers such as rickshaw (5 rupees per day), taxi drivers (10 rupees per day), or luggage porters at railway stations (2 rupees per day) were – according the information I collected – expected to pay daily to the party in the parts of Kolkata within its 'jurisdiction.'" (ibid, p. 7).

This was a fundraising 'method' used by political parties in India⁵³. The CPI(M), it is true, redistributed part of the monies collected, providing temporary financial assistance to those who, upon falling ill, were unable to earn a living: only 8% of the active Indian population was employed in the formal sector.

"Similarly, the mass organisations that the Marxist party had gradually established offered workers in cities and the countryside a useful channel – in a large and populous state in which it is remains difficult

⁵²A young student, then close to the Marxist Party, related to the author that after joining the peasants who resisted expulsion from their land, he learnt watching the news that he stood accused of a rape a CPI(M) activist had committed.

⁵³We visited Kolkata one year after the elections had taken place. It was frequently difficult to hail a taxi. We were told that unlike in the past when drivers had to make a daily 'contribution' to the Marxist Party, Trinamool Congress's workers would force them to do so whenever they parked.

for an ordinary citizen to gain access to persons of influence, through which to send complaints and demands to those in power.” (ibid).

It was also rumored that the CPI(M) kept the deeds of ownership of the lands which the Left Front had distributed under lock and key in its headquarters. Its goal was to make sure the families who had benefited from land distribution kept on voting for it. Probably seeking to establish a party whose members would display unquestionable loyalty, the Party failed to address many of the mistakes that aroused the opposition of its erstwhile followers. It was, however, Bhattacharjee’s all-out attempt at industrialization that turned the peasants away from the Left Front government. No doubt they were already struggling to accept the control of the CPI(M) over their daily lives that was compared to some of the methods employed by the Communist Party of the People’s Republic of China. Similarly, it was openly stated (in 2011) that the CPI(M) nominated all teachers in rural as well as urban areas, whether they were simple schoolteachers or university professors who all were preferably the party members.

The population had thus come to forget the popularity the left political formations had enjoyed during the first ten years of their rule. There remains the nature of the opposition that the government faced from 1977 to 2011, as its opponents decried its frequent use of ‘severe measures’ which hit, through the use of more and more ‘goondas’⁵⁴ (armed muscle) those who dared to indulge in criticism. Such a reading tended to erase the dimension of collaboration: the middle and upper classes now seemed seduced by the fruits of a consumer society that barely reached West Bengal. A significant part of the Indian intelligentsia had long adhered to the ideals of the left, justifying the ‘mistakes’ of the Communist movement by the necessity of fighting ‘bourgeois propaganda’. No doubt recent indicators had also alarmed it. Indeed, West Bengal’s GDP ranked a middling 18th among Indian states, while “the long ‘reign’ of the CPI(M)... had not only undermined one of the long-standing key attributes of the Bengali identity – its intellectual leadership – but had left the economy – already laid low during the earlier Congress rule – in a parlous state” (ibid, p. 8). In any case, the Bengali electorate – of which a significant part had never experienced a ‘bourgeois’ government – was eager for political change. They were thus little sensitive to the argument that only the re-election of the Left would enable the social assets the latter had won to be retained. The also judged Marxist discourse outdated, as the country was engaged in an intense economic liberalization. It welcomed the decision of the Election Commission to closely monitor the 2011 elections; the latter divided the consultation into six phases (April 18th, 23rd and 27th, and May 3rd, 7th and 10th), in order to allow large contingents of the security forces to move between areas.

At the end of the elections, the CPI(M), which had obtained 235 of the 295 seats five years earlier, held only 40 of the seats which the Left Front obtained, a result that concealed the fact that 41% of those who voted remained faithful to it. The TMC got 184 seats and Congress, its then ally, 42. Behind the scenes, the CPI(M) acknowledged out that once installed in office, the Trinamool Congress, using similar methods the Left Front experienced during its ‘reign’,

⁵⁴Ironically, members of the CPI(M) told the author that after a defeat they expected that their party would at least be able to get rid of all the ‘goondas’ who would join the TMC. This remains the case.

would confirm its prominence in the next legislative elections. In any case, for many of the poor, Banerjee represented hope. In addition, Naxalite groups in the districts of West Midnapore, Bankura and Purulia called on voters to punish an overly legalistic left. To note that Banerjee distanced herself from Hindu nationalists; she had been particularly keen in gaining the confidence of the Muslim community (27.1% of the state's population) (Indian Government of India 2011) episode of Nandigram, a region that was in large part home to Dalits ('untouchables') and Muslims.

8. Conclusion

8.1. An outline of the evolution of Communist movement in India

We have briefly attempted, in this study, to touch upon some events which marked the history of the Communist movement of the subcontinent, as it sought to prove itself an integral part of the Indian nation. Like other Communist parties outside the Soviet bloc, the original CPI adhered to the myth of a 'socialist homeland' which, through the eventual establishment of Communism, would give birth to 'new man'. It based its strategy on analyses of the Indian situation in which theoreticians in Moscow, seeking to defend the world hegemony of the USSR, were engaged, and which thus curbed its assertiveness on the national political scene. Applying the theory of 'peaceful transition to socialism', with Moscow and then Beijing deciding on a policy of friendship with New Delhi, it welcomed the non-aligned foreign policy adopted by the Nehru government. This was a new spin that did not fail to draw ironic comments from the rest of the Indian political class. Adopting, with the consent of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, a nationalist position, upon the death of Stalin, the CPI found itself caught in the quarrel between the two 'big brothers'. While the People's Republic of China was openly seeking regional hegemony, questioning the borders with its neighbours, the Communist Party of India was again confronted by its history. It came to deny its first birth in Tashkent, which however reflected the movement of ideas that shook the countries subjected to colonialism and the underdevelopment for which foreign yoke had at least been in part responsible.

In the aftermath of the 1964 and 1967 splits, the forces of the Communist movement became fragmented. Observers, however, paid particular attention to the case of West Bengal, as it seemingly symbolised the success of an Indianized Communism which managed not only to conquer power but also to retain it over a long period. Faced with defeat in 2011, the CPI(M) preferred to insist on the consumerism of the middle- and upper-classes, who enjoyed an enviable standard of living compared to the rest of their fellow citizens and wanted to undermine the egalitarian discourse of the left. This is, however, an insufficient argument to explain the support that Mamata Banerjee got.

"It is perhaps revealing to look at the discourse of young activists of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) with whom I discussed in a working-class suburb of the North 24 Parganas district of Kolkata on the eve of the [2011] election. They emphasised, in a language that some will judge simplistic, the change in the balance of forces in West Bengal: the left was now right-wing (the CPI(M))

having, according to this interpretation, betrayed its original aims), while the right (and thus Mamata Banerjee) had propelled itself into the forefront of representing the workers” (ibid, p. 9-10).

There remains the complexity of situation in West Bengal, since Mamata Banerjee has, since her first election, been content with a policy of ‘dol’ (or gifts). The Chief Minister has thus refrained from any attempt at industrialisation since this presupposes the creation of SEZs.

8.2 The refusal of Communist leaders to engage in a genuine evaluation of the CPI(M)’s shortcomings?

During its Twentieth Congress (April 4th-9th, 2012) held in Kozhikode (Kerala), the Communist Party of India (Marxist) acknowledged that it needed to promote a leftist policy, noting that:

“The political-tactical line of the 19th Congress had provided the direction that as against the Congress and the BJP we should strive to build a third alternative. For this the Party should work for joint actions and build united struggles with the non-Congress secular parties on commonly agreed issues” (CPI(M) 2012).

This Nineteenth Congress (March 20–April 3, 2008), had emphasised that a “third alternative” at the national level would be possible “only when there is a change in the stand of the political parties which are today either with the Congress or the BJP” (ibid). As “far as economic policies” were concerned, most of the regional parties “adhered to the policies of liberalisation”, hence the intention of the CPI(M) to draw these political groups into “building big movements and unleashing struggles” (ibid). At its Kozhikode meeting, the Marxist Party underlined that it wanted to “maintain relations with all the non-Congress secular parties for developing united struggles”, opposing “bourgeois-landlord policies” and putting into practice “the left and democratic alliance” (ibid). The Nineteenth Congress, acknowledging the “electoral setbacks” the “CPI(M) and the Left” had suffered, reiterated “the Party’s independent role and activities” (ibid). It was to ensure that its “tactics of entering into electoral understanding and joint platforms... should not hamper or blur” its “independent identity” (ibid). Moreover, the CPI(M) condemned – during its Twenty-First Congress (January 19-21, 2015) “the neo-liberal agenda”, the “massive corruption”, “the relentless price rises and growing unemployment” that the UPA-II government coalition (United Progressive Alliance led by the Congress Party) had unleashed, noting that the population (especially the middle-class and young people) had little confidence in the government (CPI (M) 2015.a). The party sought (as stated in its *Political Resolution*)

“to expand its independent role, strengthen Left unity and mobilise the working class, peasantry and other sections on the basis of a left and democratic platform” (ibid).

On the eve of the 2016 legislative elections, the provincial section of the CPI(M) in West Bengal argued as to the necessity of an electoral alliance with the Congress Party, justifying this in large part by the threat of communalism – a threat many critics denied. The verdict was unambiguous.

“One of my interviewees said that if the CPI(M) believed itself incapable of facing the electorate alone, ‘why don’t they shut the Party’, an indication of the extent of the disarray. Other leftists met in Kerala smiled ironically at the CPI(M)’s assertion that one of the explanations for the defeat suffered by the Left Front [in 2016] was a secret rapprochement of the BJP and the Trinamool Congress or from the joint forces of neo-liberalism and the ideology of ‘Hindutva’. Some may judge such reactions to be partisans, but the researcher is obliged to take note of them” (Reynolds 2016, ibid).

The TMC took 211 of the 292 seats, enjoying an impregnable overall majority. The Congress won 44 seats (two more than in 2011), having benefitted from the electoral alliance with the CPI(M), even though it could not boast of the support of much of the population any longer. The Left Front was relegated to third, for at least two reasons: its supporters voted for Congress' candidates whenever they were directed to so, whereas the Congress's followers did not abide by the same discipline; the CPI(M) lacked confidence in its forces, believing itself incapable of victory in twenty constituencies which it, somehow, gifted to the Congress. Leftist sympathisers further stated the Marxist Party refused to acknowledge the strong anti-Congress tradition to which West Bengal remained faithful. As an example of this analysis, they underlined that "800,000 voters, or 1.4%" of the electorate "chose a new option that of 'NOTA' or none of the above", concluding that they would "would have voted for the Left Front had it not agreed to an electoral pact favourable to the Congress" (ibid). The Party, in the end, took this silent protest into account when it indicated in its *Political Tactical Line* (January 19-21, 2015) that:

"If the focus had been on strengthening the independent role of the Party and building the Left and democratic Front (which is a class based alliance, not an electoral alliance), then what we see in practice today of concentrating on electoral tactics, seeking to build an electoral understanding with bourgeois parties and projection of an alternative which is only electoral in nature could have been avoided" (CPI(M) 2015.b).

Left-wing sympathisers may find the analysis we have tried to present as irrelevant, considering the increasing polarization of the Indian political scene and a rewriting of history that threatens the foundations of Indian secularism. The fact remains that the historian and the political scientist must be scrupulously objective in examining the past, whatever their political commitment. India under the rule of Narendra Modi and the Hindu nationalists raises many concerns, but these should not prohibit a critical analysis of the recent evolution of the CPI(M) on the Indian political scene. This political formation continues to resort to an obsolete terminology reminiscent of the Stalinist years, when it attempts an evaluation (moreover, a rather timid one) of its 'reign' in West Bengal. The CPI(M) in West Bengal but also in New Delhi is struggling to draw up a true assessment of their performance in this state.

The Indian left is at the crossroads. The CPI(M), because of its forces much larger (proportionately) than the rest of the left, has a key role to play: that of defending democratic institutions under threat, but also advocating better social justice. It must fight the slogan that only a free market and a sustained economic growth will help overcome poverty. It is, however, divided into two groups, one defends a return to the original values of the Communist movement that will allow it to win support from the population in other parts of the country. The second group also calls for a re-examination of the Party line from 1996 to the present day. It believes that the Marxist Party missed a historic opportunity in refusing that Jyoti Basu become Prime Minister in 1996, as following the legislative elections, the country faced the era of coalitions.

One should, lastly, underline the specificity of the Indian context in which social classes coexist with a caste system that persists. The analysis of the CPI(M) of the Indian situation is nonetheless valid. The latter should, however, pay more attention to the success of the Communist model in Kerala, where there have been regular changes in power since 1957. In addition, it may need to consider reunification with the CPI, since the latter is also still faithful to the parliamentary route.

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⁵⁵Joshi decided, shortly before his death, to give his personal papers to the Jawaharlal Nehru University (New Delhi). The latter kept the numbering that the leader adopted without correcting the errors. This document dated January 1948 is thus inserted within documents of the year 1947.

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