

SANGH that we have described above, branches of the SANGH should be started all over the country for carrying on a general propaganda about the ideals, aims and objects of the new party. The SAMYAVADI SANGH will stand for allround freedom for the Indian people—that is for social, economic and political freedom. It will wage a relentless war against bondage of every kind till the people can become really free. It will stand for political independence for India so that a new state can be created in free India on the basis of the eternal principles of justice, equality and freedom. It will stand for the ultimate fulfilment of India's mission, so that India may be able to deliver to the world the message that has been her heritage through the past ages.*

*Presidential address at the Third Indian Political Conference,
London 1933

Forward Bloc—Its Justification

[*This thesis was written by Netaji in Kabul in February-March 1941 during his secret Sojourn there en route to Europe.—Ed.*]

The evolution of a Movement is analogous to that of a tree. It grows from within and at every stage it throws out new branches, so that there may be ever increasing progress. When no fresh branches sprout forth, the Movement may be presumed to be in a process of decay or death.

While every Movement draws its sustenance from the soil from which it springs, it also assimilates nourishment coming from outside—from the atmosphere, environment, etc. Internal sustenance and external nourishment are both necessary for a living Movement.

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

Wing begins to dominate the Movement as a whole. Thus the Left Wing becomes, in time, the main stream of the Movement.

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

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

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

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

To come now to a study of the Gandhi Movement. By 1919, after the close of the World War, a new situation arose in India and with it, new problems. The official Indian National Congress could not face this situation as it had lost its dynamism altogether, and a Left Wing was clearly necessary if the entire Congress

was not to stagnate and die. At this juncture a Left Wing appeared in the form of the Gandhi Movement. Conflict ensued for a time and the old leaders were driven out of the Congress or voluntarily withdrew. Ultimately, a "Synthesis" took place. The Congress accepted the tenets of Mahatma Gandhi and the Left Wing then became the official Congress.

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

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

moved the resolution declaring that henceforth Independence was to be the goal of the Indian National Congress.

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

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

The Gandhi Movement did not lose its elasticity and adaptability in a day and the attitude of the Gandhites towards the Congress Socialists and other Leftists remained benevolent on the whole in 1934 and after. As a matter of fact, the Congress Socialists were

offered seats on the Congress Working Committee in 1936, 1937 and 1938. (They did not accept the offer in 1938). In January, 1938, the Gandhites, at the instance of Mahatma Gandhi himself, supported my candidature for the Congress Presidentship. And at the Haripura Congress in February, 1938, when I was to nominate the Working Committee for the year, Gandhiji was clearly of opinion that there could be no objection to having Socialists on the Working Committee.

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

Since September, 1938, Gandhism has tended to become increasingly static and hide-bound. At the Haripura Congress in February of the same year, the two most important resolutions passed were on the questions of Federation and the coming War. Though the resolution on Federation was one of uncompromising opposition, throughout that year the air was thick with rumours that negotiations for a compromise between the Gandhites and the British Government were going on behind the scenes. My attitude of uncompromising hostility towards Federation was the first item in the Gandhian charge-sheet against my

Presidentship. The second item was what the Gandhites regarded as my unduly friendly attitude towards the Leftists. The third item in the charge-sheet was my sponsoring and subsequent inauguration of the National Planning Committee which, in the view of the Gandhites, would give a fillip to large-scale production at the sacrifice of village industries, the revival of which was a very important item in the Gandhian constructive programme. The next charge against me was that I advocated an early resumption of the national struggle for Independence, to be preceded by an ultimatum to the British Government.

By September, 1938, any intelligent person could have foreseen that in future the relations between the Gandhites and the Leftists would cease to be cordial. As already indicated above, Gandhiji himself gave a frank expression to the change in his mentality. Furthermore, it became clear to esoteric circles in the Congress at the time of the Munich Pact that in the event of a War-crisis overtaking India in the future—an open rupture between the Gandhites and the Leftists would become unavoidable. It is true that from 1927 (Madras Congress) to 1938—the War-policy of the Congress was clearly enunciated in successive annual sessions of the Congress and one would not under ordinary circumstances have expected any divergence of opinion, not to speak of a rupture, among Congressmen on the war issue. Nevertheless, discussions among important Congress leaders during the international crisis preceding the Munich Pact left no room for doubt that the Gandhites cherished no

enthusiasm for the war-resolutions passed by preceding sessions of the Congress and they would not hesitate to circumvent them should they find it necessary or convenient to do so. Now the two questions on which the Leftists were tremendously keen and on which they would not countenance any compromise were those of Federation and the coming War. Consequently, the vacillating and compromising attitude of the Gandhites on these two issues presaged a breach between them and the Leftists in the days to come.

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

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

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

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

Since 1938, the issues on which we Leftists have found ourselves at loggerheads with the Gandhites and on which no compromise has been possible—are the resumption of the national struggle for Independence and the correct war-policy of the Indian people. It is to be noted that till November, 1940, Mahatma Gandhi consistently declared in private and in public, that any Satyagraha or Civil Disobedience was out of the ques-

tion and that anybody who launched such a movement would be doing harm to his country. It is true that in November, 1940, Individual Satyagraha was started under his auspices. But as Gandhiji himself has declared and as we all know very well, it is not a mass struggle for the attainment of Independence. As responsible British officials in India and in England have already declared, this movement has not embarrassed the British Government to any appreciable degree. In conformity with his desire that Great Britain should win the War, Mahatma Gandhi has refrained from creating an embarrassing situation for the Government which a mass struggle for winning Independence would naturally have done.

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

That Gandhiji could, even at his present age, alter a position consistently and tenaciously advocated and upheld by him for a fairly long period—though this change may be due to pressure and be only partial—is evidence of his adaptability and mobility. Nevertheless

it is not adequate for the needs of the times. We are now living in the "Blitzkrieg" period of history and if we do not move with the times, we shall have to go under. So far, Gandhiji has been unable to prove by his action that he can keep abreast of the times and lead his nation—and this accords with our belief which we have already stated that the Gandhi Movement is becoming static and hide-bound.

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

Whatever revolutionary fervour the Gandhi Movement had, was sapped more by the acceptance of ministerial office than by any other factor. It would be no exaggeration to say that under the influence of this factor, a large number of Congressmen have definitely turned from the thorny path of Revolution

to the rosy path of Constitutionalism. Congress Ministries in the provinces were formed in 1937 and neo-Constitutionalism reared its head in a menacing form within the Congress in 1938. Ever since then, the main task of Leftism has been to fight this "Frankenstein" created by the Congress itself. How to stem this drift towards Constitutionalism, how to create afresh a revolutionary mentality among the people in place of the neo-constitutionalist mentality, how to face the war-crisis in a bold and adequate manner, how to bring the Congress back to the path of uncompromising National Struggle and how ultimately to establish Leftist ascendancy in the Congress—these have been the main problems for the Leftists since 1938.

The Gandhi Movement today has become a victim of not only Constitutionalism but also of Authoritarianism. A certain amount of Authoritarianism is permissible and natural in a militant organization. But the excessive Authoritarianism that one finds today is traceable to the same cause as Constitutionalism. Since the acceptance of Ministerial office, the Gandhiites have had a taste of power and they are anxious to monopolise it for themselves in future. What has been going on within the Congress of late, is "power politics", though of a sham kind. The fountainhead of this "power politics" is Wardha. It is the aim of this "power-politics" to beat down all opposition within the Congress so that the Gandhiites may comfortably rule the roost for all time. But this game will not succeed. Real power has yet to come and

it will never come if we travel along the safe path of Constitutionalism. It is certainly possible for the Gandhiites to expel all discordant elements from the Congress and make it a close preserve. But that does not mean that they will be able to win liberty for India. And without real power, there cannot be real "power-politics". What we see therefore today is sham "power politics".

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

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

latter, self-consolidation, *i.e.*, Right-consolidation, was right and natural; but Left-consolidation was a crime.

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

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

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

(i) By forming one party and rallying all the Leftist elements therein. This, however, was not possible because several parties claiming to be Leftists, already existed, and they were not prepared to liquidate themselves in favour of one Party.

(ii) By organizing a new Bloc which all Leftists and existing Leftist parties would join, while retaining the separate identity of their respective parties, if they so desired.

This was the first aim and endeavour of the