

"Boycott Elections!"

Some Lessons of Recent History

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France provides a striking example demonstrating how a revolutionary mass movement can be disrupted once the people are deceitfully persuaded to give up armed struggle and walk into the blind alley of parliamentary elections. I am not referring to the revolutionary upsurge which took place in that country in May this year and the subsequent fraudulent bourgeois elections there. What I refer to is the sequence of events which happened there 23 years ago, and to which the Chinese comrades have pointedly drawn the attention of all Marxist-Leninists. We, the Communist revolutionaries of India, must today study the events that took place in France and in Italy in order that we may successfully fight the deceitful tactics of our own revisionists and neo-revisionists, who, while fraudulently mouthing revolutionary phrases, shamelessly participate in bourgeois elections and even compete with the ruling Congress Party and the other reactionary political parties in singing the praises of the so-called parliamentary democracy in India, devised and imposed by the British imperialists to preserve and protect the imperialist-feudal interests in this country.

During the period of the anti-fascist war, the French Communist Party organized people's armed forces five lakh [half a million] strong which at one time liberated Paris.

But to Thorez, the then general secretary of the French Communist Party (CPF), the people's armed forces were a dreadful monster. In November 1944, this coward, who had hidden himself abroad for a long time [\[1\]](#), returned to France and handed over the people's armed forces as a gift to the class enemies of the people in exchange for an official post, the vice-premiership. For the sake of securing ministerial *guddis* through bourgeois elections, he forced the people's armed forces, which had shown exemplary valour, spirit of sacrifice and had a record of heroic exploits, to disband and hand over their arms to the class enemies. In November 1945, the de Gaulle government sponsored the elections to the first National Assembly. The French Communist Party, which had at that time an armed force at its disposal, chose to surrender its arms rather than to boycott the election, and took part in it. At one time it formed the "Left majority" in the Assembly. But the French bourgeoisie easily revised the electoral law. As a result, in the election

of 1951 there was a sharp reduction in the number of CPF seats to 103, that is, there was a loss of 79 seats. In the 1956 election, the CPF gained 150 seats. But before the parliamentary election in 1958, the French monopoly capitalists again revised the electoral law with the result that the number of seats held by the CPF fell very drastically to a mere 10, that is, it lost 140 seats. As an awakened French Communist Party member remarked, the French bourgeoisie treated the Communist Party like a lemon, to be squeezed dry and then thrown away.

For a period during which Maurice Thorez was in hiding, Jacques Duclos acted as the leader of the CPF. After Paris was liberated and the city was under the control of the armed forces led by the CPF, Duclos, who had just come out of hiding, said in a speech on November 15, 1944: "When some men advocate the disarmament and liquidation of the Republican Civil Guard while the fifth column is strongly armed, they show that they prefer disorder to the arming of the people."

Thus the Party leadership declared that the Republican Civil Guard, the people's armed forces led by the Party, was not to be disbanded. The class enemies were, of course, eager to break the power of those heroic combatants of the resistance struggle and have popular forces, assembled during the Resistance at the call of the CPF and the National Front, disbanded. The CPF was fully correct in opposing this attempt of the class enemies, and in refusing to let victory slip into the hands of the enemies of the people.

But before long the CPF began to speak in a different voice. Two months after Duclos' speech, the Central Committee of the French Communist Party meeting at Ivey, January 21-23, 1945 heard a speech of Maurice Thorez, who had just returned to France with the special authorization of de Gaulle. Speaking of the same Republican Civil Guard, patriotic ex-militiamen, the Secretary-General of the Party declared:

"These armed groups had their reason for being before and during the insurrection against the Hitlerian occupation and its Vichyite accomplices^[2]. But now the situation is different. Public security should be assured by the regular police forces constituted for this purpose. The Civil Guard and all irregular armed groups should, in general, no longer be maintained."

Thus, the Party leadership ordered the soldiers of the Resistance, who were led by Communists, to turn in their arms!

But this treachery was only a beginning for Thorez, who had the approval and following of the whole leadership of the French Communist Party in this. This traitor then pushed through along the road of treachery and subsequently managed to become the vice-president of the Council in the first government of de Gaulle. Since then what a frantic campaign he launched throughout all of France under the motto: "Renaissance, democracy, unity!"

And what could this so-called "renaissance" of France mean under the conditions prevailing then? The French state machine remained, and remains even to this day, in the service of the bourgeoisie, and the organs of repression - the army, police, prisons - were, and are still, exclusively in the service of the dominant class, that is, the bourgeoisie. Under these conditions the "renaissance" of France could only mean the strengthening of capitalism and not of the

proletarian revolution. However, the CPF completely ignored all these facts and went on to give a call for a "battle of production" and bitterly fought all militant demands coming from the workers.

At the same time, elections and referendums were taking place. And what did the Party leaders, several of whom had already managed to become ministers, do? They dreamed only of getting votes and seats in parliament and of climbing on to the ministerial *guddi*. The Party leaders eagerly bartered away the vital interests of the working class in order to curry favour with and to reassure the bourgeoisie. Thus, Maurice Thorez launched his notorious revisionist theory of the "peaceful road" from capitalism to socialism. In an interview published in the British conservative newspaper, *The Times*, on October 18, 1946, he declared:

"The progress of democracy throughout the world, despite rare exceptions which prove the rule, makes it possible to imagine other routes for the advent of socialism than taken by the Russian Communists. Anyway, the road must differ for each country. We have always thought and stated that the people of France, rich in glorious tradition, will themselves find their way toward more democracy, progress and social justice..."

And he insisted on the infamous "unity":

"The union of worker and republican forces is the sure foundation of democracy. The French Workers Party which we propose to build by the fusion of Communists and socialists will be the guide of our new, popular democracy."

This declaration by Thorez was nothing but a subtle repudiation of the teachings of Lenin and of the revolutionary road of the October Revolution. To misinterpret the thought of Lenin with such deliberateness, as Thorez did, is an expression of base opportunism. With this he came to terms with the class enemies and the Social Democrats, who held firm to their own 'principle', the principle of loyally managing the interests of the bourgeoisie. As is known, the French bourgeoisie found itself in a difficult position owing to the military defeat it suffered in 1940 at the hands of Hitler's army and also because of its treason to the country. The emergence of a popular armed force led by the French communists in liberated France threw them into a panic. They were almost dead with fear of an impending revolution. Thorez with this policy of his came to the rescue of the French bourgeoisie and allowed them to wriggle out of an impossible situation. Thorez's policy was based not on Lenin's teachings but on a non-proletarian ideology.

The CPF at that time had tremendous prestige among the working class and the people because it had organized and led armed resistance against the invading Hitlerite aggressors. It alone was capable of appealing to the workers. Thorez treacherously put this great prestige of the CPF in the service of the bourgeoisie and allowed them to rehabilitate themselves not only in the economic, financial, industrial, and agricultural fields, but in the political field as well. The Social Democrats were unmasked in the course of the war and the Resistance movement. But, thanks to the treacherous policy of Thorez, they managed to sew up their tattered garments and got down once more to their dirty political business. The Church played a similar role.

In this way the entire fashionable, reactionary group succeeded in weaning away the communist leaders of France from the path of class struggle, trapped them in the electoral game and even allowed them to occupy some ministerial posts. Then the French bourgeoisie, with the help of U.S. imperialism, unceremoniously dismissed the communists, who had served them so well until then, from the ministerial posts, like a lemon squeezed dry. Obviously, the bourgeoisie had correctly calculated that the communist leaders were so deeply committed to the "peaceful road" that, dismissed from the ministerial posts, they would invariably engage themselves again in the electoral struggle rather than resort to armed struggle. Moreover, the working class and the masses would quickly become disillusioned about their role if they continued for long to remain in the reactionary cabinet. On the other hand, their prestige among the masses would go up as soon as they were thrown out of the cabinet, which could then be used once more to serve the interests of the bourgeoisie even better.

The CPF did not make any concrete analysis of the positions of various social classes in France in 1944, nor did it analyse the problems. It viewed all the problems from the viewpoint of class collaboration and never from the viewpoint of class struggle. By collaborating with the parties and representatives of the bourgeoisie the CPF concretely and actively supported the restoration of the reactionary state where every organ remained in the hands of the bourgeoisie serving its interests. And by engaging in the electoral struggle and making the development of the militant mass struggles conditional upon the presence or non-presence of communist ministers in the bourgeois government, the CPF not only helped to strengthen that reactionary state machine but condemned itself to a position where it had to choose one of the two alternatives: either it was to submit to the reactionary "system", and thus degenerate into a peaceful party engaged in electoral struggles only, or get crushed by those very reactionary forces which it itself had helped to regain power. Before long CPF began to reap the harvest on the poisonous seeds it had sown earlier. Once the bourgeoisie grabbed back power, thanks to the help rendered by the CPF, it did not hesitate to wreak its class vengeance on the working people. The French miners, in particular, suffered most from it. The CPF had persuaded the workers to turn in their arms with a view to restoring 'order'. Now, the bourgeoisie employed its armed forces to preserve that 'order' and the miners had to pay the price of the Party leaders' sins with their own lives. Struggling with empty hands against well-armed forces of 'order', several miners were killed.

Thus the Party of 75,000-strong armed force, instead of advancing towards socialism, slid down into the mire of electoralism, parliamentarism and ministerialism, thanks to the opportunism of the Party leaders. The leaders persisted in their nefarious anti-Leninist practice and even accentuated it with the result that the Party sank deeper and deeper into the mire of opportunism with every subsequent parliamentary election, destroying the revolutionary proletarian fighting potential of the CPF quickly with every passing year. We know today to what depth the CPF has sunk. One has only to recall the despicable role played by the CPF during the revolutionary mass upheaval in France in May this year, to realize the degree of its degeneration. The CPF today has become a full-fledged bourgeois party, and is no different from other bourgeois parties. Like the other bourgeois parties it also participates in the scramble for ministerial posts. In order to help one section of the bourgeois parties against another, the CPF gladly put itself out of the elections of December 1965. There is no limit to its shameful capitulation to the bourgeoisie.

When Thorez began his treacherous drive to push the CPF into the bottomless pit of degeneration, many comrades in the Party grew alarmed and challenged him. But Thorez, who had great manoeuvring skill, quickly got rid of all those who dared to challenge his "discipline", defamed them and forced them out of the Party. It may be recalled in this connection that almost all militants dating from the Resistance, all those who engaged in armed struggle against the Nazi occupation and the French traitors of the Vichy government, were successively removed from political functions and important posts in the Party. Two top leaders, Andre Marty and Charles Tillon, were expelled from the Party. Is it correct that they opposed the decision to dissolve the militia and turn in arms? What is certain is that Marty always advocated forms of the class struggle of a proletarian nature and Tillon played a primary role in the military combat of the Resistance. On May 28, 1952, there was a formidable anti-U.S. demonstration against the war criminal Ridgway on his trip to Paris. For this, Thorez punished Marty and Tillon, using police methods and slanderous lies in complete violation of the principle of democratic centralism.

Thousands upon thousands of really revolutionary and proletarian cadres of France lay down their lives in the difficult armed Resistance against the invading Nazi army. Many of those exemplary militants who survived were trampled upon by modern revisionism before it could establish itself in France.

A similar thing happened in Italy also. Like Thorez in France, Italy had its Togliatti. What Thorez did in France, Togliatti did in Italy. The people's armed struggle in Italy had developed vigorously. By the end of World War II, there was an armed force of 256,000 guerrillas and insurgent workers. They liberated Milan, Venice and more than 200 other large and small cities, captured the fascist chieftain Mussolini and executed him. But Palmiro Togliatti, the then general secretary of the Italian Communist Party, who had just returned to Italy after 18 years abroad, advanced a capitulationist line. Togliatti's line advocated bringing in socialism "not by resorting to force and insurrections" but by reforming the social structure. He forced the guerrilla detachments in north Italy to accept the united command of the reactionary Badoglio government and the "allied armies". Moreover, he disarmed the guerrillas and the patriotic police. In this way, he bartered away the fundamental interests of the proletariat and surrendered to class enemies the fruits of victory gained by the Italian people in the course of their anti-fascist armed struggle, in exchange for the portfolio of minister and vice-premier in the reactionary Italian government. Togliatti's treacherous line totally destroyed the revolutionary proletarian potential of the Italian Communist Party, which had a great tradition, and turned it into a full-fledged bourgeois electoral party.

The same things happened not only in France and Italy but in a number of other European and Asian countries also. Take, for instance, the events that happened in China after the Second World War.

Like Thorez in France and Togliatti in Italy, China's Khrushchev, Liu Shao-chi, betrayed the cause of the Chinese revolution. After the War of Resistance Against Japan ended in 1945, this traitor advanced the theory that "armed struggle in general has come to a stop", and that "the main form of struggle in the Chinese revolution has now become peaceful and parliamentary; this is a legal mass struggle and parliamentary struggle" and "all political issues should be solved

peacefully". He suggested that the Chinese Communist Party, which had at that time a battle-seasoned 10 lakh-strong [one million] army and 20 lakh-strong [two million] militia force under its leadership, give up its leadership over the People's Liberation Army and allow it to be "reorganized" into Chiang Kai-shek's reactionary Kuomintang army. He tried to force the Party to hand over its army and leadership of the People's Liberation Army to the Chiang clique and run for the posts of "officials" in Chiang's "Central government". But unlike in France and Italy, this treachery of China's Khrushchev could be totally defeated in China because of the brilliant leadership of Chairman Mao.

Lastly, let us turn to India. After the Second World War a tremendous revolutionary upsurge of workers, peasants, students, soldiers and other toiling masses, violent and armed, started in India threatening to sweep away the British imperialists. A most significant feature of it was the armed peasant struggle against feudalism in various places of India, of which the peasant struggle in Telengana was the biggest, longest and the most developed. India's Khrushchevs Ranadive, Sundarayya, Dange and others - in collusion with the Nehru government, stabbed the glorious Telengana struggle in the back and forced the heroic peasant revolutionaries and revolutionary communists to turn in their arms to Nehru's army and police and finally handed over thousands of these revolutionaries to Nehru's butchers to undergo inhuman torture and death. These Indian Khrushchevs bartered away the fundamental interests of the Indian proletariat and the cause of the Indian revolution in exchange for some seats in the reactionary parliament of the Nehru clique. They forced the Indian Communist Party into the blind alley of parliamentary and electoral struggle and ran for ministerial *guddis*. The struggle between the two lines the revolutionary proletarian line and the capitulationist line of "peaceful parliamentary struggle" advocated by India's Khrushchevs began since then in the Indian communist movement.

So, we see that the slogan "boycott elections" advanced by the All India Coordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries is correct not only for West Bengal or India. Indeed, this is a slogan of all the people of the world who are oppressed by imperialism. This slogan is not merely a tactical slogan valid only for a given period. On the contrary, this is a strategic slogan valid for an entire era which began after the Second World War and the victory of the great Chinese revolution.

As the Chinese comrades have pointed out, during World War II, at the same time as it achieved tremendous growth, the international communist movement produced its own opposite - an adverse current of counterrevolutionary revisionism. The main characteristic of this adverse current was the rejection of violent revolution and the advocacy of the parliamentary road. The twentieth congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union helped this adverse current to become a fully developed, openly counterrevolutionary theory. As we know, it was Chairman Mao *alone* who stood up firmly in opposition to this counterrevolutionary revisionist adverse current at that time and has since been leading the great Communist Party of China and the international Communist movement in the great worldwide struggle against it, winning thunderous victories.

The call given out by the All India Co-ordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries to boycott elections has to be viewed in the context of this struggle of the international communist movement and in the light of the thought of Chairman Mao. This call, this slogan, flows directly

out of Chairman Mao's thought. We must remember that this slogan is neither a temporary nor a local slogan. If any revolutionary judges the question of participation in or boycotting the bourgeois parliament in the old way and concludes that this slogan is valid only for today and only for those four States in India where mid-term elections are going to be held soon, he is sure to commit mistakes. In India, today, armed struggle is not a matter of distant perspective but a living concrete reality of the present. In fact, this has been so since 1946. Today, in 1968, after Naxalbari, Srikakulam, Muzaffarpur, Lakhimpur etc. and the armed peasant struggles that are bursting forth every day in all parts of the country, there is no ground whatsoever to make this question a debating issue. The Indian revolution has started its victorious march forward smashing all the obstacles put up by the reactionaries and revisionists. No power on earth is capable of stopping it from developing and winning final victory.

NOTES

1. *Like Togliatti, the general secretary of the Communist Party of Italy, Thorez had been staying in Moscow during the war.*
2. *After the defeat of France by Germany in 1940, a government was set up at Vichy under Petain and Laval, French stooges of the Nazis, to govern a part of France not directly wider German occupation.*