

ASIAN COMMUNIST PARTIES AND THE PROBLEM OF NATIONALISM

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BOTH THE PERVASIVENESS AND THE EXPLOSIVE FORCE of nationalism have been vital dimensions of Asian political movements in the twentieth century. Communist parties in particular have demonstrated an ability and an interest in channelling nationalism into an effective political force in the quest for political control. Nonetheless, Communist parties in Asia have not had unqualified success in every setting, and the wide differences in the Communist Parties of Japan (JCP) and India (CPI) in identifying with nationalism and in amassing popular support may point out the importance of a nationalist line and at the same time indicate some of the limitations of this particular party tactic.

The consideration of these parties will be confined to a short period after World War II, when these countries first experienced independent representative government, Communist Parties were legal and aimed for parliamentary power, and nationalism was important in Japan and parts of India.

To understand the Japanese Communist Party's relations with nationalism, one must first consider some obstacles arising from a historical incompatibility of Japanese nationalism with the JCP.

Japan had no bitter, direct experience with colonialism, thus limiting the concern of Japanese nationalism to other interests more difficult for the JCP to assume. Even though Japan was occupied by a foreign power after World War II, this experience was neither so harsh nor so lengthy as to produce widespread hatred of the imperialists or a truly national movement for "liberation." Furthermore, Japanese nationalism contained elements of pre-war sentiments such as the glorification of the Emperor and rivalry with Russia. At the same time, the JCP was widely believed to be a tool of the USSR, and thus in agreement with Russian foreign policy on significant issues of Japanese national concern. Throughout most of its history, the JCP has attacked the Imperial system and even the Emperor himself, as demonstrated by the Party call for the trial of the Emperor as a war criminal immediately after the war.

Other characteristics of the JCP made its effective use of nationalism difficult. Because of pre-war repression, JCP leaders often were in prison or in exile, preventing them from acquiring a satisfactory understanding of the immediate needs of the populace. Many members of the JCP were intellectuals, better read in the Marxian Classics than understanding Japanese society.¹

The Party tried to overcome these obstacles and to establish broad mass appeal through moderate tactics and aims, appearing independent of Soviet domination, and making the American Occupation a nationalist issue. In February, 1946, Nosaka Sanzo, the Party leader, instructed regional members to refrain from anti-emperor talk and terrorist agitation and become "lovable." The new goal became "peaceful revolution." A distinction was made between the Emperor and the foul Imperial system.² The Party spoke often of its program to aid the victims of the Pacific War. In 1947, JCP members tried to associate the conservative parties with the imperialists-colonialists. Thus, from a militant secret organization, the JCP tried to become a patriotic organization with a mass appeal.

During the period 1946-1950, the JCP grew greatly in prestige, as demonstrated by the number of new student and general public sympathizers, and its impressive 1949 election successes. Perhaps 40% of the university students supported the Party, due in part no doubt to their traditional anti-government stand whatever the issue.³ Swearingen estimated that as many as three million Japanese may have sympathized with the JCP. In 1949 the Party received nearly 10% of the vote, obtaining 35 seats in the House of Representatives, and becoming the fourth largest party. This is compared with the 5 seats it obtained in the 1946 election out of a 464 member House.

Nationalist propaganda was involved in this relatively successful experiment with democratic tactics but several additional political factors probably contributed to its victory. The temporary division and discrediting of the Socialists at this time probably helped the communists⁴ as did such factors as the eclipse of the pre-war leaders, the general instability of the war-aftermath and the general moderate image the JCP assumed.⁵

A rather sharp turn of events in 1950 brought out again the differences between JCP aims and those of Japanese nationalism. The JCP association with the Russian indoctrination and treatment of Japanese war prisoners

¹ Doak A. Barnett, *Communist Strategies in Asia* (New York: Praeger, 1963), p. 65.

² Rodger Swearingen and Paul Langer, *Red Flag in Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952), p. 134.

³ Rodger Swearingen, "The Communist Line in Japan," *Far Eastern Survey*, XXXIII (April, 1954), p. 56.

⁴ Robert Scalapino and Junnosuke Masumi, *Parties and Politics in Contemporary Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), p. 36.

⁵ Barnett, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

and the Party's reaction to Cominform criticism of JCP policy revealed the anti-nationalist aims of the Party.

In the Spring of 1950 a Committee of the Japanese Diet stated that the JCP had assisted Russian authorities in obstructing the repatriation of Japanese war prisoners. The Japanese government estimated that 234,151 Japanese had died in Chinese and Russian camps by summer of 1951 and that 17,637 still remained in Soviet hands. Information was revealed to the effect that JCP members had edited the prison newspaper which contained policy statements of the Soviet and Japanese Parties and their account of events in Japan. Such indoctrination presumably served the purpose of broadening the JCP base of support in its goal of government domination.⁶

After only a short time, riots and demonstrations commenced. On May 30, only four days before an election, several American soldiers were assaulted by Communists during a Memorial Day observance. On June 3, a general strike was advocated by the Communists. The JCP again began its attack on the Emperor and refused to support territorial claims against the USSR.

In the June 4 election, the JCP received only two seats in the House of Councilors, and none in the House of Representatives in the election of October 1, 1952.

Several factors contributed to this setback. When Party membership decreased from 108,693 in March, 1950, to 56,000 in September, 1951, a considerable number withdrew from recognized communist affiliation to join the underground.⁷ Soon after the initiation of terrorism, General MacArthur instructed Premier Yoshida to purge the Communist Central Committee and other communists from the press, government and industry—21,000 in all. In addition, several newspapers were closed. As the JCP had failed to gain an alliance with the Socialists in the late 40's it now had to compete with them. Many Socialists were far enough left to attract potential communist votes, particularly when the Socialists had the advantage of having no conspiratorial past or foreign affiliation. Thus, it cannot be said that the decline of the Party's influence resulted solely from the withdrawal of support from a nationalist oriented public. Yet such a dramatic reversal of Party fortunes at the time when it so clearly showed its subordination to Soviet Union indicated the importance of the nationalist issue. Evelyn Colbert summarizes the situation thus:⁸

The Cominform attack and the Party's response served in the eyes of the Japanese people to underline the Party's interconnection and its subservience to Moscow at a time when long-held antipathies to Russia were intensified by the repatriation issue and Soviet accusations against the Emperor.

⁶ Swearingen and Langer, *op. cit.*, pp. 232-233.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 214.

⁸ Evelyn Colbert, *The Left Wing in Japanese Politics* (New York: Institute of Pacific Relations, 1925), p. 291.

As with the Japan Communist Party, the Communist Party of India faced severe problems in creating a nationalist image as a result of certain factors within the party. By the end of World War II, the CPI had acquired an anti-nationalist reputation. From 1928-1935, at the urging of Stalin, the CPI attacked Gandhi, Nehru, and the Congress Party, cutting itself off from India's greatest nationalist force and ruining its chances for an alliance of the left. In 1942, after the Allies and USSR had joined forces against the Axis Powers, the CPI supported the British war effort, as a result of which it was denounced by the entire nationalist movement. Furthermore, the Party supported British attempts to court-martial Indian officers who assisted the Japanese. Public hostility toward the CPI was demonstrated by attacks on Party members and officers, particularly in Bombay and Calcutta. In September 1945 when the CPI tried to join a Congress sponsored public meeting, a riot took place.⁹

To overcome this image, the CPI attempted to associate itself with nationalist terrorist bands by means of various pamphlets.¹⁰ Yet, during the Naval Mutiny of February 1946 against the British, the Party failed to claim involvement in it. Further, in accordance with Soviet policy, during the critical period of the independence settlement the CPI "disassociated itself from the major problems of Indian independence by turning to international issues on the one hand, and to local issues on the other."¹¹ In 1948, during the February Calcutta Conference, the Party initiated a terrorist campaign at the call of the international leadership, quarreling during the next three years about whether to use the Russian or the Chinese plan of revolution.

Internally, the Party leadership was badly disorganized and unable to take concerted action. Linguistic, caste and cultural differences increased the difficulty of uniting local parties into a strong, centralized one. Each regional party was interested in its own activities such as trade unions and front organizations. The Politburo at times ceased to meet while local parties drew up their own manifesto and led their own rebellions. In addition, the division between Chinese and Russian oriented party members created further disunity. The lack of concerted action during the Terrorist period (1946-1951) indicated this tendency. By the end of 1946, the CPI Central Office appeared to be thoroughly uncoordinated—"contradictory statements followed one another in quick succession."¹² Randivi, the head of the Party during much of this period, and his concept of a proletarian revolu-

⁹ Gene Overstreet and Marshall Windmiller, *Communism in India* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1959), p. 234.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 335.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 248.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 245.

tion were ignored by local communists who led peasant uprisings in sections of Senegana and Andhra.¹³

Thus a historical incompatibility of the CPI with Indian nationalism coupled with decentralized party organization would indicate the almost insurmountable difficulty of the Party in creating an effective nationalist identity. Yet this same concentration of political party power at the local level would seem to make easy an exploitation of regional nationalism based upon linguistic and cultural differences. The central party organs, seeing the value of such exploitation in 1946, advocated the fragmentation of the Indian subcontinent into sixteen "nations."¹⁴ When in 1948-1949 Hindi was made the national language, the Party said that no one language could serve those of the dominant central bourgeoisie.¹⁵ The opportunity for the local parties to exploit this particularism on specific issues came in September, 1951, when the CPI finally joined the democratic fold in enthusiastically campaigning for the 1951-1952 elections.

The flexibility with which local parties used regional nationalism can be seen by the tactics of several of these parties. In Travincore-Cochin, where the people were the best educated in India, the CPI sponsored a literary movement. In Andhra, where the Telugu speaking population sought a lingual province independent of Madras (in which Andhra was included), the CPI fervently supported the separation. In the Tengana district of Hyderabad the Party exploited the "chaotic conditions resulting from the resistance of the Nizam of Hyderabad to the incorporation of his principality into the Indian Union."¹⁶

These were some of the factors contributing to a likelihood of a CPI identification with Indian and regional nationalism. A brief consideration of the 1951-1952 election results may show an important relationship between election success and the nationalist factor.

The CPI and the People's Democratic Front (several small Marxist groups in Hyderabad) won 23 of 70 contested seats in Parliament compared with the 362 for the Congress Party. The CPI nationally was fourth in popular vote (4,712,000), receiving 5.4% while the Congress got 47,530,000 with 44.8%. The Socialists, second in rank, got 11,000,000 votes. In Madras, Hyderabad, and Travancore-Cochin, the Communists were relatively more successful, particularly in the elections for the provincial assemblies. In Madras the CPI received 2,594,000 of the 19,975,000 votes cast for the regional seats, winning 8 of the 75 seats entitled to Madras. Significantly,

¹³ Morton Schwartz, "The Wavering 'Line' of Indian Communism," *Political Science Quarterly*, LII (December, 1955), pp. 552-572.

¹⁴ Overstreet and Windmiller, *op. cit.*, p. 493.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 502-503.

¹⁶ Schwartz, *op. cit.*, p. 564.

41 of the 61 assembly seats were from Andhra. A similar record appeared in Hyderabad where the People's Democratic Front polled 1,367,000 votes of the 5,202,000 total, receiving 42 of the 175 regional seats, and in Travancore-Cochin, where the party was outlawed, Communists ran as independents in the United Front of Leftists winning 32 of 108 seats in the assembly whereas it won only 4 of the 25 National seats.¹⁷

In Upper Pradesh, the CPI received only 59,700 of the 17,075,000 votes cast winning no seats in Parliament and having a similar record in the assembly election where it won no seats after contesting 41. Only 17 assembly seats were won in Madras, Hyderabad, Travancore-Cochin and West Bengal, where the CPI received 28 of 238 seats.¹⁸

A number of factors contributed to these results. In Hyderabad and Travancore-Cochin the Communists were in alliances; thus, their true popular support could not be accurately measured. Corruption and maladministration by the Congress Party in these areas led to voter defection.¹⁹ Further, the Communists spent more time and more money in these three regions. Finally, the Communists probably gained from the Congress' speeches warning against the evils of communalism and feudalism.

Thus, while obviously the nationalist factor was hardly the only one of importance, there seems to be a very real relationship between nationalist identification and election success. In an intra-party report concerning the 1951 election, it was stated that success came where "provincial units of the Party brought out their own manifestoes, where agitation was positive and such concrete factors as the 'national' factor, the factor of unification of the nationalities into linguistic provinces, were effectively utilized."²⁰

The poor showing of the Party in the dominant states where there was little need for protection from the center and where Indian nationalism had greater appeal, in part at least, indicates the dilemma faced by the CPI.

While this study doesn't presume to make a historical account of the Indian Communists, several significant events during the middle 50's point to several prerequisites for an effective use of the nationalist issue. When the cause of local frustration is eliminated, as it was in Andhra when it became a state in 1953, the Congress could make Indian nationalism the issue against the Communists, such as occurred in the 1955 elections when the CPI in Andhra received only 8% of the assembly seats compared with the Congress' 61%.²¹ Additionally, the USSR at this time worked

¹⁷ M. R. Masani, *The Communist Party of India* (Boston: The Macmillan Co., 1954), pp. 157-160.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

²⁰ Selig Harrison, "The Challenge to Indian Nationalism," *Foreign Affairs*, XXXIV (July, 1956), p. 630.

²¹ Overstreet and Windmiller, *op. cit.*, p. 318.

very hard to seek Indian friendship or at least her neutrality and thus praised more and more both Nehru's domestic and foreign policies, resulting in the frustration of the CPI. For the same reason the Russians instructed the Indian Party to put less emphasis on particularist agitation, which it understandably and incompletely did. The subordination of the CPI, a revolutionary party, to the Russian Communists who were seeking international respectability, thus greatly limited the CPI's opportunity.

This brief examination of two unsuccessful Communist Party organizations indicates that the historical experience of colonial subjection is not in itself sufficient to create Communist success; rather, a more critical factor would be the extent of nationalistic feeling channeled into non-revolutionary political organizations. The differences in India are particularly instructive in that they indicate variations in the emerging nations regarding their relationship with communism. From the point of view of general communist doctrine and its acceptance by those able to influence the political systems of these areas, there appears to be a need for a highly independent Party, particularly in the rather sensitively self-conscious countries like Japan and India. That what is good for the international leadership may not be good for the national communist party's bid for power is clearly indicated by the frustrations of the parties in India and Japan. If this factor coupled with a sincere nationalism is necessary for communist growth, a further expansion of world communist power may only come with a corresponding further development of polycentrism of the communist movement.