

Another piece with some history...Jairus

*The following article first appeared in **Revolutionary History** Vol 1 No 4 (Winter 1988-89). The continuation of the series has been much delayed by a combination of factors and we have received a number of enquiries as to whether the series was concluded. Wesley Ervin's history of Trotskyism in India is now to be continued in the next issue of **Revolutionary History** (Spring 1997) - an issue devoted to questions of the revolutionary movement in India and Ceylon (Sri Lanka). We are republishing Part One here for the benefit of readers who may find difficulty in accessing it in print. Please accept our apologies in advance for any incorrect spellings of unfamiliar words, especially proper nouns - we would be grateful to be informed of any such. At some later stage, when time permits, I will revise the HTML for this document, to create hyperlinks for all 116 of Irvin's footnotes. I hope that readers will agree that the document is sufficiently informative as to justify posting in its present state. [jjp].*

Editorial introduction from Revolutionary History Vol 1 No 4

*This is the first of a three - part series of articles upon the history of Trotskyism in India. It is, to our knowledge, the first comprehensive study on the subject to be published in English. The research upon which it is based, which included dozens of interviews with the surviving members of the Bolshevik Leninist Party of India (BLPI) as well as the examination of the (now rare) publications of the party, was done in India and Ceylon (Sri Lanka) in 1973 - 74, when Ervin was a supporter of the Spartacist League of the USA. The second and third parts of his account, covering the period from the end of the Second World War, will appear in subsequent issues of **Revolutionary History**.*

*Contact was established between the Socialist Workers Party of the USA and the BLPI during the War years, and the theses of the BLPI and numerous articles on India were published in **Fourth International** magazine from 1942 to 1946, **The Manifesto of the Fourth International : To the Workers and Peasants of India**, appearing in the issue for October 1942. The Workers Party of Max Shachtman also maintained an interest in India, and in November 1942 published **India in Revolt**, a pamphlet by Henry Judd (Sherman Stanley).*

*Trotsky's study '**India faced with Imperialist War**' appeared on 25 July 1939 and is included in **Writings of Leon Trotsky (1939 - 40)**, second edition, New York 1973, pp 28 - 34.*

*Much of the material of the Fourth International on the Indian situation, as well as other documents and articles by the Indian Trotskyist Gour Pal and by Pierre Broué appeared in a special issue of the **Cahiers Léon Trotsky** (No 21, March 1985). An English translation of Broué's '**Notes sur l'histoire des oppositions at du mouvement trotskyste en Inde dans la première moitié du 20 siècle**' [pp 11 - 44], now partly superseded by this study, can be obtained from John Archer at the address given elsewhere in this magazine.*

Trotskyism in India

Part One : Origins through World War Two (1939 - 45)

by Charles Wesley Ervin

Introduction

The Trotskyist movement in India was launched in 1942, under wartime conditions of repression. The Bolshevik Leninist Party of India (BLPI) was created by emigre cadres of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (Ceylon Socialist Party) and scattered groups of Indian Trotskyists. The Indian section of the Fourth International, though small in numbers, was a breakthrough for the beleaguered world Trotskyist movement during these dark days.

No sooner had the BLPI been formed than its militants were swept up in the mass "Quit India" movement in August 1942. The Communist Party did everything to derail the struggle. The Trotskyists intervened admirably, and many went to jail as the British beat back the upsurge. The BLPI was forced underground before it was even consolidated. For the duration of the war, the Trotskyists in India worked clandestinely, gaining a foothold in important unions, publishing an exemplary party journal, and clarifying their politics through internal struggle.

At the end of the war the mass movement flared anew. The BLPI regrouped in 1945 and aggressively intervened on all fronts. The Fourth International had every reason to be optimistic and proud. In Madras, the Trotskyists captured several key unions and led strikes and mass struggles.

The British felt tremors of revolution in the naval mutiny of 1946, which raised the banner of Hindu-Muslim communal unity. Gandhi's Congress and Jinnah's Muslim League hastened to settle with British imperialism. The tide turned. Hindus and Muslims clashed in savage communal riots. India was torn asunder at independence, as millions perished in communal holocaust.

As India approached its crossroads in 1947, the BLPI's revolutionary will was put to the test. Though the BLPI had made impressive gains, it was still a tiny propaganda league facing staggering tasks. The leadership was weakened as Samasamajists returned to Ceylon, where the movement had split into rival parties. Defeatist moods were reflected inside the party. Grasping for opportunities, a minority proposed to enter the Congress Socialist Party. The BLPI leadership wavered, then collapsed. It had lost its Bolshevik backbone. In 1948 the BLPI was dissolved into the Socialist Party.

The "entry" was the shipwreck of the Indian Trotskyist movement. The Trotskyists had no factional perspective or leadership. Some degenerated quickly into Social Democrats or trade union careerists. The Fourth International was no help; Pablo had turned into the biggest "entryist" of them all. The subsequent history of the Indian Movement is a pathetic tale of inadequacy, opportunism, and international misleadership.

Until recently, the history of Indian Trotskyism was essentially a closed book. Very few documents have survived, mostly unpublished, buried in personal collections in India and

Ceylon. In 1985 a first effort at a history was made by Pierre Broué in the journal *Cahiers Léon Trotsky* [1]. Broué, however, didn't uncover many original documents, nor did he interview participants. As a result, his work is uneven, with gaps and inaccuracies. It is distorted by an overemphasis on the Revolutionary Communist Party of India, which never was Trotskyist. His history, moreover, stops at the BLPI's entry into the Socialist Party in 1948, without probing the role of the International Secretariat of the Fourth International in the India debacle.

I began research on this history back in 1973, when I went to India for a year to seek out documents and former Trotskyists willing to tell me what they remember about the movement. I interviewed the surviving leaders. I also made three trips to Ceylon (Sri Lanka). I unearthed documents available nowhere else - party newspapers, leaflets, internal bulletins, personal correspondence.

This is a history of Indian Trotskyism from its origin in the mid-1930s up to 1965. My goal has been to reconstruct a history of the movement in as much detail as possible and to pose what I believe are important questions: How could a party that seemed to have so much going for it in 1947 collapse face down in the social democracy a year later? Why did the Ceylonese leadership pull out of the BLPI's collapse prefigure the demise of the Ceylonese section of the Fourth International, the Bolshevik Samasamaja Party, in 1950? What was the International Secretariat doing about India all this time?

This work is in three parts. The first section covers the origins of the BLPI and its struggles during the war (1935-45). The second part focuses on the postwar gains of the BLPI and entry dispute (1945-47). The final section traces the BLPI's liquidation, and the subsequent regroupments and manoeuvres by Indian Trotskyists (1948-65).

Let me express my gratitude to all those in India and Ceylon who made this work possible. It is dedicated to the memory of the cadres of the BLPI, who in their finest hour brought honour to the banner of Trotskyism.

Origins of Indian Trotskyism

India loomed large in the revolutionary Comintern's strategy, as it was the cornerstone of the Raj, the foundation of British Imperialism. Nationalist and class struggles flared on an unprecedented scale after the First World War, which had increased the Indian bourgeoisie's economic growth and political leverage. Gandhi's Indian National Congress, political apparatus of the Indian bourgeoisie, roused millions in its first Civil Disobedience campaign. At one point in 1920, a million and a half workers were on strike. Peasant revolts erupted in Bihar and Bengal. The British feared revolution, and so did Gandhi, who called off the campaign after peasants torched a police station with police inside. The London Times warned, "*among the ignorant masses of India, a political revolution would become a social revolution in a very short time*" (2).

The Comintern's early efforts to implant Communism in India were directed from afar by the Indian revolutionary MN Roy. In 1920 Roy formed a Communist Party of India at Tashkent, but in India itself progress was slower. British Intelligence monitored the Comintern's every move and message, confiscating literature, jailing cadres, etc. Indian Communism was set back by the Cawnpore Bolshevik Conspiracy trial in 1924, but local Communist groups made headway among the awakening working class. The British again clobbered the Communists in the 1929

Meerut trial. At that time, the CPI consisted of barely a few dozen cadres with only a rudimentary grasp of Marxism and Bolshevik functioning.

By the mid - 1920s Stalin's bureaucratic reaction had triumphed in the Bolshevik party and the Comintern underwent a sea change. The Chinese Revolution became the burning issue in the East. The Chinese Communists were up to their necks in the Kuomintang. Stalin-Bukharin gambled everything on "*Comrade Chiang*," while Trotsky's Opposition fought for the CP to break free before it was too late. Roy went to China as Stalin's agent to keep the CCP-KMT alliance together. Chiang turned on the Communists and decimated the party. Had Roy gone over to the Left Opposition, rather than to the Right, the whole story of Indian Trotskyism might have been quite different.

Congress launched its second great Civil Disobedience movement in 1930, but again Gandhi put on the brakes (the 1931 Gandhi-Irwin Pact), causing widespread disgruntlement and the growth of the Congress Left, led by Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose. Meanwhile, the Comintern's ultraleft "Third Period" turn (1929-33) sent the CPI off into the political wilderness. It turned its back on the nationalist struggle and set up tiny, breakaway "red" unions. The Congress Left radicalised and grew. In 1934 the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) was formed within Congress, while the CPI was made illegal.

Popular Front

With the flip-flop to the Popular Front line, the CPI rediscovered Gandhi's virtues, elevated the bourgeoisie to leader of the revolution, and rejoined Congress. The Stalinists formed an alliance with the Congress Socialists, who were Congressmen first, "*socialists*" second. The Popular Front in India took the form of Congress Ministries (1937-39) in seven of India's eleven provinces. Congress took office, while the Congress Socialists, Stalinists, and their hangers on preached unity with the bourgeoisie in the name of the "*National United Front*" (replay of Stalin's script for the Kuomintang). Congress initially roused hopes and expectations by releasing political prisoners and passing legislation to help debt-ridden, impoverished peasants. But it didn't "*break the Constitution from within*", as it promised, nor even protest against the promulgation of the draconian Defence of India Rules, used to railroad independence fighters and militants.

As class struggles sharpened, the Congress Ministries proved to be no different from the imperialist interests they served. Congress intervened against strikes in Bombay and Madras. The powerful Bombay proletariat, concentrated in the textile mills, staged a general strike. Police shot down workers in Bombay, Kanpur, and Madras. In Bihar and the United Provinces, seething with peasant unrest, Congress came to the rescue of the landlords (zamindari). It is reactionary policies also fanned the flames of Muslim discontent, which played into the hands of the feudalist-communalist Muslim League.

The Congress ranks radicalised. Prominent peasant leader Swami Sahajanad, a Congress Socialist, denounced Congress as a tool of the landlords, and quit. But the Congress Socialist, denounced Congress as a tool of the landlords, and quit. But the Congress Socialists and their Stalinist allies refused to break with the bourgeoisie. The CSP's relationship to Gandhi was, when push came to shove, support and surrender. Polarisation in Congress came to head at the 1939 Congress Session, where Subhas Chandra Bose, leader of the "*Congress Left*", was elected president with the support of the CSP and Stalinists. But the Right introduced a motion to make

Bose select his Working Committee in consultation with Gandhi. On the conference floor, the CSP remained neutral, causing the vote to go against Bose. In the face-off, the Stalinists likewise capitulated to the lawyer in loincloth, calling for *"united leadership under the guidance of Gandhiji"* [3].

During the Popular Front Period, opposition to the Stalinists grew within the CSP. Some, especially on the right, feared a CSP takeover by the Stalinists, who had grown rapidly (from about 150 in 1934 to over 3000 in 1939) and controlled entire CSP units. Others shared the British Labour Left's criticisms of the Comintern's Popular Front line, especially the rapprochement with Britain. The Moscow Trials also came as a shock. A former CPI leader later recalled:

"The Congress left wing was also extremely critical of the purges taking place in Moscow, and some of their leaders were extremely disgusted by the propaganda contained in the CPI front journal National Front, which depicted Trotsky as a poisonous cobra and an agent of Fascism. Even Nehru, who was one of the first Congressmen who popularised the Russian Revolution and Soviet achievements, expressed his disapproval of the purges in 1938" [4].

Quite a few Congress Socialists were sympathetic to Trotsky. Swami Sahajanand, the famous peasant leader, quoted him. In 1937, the Congress Socialist carried an article by one Kamal Biswas paraphrasing Trotsky's analysis of the USSR. It was a bombshell. The British CP leadership fired off a slanderous reply [5]. The Stalinists, of course, branded any left criticism as *"Trotskyite"*. In London, Krishna Menon, leader of the India League and by 1937 a CP sympathiser, wrote to Nehru expressing concern over the apparent spread of *"Trotskyite"* views in India [6]. Menon also wrote several letters to Minoo Masani, fuming against the Biswas article and chastising Masani for softness *"on the Trotsky propaganda within the party"* [7].

This ferment in the CSP didn't go unnoticed by Trotskyists abroad. For years Trotsky's International Secretariat had been seeking an opening in India, unsuccessfully. The American Trotskyists now aggressively pursued contacts with the Congress Socialists. Yusuf Mehrally met with them while on a visit to the US in 1938 [8]. The SWP's India expert, Sherman Stanley (Stanley Plastrik), began corresponding with Minoo Masani in August 1938. The following year the CSP's weekly, Congress Socialist, printed several contributions by Shachtman and Stanley [9]. In July 1939, Trotsky wrote **"An Open Letter to the Workers of India"** to try to influence the CSP [10].

Heterogeneous

In the late 1930s, a few militants began to work in the name of Trotskyism and the Fourth International. At the outbreak of the war there were Trotskyist circles in Calcutta, Bombay, the United Provinces (UP), and Gujarat. Each emerged independently of the others and for the most part in isolation from the international Trotskyist movement. Lack of resources stunted their growth. The early groups were very uneven and heterogeneous, largely shaped by local conditions and their respective backgrounds.

The best and most important of these early groups was the Revolutionary Socialist League of Bengal, formed by Kamalesh Banerji. Bengal had its own leftist traditions, going back to the early Narodnik-like terrorist groups (MN Roy's background). Bengal was Subhas Chandra Bose's base, as well as the turf of *"critical Stalinist"* Saumyendranath Tagore, who had launched his

Communist League as a rival CP. The Bengali intelligentsia was very radical, politically literate, and sophisticated. From a well-off family, Banerji had joined Congress and participated in the Civil Disobedience campaign of 1930-32, for which he went to jail for six months [11]. Banerji, a true Bengali intellectual with a magnetic personality resumed activity in the Bengali students' movement, where Indra Sen was also politicised.

Convinced

Although they were critical of the Popular Front line, they became Trotskyists under the influence of Ajit Roy Mukherji, Banerji's former classmate [12]. As a law student in London in the early 1930s, Roy had become a CP sympathiser and joined the League Against Imperialism [13]. Roy would argue about Trotskyism with his friend Bal Krishna Gupta, who got him to read *The History of the Russian Revolution*. Roy was convinced by the appendix on "*socialism in one country*", contacted some of the British Trotskyist groups, and ended up with CLR James. In 1937 Roy returned to Calcutta, and over the next year Banerji and Sen were won to Trotskyism. Roy then returned to London. His plan was for the Calcutta Trotskyist to follow, get experience working in Britain, and then return to India, but the war intervened.

In Calcutta, Banerji wrote for a Bengali cultural monthly, *Purvasha* (The East), edited by the young poet Sanjay Bhattacharya and patronised by Congress Socialist leader Humayun Kabir [14]. Banerji also wrote for *Natum Patra* (The New Journal), which he all but took over. In 1939 the Calcutta group adopted the name Revolutionary Socialist League, the name already taken by the CLR James group [15]. The group was financed by Bal Krishna Gupta, who returned to India at the start of the war.

The Bolshevik-Leninist Party of the United Provinces and Bihar had its origins in the Communist Party. With the Comintern's Popular Front turn, the Indian Communists had to crawl back to Congress and build up the Congress Socialist left wing. One Communist who balked was Onkarnath Shastri in Benares [16]. Shastri had been a student at Kashi Vidyapith, where his teachers included such Congress Socialist luminaries as Acharya Narendra Dev. Shastri joined the tiny CPI in 1932 and was schooled in the ultraleftism of the day. Shastri rebelled at CPI leader PC Joshi's orders to negotiate joint work with the Congress Socialists. Joshi confronted Shastri, and demanded that he recant or face expulsion. Shastri quit the next day. Denounced as a "*Trotskyite*", Shastri decided to investigate, and over the next year he studied works by Trotsky -- notably, *The History of the Russian Revolution* and *The Revolution Betrayed* -- which, as he later recalled, were "*selling like hot cakes*" in Benares, Calcutta, and Bombay [17].

In 1937 Shastri moved to Allahabad (UP), where a Congress friend set him up as editor of a small Hindi-language daily newspaper, *Samaj* (Society). Shastri used it as his *Iskra*. He popularised Communism, castigated the Stalinists, and started to serialise Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution* in Hindi translation. Self-taught, Shastri's grasp of Trotskyism was rudimentary, still tinged with Third Period Stalinism. For example, he continued to reject the slogan of a Constituent Assembly, even though it could be used as a programmatic weapon against the British-sponsored Popular Front Ministries, set up on the basis of what even Congress called a slave constitution.

Participating in Congress activities around UP and Bihar, Shastri attracted a personal following among students and petit-bourgeois youth. His young recruits intervened in Congress with Trotskyist literature, provoking attacks from Stalinists [18]. Evidently, Shastri was prominent

enough to be invited to co-chair a conference with Dr. Sampurnanand at Mirzapur in November 1937 [19]. His attacks on Congress and the Congress Socialists were enough to cause his patron to cut off funds for Samaj, which folded.

In 1938 Shastri moved to Kanpur (UP), where Harihamath Shastri, a Congress Socialist leader and president of the Cawnpore Mazdoor Sabha (Kanpur Workers Federation), asked him to lead study circles. Kanpur was a hotbed of labour militancy. In 1938, there was a general strike of textile workers against the Congress Ministry. As Shastri later recalled:

"Stalinists had made the Socialists quite comfortable there. Thinking I could expose them to their advantage, he invited me there. I needed a proletarian field, so I went there. He financed me for one year and to his surprise he had to learn that most of his men became Trotskyists." [20].

It was (and still is) common for petit-bourgeois radicals like Shastri to assume positions in Labour and peasant organizations, a reflection of the vast gulf between the educated middle class and the masses of destitute, illiterate, backward workers and peasants. Shastri's weakness, it seems, was that he wanted to be a "mass leader" and neglected the slow, difficult, low-profile work of developing a propaganda group.

With the onset of war, Shastri was forced underground:

"At the outbreak of the Second World War a warrant under section 124A was issued against me at Kanpur for a seditious speech made there, when I went underground and began to abscond. It was then and there that I formed the Bolshevik Party of India, the Organising group consisting of industrial workers behind me" [21].

Evading the police, Shastri travelled around UP and Bihar, and in Calcutta he met Kamalesh Banerji, and they resolved to work jointly. Shastri had two supporters in Calcutta already (Karuna Kant Roy and Sheo Pratap) who were putting out Avaz (The Voice), in Hindi [22]. After meeting Banerji, Shastri changed the name of his group from Bolshevik Party to Bolshevik-Leninist Party of the United Provinces and Bihar.

The Bolshevik Mazdoor Party in Gujarat came about through a very similar process. The turn to the Popular Front disturbed Chandravadan Shukla, a young Gujarati intellectual who had joined the party in Ahmedabad in 1936 [23]. He was a local party secretary, an activist in the Ahmedabad student federation (Vidyarthi Mitramandal), and a functionary in the CPI-led Mill Kamgar Union - another typical example of the student radical in the labour movement. In February 1938 he attended the annual Congress session at Haripura, where he made his misgivings known to the CPI. Sometime later, Chandravadan Shukla, his wife and few others in Ahmedabad and Bhavnagar withdrew from the CPI to function as a rival Communist Party.

Denounced as "Trotskyite," they knew little about Trotsky. The dissident group foundered, and most drifted back to the CPI, except for the Shuklas and a few others, who began to study whatever literature they could get their hands on to formulate a critique of the CPI and Comintern. In 1938 or 1939 the group began publishing a Gujarati-language weekly, Age Kadam (Forward March!), which lasted seven or eight months, and also published pamphlets in the name of the Workers Literature Propaganda Association (Major Sahitya Prachar Sabha). Later, the group took the name Bolshevik Mazdoor Party (Bolshevik Workers Party) of India.

Regroupment

In late 1939 Shukla published a manifesto in Gujarati, *Communism and India*, as a basis for leftist discussion and regroupment [24]. It denounced the CPI and the Popular Front Policy, and discussed the role of the Indian proletariat and the dynamics of revolution in India. The Congress Socialists were criticised for providing a left cover for bourgeois nationalism. It was a classic two-tier, minimum / maximum programme. A series of democratic, minimum demands (eg, abolition of landlordism, repeal of repressive laws, release of political prisoners, the eight-hour work day, higher wages, eradication of illiteracy) were lumped together with revolutionary slogans (arming the workers, forming workers' and peasants' committees) and goals of socialist reconstruction (withering away of the state, creation of a classless society).

There was a definite hint of Trotskyism in the section on Internationalism, which criticised the bankrupt Comintern, Second International, and Amsterdam Bureau, and concluded: "*The Fourth International seems to be a Marxist organisation, but not much is known about it*" [25]. This was a deliberate understatement, as Shukla remembers. The BMP wasn't mentioned because it was trying to appear "*non-sectarian*."

At the outbreak of war Shukla's BMP consisted of about ten members between Ahmedabad and Bhavnagar, with sympathisers scattered in smaller towns of Gujarat, and in Indore and Ajmer. Shukla moved to Bombay in 1940 after being blacklisted in Ahmedabad. The BMP put out a Gujarati-language agitational sheet, *Inkilab* (Revolution), which denounced Gandhi's satyagraha (passive resistance), opposed the war and conscription, and urged workers to fight for higher wages [26].

In Bombay, the Petrograd of India, Trotskyism was first associated with a flamboyant, ultraleft adventurer, Dr. Murray Gow Purdy, an emigre from South Africa of British descent. Purdy's background is hard to verify; he added legends of his own. Purdy said he'd been a member of the South African CP and in the early 1930s joined Trotskyist groups in Johannesburg [27]. After running foul of the South African authorities, he allegedly fled to Abyssinia, where he said he fought against the Italian fascist forces for a short time before moving to India [28].

Settling in Bombay, Purdy got involved with Congress and the Congress Socialists. Evidently, in 1938 he formed a Friends of Trotsky Society [29]. That same year Purdy produced what seems to have been the first Trotskyist programme for India. The Bolshevik-Leninist-Trotskyist Draft Provisional Programme, based on Trotsky's earlier 11-point programme for the International Left Opposition [30]. As is clear from this programme, Purdy's politics were a mish mash of sectarian ultraleftism (a kind of "*Third Period Trotskyism*"), harebrained pseudo-Marxist theories, infantile rhetoric, and recipes for opportunism. Purdy was quite energetic and, unfortunately, became widely known as India's "*Trotskyist*."

Purdy denied that Congress was a bourgeois party or organisation, calling it instead a "*united front of the nation*"---the same formulation used by the Congress Socialists, Stalinists, Royists, et al as a rationale for all sorts of opportunism. For all his talk about the need for an independent party, for soviets, and so on, Purdy clearly hadn't grasped the basic lesson of Trotsky's whole line on the Kuomintang. His draft programme condemned the Popular Front in Spain and France, but missed the one right in front of him.

Purdy's claim to fame was his pet theory that India's untouchables were the vanguard of the proletarian revolution. His pamphlet states:

"For the first time in its history we proudly affirm that the hereditary proletarians forming the untouchable Harijan class shall be the spinal cord of the proletarian government, of which the industrial proletariat must be the head. Unlike the Stalinist Communist Party we openly state our independence upon and integral unity with the Harijan propertyless proletarian class. Our work must be among our Harijan brethren, and we must oppose the treacherous Gandhian propaganda among them" [31].

Purdy clearly confuses caste and class. Harijans could be mobilized as important allies of the working class and a key pillar of Socialist government, but not as the Socialist vanguard. Purdy's harijan vanguardism anticipated Fanon's New Left dogma, *"the most oppressed are the most revolutionary."*

Purdy peddled a lot of Third Period Stalinist politics in Trotskyist guise. Thus, his programme rejected all *"so-called immediate demands"* in general, and the slogan for a Constituent Assembly in particular, as an open abandonment of Marxism." In contrast, Trotsky in his **"Open Letter to the Workers of India"** emphasised the critical importance of fighting for partial, transitional, and purely democratic demands, including that of the Constituent Assembly.

Where Gandhi put a minus, Purdy put a big plus. Whereas Gandhi preached against what he called *"violent and bloody revolution"*, Purdy called Trotskyism the *"violent and bloody revolutionary programme"* [32]. Just about every page of his programme has some gratuitous mention of violence. On the cover, the first three slogans are:

"1. Violent expulsion of British imperialism. 2. Violent expropriation of zamindar's land by peasants. 3. Violent expropriation of capitalist means of production."

To his credit, Purdy grasped the fact that the destruction of the ancient caste system and all the feudal relics encrusted in Indian society --- that is, the tasks of the democratic revolution --- would take a violent, revolutionary conflagration of proportions not seen since Napoleonic Europe.

Murray Purdy was out to build a cult, where he'd be the guru surrounded by devotees --- a tradition in Indian politics (eg, the terrorists). By 1939, he had, it seems, a few followers, which at some point he called the Workers Group [33]. He had no press, but got an article printed in the Congress Socialist in which he made an orthodox Leninist case for a revolutionary defeatist position in the coming war [34]. He reprinted at least one Trotsky pamphlet [35].

In 1940, Purdy began to collaborate with Chandravadan Shukla, who had relocated to Bombay, and in early 1941 they formed the Revolutionary Workers League [36]. It didn't last long. In June 1941, when the Nazis attacked the USSR, Purdy changed his line on the war, adopting what amounted to a defencist position, in the name of support to the USSR. Shukla split over this issue. Purdy reverted back to his defeatist position in December 1941 when the Stalinists became defencists [37].

The Ceylon Connection

Ceylonese Trotskyists played a dominant role in launching and leading the Bolshevik Leninist Party of India (BLPI). The decision to form the BLPI was part and parcel of the *"Trotskyist turn"*

of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP). From its beginnings, the LSSP had a revolutionary and a reformist wing, which overlapped. Those tendencies were carried over into the BLPI, and the struggles between them shaped its development, as well as the course of the Ceylonese movement itself for years to come.

In 1935 a small group of young, educated Ceylonese leftists launched the LSSP as a mass organisation to fight for independence and reforms [38]. The core leadership---Philip Gunawardena, Leslie Goonewardene, NM Perera, Colvin R de Silva, SA Wickremasinghe - had been politicised as students in London in the late 1920s and early 1930s, when Socialism was in the air. Back in Ceylon, they faced a unique situation. There was no Communist or Socialist party, and the Ceylon National Congress was a pale reflection of the Indian Congress. There was a vacuum of leadership on all fronts.

These Ceylonese Young Turks were talented, energetic, and had resources to pursue politics (most were from elite families). Ceylon's Youth Leagues provided that arena. In 1931 SA Wickremasinghe was elected to the first State Council, the British version of a Duma for Ceylon. A few years later Philip Gunawardena, Colvin R de Silva, and others ventured into labour organising and grass-roots relief work during the malaria epidemic of 1935-35. As elections to the second State Council approached, it was decided to form a party and field candidates. Only a few months after the LSSP was launched, Philip Gunawardena and NM Perera were elected to the State Council. Samasamajists were becoming the Nehrus of their little island.

The LSSP had a split personality from birth. Its leaders were sophisticated leftists, but the LSSP was deliberately intended to be a very broad, "soft" Socialist party, more nationalist than Marxist. As Philip Gunawardena announced in 1936, *"Our party is not a Communist Party....It is a party which is much less militant and less demanding than the Communist or Third International"* [39]. The LSSP's brief manifesto espoused Socialism in abstract, idealistic terms and put forward demands of a nationalist-populist character. Anyone who agreed with it and paid a nominal pledge could join. Thus the LSSP was a lot like the Congress Socialist Party, which also had a heterogeneous leadership (Marxian Socialists, Fabian Social Democrats, Gandhians) and a hotch-potch programme.

The LSSP was a petty-bourgeois radical party that also played the surrogate role of bourgeois-democratic movement (like the Indian Congress), most evidently in the State Council, where NM Perera and Philip Gunawardena often sounded like liberal democrats, promoting causes such as creating parochial schools, establishing a state bank, and using budget surpluses to pay off the national debt. As academic historian George Lerski noted, NM Perera's speeches gave *"not so much a Marxist as a Fabian reformist approach"* [40].

One of the strongest points of the early LSSP was its orientation to the Tamils, the core of Ceylon's proletariat (Tamils were 85 per cent of the agricultural proletariat in 1931). Beginning in the 19th century, the British worked their tea and rubber plantations with impoverished peasants recruited from South India, mainly Tamil-speaking Hindus. These Tamils laboured like serfs, lived imprisoned on plantations that resembled mini-bantustans, and couldn't vote. The LSSP championed democratic rights for the Indian minority. When Sinhalese chauvinists campaigned to halt further immigration and to deport Indian estate workers, the Samasamajists denounced the racist anti-Indian agitation and advocated extending the franchise to all *"permanently domiciled"* Tamils. Samasamajist cadres carried out exemplary grass-roots

organising among the estate workers, against the opposition of the British and the Tamils' communal leaders.

Within the LSSP there was a Trotskyist tendency, which is often called the "*T Group*", which included Philip and Robert Gunawardena, Colvin R de Silva, Leslie Goonewardene, Edmund Samarakody, and NM Perera. Its origins are shrouded in myths. Clearly Philip Gunawardena was its leading light. A forceful personality, he had openly supported the International Left Opposition while still in the British CP and contacted Opposition groups in France and Spain on the way back to Ceylon [41]. Under his influence, Colvin R de Silva and Leslie Goonewardene became Trotskyists somewhat later. The Moscow Trials and Stalin's dirty work in Spain had a great impact, as did Trotsky's *Revolution Betrayed*, which became available in English in 1938. NM Perera was a very platonic Trotskyist [42]. So it would seem the "*T Group*" had characteristics of a political tendency and an old-boy clique.

The war posed point-blank the issue of Stalinism, forcing a resolution of the LSSP's lingering ideological ambiguities. When the British and French Communist Parties first came out in support of the war, then flip flopped, it was obvious Stalin would sacrifice the support of colonial freedom for the sake of his allies of the moment. The LSSP denounced the Comintern:

"The clash between the Trotskyists and the Stalinists now came into the open in the party. Shortly afterwards, the Stalinists were expelled. This was probably the first occasion in the history of party expulsions where the Trotskyists expelled the Stalinists, and not the reverse.

The Executive Committee of the party also adopted a new programme and constitution. Hitherto the programme of the party had been vague. Now a clear revolutionary programme was adopted, in line with the programme of the Fourth International, founded by Trotsky in 1938...An effort was thus made to convert the party from a loose body of individuals into a fighting organisation" [43].

Thus the LSSP became formally Trotskyist not through factional struggle but through what was basically a coup by the "*T Group*". *The party ranks were presented with a fait accompli. The necessary political struggle had been short circuited, even if the outcome was favourable. Trotsky himself had once remarked, Without a bitter ideological and, consequently, factional struggle, young Communist parties, often having a Social Democratic past, cannot ripen for their historic role"* [44].

As the war unfolded, the LSSP became an even more annoying thorn in the side of the British. The party opposed the war and led militant plantation strikes, sparking renewed struggles by urban workers. As Samasamajist Doric de Souza later noted, the LSSP "*began to crystallise politically as representing the working class*" [45]. In June NM Perera, Philip Gunawardena, Colvin R de Silva, and Edmund Samarakody were arrested. The party press was sealed, Leslie Goonewardene and others went underground, and more arrests followed.

Faced with these objective conditions, conference held in April 1941 the LSSP was reorganised as a cadre party, adopted a nominally revolutionary programme, and proclaimed solidarity with the Fourth International [46]. The government had slammed the door on its parliamentary work, dashing whatever hopes the Samasamajists might have had in peaceful, legal reforms. Repression put an abrupt end to the LSSP's functioning as a loose, open mass party. If only for self-preservation, a tighter cadre-type party organisation was now a necessity.

The crackdown in Ceylon also served to raise the political horizons of the LSSP. In India, despite mass arrests, Congress was very much alive and kicking. If India wrestled free, Ceylon's Independence would probably follow in its wake. It made nationalist sense to see Ceylon as part of the larger revolution brewing in India. Moreover, it made practical sense for the Samasamajists to head for India themselves. Ceylon is a tiny island, and the Ceylon police were breathing down their necks. In India, they could work with less likelihood of discovery.

The LSSP had been developing contacts in India for years. It had established fraternal relations with the CSP, and Samasamajists contributed reports and political articles to the Congress Socialist [47]. In 1937 the LSSP sponsored rallies around the island for the CSP's popular orator, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya. Even more importantly, the Samasamajists discovered that there were Trotskyists in India.

Organising the All-India Party

In March 1939 at the annual Congress session in Tripuri, Leslie Goonewardene met Murray Gow Purdy and invited him to visit Ceylon [48]. Purdy went, but was horrified to discover that the LSSP's leaders weren't professional revolutionaries, but lived quite comfortably, pursued professional careers, and in some cases were quite wealthy. It was too much for the apostle of violent revolution and the harijan party. Back in India, Purdy put out a slanderous pamphlet, *Millionaire Trotskyists of Ceylon* [49]. Thus began Purdy's hostility to what would become the BLPI.

Philip Gunawardena met Kamalesh Banerji in Calcutta on his way back to Ceylon after attending the Congress session at Ramgarh in March 1940. After Philip Gunawardena's visit, collaboration quickly developed between the Colombo and Calcutta Trotskyists. In late 1940, the Samasamajists and Calcutta group took the next step toward, launching an Indian organisation. As recalled by Leslie Goonewardene:

"A pre-conference was held in Kandy in December 1940 at which NM [Perera], Philip [Gunawardena], Colvin [de Silva], Doric [de Souza], Robert [Gunawardena], Reggie Senanayake, Kamalesh Bannerji, Bernard [Soysa], and I were present. Here it was resolved to form a party of India, Burma and Ceylon. A decision was also taken to send Samasamajists across to India, beginning with Bernard."

This meeting took place under the tightest secrecy. NM Perera, Philip Gunawardena, and Colvin R de Silva, who were in Bogambara Prison in Kandy, attended with the connivance of their jailer, who agreed to let them slip away for the night provided they return in the morning. Leslie Goonewardene, wanted by the police, was the LSSP's underground organiser. Robert Gunawardena was responsible for the party's legal front work.

V Balasingham went to South India. Doric de Souza and Bernard Soysa made several trips to Calcutta, and through the Bannerji group met Shastri. In Bombay the Samasamajist emissaries again met Purdy, who introduced them to Chandravadan Shukla. Purdy, competing with the Samasamajists, tried to broker unity with the Shukla, Shastri, and Calcutta groups, but failed every time [50].

"After Bernard went across and made the arrangements, Shastri, Kamalesh and Indra Sen came to Ceylon, and at a conference at which they were present, the earlier decision to form an all-India Party was re-affirmed. It was also decided to draft the programme of the party" [51].

The programme for an Indian Trotskyist party was outlined at this meeting [52]. Reflecting the progress made at this meeting, the secret LSSP conference held the following month approved a proposal for the LSSP to function as the Ceylon unit of the larger party that was being created. The revised programme affirmed the integral link between the Ceylon and Indian revolution: *"the revolution in Ceylon is dependent on and is indeed an integral part of the Indian revolution"*.

After the Ceylon preconferences, more Samasamajists crossed over to India. Leslie and Vivienne Goonewardene, Hector Abhayavardhana and SCC Anthonipillai went to Madras. Kamallesh Bannerji, Bernard Soysa, and Leslie Goonewardene visited Bombay, and Shukla had a printing press---a priceless resource. His Bolshevik Mazdoor Party (BMP) had started an underground journal, Bolshevik Leninist, from Bombay. His followers up in Gujarat put out an illegal press, Inkilab (Revolution), which had a primitive Trotskyist content. It denounced Congress as compromisers, blasted the Stalinists' and Royists' pro-war treachery, raised the slogan *"Defend Soviet Russia"*, and called for factory committees to fight for economic demands [53]. The BMP raised the slogan, *"Not one paise [penny], not one man for the imperialist war!"* and called for *"councils (soviets) of the elected representatives of workers, peasants, and soldiers in preparation for the revolutionary process"* [54].

BLPI launched

Plans to launch the BLPI were postponed by arrests in the summer of 1941. In Calcutta the police pounced on Indra Sen, Kamallesh Bannerji, Bernard Soysa, Doric de Souza and his wife. The Samasamajists were arrested and interrogated. Doric de Souza and Bernard Soysa slipped away to Bombay. Indra Sen was interned.

The organising meeting of the BLPI finally took place in Calcutta during November 1941 [55]. The programme drafted after the Ceylon meeting in March was discussed. The Formation Committee of the Bolshevik Leninist Party of India, Ceylon and Burma was created. The name reflected the goal of the Fourth Internationalists to create a subcontinental federation of Trotskyist parties. As it turned out, Burma was soon occupied by Japan and nothing was ever started there. A Provisional Committee was elected to carry through the organising work. The working committee evidently included Leslie Goonewardene, Kamallesh Bannerji, Onkarnath Shastri, and Soma Ramanathan of Tanjore [56]. The draft programme was then discussed by the groups in Calcutta, Madras, Bombay, UP and Gujarat.

The Trotskyists working in India were soon joined by more Samasamajists. NM Perera, Colvin R de Silva, Philip Gunawardena, and Edmund Samarakkody were spirited out of prison on 7 April 1942 and, except for Samarakkody, crossed over to Madras on fishing boats from Valvettiturai [57]. From Madras Philip Gunawardena and NM Perera moved to Bombay, where Shukla was operating. SCC Anthonipillai and V Karalasingham, two Tamil LSSPers, also crossed over to Madras.

The BLPI was formally launched in May 1942 as a democratic-centralist organisation. Only a select few attended the secret meeting in Bombay, which brought together the LSSP and the Indian groups (Bannerji, Shastri, and Shukla). Organisationally, the party had Units in Bombay, Madras, Calcutta, and UP. The party Centre and printing press were in Bombay. A Bombay District Committee was to be responsible for integrating Shukla's BMP up in Gujarat. The UP Unit consisted of Shastri's followers (Kanpur, Allahabad), while the Bengal Unit was the

Bannerji/Sen circle supplemented with Samasamajists. Madras was entirely run by Samasamajists. Altogether, there were probably several dozen Trotskyists.

The Bolshevik Leninist became the BLPI's theoretical journal. The first issue that appeared in the name of the BLPI carried a statement on the war by Leslie Goonewardene [58]. The Trotskyist position (defeat of all capitalist belligerents through revolution, defence only of the USSR) had a powerful appeal in India, especially in contrast to the pro-war, no-struggle line of the Stalinists, who smeared its opponents as a "*Fifth Column of Fascism*." Even Gandhi's Congress publicly quoted favourably from the Trotskyists' anti-war position [59].

On the programmatic level, the new party was well armed. The BLPI programme was a powerful document, superior to even the revised LSSP programme of 1941, reflecting the contribution of the Indian Trotskyists. It was immediately reprinted by the American and British Trotskyists [60]. It opened with slogans that boldly declared the aims of the party:

"Independent working class aid to the Soviet Union. Soviets in the coming revolution. Working class leadership in the revolution. Seizure of factories by the workers and land by the peasants. Overthrow of imperialism and the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat" [61].

The Draft Programme analysed the development of capitalism in India, the role of the various classes, and the importance of the agrarian revolution, and it applied with considerable skill the Trotskyist theory of Permanent Revolution. It was a razor sharp in characterising Congress: "*The main instrument whereby the Indian bourgeoisie seek to maintain control over the national movement is the Indian National Congress, the classic party of the Indian capitalist class, seeking as it does the support of the petty bourgeoisie and if possible of the workers, for their own aims.*" The BLPI programme adapted the demands of Trotsky's Transitional Programme to the Indian context. So, at least on paper, it stood for political trade union work, a unique distinction on the Indian left.

International contacts were also coming into the picture in this period. The first effort to contact Trotsky himself had been made in 1939 by Selina Perera (NM Perera's wife). From London she visited the American SWP, which made plans for her to go on to Mexico. Unfortunately, her trip to Mexico was botched and she never crossed the border [62]. Trotsky's letter (December 1939) to an "*Indian comrade*" was actually to her [63].

"Russian Question"

Trotsky asked the youthful Sherman Stanley, one of his secretaries and an India buff, to make a tour of South Asia and the Far East [64]. Before Stanley actually left, however, factional struggle erupted in the SWP over the "*Russian question*," precipitated by the Stalin-Hitler Pact and the Soviet military advance into Finland and eastern Poland. Sherman Stanley (Max Shachtman's nephew) sided with the Schachtman-Burnham minority, which rejected unconditional defence of the USSR. Stanley's trip, then, turned into a factional tour.

In 1940 Stanley visited Ceylon and India, where he met Bannerji's RSL. Purdy, and Minoo Masani [65]. After Stanley's visit (August 1940), the RSL put out its first signed leaflet [66]. Stanley's report, published in an internal bulletin of Schachtman's Workers Party, described the Calcutta RSL :

"Although the group is very small and exists primarily on the literary-propaganda level, nevertheless it is made up of fine elements with a sound education. Its centre is in the city of C --

[Calcutta], with one branch (trade-unionists) in the great industrial city of C --- [Cawnpore(Kanpur)]. The league is alive, functioning and publishes a monthly magazine in the Hindustani language [Avaz, presumably]. I met often with these comrades and together we analysed the general situation, from which we drew up a programme of practical action. The carrying out of this programme can only lead to growth of the group, for everything lies in its favour.

On the question of Russia's participation in the world war, all of them were and remain in absolute agreement with our position. They had come to these conclusions long before my arrival and --- although acquainted with Trotsky's attitude from the public press --- could not understand or approve of it for a moment. Their political statements are in accordance with our policy.

The problem of MGP [Murray Gow Purdy] of B --- [Bombay] has, I believe, been satisfactorily solved by his agreement at my insistence that he place himself entirely under the direction of the RLSI. P --- to date has been an abysmal failure --- totally isolated and without a single follower. He has agreed to withdraw and destroy his pamphlet [Millionaire Trotskyists of Ceylon, presumably] and attempt to integrate himself into the genuine group" [67].

Shachtman's newspaper broke the news of "this new section" [68]. As it turned out, however, none of those contacted by Stanley supported the revisionist Shachtman-Burnham line once they found out the real story. The SWP gleefully rubbed it in the Shachtmanites' faces [69]. Stanley was also wrong about Purdy, who wrote to the SWP in March 1941 :

"I should like to say that I am now --- as before 100% in support of your policy and ideas. The policy of Messrs. Burnham, Shachtman, Sherman Stanley and Abern is obviously wrong on each of the disputed issues....Stanley's ideas of the business in the Indian empire, and especially about Ceylon, have to be thoroughly scrutinised. The opinions he enunciated here were fundamentally wrong. Neither the aristocratic planters of Ceylon nor the stockbrokers of Calcutta are suitable representatives for our business in India" [70].

Needless to say, "the aristocratic planters of Ceylon" refers to the LSSP leaders, and "the stockbrokers of Calcutta" to the RSL's wealthy patron, Bal Krishna Gupta. Purdy hadn't changed a bit.

With the war well under way Trotskyists in India and Ceylon had only tenuous links with supporters abroad. Correspondence and illegal leaflets trickled through [71]. SWP sailors who put ashore in Colombo and Calcutta were able to rendezvous with comrades. An eyewitness report gives the feel for the times:

"I am happiest to be able to report that there is a growing Trotskyist movement in India. The Trotskyists I talked with were extremely optimistic about the future of the Fourth International in their country. They already have groups in a number of cities and are planning the consolidation of these groups into an All-India party as soon as possible.

I also learned that, contrary to reports circulated in the United States sometime ago, they are and have from the beginning been in full agreement with the position of the Socialist Workers Party for defence of the Soviet Union.

The Fourth Internationalists in India are composed mainly of workers and have been winning over more and more union militants. Of course, they are functioning under very difficult illegal conditions. Some of the Indian comrades are in prison.

They are publishing a paper, called The Spark ---- named after Lenin's paper, Iskra. In the formation of their party, and as a guide for its organisational methods, they are trying to apply the teachings of Lenin's What Is To Be Done?" [72].

The reference to The Spark points at Chandravadan Shukla's BMP. The Kathiawad Committee of the BMP (Shukla's supporters in Bhavnagar) put out a Gujarati-language sheet, Tanakha (Spark). The first issue declared the BMP to be the Indian Section of the Fourth International and featured Trotsky's "Open Letter to the Workers of India" in Gujarati [73].

The August Struggle and the "1942 Split"

No sooner had the BLPI been launched than it was swept up in the August Struggle, the most insurrectionary movement since the 1857 Mutiny. It was a political baptism of fire for the BLPI. The August Struggle was overwhelmingly petit-bourgeois in character, an explosive paroxysm by students, the urban middle class, and the rural masses. Politically, the BLPI appeared as the extreme left wing of the labour movement, hammering away at the need for a working class perspective.

The August Struggle polarised the party leadership. The opportunist wing of the old LSSP rebelled, leading to a de facto split. What is often called the "1942 LSSP split" actually was fought out in India, precipitated by the August Struggle. At bottom, it was a fight over what kind of party would lead the Indian struggle for liberation --- proletarian revolutionary or petit-bourgeois radical?

Japan's advance through the Pacific and into Burma transformed Indian politics. Congress, emboldened by Britain's difficulties, went from conditional support to open opposition, seeking to force a settlement with British imperialism. On 8 August 1942 Congress called for mass civil disobedience to pressurise the British to "quit India". The British panicked. Within twelve hours every important Congress leader was in jail or on his way. News of the arrests brought thousands onto the streets of Bombay. Barricades went up, and crowds battled with the police. The August Struggle had begun.

From Bombay the protests spread like wildfire. Government buildings were torched, rail lines uprooted and police stations besieged. Spontaneous strikes took place. Literally millions chanted "Inquilab Zindabad!" --- Long Live Revolution! But there no revolutionary leadership. Radical students rushed headlong into the vanguard. Congress Socialists became leaders on the spot. Congress leaders deplored the violence, while the Stalinists and Royists actively opposed the struggle, warning workers to stay clear of the "Fifth Column" and fingering militants to the police. Thus, in the critical opening round, the powerful Bombay proletariat --- 300,000 workers with militant traditions of struggle densely concentrated in huge mills --- remained on the sidelines, passive. Had the battalions of labour swung into action, soviets would have been on the order of the day.

There was no question that the peasants would have supported workers' power in the cities. In fact, after the initial upsurge in the cities, the struggle spread and intensified in villages across

India. In some areas, such as Bihar, peasants drove out the police, and set up little "Congress Raj" governments. Jails were opened. In some instances, Congress prisoners who were liberated denounced the violence and voluntarily went back to their cells. Retaliation was swift and savage. Thousands were killed as police ran amok, troops and tanks were deployed, and fighter planes sent against villages. The struggle was forced underground everywhere. Leadership, such as existed, was in the hands of petty-bourgeois radicals, notably the Congress Socialists, Bose's Forward Bloc, and other leftists, who took to military adventurism, sabotage and terrorism in a futile effort to sustain the scattered rural struggles and revive the movement in the cities. The Congress Socialists urged workers to leave the factories and return to their home villages. Their struggles, though often courageous, were impotent gestures of rage or self-sacrifice, having nothing in common with a revolutionary perspective, ie, struggle for working class power. Unable to lead the working class, the Congress Socialists tried to stampede it.

The Trotskyists plunged into the struggle, attempting to direct it politically and tactically. The BLPI was not yet prepared to intervene on an all-India basis, even as a propaganda league, much less as a combat party. It issued a leaflet in Bombay on 9 August (the day the struggle erupted) pledging support to *"any mass action that the Congress may take against British imperialism"* while warning that *"Congress, which is dominated by Indian bourgeois interests, in all critical situations acts as the instrument of the Indian bourgeoisie"*. It posed the key issue of igniting agrarian revolution in the struggle for power:

"The slogans of 'Abolition of Landlordism without Compensation' and 'Cancellation of Peasant Debt' must be leading slogans of the struggle. Not only no-tax campaigns against the government, but also no-rent campaigns against all landlords must be commenced on the widest possible scale, leading to the seizure of land by the peasants through Peasants' Committees."

Manning the nerve centres of the economy, the workers are in the position to deal the most devastating blows against imperialism...A mass general political strike against British imperialism will paralyse and bring to a stop the whole carefully built up machinery of imperialist administration" [74].

Other leaflets called for the formation of strike committees and organised workers' defence guards. The party also directed well-aimed propaganda at British and American troops, showing how their anti-fascist sentiments were being perverted to serve the imperialists. The BLPI blasted the CPI as *"pimps and procurers"* for imperialism, while raising the slogan *"Defend the Soviet Union"* [75].

In Bombay the BLPI's intervention was limited to propaganda, since the party had no roots yet. In Calcutta, however, the Trotskyists had a history in the Bengal Provincial Students Federation and other student groups, where they were able to organise demonstrations. In Madras and Madura the Trotskyists took part in strikes and demonstrations, issuing propaganda in Tamil. A number of militants were thus won to BLPI.

Many BLPI members were arrested and imprisoned during the first weeks, as the British ferociously beat back the movement. Kamallesh Bannerji was arrested in September, and held without trial for the duration of the war. Indra Sen was interned to his home away from Calcutta. Onkarnath Shastri was arrested in Kanpur. Most of the Samasamajists fortunately evaded arrest, but were in constant danger of discovery. Travel was risky, and communication with other areas restricted.

Slandered

The Stalinists were out to crush the BLPI, too. The CPI press viciously slandered the Trotskyists as *"criminals and gangsters who help the Fascists"* by allegedly calling for *"strikes, sabotage, food riots and all forms of anarchy"* and *"attempting to stir up trouble in all war industries"* [76]. *"Trotskyite-traitors"*, declared the CPI in a 1943 conference resolution, *"must be treated by every honest Indian as the worst enemy of the nation and driven out of political life and exterminated"* [77]. This was no idle threat. Stalinists from Ceylon were brought over to India to hunt for Samasamajists, and CPI stool-pigeons fingered militants to the police during the war [78].

Forced underground, the BLPI used its journals --- the Bolshevik Leninist, published in Bombay, and Permanent Revolution, just started in Calcutta --- to hammer home the lessons of the August Struggle, why it was defeated and what it would take to win next time. It was an enormous accomplishment just to maintain a clandestine press in conditions comparable to Nazi-occupied Europe. These journals were among the best produced by Trotskyists, anywhere, during the war. The BLPI went straight to the key issue of power:

"...the fact was that, at the very outset of the upsurge, when imperialism took the offensive against it, the question of power automatically emerged. The effort at demonstration was immediately transformed into a struggle for the possession of the streets. This led to a direct clash with those instruments of the imperialist state, the police and military. Such a contest could not be won without purposeful direction and organised mass action. It was, however, in these very characteristics that the movement was most lacking. Consequently the movement never really went beyond the proportions of a violent political demonstration, and when it met the full blast of organised state repression, it collapsed" [79] (original emphasis).

What was urgently needed, it continued, was for the working class to be mobilised at the head of the insurgent nation. Given the Stalinists' stranglehold on the workers, the burning question of the hour was *"how to short-circuit the official leadership of the working class organisations and get through to the worker masses"*.

The BLPI aggressively polemicised against the Congress Socialists and other petit-bourgeois parties that had emerged as leaders.

"The supreme need of the hour is the mobilisation and consolidation of the revolutionary elements of the country under the leadership of the vanguard of the proletariat which alone is capable of waging an uncompromising struggle. We appeal to the revolutionaries disillusioned with the vacillations of the Congress and the oscillations of petit-bourgeois radicals to join our ranks. The other left parties, notably the CSP, are by their very essence centrist organisations. Centrism has no place in the clash of irreconcilable camps. The programmes of these parties are in no way different from that of the Congress. Theirs is only an aggressive nationalism. What we need above all is a programme that reflects the needs and aspirations of the exploited millions. The programme of the Bolshevik-Leninist Party is the programme of the masses" [80].

Thus the BLPI took a firm class stand in the face of considerable petit-bourgeois pressures. If there was a weakness, on the literary level, it was a certain abstractness. The whole situation had cried out for immediate, aggressive united front tactics directed toward the Congress Socialists, Forward Bloc, and Congress militants who stood for anti-imperialist struggle.

The August Struggle exacerbated differences already simmering among the Samasamajists. The 1941 decision to launch an Indian party had opened fissures in the LSSP ranks and leadership. Philip Gunawardena and M Perera opposed the whole BLPI venture, arguing that Trotskyists in India should join the Congress Socialist Party rather than form a Trotskyist group [81]. Gunawardena and Perera led the revolt in the name of the Workers Opposition. The pro-BLPI Samasamajists formed the Bolshevik-Leninist faction. Evidently Gunawardena and Perera had significant support among the old LSSP's ranks and periphery [82]. In Ceylon a party conference was convened in 1943 where the Workers Opposition outvoted the Bolshevik-Leninists.

Gunawardena argued that the BLPI *"was launched with insufficient preparation by immature and unreliable political elements"* who were *"no more than romantics at the time"*. Citing Trotsky's **"Open Letter to the Workers of India"** (1938), Gunawardena argued, *"The Trotskyists of India did not follow Comrade Trotsky's advice and enter the Congress Socialist Party and other mass organisations. Had they joined the CSP and other mass organisations, then during the 1942-43 struggle we could have popularised the principles and programme of Trotskyism and won to the banner of the Fourth International all genuine revolutionaries in the CSP and other mass organisations. We could have participated along with Congress Socialists in the mass activities of that struggle. The Congress Socialist Party gained in influence as a result of its participation and leadership of mass actions"* [83].

Trotsky urged Indian revolutionaries to *"actively participate"* in the CSP, not necessarily to enter it. He deliberately avoided specific tactical advice, because of his general unfamiliarity with the Indian Scene [84]. In any case, Gunawardena's idea of *"active participation"* was very different from Trotsky's. Gunawardena uncritically embraced the petit-bourgeois guerrilla bands (Congress Socialists, Forward Bloc, etc). In a 1943 article in Bolshevik-Leninist, he let the cat out of the bag:

"Bolshevik-Leninists do not disavow any form of struggle. They do not lecture the masses in revolt. They are students in the school of practice. They believe that everything that is spontaneous is necessary. They are trying to give conscious expression to the spontaneously developed procedure of the masses. The BLP of India supports unreservedly the struggle against British Imperialism, including all acts of sabotage in which the masses participate" [85].

Gunawardena concluded: *"It is the task of the party of the working class to give a leadership to these scattered peasant revolts by actually participating in them."* In other words, the BLPI should take the path not of Lenin's Bolsheviks but of the Russian SR party under Czarism.

Doric de Souza, a youthful leader of the Bolshevik-Leninist Faction, wrote a thinly-veiled polemic against Gunawardena in Permanent Revolution:

"Certain limits are given to this 'actual participation' by the level of development of the party, and by the scope and extent of the working class struggle itself. 'Actual participation' under the given conditions of the present limits itself to the propaganda of bold agrarian slogans (propaganda by every means, including work in, and the influencing of mass organisations among the peasantry), bringing to the forefront the social issues of the countryside, the overthrow of landlordism, the transfer of the land to the cultivator, the abolition of rural debt, etc..."

In the absence of proletarian struggle on a revolutionary scale in the cities of India, no party can bring 'working class leadership' artificially to the village struggle: in the process such a party would only de-class itself as the CP of China became a peasant party from 1926-29 onwards....

The method [of sabotage] bears the class-impress of the petit-bourgeois, and offers (of itself) no challenge to the property relations of the established order" [86].

At bottom, Gunawardena and Perera were in revolt against the BLPI as a "hard", democratic-centralist organisation. In a soft, Social-Democratic party (pre-war LSSP, CSP) they could pursue their (respective) opportunist appetites. Although the differences were ostensibly over "tactics", in hindsight it is clear that this split was analogous to the initial Bolshevik-Menshevik division over the organisation question. Philip Gunawardena, the "*father of Ceylonese Marxism*", had been corrupted in the LSSP. He had put on a nationalist-populist mask in the State Council for four years, and the mask had become the face.

As others have observed before, Philip Gunawardena was always one step ahead of everyone else. In his better days, he was the first to become a Trotskyist, the others followed. On the way down, he wanted to liquidate the BLPI into the Congress Socialists in 1942. His opponents carried out that very line six years later. He resurrected the "old" LSSP in 1945, and the Bolshevik-Leninists rejoined it in 1950. He joined the first Popular Front in the 1950s, and the others followed suit in 1964.

The fight in Bombay came to an abrupt halt when in July 1943 the police, acting on information supplied by a Stalinist who had infiltrated one of NM Perera's study circles, raided BLPI residences in Bombay and Madras [87]. In Bombay, Philip and Kusama Gunawardena and Bernard Soysa were arrested. Perera was nabbed in Ahmedabad. In Madras, Robert Gunawardena, Lionel Cooray, and Reggie Senanayake were arrested. The Samasamajists were deported to Ceylon and jailed. More arrests (a half dozen or so cadres in Bombay) followed later in July.

What NM Perera experienced in jail was typical:

"To keep away the obnoxious smells that emanated from the toilets he was forced to start smoking. Within fourteen days he lost twenty five pounds. He was locked up with criminals suffering from all kinds of communicable diseases, ranging from typhoid to leprosy and venereal diseases....The rice was really shoved through an iron opening and collected all the dust and rust by the time it reached the prisoner's hands" [88].

The BLPI had been hit with two body blows --- first the arrests during the August Movement, now these. The Bombay unit was in a bad shape. Indra Sen was sent from Bengal, where he broke house arrest, to Bombay to try to salvage something [89].

Defected

To make matters worse, after the arrests in Bombay, Chandravadan Shukla defected from the party, taking the printing press and Bolshevik Leninist with him. From the start, when he joined the BLPI, he was very protective of his printing press and wanted to preserve his control over his followers in Gujarat, who continued to use the name BMP [90]. Shukla admitted his differences were mainly personal when he met with British Trotskyists a few years later:

"The split was justified mainly on personal grounds, ie, the resolution in the BLP to place the press under the control of the Bombay DC [District Committee] reflected on Comrade Shukla's ability to run it. The party posts were monopolised by Ceylonese comrades, etc. Also was added the dangerous partiality shown to the Workers Opposition Faction by the Centre group headed

by Comrade Tilak (Leslie Goonewardene): *the certainty that the Workers Opposition Fraction was an anti-Bolshevik tendency that was on the point of capturing the Party*" [91].

Whether or not Leslie Goonewardene was soft on Gunawardena and Perera is unclear. It should be noted that, whatever his other differences, Shuklas has a personal grudge against Philip Gunawardena, who once physically assaulted Shukla at a meeting of the Bolshevik Leninist editorial board in Leslie Goonewardene's flat [92].

After the police raids of July 1943 Shukla resumed independent functioning in the name of the BMP. The BLPI's Permanent Revolution denounced *"the theft of the party press at that critical moment [the July police raids]...by a group of unscrupulous political adventurers (the so-called 'Bolshevik Mazdoor Party')"* [93]. The BMP had no ostensible political differences with the BLPI. Shukla continued to put out Bolshevik Leninist irregularly as well as agitational leaflets [94]. The BMP recruited a number of students and intellectuals, while the BLPI was trying to rebuild a Bombay unit, which was flattened again by arrests in early 1945 [95].

The BLPI also had to contend with Murray Gow Purdy in Bombay. After the BLPI was launched, Purdy countered by forming his own little group, the Mazdoor Trotskyist Party of India. Purdy had recruited a handful of devotees, who generally were subjectively revolutionary, very activist working class organisers. B Mallikarjun Rao had come to Bombay in 1937 from Andhra, attended Sydenham College, became assistant secretary of the Bombay Girni Kamgar Union (mill workers), then the largest CPI-led union, and also worked for the Free Press Journal and the Bombay Chronicle [96]. After joining Purdy's group, he moved to Hyderabad, where he was a prominent leader in building a large, militant railway workers' union. Sitaram B Kolpe also worked as a journalist for the Free Press Journal and became a leader of the All-India Journalists Union. Murlidhar Parija, who had got a copy of Purdy's 1938 programme from an old Russian Bolshevik working on the Bombay docks, became a leader of the Engineering Workers Union [97].

In May 1942 Purdy issued the draft programme of the MTP [98]. It was considerably toned down, without the violent rhetoric, and he dropped his pet theory of the Harijan vanguard. Purdy was still hostile to the BLPI:

"The Mazdoor Trotskyist Party has no connection with the Revolutionary Socialist League of Calcutta or the Bolshevik Leninist Party of India, which consists of nearly similar personnel under another name; nor with the other sub-division of the same group calling itself the Bolshevik Workers Party. These three groups of petit-bourgeois are fundamentally similar and organisationally connected to the capitalistic Sama Samaj Party of Ceylon. We Trotskyists will have nothing to do with middle class bourgeois 'Socialist' parties, which had until recently a multi-millionaire and today has many rich members upon its committee" [99].

For all its Trotskyist pretensions, Purdy's revised programme had no trace of Trotsky's Transitional Programme, and compared to the BLPI's programme, it was exceedingly simplistic. The MTP started an underground paper in English with the Hindi title Kranti (Revolution) [100]. Purdy also published a book on South Africa [101].

Purdy went underground in the *"Quit India"* struggle. He called for *"revolutionary satyagraha committees"*, an oxymoron (satyagraha means *"peaceful non-cooperation"*). His followers made good on his earlier exhortation to a insurrectionary violence. Ambika Singh, a former terrorist

recruited by Purdy, led armed peasants into clashes with the police in Jaumpur and Sultanpur, for which he was sentenced to death, but later released under popular pressure [102]. In Secundarabad, Mallikarjun Rao was one of the leaders of a rail strike, and the Purdyites evidently were involved in sabotage.

Expropriations

With the ebb of the August struggle Purdy's people took to "*revolutionary expropriations*" (robbery), just as some of the Russian revolutionaries had done in the aftermath of the failed 1905 Revolution. In one late in the war Purdy and one Edward Dennis Gee impersonated military men, assaulted a diamond merchant, and made off with currency and gold worth 180 000 rupees, a huge sum even now [103]. They were caught, sentenced to ten years' imprisonment, and incarcerated in Bombay's Arthur Road jail. During the trial Purdy made a dramatic escape and hid for a week in a hut disguised as a Muslim. Back in prison, Purdy, his comrade Mallikarjun Rao, and two others tried to escape, but failed. Purdy was sent to Yeravada Jail in Poona, where he was kept right up to independence in 1947. These Trotskyists were no wimps.

The Grim Years Underground

The ebb of the August Struggle ushered in a black period of reaction, demoralisation, and death. The British crushed the movement with a vengeance, and widespread demoralisation and political apathy set in. In 1943 famine stalked Bengal, and millions perished. As the war economy tightened, rampant inflation and shortages pauperised the petit bourgeoisie. The working class was restless but under the thumb of the Stalinists and Congress bureaucrats. Communalist organisations like the Muslim League (patronised by the British against Congress) and Hindu Maha Sabha grew, while union ranks thinned.

Once again the Congress Right angled for compromise. In early 1944 Gandhi offered to support the war in return for Congress representation in a National Government under imperialism. The CPI applauded, because this was substantially the same as its "*National Government for National Unity and National Defence*". Thus, whether or not the CPI rejoined Congress or got seats in this government, it would clearly be a Popular Front, a re-run of the Congress Ministries of 1937-39, but even more reactionary. Not only had Gandhi dropped the call for Indian independence, but he was offering to help run the country while Indian troops were used to restore British power in Burma. Not only would Congress now uphold the "*slave constitution*", but it would be the jailer for militants of the August Struggle. Most of the Congress left was already in jail, and Gandhi now called for fugitives to turn themselves in.

Illegality

The BLPI's work for the duration of the war had to be carried out under conditions of de facto illegality. The Calcutta, Bombay and Madras Units functioned autonomously. After Onkarnath Shastri's arrest in 1942 all contact was lost with his followers in UP and Bihar. In June 1943 the BLPI Provisional Committee soberly assessed the conjuncture and reaffirmed party building as the "*urgent task*" [104].

In Bombay the unit limped along and morale was low. Some work was carried out in the CPI-controlled Girni Kamgar Union, but the union movement was in decline. Shukla's BMP capitalised on the BLPI's weakness and managed to recruit students. In Calcutta, now the party centre, a modest foothold in the textile mills outside Calcutta was gained, but without immediate

payoff. The student work in the Bengal Student Congress was more productive, headed by capable young Bengali intellectuals (Suprova Roy, PK Roy). The Bengal Committee continued to put out Permanent Revolution and published several pamphlets during 1943-44 [105].

The party's greatest gains were made in South India, in Madras and Madura, where work had been begun by the Samasamajist Balasingham in 1941. During the war the BLPI developed fractions in the huge Buckingham and Carnatic Mills, the base of the Madras Labour Union, the oldest registered union in India. The BLPI also developed a fraction in the important MSM Railway workshops [106]. The working class in Madras Province was politically backward, but extremely militant. Congress dominated politics; the left, including the Congress Socialists, was virtually non-existent. The BLPI had a student activist who was a member of the Madras Congress Committee. He Organised and led the first post-1942 demonstration in Madras and rallied broad support against attempts by the Congress High Command to expel him as a Trotskyist. Leslie Goonewardene, Hector Abhayavardhana, and SCC Anthonipillai played key roles in the Madras Unit.

The BLPI held its first representative all-India conference in Madras on 20-25 September 1944 [107]. The party debated and adopted the Political Committee's theses [108]. This resolution addressed the key issue of a possible National Government, aptly characterised as *"a government of the native exploiters under British imperialism"* and *"an alliance of the feudalists, the Indian bourgeoisie, and the imperialists against the masses"*. It argued, *"whether the CP is accepted within the Congress fold or not, it will make itself an agency within the working class for the Congress far more effective than the CSP has been, or could ever be"*. But the resolution didn't characterise the would-be National Government as a blueprint for a Popular Front and clearly state the BPLI's opposition to its election. It simply stated that the National Government would unlock the situation and *"initiate a change in the mass mood"*, opening possibilities for renewed struggles, in which the BLPI would intervene. One could read this as an implicit argument for some kind of *"critical support"* to the Popular Front.

During 1944-45 the Congress-Stalinist campaign for a National Government dominated politics. The Congress Socialists, the heroes and veterans of the movement now repudiated by Congress, faced a dilemma. If Congress were to take office, the CSP would either have to surrender abjectly to the Congress Right and be party to the repression of the masses, or leave Congress in opposition. Leading Congress Socialists had already given their answer: dissolve the CSP and simply embrace Congress. Already Congress was trying to herd independent unions and peasant councils into its organisational vice. The bourgeoisie wanted to make sure there was no repeat of the upsurges of 1937-39 or 1942.

Dissent mounted in the Congress Socialists' ranks, especially among militants recruited during the August Struggle. Other leftists squirmed; the Revolutionary Socialist Party and Tagore's RCPI wouldn't publicly condemn Congress' move toward office. This was the BLPI's first opening. The BLPI called on Left Congress ranks to *"fight out the Right Wing on the question of acceptance of office"* [109].

"Where Congress has already accepted office or is supporting ministries, there we must press for immediate release of all political prisoners. In this bitter fight the progressive forces must support the rank and file leftists. We, the Bolshevik-Leninists, pledge full support to these fighters in their fight against capitulation...."

DEMAND:

Immediate release of all political prisoners,

Immediate repeal of all repressive laws.

Consolidate the left forces in Congress through these struggles" [110].

What if these demands were won? The Congress Left would still be a prop to a bourgeois government, itself the flimsy facade to direct imperialist rule. It is not for Trotskyists to consolidate the left wing of a Popular Front. The BLPI should have been vociferous, rock-hard opponents of it on principle, an *"unpopular"* stand at first, but one that points the way forward.

Exemplary

The BLPI's weakness on this issue should have been a flashing danger signal for the International. At this point, however, the FI existed mainly as a mailbox of the American SWP, which tried to fill the breach, and overall, did so competently, even heroically, as in the case of its maritime couriers. But the SWP, which lost talented intellectuals in the Shachtman split, didn't always rise to the political challenges posed during and after the war. In fact, the BLPI had leaders who were at least the equals of their comrades in New York and London. The BLPI's internationalism was exemplary. Though underground, its leaders contributed ably to the life of the International, such as it existed. On several issues ---- notably the Proletarian Military Policy and support to China in the war --- it was the BLPI that spotted flashing danger signals and intervened.

The editorial board of Permanent Revolution opposed the Proletarian Military Policy adopted by the American SWP and British RCP, arguing quite cogently:

"On this question our co-thinkers in England and America must seriously reconsider their central slogan of military training under trade union control, which in the context of imperialism is a surreptitious attempt to introduce by the back door military defencism and consequently may lead to social-patriotism" [111].

The SWP, which took the PMP too far, ended up quietly dropping it.

In 1943 Philip Gunawardena wrote a razor-sharp polemic against the American SWP, which had taken a dive in its anti-war agitation, sweeping the Leninist slogans, *"revolutionary defeatism"* and *"turn the imperialist war into a civil war"*, under the rug out of an overly self-protective desire to preserve legality [112]. Gunawardena (who himself had gone to jail for anti-war propaganda) made all the right arguments. So, when his opportunist appetites weren't in the way, he could sound very orthodox; ie, he was a centrist ---- revolutionary in words, opportunist in deeds.

The BLPI also contributed to the debate over China, namely, whether or not to continue support for China once the US entered the Pacific War. The FI majority, centred on the American SWP, continued to support China, while a minority argued that China's fight for independence had become subordinate, militarily and politically, to Anglo-American war aims. The Chinese Trotskyist movement split over this issue. Initially, the BLPI provisional leadership endorsed and reprinted the SWP/FI position, although some cadres dissented [113]. However, at the 1944 Conference, a resolution was adopted that stated:

"...by reasons of the interlocking of the Sino-Japanese War with the Second Imperialist World War, the subordination of Chungking's struggle to the reactionary war of the Anglo-American imperialists, and the conversion of the Chung-king regime into the channel of Anglo-American

economic penetration and political control, the Chungking-led war against Japan has been denuded of its progressive content and cannot therefore be supported by proletarian revolutionaries" [114].

The BLPI's position on the Red Army's advance into Eastern Europe reflected a degree of dialectical thinking absent in the knee-jerk orthodoxy upheld by the FI majority as well as the Stalinophobic revisionism that also surfaced [115]. The BLPI was rock solid on the Russian question [116].

It is a tribute to the BLPI's cadres that this fragile young party not only survived but in certain areas grew. It kept the banner of Trotskyism aloft in conditions of repression and privations not unlike occupied Europe. It kept its working class, revolutionary course through the "*Quit India*" storm and against senior leaders calling to abandon ship. It recognised the need to begin as a propaganda league, while trying to build a base in the working class. The BLPI seriously attempted to function as a democratic-centralist, Bolshevik organisation, something unprecedented in India, even in the early CPI. Last, but certainly not least, the BLPI took every possible step, some quite risky, to function as a disciplined contingent of Trotsky's Fourth International, World Party of Socialist Revolution.

Charles Wesley Ervin

1. Pierre Broué, "*Notes sur l'histoire des oppositions et du mouvement trotskyste en Inde dans la première moitié du XX^e siècle*", Cahiers Léon Trotsky, March 1985, pp11-44.
2. The Times, 13 March 1924.
3. PC Joshi in National Front, 19 March 1939, p96.
4. K Damodaran, "*Memoir of an Indian Communist*", New Left Review, no.93 (September/October 1975), p.38.
5. Kamal Biswas, "*Dictatorship of the proletariat and USSR*", Congress Socialist, 5 June 1937, pp15- 16ff. The British CP's response was "*The USSR and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat*", Congress Socialist, 17 July 1937. pp7-8ff.
6. Cited by Partha Sarathi Gupta, "*British Labour and the Indian Left*" in BR Nanda (ed), Socialism in India (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1972), p117.
7. Quoted in Minoo Masani, Bliss Was It in that Dawn (New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann, 1977), p77.
8. See the internal party report by Max Shachtman, "*On the Question of the Congress Socialist Party*", dated 18 October 1938, in the Max Schachtman Collection (microfilm reel 3387), Tamiment Institute, New York University Library.
9. Congress Socialist, 22 January 1939, 26 March 1939, 25 June 1939.
10. See Masani, Bliss Was It in that Dawn, p140. According to Plastrik, it was he who, while serving as secretary to Trotsky in Mexico at that time, urged Trotsky to write the "*Open Letter*". Interview with Sherman Plastrik (New York City), 7 December 1974.
11. Kamallesh Banerki died in 1967. This account is based on interviews with his comrade, Indra Sen (Calcutta), 16 January 1974, 1 February 1974, and 26 April 1974.
12. Interview with Ajit Roy (Calcutta), 10 February 1974. Also his tape-recorded narrative, "*Reminiscences of early days in India and Britain*", made in December 1975, at the request of the British Trotskyist historians Sam Bornstein and Al Richardson, who quote him in their work, Against the Stream, pp262-63.
13. In this period he wrote a pamphlet, In Defense of the Colonial Revolution, which was later reprinted by the Revolutionary Communist Party, British Section of the Fourth International.
14. Letter from the Indian historian Gautam Chattopadhyaya (Calcutta), dated 21 February 1978.
15. See S Bornstein and A Richardson, Against the Stream, p268.

16. My account of Onkarnath Shastri is based on letters from him to me and on interviews and correspondence with his early recruits. Letters from Shastri (Allahabad UP) of June 1974, 11 October 1975, 15 November 1977. Interviews with Raj Narayan Arya (Kanpur), 21 April 1974, and Karuna Kant Roy (Calcutta), 30 January 1974. Letters from Raj Narayan Arya, 9 September 1977 and 18 January 1978.
17. Letter from Shastri, undated, received in February 1978.
18. Interview with Karuna Kant Roy (Calcutta), 30 January 1974.
19. Shastri reported the conference in an article, "*Convert imperialist war into civil war. Prepare for the expropriation of the zamindari without compensation*", in Samaj, 17 January 1938, pp. 10ff.
20. Letter from Onkarnath Shastri (Allahabad), undated put postmarked in June 1974.
21. Letter from Onkarnath Shastri (Kanpur), 15 November 1977.
22. No issues seem to have survived. Evidently about four or five were put out in Calcutta, irregularly, before it closed for lack of funds. interview with Karuna Kant Roy (Calcutta), 21 January 1975.
23. This account is based on interviews with Chandravadan Shukla (Bombay), 27 December 1973, 7, 12 and 13 June 1974.
24. Chandravadan Shukla, Samyavad ane hind (Communism and India). Ahmadabad: Majur Sahitya Prachar Sabha. Dated 10 October 1939.
25. Samyavad ane hind, p34.
26. "*What is to be done?*" Inkilab, no8, October 1941.
27. See Purdy's letter of December 1938 to Max Shachtman and James P Cannon in the "*Exile Papers*", Trotsky Archive, Houghton Library at Harvard University.
28. Interviews with Sitaram B Kolpe (Bombay), 15 December 1973; Murlidhar Parija (Bombay), 12 and 23 December 1973; and Mahendra Singh (Varanasi), 2 January 1974. Brou, relates, with appropriate scepticism, a different "legend" namely that Purdy went from South Africa to Spain where he fought in the Republican forces.
29. Information from a police file, Home (Pol) File No7/7/47---Poll (1), pp7-10, cited by Bankey Bihari Misra, The Indian Political Parties: an Historical Analysis of Political Behaviour up to 1947 (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1976), p620.
30. Yarrumji Eedrupji [Murray Purdy], Bolshevik-Leninist-Trotskyist Draft Provisional Programme, np, nd. "*Yarrumki Eedrupji*" is "Murray Purdy" spelled backward, with the Hindi honorific suffix, ji, added (as in "*Gandhiji*").
31. Bolshevik-Leninist-Trotskyist Draft Provisional Programme, p31.
32. Ibid, p44.
33. Purdy states this in a subsequent programme. See Kamred Satnarayana [Murray Purdy], Karyakarm va dhyyeya [Programme and Principles], Maharashtra Kamiti Prakashit, Hindi Mazdur Tatskist Parti, Mumbai, 1 March 1943, p15.
34. MG Purdy, "*Is War Inevitable?*", Congress Socialist, 4 June 1939, p3.
35. Leon Trotsky, Lenin's Last Testament. American introduction by Max Shachtman (1935). Indian introduction by MG Purdy. Bombay, December 1940.
36. Interviews with CV Shukla (Bombay), 13 June 1974, and Sitaram B Kolpe (Bombay), 19 June 1974. According to Kolpe, the discussions involved Chandravadan Shukla, his wife Shanta, Purdy, Kolpe, and AH Tilakr.
37. The British Trotskyists who met Purdy's people in 1946 reported: "*It is also true that after the USSR was attacked the group took a defencist position on the war, changing this when the Stalinists also took this position (which they did in December 1941)*". See DG [Douglas Garbutt], "*Report on the Fourth International Movement in India*", internal document, Revolutionary Communist Party of Britain, undated [probably late 1946], p15. Likewise, Leslie Goonewardene stated in a letter of 30 April 1975: "*shortly after Hitler attacked the USSR, Purdy evolved the position of 'revolutionary support of the war against Hitler and Mussolini'*". Shukla provided his side of the story in interviews

in Bombay on 27 December 1973 and 13 June 1974.

38. See Leslie Goonewardene, *A Short History of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party* (Colombo: LSSP, 1960); George Jan Lerski, *The Origins of Trotskyism in Ceylon* (Stanford: Hoover Institution, 1968); Edmund Samarakkody, *"The Struggle for Trotskyism in Ceylon"*, *Spartacist* (New York), no22 (Winter 1973-74); and V Kumari Jayawardena, *"Origins of the left movement in Sri Lanka"*, *Social Scientist*, no6/7, January/February 1974, p9.

39. Quoted in George Jan Lerski, *Origins of Trotskyism in Ceylon*, p26.

40. GJ Lerski, *Origins of Trotskyism in Ceylon*, p40.

41. V Karalasingham, *The Politics of Coalition* (Colombo: International Publishers, 1964), p67.

42. As Karalasingham put it, *"It is an open secret that Dr NM Perera was far from being a Marxist."* V Karalasingham, *The Politics of Coalition*, p65.

43. Leslie Goonewardene, *A Short History of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party*, p15.

44. Leon Trotsky, *"The Three Factions in the Comintern"*, in *Writings of Leon Trotsky* (1930) (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1975), p16.

45. Doric de Souza *"Parliamentary Democracy in Ceylon"*, *Young Socialist* [Colombo], October-December 1961, p126.

46. Part of the programme, *"The Road to Freedom for Ceylon"*, was reprinted in *Fourth International*, April 1942, pp117-18.

47. A column, *"Our Ceylon Letter"*, first appeared in *Congress Socialist*, 13 June 1936. For articles by Leslie Goonewardene, see *Congress Socialist*, 6 June 1936, 3 October 1936, 20 March 1937.

48. Letter from Leslie Goonewardene (Colombo), 30 April 1975.

49. Interviews with Sitaram B Kolpe (Bombay), 15 December 1973, and Mahendra Singh (Varanasi), 2 January 1974. I've never located a copy of this pamphlet.

50. Interviews with Karuna Kant Roy (Calcutta), 30 January 1974, and Indra Sen (Calcutta), 16 January 1974.

51. Letter from Leslie Goonewardene (Colombo), 30 April 1975.

52. *"A Transitional Program for India"*, *Fourth International*, October 1942, p309.

53. *"Overthrow Imperialism"*, *Inquilab*, no9, March 1942.

54. *"May Day Manifesto"*, *Inquilab*, no10, May 1942.

55. It was probably this meeting that prompted the SWP to announce: *"We have just received news from India of the formation of the All-India Bolshevik-Leninist Party."* See John G Wright, *"Agrarian Revolution is Key to Struggle in India"*, *Militant*, 7 March 1942.

56. From the police file, Home (Pol) File No7/7/47---Poll (I), cited by BB Misra, *The Indian Political Parties: an Historical Analysis of Political Behaviour up to 1947*, p621.

57. See EP De Silva, *A Short Biography of Dr NM Perera* (Colombo: De Silva, 1975), pp20-21.

58. K Tilak [Leslie Goonewardene], *"The War and Revolutionary Policy"*, *Bolshevik Leninist*, August 1942.

59. *"The Real Fifth Column in India"*, *Harijan*, 9 August 1942, p27.

60. Sections of the BLPI's draft programme (theses) were reprinted in *The Revolution in India* (Tait Memorial Pamphlet [Edinburgh], September 1942); *The World Revolution and the Tasks of the British Working class* (London: Workers International League, 1945); and *Fourth International*, March 1942, pp82-87, April 1942, pp122-25, and October 1942, pp309-14.

61. Draft Programme of the Bolshevik Leninist Party of India, nd [1942]. The Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace, Stanford, has what appears to be an original mimeograph.

62. See GJ Lerski, *Origins of Trotskyism in Ceylon*, pp185-87. The SWP press ran an interview with an unnamed Ceylonese comrade, undoubtedly Selina Perera. See *"An Interview with a Comrade"*, *Socialist Appeal*, 10 November 1939.

63. Interview with Selina Perera (Calcutta), 10 February 1974.

64. Interview with Stanley Plastrik (New York), 7 December 1974.

65. Masani recounted his encounter with Stanley in his memoirs: M Masani, *Bliss was It in that*

Dawn, p140.

66. Interview with Indra Sen (Calcutta), 1 February 1974.

67. International Bulletin [American Committee for the Fourth International], no1 [1940], p9.

68. "A Foothold in India", Labor Action, 21 October 1940.

69. "A Letter from India", Fourth International, November 1942, pp345-46.

70. "India" International Bulletin [SWP], vol1, no7 (August 1941), p16. No name is given in the bulletin, but there's no doubt it was written by the inimitable Purdy.

71. Labor Action, 2 February 1942, 23 March 1942, 19 October 1942.

72. "American Tells of Indian Workers' Organisations", Militant, 7 March 1942.

73. "The Imperialist War and Its Consequences Sharpen the Old and New Contradictions in India", Tanakha, year 1, no1, [nd].

74. Leaflet quoted at length in "News from the Bolshevik-Leninist Party", Fourth International, July 1943, p221.

75. Quoted in Fourth International, July 1943, p221.

76. See People's War, 7 March 1943, 4 June 1943 and 12 September 1943.

77. Quoted in Madhu Limaye, Communist Party: Facts and Fiction (Hyderabad: Chetana Prakashan, 1951), pp48-49.

78. For abundant evidence of the CPI's collaboration see the series by Arun Shourie in Illustrated Weekly of India, 18 March, 25 March, 1 April and 8 April.

79. Gafur Kan, "Lessons of the First Phase of the Anti-Imperialist Struggle", Permanent Revolution, January 1943, p7.

80. "The Indian Struggle", Permanent Revolution, April-June 1943, p56.

81. A later BLPI internal document makes reference to an internal document of this period by Gunawardena and Perera which allegedly states that Trotskyism was "too advanced" for Indian workers. See V Chester, "The Grave-Diggers of the BLPI", Internal Bulletin [BLPI], vol3, no1, March 1948, p19.

82. As one political analyst noted, "The rank and file of the party, however, were largely against this project of a BLPI." See DS Weerawardana, Ceylon General Election, 1956 (Colombo: Gunasena, 1960), p61.

83. DPR Gunawardena, "Bolshevik-Leninists Should Enter Immediately the Socialist Party of India (CSP)", Internal Bulletin, LSSP [Gunawardena/Perera], vol1, no2, March 1947, p2. Although a later document, it merely reiterates Gunawardena's original position.

84. Stanley Plastrik recalled that Trotsky was even reluctant to write the Open Letter for this reason. Interview with Stanley Plastrik (New York City), 7 December 1974.

85. Rup Singh [Philip Gunawardena], Bolshevik Leninist, February 1943. This passage, singled out by Doric de Souza, does not appear in the SWP's reprint of the article: Rup Singh, "The August 1942 Struggle", Fourth International, October 1944, pp309-14.

86. S Livera [Doric de Souza], "Working Class Leadership of the Peasantry" Permanent Revolution, January-March 1944, pp6,7,9.

87. See "Police Raid Trotskyist Centres in Bombay and Madras", Permanent Revolution, July-September 1943, p27, and "The Stalinist-Police Alliance--The Summit of Popular Frontism", Permanent Revolution, January-March 1944, p21.

88. EP De Silva, A Short Biography of Dr NM Perera, p23.

89. Interview with Indra Sen (Calcutta), 17 January 1974.

90. interview with Chandravadan Shukla (Bombay), 12 June 1974. One issue of Inkilab (vol2, no11, July 1942) referred to the "Bolshevik Mazdoor (Leninist) Party of India", another (Inkilab, vol2, no13, 20 November 1942) used the name, "Gujarat Branch of the Bolshevik Mazdoor Party of India". Inkilab advertised Bolshevik Leninist as the theoretical organ of the BMP.

91. DG [Douglas Garbutt], "Report on the Fourth International Movement in India", p15.

92. Interviews with Chandravadan Shukla (Bombay), 23 December 1973 and 12 June 1974; and with

Indra Sen (Calcutta), 17 January 1974. This incident was corroborated by Leslie Goonewardene in a letter dated 30 April 1975.

93. "To Our Readers", Permanent Revolution, July-September 1943, p25.

94. Sampurn swatantrya ke liye [For complete independence], BMP leaflet, dated 26 January 1944.

95. Reported in Bombay Free Press, 19 March 1945.

96. See "Comrade Mallikarjun Rao", Marxist Outlook [Bombay], (April 1966), p22-25.

97. Interview with Murlidhar Parija (Bombay), 14 December 1973.

98. The Mazdoor Trotskyist Party of India. Draft Programme. Issued by the Provisional Committee of the Mazdoor Trotskyist party of India, Calcutta. 15 May 1942.

99. The Mazdoor Trotskyist Party of India. Draft Programme, appendix.

100. Interview with Sitaram B Kolpe (Bombay), 19 June 1974. I've never seen copies of Kranti.

101. MG Purdy, The South African Indian Problem, a Revolutionary Solution. [Bombay: SK Kombrabail], 1943.

102. Interviews with Murlidhar Parija (Bombay), 23 December 1973 and Mahendra Singh (Varanasi), January 1974.

103. See "Property Found with Purdy", Times of India, 6 March 1946, "Two Years Jail for Purdy", Times of India, 1 March 1946 and "Ten Years RI for Purdy", Free Press [Bombay], 18 February 1946.

104. "The Present Political Situation and Our Tasks", Permanent Revolution, July-September 1943, p21.

105. The BLPI's Fourth Internationalist Library series included: Manifesto of the Fourth International on India (FIL vol 1); Trotsky, Imperialist War and Revolutionary Perspectives (FIL vol2); Trotsky, Fourth International and the Soviet Union FIL vol 3); Tilak [Leslie Goonewardene], From the First to the Fourth International (FIL vol 4); and Trotsky, What is an Insurrection? (FIL vol5).

106. Interview with S Amarnath (Bombay), 14 June 1974.

107. See "India", Fourth International, April 1945, p126.

108. "The Present Political Situation in India. Theses of the Political Committee of Bolshevik Leninist Party of India and Ceylon, adopted 4 August 1944", in Fourth International, October 1944, pp301-07.

109. Ministry-Makers and "Leftist"-Fakers, BLPI pamphlet, dated April 1945, p7. Reprinted under the name Hemu Kalani, in Fourth International, July 1945, pp199-200.

110. Ministry-Makers and "Leftist"-Fakers, p8.

111. "Britain at the Cross Roads", Permanent Revolution, January-March 1944, p18.

112. Rup Singh [Philip Gunawardena], "Revolutionary Defeatism", Permanent Revolution, April-June 1943, p39-44.

113. "American Intervention in China", Permanent Revolution, January 1943, p24-26. For the dissenting view, see VS Roy, "China in the World War: A Review", Permanent Revolution, April-June 1943, p46.

114. "China in the World War", quoted in Permanent Revolution, October-December 1944.

115. "The Red Army in Eastern Europe", reprinted in Fourth International, April 1945, p127.

116. See "For the Revolutionary Defence of the Soviet Union!", Permanent Revolution, April-June 1943, p54 and "The Russian Offensive", Permanent Revolution, January-March 1944, pp19-20.