

## THE INDIAN REVOLUTIONARIES AND THE BOLSHEVIKS — THEIR EARLY CONTACTS, 1918-1922\*

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INDIAN REVOLUTIONARIES USUALLY WORKED ON THE ASSUMPTION "England's difficulty is India's opportunity,"<sup>1</sup> from which it followed that England's enemies are India's friends. So, Germany was their natural friend and patron during World War I. An Indian Independence Committee was formed there to act as a liaison between the German Government and the Indian revolutionaries in different parts of the world, and the former spent over ten million marks to organise a revolt in India. By the end of 1916, however, their efforts had failed, and it was clear that nothing more could be done with German help. Naturally, some among the Indian revolutionaries began looking around for other possible sources of assistance.

After the March Revolution in Russia, Mahendra Pratap, President of the Provisional Government of Free India at Kabul, sent an emissary to Russian Turkistan, in the hope of some favourable response. But, he was told that the Kerensky Government would pursue the Czarist foreign policy of alliance with their western allies. However, the situation changed when the Bolsheviks came to power. They were reported to have invited Mahendra Pratap to visit Russia, and he went to Moscow in March 1918, on his way to Berlin. He had an interview even with Trotsky. But, the Bolsheviks themselves were then engaged in a bitter struggle for survival, and were in no position to spare any assistance for the India revolutionaries. Mahendra Pratap went to Germany after a short stay in Moscow,<sup>2</sup> obviously not impressed with the Bolsheviks as possible friends of any particular value.

More fruitful contacts between the Indian revolutionaries and the Bolsheviks had already taken place, at an informal level, in distant Sweden. In the summer of 1917, Dutch and Swedish socialists took the initiative in organising an international conference at Stockholm, primarily to find out ways and means for bringing about an end to hostilities. Virendranath Chattopadhyaya reached Stockholm at the end of May to attend the conference at the head of a small Indian

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\* Culled from the records available at the National Archives of India, New Delhi.

<sup>1</sup> Maulvi Barakatullah is believed to have been the first to use this expression, as early as 1904. Circular No. 5, H. p. 1908 November 6, Deposit.

<sup>2</sup> Mahendra Pratap, *My Life Story of Fiftyfive Years*, Delhi, 1947, pp. 57-58.

delegation, and was soon joined by Bhupendranath Datta, then the Secretary of the Indian Independence Committee in Berlin. There, the Indian delegates met Karl Radek and Angelica Balabanova, the first General Secretary of the Communist International (Comintern in short), and became particularly friendly with K. M. Troianovsky. Troianovsky stayed on at Stockholm even after the conference was over, and returned to Russia after the Bolshevik Revolution with the request from his Indian friends to do something for them in the changed circumstances. He kept his word, and informed Chattopadhyaya in the summer of 1918 that a Russo-Indian association had been formed in Moscow.<sup>3</sup>

The Indian Independence Committee, in the meantime, on the advice of Troianovsky, had put itself in contact with the Soviet Embassy in Berlin.<sup>4</sup> But, unfortunately for them, the German Government suddenly asked the Soviet Ambassador, Adolf Joffe, on 6 November 1918, to quit the country on charge of illicit contacts with German communists. He was prepared to take some of the Indians with him to Russia. But it was not possible for any of them to accompany him in such a hurry.<sup>5</sup> Besides, it appeared that they still had some mental reservations about suddenly cutting off their old contacts and casting their lot with the unknown Bolsheviks. At any rate, it was the end of all formal contacts between the Bolsheviks and the Indian Independence Committee, and in December 1918 the latter was formally dissolved.<sup>6</sup>

Berlin, however, soon acquired a new importance as a rendezvous of revolutionaries of different countries proceeding to attend the Second World Congress of the Comintern in Moscow. Soon, a few Indians too reached Berlin on their way to Moscow. The first to arrive was M.N. Roy. He came to Berlin from Mexico, probably in December 1919. Abani Mukherjee, too, soon appeared in Berlin with the alias, Dr. R. Sahir. M.N. Roy left for Russia in May 1920, and Abani Mukherjee followed him soon.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Bhupendranath Datta, *Aprokashita Rajnaitik Itihas* (in Bengal), Calcutta, 1953, pp. 240-245. Also see note by the British Minister at Stockholm, dated 24-5-1917, Home (Political) Proceedings of the Government of India, 1917 July 41 Deposit. Virendranath Chattopadhyaya was the eldest brother of Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, the well-known poetess and nationalist leader of India. He was one of the senior-most Indian revolutionary leader abroad before World War I, and the real leader of the Indian Independence Committee in Berlin during the war. He is believed to have died in Russia in December 1942.

<sup>4</sup> Bhupendranath Datta, pp. 245-246.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 247. Also E. H. Carr, *German-Soviet Relations between the two World Wars, 1919-1939*, London, 1952, p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> Bhupendranath Datta, p. 248.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 248-250. Also, M. N. Roy, *Memoirs*, Bombay, 1964, pp. 296-298, 304-305. M. N. Roy, i.e. Manabendra Nath Roy, was the pseudonym of Harendranath Bhattacharya, one of the leaders of the Yugantar revolutionary group in Bengal before World War I. He left India in August 1915 in search of German money and arms, and after travelling for a year in East Asian countries he reached the U.S.A. where he was arrested. But he managed to escape to Mexico in 1917, where two years later he formed the first Communist Party outside the U.S.S.R. Then at Borodin's suggestion he came to Moscow, and played a spectacular part in the

Before leaving Germany, M.N. Roy had requested his Indian friends there to accompany him to Russia. But their leader, Chattopadhyaya was still away at Stockholm, and in his absence the rest were not keen on taking any major decision. Besides, now that their comrades in the U.S.A. had also been released, most of them preferred to watch the evolution of events from their familiar surroundings rather than commit themselves to unknown allies.<sup>8</sup>

In the meantime, some Indian revolutionaries operating through Afghanistan had made contacts with the Soviet authorities. A few months after Mahendra Pratap's abortive visit two college teachers from India, Ahmed Haris and Muhammad Hadi (both are believed to be aliases of two gentlemen from Delhi, Sattar and Jabbar) reached Moscow, towards the middle of November 1918. They brought with them a message for the Soviet authorities said to have been passed at a meeting in Delhi, at the end of 1917. They had a meeting with Lenin, on 23 November, and on the 25th Muhammad Hadi addressed the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party. On 5 December, at an international gathering, Muhammad Hadi requested the Soviet authorities to help India win her freedom<sup>9</sup> What actually transpired there has not yet been known. However, it is a fact that, in March 1919, Maulvi Barakatullah and Abdur Rab led an Indian delegation from Kabul to Tashkent, where they were given a rousing reception. Barakatullah appealed to all Muslims to rise in revolt against British imperialism, and anti-British propaganda leaflets were distributed in the towns of Central Asia.<sup>10</sup> The British were obviously perturbed at the pan-Islamic slant he gave to the usual Bolshevik propaganda.<sup>11</sup>

However, the prospect of Soviet aid for India's struggle brightened by the summer of 1919. By then, most of the so-called Russian Turkistan

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Comintern till his expulsion from it in 1929. He returned to India, and died on 25 January 1954.

Abani Mukherjee was sent to Japan in April 1915 as an emissary of the Bengal revolutionaries. On his way back a few months later he was arrested in Singapore, where it was suspected he made some damaging confession. However, he managed to escape to Java in the autumn of 1917, and ultimately made his way to Russia and played some part in the Comintern. He too was later expelled, and is believed to have died in Russia on the eve of World War II.

<sup>8</sup> M.N. Roy, p. 487. Also, the oral statements of Birendranath Dasgupta and Pandurang Khankojé to the author.

<sup>9</sup> Anand Gupta (ed) *India and Lenin*, New Delhi, 1960, pp. 43-45. Also, a radio telegram from Moscow to Tashkent in January 1919, F.P. 1920 February 77-171.

<sup>10</sup> F.M. Bailey, *Mission to Tashkent*, London, 1946, pp. 1943-146. Also see D. Kaushik, "Indian Revolutionaries in Soviet Russia", *Link*, 26-1-1966, p. 72. Maulvi Barakatullah, originally an inhabitant of Bhopal, lived in the U.S. and Japan for many years before World War I organising revolutionary activity among the Indians there. He came to Germany early in 1915, and came to Kabul with Raja Mahendra Pratap and the Turko-German mission. There he became the Prime Minister of the Provisional Government of Free India. He died in the U.S.A. in 1926.

<sup>11</sup> P. T. Etherton, *In the Heart of Asia*, London, 1925, p. 160. Also see Montague to Chelmsford on 9-9-1920, *Montague Papers*, Vol. IV.

had been brought under Soviet control, and the Afghan Government had started diplomatic negotiations with Moscow. An Afghan delegation, that included Barakatullah, reached Moscow in the beginning of May with Amir Amanullah's letter for Lenin, dated 7 April.<sup>12</sup> Lenin in his reply, dated 27 May, congratulated the "independent Afghan people heroically defending itself against foreign oppressors", and suggested that diplomatic relations would open "wide possibilities for mutual aid against any attack by foreign bandits on the freedom of others".<sup>13</sup> This letter was sent to N.Z. Bravin at Tashkent, whence he set out for Kabul on 14 June to formalise diplomatic relations, and to make arrangements for Soviet aid. Their mission also included a few Germans and Austrians from the Russian prisoners-of-war camps in Turkistan, who were to impart military training and instructions in explosives, and they reached Kabul a few days after the Treaty of Rawalpindi had been signed on 8 August 1919. Barakatullah, too, returned to Kabul with this mission.<sup>14</sup>

Shortly before Bravin's mission had left Tashkent an Afghan mission under Muhammad Wali Khan had arrived there, and on 14 June they too left for Moscow with Amanullah's second letter. They reached Moscow in the beginning of October 1919.<sup>15</sup> On 27 November Lenin wrote to Amanullah assuring him military aid against British imperialism.<sup>16</sup> Thus began a series of friendly correspondence and negotiations that ultimately culminated in the Russo-Afghan Treaty of 28 February 1921. The growing friendship between these two countries was, obviously, of considerable importance to Indian revolutionaries operating in and seeking foreign help through that region.

By the time this exchange of missions took place the war situation had considerably improved for the Bolsheviks. The Allied and White Russian troops were almost everywhere in retreat, and the Soviet

<sup>12</sup> *Papers Regarding Hostilities with Afghanistan*, London, 1919 p. 18. In an interview with the *Izvestia*, published there on 6-5-1919, p. 1, Barakatullah was reported to have said, "I am not a Communist or a Socialist. . . My political programme has been so far that of driving the Britons from Asia. I am an unreconcilable foe of European capitalism in Asia, which is represented largely by the British. In this attitude I stand close to Communists, in that respect you and I are natural allies." Foreign and Political Proceedings of the Government of India, 1920 February F 17-171. Also, X. J. Eudin & R. C. North, *Soviet Russia and the East, A Documentary Survey*, Stanford, 1957, p. 83.

<sup>13</sup> Louis Fischer, *The Soviet in World Affairs* (Vol. I, London, 1930, pp. 285-286. Also, *The Times*, 13-6-1919, p. 12.

<sup>14</sup> C.S. Samna, *India and the Anglo-Soviet Relations (1917-1947)*, Bombay, 1959, p. 41. Also, F.M. Bailey, pp. 174-175. There were already 150 German and Austrian former prisoners-of-war in different factories. Chelmsford to Montague on 20.3.1919, *Chelmsford Papers*, Vol. V, Part 2.

<sup>15</sup> C.S. Samna, *op. cit.*, pp. 41-42. Also see F.M. Bailey, p. 169. This Afghan delegation was officially welcomed at Moscow on 10 October 1919. Eudin & North, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 42-43.

authorities were now in a position to take the offensive not only militarily but also politically. A second Soviet mission under Yakov Suritz left Moscow, late in the summer of 1919, and reached Kabul in December the same year.<sup>17</sup> Mahendra Pratap, Tirumal Achari and Abdur Rab also came with this mission to ensure co-operation between the Bolsheviks and the Indian revolutionaries there, and to organise revolutionary work and tribal raids.<sup>18</sup> As to what they did in co-operation with their Afghan and Russian friends we can only refer to a British official note handed over by Sir Robert Horne to Leonid Krassin, the Soviet negotiator in London. It charged Suritz, who had by then succeeded Bravin, of putting pressure on the Afghan Government to allow passage of arms to the Indian frontier through their country and to facilitate the establishment of a printing press at Kabul for anti-British propaganda. It further added that Indian revolutionaries in Afghanistan were active among "the tribes along the Chitral, Wakhan and the Pamir," and had urged the formation of a military centre on the Chitral-Pamir frontier, and that according to Suritz himself "Tashkent is only a *pis aller*, . . . that the base will have to be removed to Kabul as soon as circumstances permit."<sup>19</sup>

It is not yet possible to determine how far these charges are true. At any rate, these appear highly probable and certainly not wholly false. The Bolsheviks, then flushed with success, were keen on putting all conceivable pressure on England, short of war, to persuade the latter to agree to trade negotiations. Elated at the news of disturbances in the Punjab a few months ago and the India-wide agitations that followed, the Indian revolutionaries at Kabul, too, were naturally eager to organise tribal raids and to smuggle arms across the Indian frontier.

But attempt on this line made little progress. The main reason was that the Afghan Government, despite professions to the contrary, was not prepared to invite further risk by helping the Bolsheviks or the Indian revolutionaries so openly. Besides, none of the Indians there was in contact with any revolutionary group within India to whom arms might be sent. Even the Soviet leaders themselves were still not clear about the policy to be pursued towards India. So, though some arms appeared to have reached the Indian frontier,<sup>20</sup> nothing spectacular could take place in the existing circumstances.

<sup>17</sup> Malleon from Meshed to the Chief of the General Staff in Delhi on 28-11-1919, Home (Political) Proceedings of the Government of India, 1920 February 398-412 k.w.a.

<sup>18</sup> Anand Gupta, p. 32. Mahendra Pratap had come to Moscow from Germany on hearing that Afghanistan was at war with Britain. There he, Barakatullah, Abdur Rab, Tirumal Achari, Dalip Singh Gill and their servant, Ibrahim met Lenin. *Ibid.*, pp. 32-33. Also see *The Times*, 17-3-1920, p. 11.

<sup>19</sup> As cited in C.S. Samna, pp. 58-59.

<sup>20</sup> Jadugopal Mukherjee, *Viplabi Jibaner Smriti* (in Bengali), Calcutta, 1956, pp. 480-481. Also Bhupendra Kumar Datta, *Viplaber Padachinha* (in Bengali), Calcutta, 1953, pp. 245-248.

However, the prospect of Soviet aid for a revolution in India became brighter after the Second World Congress of the Comintern, that met at Moscow from 19 July to 7 August 1920. Here it took upon itself the militant task of organising and aiding anti-imperialist revolutions in other countries.<sup>21</sup> The defeat of the Red Army almost at the gate of Warsaw, when the Second World Congress was still in session, further helped divert the attention of the Comintern from Europe to Asia.<sup>22</sup> But, as far as India was concerned, what perhaps influenced its decisions most was the arrival of M.N. Roy, and his admission to the higher echelon of the Comintern, subsequent to the adoption of his thesis on the national and colonial question by the Second World Congress as supplementary to that of Lenin himself. M.N. Roy declared: "In most of the colonies there already exist organised revolutionary parties, which strive to be in close connection with the working masses. (The relation of the Communist International with the revolutionary movement in the colonies should be realized through the medium of these parties and groups, because they are the vanguard of the working class in their respective countries). They are not very large today, but they reflect the aspirations of the masses, and the latter will follow them to the revolution".<sup>23</sup> It was a clear suggestion to establish contacts with and to help the revolutionary groups within India. Lenin, in fact, favoured still greater co-operation, at least for the time being, with the bourgeois nationalists.<sup>24</sup> Thus, the stage was set ready for organised Bolshevik assistance in India's struggle for freedom.

To help organise revolutions in Asia it was decided that the First Congress of the People of the East should meet at Baku, and a Central Asiatic Bureau of the Comintern was established at Tashkent. M.N. Roy, Georgii Safarov, and Grigorii Sokolnikov constituted this bureau, and its primary aim was to organise a revolution in India. Sokolnikov, who was then the Commander-in-Chief of the Red Army in Central Asia and the Chairman of the Turkistan Commission of the Central Soviet Government, was elected its chairman.<sup>25</sup> The possibility of Roy going to Kabul as the Soviet Ambassador was then being discussed.

<sup>21</sup> *The Second Congress of the Communist International Proceedings*, Moscow, 1920, pp. 167-172.

<sup>22</sup> M.N. Roy, p. 390.

<sup>23</sup> *The Second Congress of the Communist International Proceedings*, p. 578. Perhaps referring to M.N. Roy's presence in the Comintern Georgii Safarov wrote in the *Pravda*, on 16-7-1920, p. 1, "The Indian revolutionaries have made contact with the Communist International... Although their organisation is mainly of a national revolutionary nature, the Left radical movement has also taken root". As cited in X.J. Eudin & R.C. North, pp. 82-83.

<sup>24</sup> *The Second Congress of the Communist International Proceedings*, p. 478. Lenin said, "... on the basis of demands for national independence it would be possible to organise large masses." Alfred Rosmer, "In Moscow in Lenin's Days, 1920-1921", *The New Internationalist*, XXI (Summer 1955), p. 109.

<sup>25</sup> M.N. Roy, pp. 392-395.

So, he stayed behind in Moscow for some time while his colleagues left for Tashkent. It was hoped that from the vantage point of Kabul, as the Soviet Ambassador, he would be better able to organise propaganda and revolutionary operations against the British in India.<sup>26</sup> But the Afghan Government was already getting apprehensive of too close an association with the Bolsheviks, and had begun secret talks with the British. So they cold-shouldered the idea of Roy going to Kabul as ambassador, and he left for Tashkent, in all probability, towards the end of August 1920.<sup>27</sup> Abani Mukherjee, however, went to attend the Congress at Baku, that met from 1 to 8 September 1920. It was attended by fourteen Indians, mostly deserters from the Indian army,<sup>28</sup> and a so-called Indian Revolutionary Organisation in Turkistan was reported to have sent a petition to this Congress seeking help in their fight for freedom.<sup>29</sup> But, apart from its propaganda significance, it had hardly any bearing on the efforts of the Indian revolutionaries.

In the meantime, a new situation had been created by the unprecedented *hijrat* in the summer of 1920, which substantially influenced Indian revolutionary work in that region. This sudden exodus to Afghanistan was the result of reports, not wholly false, that the Allied powers were contemplating a partition of Turkey herself, which would, obviously, reduce the position of the Caliph to virtual impotence. As the Khilafat movement gained momentum some of their more fanatical leaders began exhorting their co-religionists to escape British tyranny by migrating to some *Dar al-Islam* and, if possible, to Turkey to fight for their Caliph. We have it on the authority of Rafiq Ahmed that the first four *muhajirs*, including himself, reached Kabul sometime in May 1920. They were well received, and were lodged at Jabal us-Siraz, at some distance from Kabul. Others, who came after them, were also brought there, and by the beginning of July there were about a couple of hundred of them at Jabal us-Siraz.<sup>30</sup>

Some well-known Indian revolutionaries, such as Mahendra Pratap, Barakatullah, Tirumal Achari, Abdur Rab, Obeidullah, and Qazi Abdul

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, pp. 395 and 420. Also see George Lenczowski, *Russia and the West in India, 1918-1948*, New York, 1948, p. 6. Abani Mukherjee too suggested that Afghanistan should be used as a base of propaganda and, if possible, of military operations against the British in India." Leo Fasvolsky, *Russia in the Far East*, New York, 1922, p. 75.

<sup>27</sup> M;N. Roy, pp. 371, 414-415.

<sup>28</sup> Robert Payne, *Red Storm over Asia*. New York, 1951, p. 8. Also A. Lobanov-Rostovsky, *Russia and Asia*, Michigan, 1951, p. 282.

<sup>29</sup> E. H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution, 1917-1923*, (Vol. III, Paper back), London, 1966, p. 265, footnote.

<sup>30</sup> Muzaffar Ahmed, *The Communist Party in India and its Formation Abroad*, Calcutta, 1962, pp. 14-17. Also, Shaukat Usmani, *Peshawar to Moscow*, Benares, 1927, p. 4. On 11-8-1920, Chelmsford wrote to Montague that about 20,000 *muhajirs* (those who leave their home for the sake of religion) had gone to Afghanistan. *Chelmsford Papers*, Vol. VI, Part 2. On 15-8-1920, A.H. Grant wrote to Chelmsford that over 30,000 had gone to Afghanistan. Ibid., Vol. XXV, Part I.

Vali, were also then staying at Kabul. But there was not much unity among them about their policies and objectives. Some called themselves Communists, some were rabid nationalists, while some others, like Obeidullah, were die-hard pan-Islamites, and they all were eager to influence and assume the leadership of these zealous *muhajirs*. Abdur Rab, Maulana Bashir, and Qazi Abdul Vali advised them to go to Turkistan, and most of them, soon frustrated with their experience in Afghanistan, also decided to leave. The Afghan Government at first raised some objection, but later agreed, and a group of eighty *muhajirs* left for Turkistan sometime in July 1920. Most of them were still keen on going to Turkey, and from Chardzhao went towards Baku. Only about nineteen *muhajirs* went ahead to Tashkent, and reached their destination towards the end of September. Abdur Rab and Tirumal Achari had already arrived there with their group, obviously, by a different route.<sup>31</sup>

To a great extent "the arrival of . . . *muhajirin* in Russia, in autumn 1920, synchronised with the crystallisation of Bolshevik oriental policy into a definite scheme of attacking England in India," and "gave Bolshevism its first great opportunity of exerting its influence in India." At last the Bolsheviks could say that they had with them a few hundred Indian revolutionaries seeking their assistance and championing their cause, and that was of considerable propaganda value. These young men could be used both in establishing contact with revolutionaries within India, and in organising frontier raids.<sup>32</sup>

M.N. Roy and Abani Mukherjee too had, in the meantime, arrived there from Moscow, and preparations were on foot to make Tashkent the centre of Indian revolutionary activities in that region. They had already rented a mansion on Lavmentev Road for their work, and it was called Indusky Doma, i.e. India House.<sup>33</sup> To make real revolutionaries out of these fanatic *muhajirs*, Roy soon arranged regular classes for their political education. Most of them, without any political background, could not, obviously, make much out of what they were being told. Still, a large section of them soon transferred their fanatical devotion to their vague new ideals, and were prepared to swear by Marx and the slogans of social revolution.<sup>34</sup>

Soon it was suggested that a Communist Party of India (C.P.I. in short) should be formed there. Though writing thirty years after

<sup>31</sup> Muzaffar Ahmed, pp. 15-28. Also Shaukat Usmani, *Peshawar to Moscow*, pp. 6-14, 60-90, 98-99. According to Fazl-e-Ilahi Qurban about thirty of them went to Tashkent, while he and about fifty others went towards Baku en route to Turkey. Rahul Sankrityayana, *Naye Bharat Ke Naye Neta*, (in Hindi), 2nd ed., Patna, 1949, p. 317.

<sup>32</sup> *The Times*, 13-10-1922, p. 13. Also, D. Kaushik, *Link*, op. cit., p. 72.

<sup>33</sup> Muzaffar Ahmed, op. cit., p. 28. Also, Shaukat Usmani, "From Tirmiz to Tashkent", *Mainstream*, 8-7-1967, p. 19. Also, D. Kaushik, *Link*, op. cit., p. 76.

<sup>34</sup> M.N. Roy, op. cit., pp. 461-462.

the event, Roy asserts that he was not willing to take that step at that stage,<sup>35</sup> the available minutes and correspondence relating to the meeting, where the C.P.I. was formed, prove that he was among those who took the lead in organising it. It was formally established at Tashkent on 17 October 1920, and Muhammad Shafiq Siddiqi was elected its first secretary. To start with, it had only seven members. On 15 December, three others also joined it, thus raising the membership of the C.P.I. at Tashkent to ten, and an executive committee, comprising M.N. Roy and Muhammad Shafiq, was elected.<sup>36</sup>

But not all Indians who had come to Turkistan, had gone to Tashkent. Those who had gone to Bokhara also formed there an Indian Revolutionary Association. Soon its branches spread to Samarkand, which had a sizeable Indian population, and to Baku, where some Indian *muhajirs* and deserters from the Indian army<sup>37</sup> had assembled even before the Congress of the Peoples of the East had given this oil-town a new importance. At Baku, they had even begun publishing, by the end of August 1920, a revolutionary fortnightly, the *Azad Hindusthan Akhbar*. Samarkand too was a major centre of propaganda directed against the British.<sup>38</sup> Tashkent, however, was the headquarter of Indo-Bolshevik activities in that region, and not much is known of the developments in other towns of Central Asia.

In the meantime, a few batches of Muslim soldiers from the Indian army had deserted to the Bolsheviks with the intention of going to Turkey as *mujahids*. But when the Indian *muhajirs* there explained to them the actual situation, most of them agreed to stay behind, and wanted to join others in an armed struggle against the British. Many *muhajirs*, who had earlier gone to Baku to fight for their Caliph, also returned disappointed, and joined their countrymen at Tashkent.<sup>39</sup> Now that their number had swelled to a few hundred, and they had many actual soldiers among them, the Indians there demanded that they should also be given arms and military training. Their demands were placed before the Revolutionary Council of Turkistan, and Roy is said to have pleaded for them. The Soviet authorities "decided to give the Indian comrades all possible support without, however, being involved in their plans..." They were allotted a shooting range off the Chirchik highway near Tashkent,<sup>40</sup> and an improvised military school,

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 465.

<sup>36</sup> I.S. Sologubov, *Inostrannie Kommunisty V Turkestanne*, Tashkent, 1961, pp. 56-57, 70.

<sup>37</sup> D. Kaushik, *Link*, op. cit., p. 73.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* Also, D. Kaushik, "An Obscure Journal of Indian Revolutionaries at Baku", *Foreign Affairs Reports*, November, 1964, Vol. XIII, No. 11, p. 177.

<sup>39</sup> Fazl-e-Ilahi Qurban cited in Rahul Sankrityayana, p. 318. Also, I. Andronov, "Awakening East," *New Times*, 5-4-1967, p. 12. *Muhajids* are those who dedicate themselves to fight for their religion.

<sup>40</sup> I. Andronov, op. cit. Also, M.N. Roy, 436-437.

named Indusky Kurs, was formally opened at Tashkent with great fanfare in January 1921. General Blücher was, probably, given over all charge of this school, while an American emigre, by the name of John, was their military instructor.<sup>41</sup> According to Roy, some of the Indian trainees there exhibited considerable proficiency in the use of arms. Some of them were even given instructions in flying, and later turned out to be good pilots.<sup>42</sup> But, unfortunately, no authentic information is available about the number of Indians, who received training there, and the exact nature of their training.

From among these *muhajirs* and deserters from the Indian and Iranian armies an International Bridge too was formed. According to some, this hastily formed army gave a good account of itself against the British Expeditionary force in Turkistan and Transcaucasia.<sup>43</sup> We have it on the authority of an eye witness, Shivnath Banerjee, that some of the Indian officers were given high ranks in the Red Army within a couple of years.<sup>44</sup>

But, by then, Roy was losing his former interest in his Central Asian work. He had expected to raise an army of liberation from among the *muhajirs*, who would operate successfully through Afghanistan. But the Afghan attitude had changed in the meantime, and their representative at Tashkent politely told him that the Afghan Government should be entrusted with the arms to be deposited at the Indian frontier. Roy, however, had reasons to be suspicious of Afghan intentions and their possible intrigues with Enver Pasha, and tactfully refused to step into what might have been a trap. Now that the road through Afghanistan appeared closed and the number of Indians locally available for his work were too few, Roy did not see much point in continuing their work in Central Asia.<sup>45</sup>

The British Government too was, obviously, allergic to Indian revolutionary activities in Central Asia. As soon as the Anglo-Soviet Trade Agreement was signed on 16 March 1921, the British representative, Sir Robert Horne, handed over to Leonid Krassian, his Soviet counterpart, a note on alleged Soviet activities directed against India and Afghanistan. The larger interest of Soviet Russia then demanded the maintenance of good relations with Britain and the removal of known sources of friction. So, by April, both the India House organisation and the military school were wound up, and Roy left for Moscow. About seventeen members of India House also came to Mos-

<sup>41</sup> M.N. Roy, pp. 466-467. Shaukat Usmani, "From Tinmiz to Tashkent", *Mainstream*, 8-7-1967, p. 19.

<sup>42</sup> M.N. Roy, pp. 470-471.

<sup>43</sup> M. Vistinetsky (ed), *In Common They Fought*, Moscow, 1967, pp. 73, 75.

<sup>44</sup> Jayantanuja Bandopadhyaya, *Indian Nationalism versus International Communism*, Calcutta, 1966, pp. 131-132.

<sup>45</sup> M.N. Roy, pp. 434-435, 442, 457, 469-471, 476.

cow, and joined the recently established University for the Toilers of the East.<sup>46</sup> This was the end of attempts at raising a revolutionary army and fomenting a revolt in India through direct intervention across her north-western frontier.

In the meantime, fresh contacts between Indian revolutionaries and the Bolsheviks had been re-established through Stockholm. There, Chattopadhyaya had long talks with Kamenov<sup>47</sup> and, probably at the latter's suggestion, sent to the Comintern in October 1920, a detailed scheme about organising the Indian revolutionaries in Europe for their common purpose.<sup>48</sup> Then, towards the end of the year, he personally went to Moscow. But, since Roy, Abani Mukherjee, and Tirumal Achari were then away in Turkistan, he could not meet any of his Indian compatriots there. Obviously, nothing fruitful could be negotiated with him alone, and Lenin advised him to produce some sort of a mandate from leading Indian revolutionaries. So, he came back to Berlin to discuss their future course of action with his friends there. However, the Russians were soon in earnest, and, in February 1921, they gave him the necessary money, and requested him to come again to Moscow with a representative body of Indian revolutionaries, with whom their future programme of action could be arranged.<sup>49</sup>

In the meantime, an Indian Revolutionary Committee had been formed in Berlin, at the end of 1920, with the blessings of Michael Borodin, who was then staying there to make arrangements for the journey of the delegates to the Third World Congress of the Comintern.<sup>50</sup> Now, with Russian money, thirteen members of this committee, including Chattopadhyaya, Bhupendranath Datta, Birendranath Dasgupta, Herambalal Gupta, Pandurang Khankōje, Gulam Ambia Luhani and Miss Agnes Smedley, left for Moscow, in the beginning of March. They were also joined by Nalini Gupta, who had come to Berlin at the end of 1920, but had not joined this committee.<sup>51</sup>

They came with high hopes, but almost from the beginning disappointment followed their foot-steps. They were primarily Indian nationalists, and sought an understanding with Soviet Russia and the Comintern, like what they had with Germany during the war, primarily in India's interest. They could also count among them most of the senior

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 468, 528. Also, Shaukat Usmani, *Peshawar to Moscow*, p. 112. Also, Muzaffar Ahmed, p. 32.

<sup>47</sup> Bhupendranath Datta, p. 247.

<sup>48</sup> Sir Cecil Kaye, *Communism in India*, Delhi, 1926, pp. 1-2.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.* Also, Bhupendranath Datta, pp. 263, 267-268, 280. Also, *The Times*, 21-9-1921, p. 12.

<sup>50</sup> Bhupendranath Datta, p. 270.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 278. Also, M. N. Roy, p. 479. The Italian Embassy, London informed the British Foreign Secretary, on 5-3-1920, that Indian revolutionaries in Berlin had already left for Moscow. A wire from Berlin to *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* confirmed it. Home (Political) Proceedings of the Government of India, 1920, April 312 B.

Indian revolutionaries abroad, and wanted to conduct negotiations on behalf of the Indian Revolutionary Committee, as representatives of nationalist India in exile. The Bolshevnik leaders, on the other hand, were primarily interested in utilising them for the spread of their ideology and influence, and insisted that the Indians should give their views and co-operate with them individually and not as a group. So, their first meeting with Chicherin, the Soviet Commissar for Foreign Affairs, was a disappointment.<sup>52</sup> Then, Chattopadhyaya, Datta, and Khankojé, as representatives of the visiting Indian revolutionaries, had an interview with Lenin, who advised them to meet and discuss their aims and problems with Karl Radek. Radek is reported to have told them that if they disagreed with the policy approved by the Second World Congress of the Comintern they were at liberty to present their own thesis on the Indian situation before the Third World Congress, but till then the Comintern was bound by the thesis already adopted, and all policy decisions relating to India would be taken in consultation with its Central Asiatic Bureau.<sup>53</sup> In that bureau Roy was the only Indian, and on issues relating to India he was, obviously, the most important man there. But, unfortunately, there was no love lost between Roy and these Indian delegates from Berlin, and co-operation was hardly possible. Still, to meet the Indian demand and to explore, if possible, an area of agreement an ad hoc commission was appointed with S.J. Rutgers in the chair. Other members of this commission were August Thalheimer, Michael Borodin, and Anthony Quelch. But, since the Comintern representatives refused to treat the Indians as a group, they boycotted the commission after Luhani had presented their point of view. Then for nearly three months, though the Indian delegation stayed in Moscow, there was little official contact between them and the Comintern or the Soviet authorities.<sup>54</sup>

However, in the meantime, the political situation had changed to some extent. Soon after the establishment of the University of the Toilers of the East in April 1921, a Communist Party of India was formed in Moscow.<sup>55</sup> Even the Bolshevniks, despite the Anglo-Russian Trade Agreement of 16 March 1921, had renewed their efforts "in exerting pressure upon the political authority of capitalist powers... through their colonies... preparing the latter to emancipate themselves from an alien yoke".<sup>56</sup> These naturally rendered desirable some sort

<sup>52</sup> Bhupendranath Datta, p. 283. Also, M.N. Roy, p. 478. Also, the oral statements of Pandurang Khankojé and Boirendranath Dasgupta.

<sup>53</sup> M.N. Roy, pp. 481-483.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 483-484. Also, Bhupendranath Datta, pp. 285, 287.

<sup>55</sup> Muzaffar Ahmed, pp. 32-33.

<sup>56</sup> Eliawa too was reported to have said on 5-5-1921 that "in 1921 we are already taking the offensive against the foundation of capitalism in India itself." *A Selection of Papers dealing with the Relations between His Majesty's Government and the Soviet Union, 1921-1927*, London, 1927, pp. 5-7.

of an understanding with the Indian revolutionaries, who could certainly influence or, at least, establish contacts with the revolutionary groups within India. So, in August, Mathias Rakossi took the initiative, and another commission was appointed to hear the Indian point of view. James Bell and Rakossi were made its chairman and secretary, respectively. Besides the Indian delegates, other members of this commission were Borodin, Troianovski, and Thalheimer. Roy too was invited to attend it.<sup>57</sup> Chattopadhyaya, who was not on good terms with Borodin, walked out of the meeting protesting against his inclusion. Then, Datta and Luhani spoke for the Indians. Roy invited the visiting Indians to join the C.P.I., that had already been established there. But, the latter looked upon it as a rather personal affair of Roy, and said that a real C.P.I. should be formed only in consultation and, if possible, in co-operation with all communist-minded Indians present there, especially the senior revolutionaries.<sup>58</sup> They had, in fact, been piqued at the formation of the C.P.I. in Moscow without their being consulted, even when they were physically present there. As a result, no common platform for co-operation could be devised, and, believing that the Bolsheviks were mainly interested in utilising them in their own interest, the Indian delegates left for Germany towards the end of September 1921. Only Nalini Gupta stayed behind in Russia to leave for India after a month as Roy's emissary.<sup>59</sup> Thus ended in frustration the efforts of Indian revolutionaries in Europe to seek Bolshevik help for India's fight for freedom.

In the meantime, it had been decided in Moscow that some of the Indian *muhajirs* should return home to make contacts with the revolutionaries in India and to establish the foundations of a communist movement there. Shaukat Usmani and Masood Ali Shah were the first to leave. They left Moscow for Baku on 21 September 1921, and reached India through Iran.<sup>60</sup> Gawhar Rahman Khan and Mian Muhammad Akbar Shah followed them soon, and reached India safe. But, Meer Abdul Majeed and Firozuddin Mansoor failed to cross into Iran from Azerbaijan, and returned to Moscow.<sup>61</sup> Then, towards the end of March 1922, a bigger group of ten, including Meer Abdul Majeer, Rafiq Ahmed, Firozuddin Mansoor, Habib Ahmed Naseem, Sultan Mahmud, Fida Ali Zaid, Abdul Qadir Sehrai, Sayyed, Abdul Hameed and

<sup>57</sup> Bhupendranath Datta, pp. 287-289, 291.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 289, 293. Also M.N. Roy, pp. 479, 485.

<sup>59</sup> Bhupendranath Datta, pp. 294, 297-298. The Comintern had, in the meantime, decided to place greater emphasis on the communist parties of subject countries than on their nationalist organisations. *Theses and Resolutions Adopted at the Third World Congress of the Communist International, June 22 — July 12, 1921*. New York, 1921, p. 21.

<sup>60</sup> Shaukat Usmani, *Peshawar to Moscow*, pp. 166-168.

<sup>61</sup> Muzaffar Ahmed, pp. 34-35. Also, Alexander Barmine, *One who survived: the life story of a Russian under the Soviets*, New York, 1945, pp. 100-101.

Nizamuddin set out for India through the Pamir route. At Kharog they divided themselves into small groups and, barring a couple of them, succeeded in reaching Chitral or the tribal territories in the north-west of the then India. But, almost all of them were apprehended by the Indian police, and were tried in the Peshawar Conspiracy Case. This trial, the first of communists in India, created quite a sensation. But the hopes of the Indians in Moscow and their Comintern patrons were not realised. Only the first four, who reached India through Iran, especially Shaukat Usmani, managed to escape arrest for some time, and could do some useful work.<sup>62</sup>

However, Nalini Gupta had, in the meantime, reached India by sea in November 1921.<sup>63</sup> He soon established contact with Muzaffar Ahmed, Qutabuddin Ahmed, and Bhupendra Kumar Datta, and the last named put him in touch with Jibanlal Chatterjee of the Yugantar group. It was arranged that secret correspondence between Roy and his friends in Calcutta would pass through Chatterjee and Muzaffar Ahmed.<sup>64</sup> To facilitate such clandestine correspondence Roy himself, possibly in April 1922, moved to Berlin, which in those days was an unorganised centre of Indian political activity in Europe. There, with plenty of Comintern money, he began publishing from May a bi-monthly, *The Vanguard of Indian Independence*,<sup>65</sup> copies of which along with those of the Comintern's *International Press Correspondence* used to be sent to India through Indian sailors and other channels. *The Amrita Bazar Patrika* and the *Atmasakti* of Calcutta, the *Independent* of Allahabad and the *Nava Yuga* of Guntur were influenced by Roy's political views.<sup>66</sup> Still, it cannot be said that he was particularly successful in popularising the communist ideology in India, although his efforts had led to the formation of communist groups in a few major cities. Nor did he meet with any success in utilising the Indian situation through the small but "organised revolutionary parties," to which he belonged before leaving India. He exhorted his comrades at home to adopt social revolution as their goal, and to prepare the Indian masses for an intensive class struggle. But his comrades, though keen to have money and, if possible, arms from the Comintern, were not willing

<sup>62</sup> Muzaffar Ahmed, pp. 35-45, 84-85. Also, Sampurnanand, *Memories and Reflections*, Bombay, 1962 pp. 39-40.

<sup>63</sup> Sir Cecil Kaye, pp. 7-8. Also, M.N. Roy, p. 547. Also, Bhupendranath Datta, p. 303.

<sup>64</sup> Bhupendra Kumar Datta's letter to author on 15-5-1965. Also, Muzaffar Ahmed, pp. 114-115. Also, Jadugopal Mukherjee, pp. 483-484. Muzaffar Ahmed is one of the founder members of the Communist Party of India, and though very old is still one of the most venerated leaders of the left Communists (C.P.I. Marxists). Bhupendra Kumar Datta is different from Dr. Bhupendranath Datta, mentioned before. The latter was the brother of Swami Vibekanda, the well-known religious as well as nationalist leader who roused a new spirit among young Indians at the turn of the century.

<sup>65</sup> C.S. Samina, p. 66.

<sup>66</sup> Sir Cecil Kaye, p. 36.

to fall in line with him in this respect. After some controversy among them it was decided at a meeting of the Yugantar group, presided over by Jadugopal Mukherjee, in the late summer of 1922, that their immediate aim should be to seek the co-operation of all classes in their fight against British imperialism. The decision was communicated to Roy, and this virtually marked the end of contacts between him and his erstwhile comrades.<sup>67</sup> Obviously frustrated, he wrote to the Communist Party of Great Britain in August 1922, asking it to send two agents to India to activate the communist movement.<sup>68</sup>

The changed international situation too, in the meantime, had made impossible any effective Soviet assistance for Indian revolutionaries. The Russo-Afghan Treaty had already denied free passage of Russian arms through Afghan territory, and even before its conclusion Kabul had begun seeking British support so that she might take a strong attitude towards Russia.<sup>69</sup> Bravin was assassinated in Afghanistan early in 1921,<sup>70</sup> and after the conclusion of the Anglo-Afghan Treaty on 22 November 1921 Russian consulates at Kandahar, Ghazni and Jalalabad were also closed down. It was obvious that the Afghan authorities had become apprehensive of the influence of Bolshevism, and were yielding to British pressure.<sup>71</sup> To the Indian revolutionaries in that region the final blow came when, in October 1922, Amanullah asked the Indian Provisional Government, then headed by Obeidullah, to quit his country.<sup>72</sup> Kabul, within close range of the Indian frontier, was then the only organised centre of Indian revolutionaries abroad and the link "through which Communist International maintains direct communication further south with British India".<sup>73</sup> So, its break-up meant the virtual end of effective contact between Indian revolutionaries and Soviet Russia.

Soviet policy too had, in the meantime, undergone a certain change. When the Indians expelled from Afghanistan reached Russian Turkistan they were rather coldly received, and were asked to take care of themselves. They were, of course, allowed to join the University for the Toil-

<sup>67</sup> Jadugopal Mukherjee, pp. 466, 484, 499-500. Many leaders of the Yugantar party were arrested on 25-9-1923, after the Government of India had come to know of their secret correspondence with M.N. Roy. *Ibid.*, pp. 475, 499-500.

<sup>68</sup> Sir Cecil Kaye, p. 21.

<sup>69</sup> Chelmsford wrote to Montague on 12-1-1921: "The Afghans are asking us to help them in taking up a hostile attitude against Russia". *Montague Papers*, Vol. V. Early in summer 1920 an Afghan mission came to Delhi and had friendly talks with Sir Henry Dobbs. L.F. Rushbrook—Williams (ed.), *India in 1920*, Calcutta, 1921, pp. 5-6.

<sup>70</sup> I. Andronov, "Awakening East", *New Times*, 1-3-1967, p. 13.

<sup>71</sup> L.F. Rushbrook—Williams (ed.), *India in the Years 1922-1923*, Calcutta, 1923, pp. 29-30.

<sup>72</sup> M.N. Roy, pp. 491-492. Also, Shivnath Banerjee, cited in Jayantanuja Bandyopadhyaya, pp. 131-132.

<sup>73</sup> *A Selection of Papers dealing with the relations between His Majesty's Government and the Soviet Union, 1921-1927*, pp. 6-7.

ers of the East,<sup>74</sup> but no more was heard of active Bolshevik aid for Indian revolutionaries. In fact, it was reported that a secret circular, no. 647/5, dated 25 November 1922, of the Political Bureau of the Russian Communist Party, issued under the signatures of Stalin and the bureau's deputy secretary, Ter-Avanesoff, confessed the mistakes committed by "the Communist International in its first efforts to promote a revolution in India," and admitted that "The Bolshevizing of the frontier tribes was found to be a longer, more uncertain, and more expensive business than had been anticipated".<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Shivnath Banerjee, cited in Jayantanuja Bandopadhyaya, pp. 131-132.

<sup>75</sup> *The Times*, 1-7-1923, p. 9. Also, C.S. Samna, pp. 68-70.