

P.C. JOSHI BIRTH CENTENARY MEMORIAL LECTURE

17 AUGUST 2007

*P.C. Joshi: A Political Journey*

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Professor Emeritus, JNU

Archives on Contemporary History  
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P C Joshi was born on 14 April 1907 and educated in Almora and the Allahabad University. Studying a diversity of subjects from Sanskrit to history and economics, he passed his M.A. in 1928 from Allahabad. After rapidly passing through a Gandhian phase, he became part of a communist group in Allahabad.

He worked in the Workers and Peasants Party of Uttar Pradesh, formed at Meerut in October 1928 with himself as General Secretary. By the end of the year, an all-India Workers and Peasants Party Conference was called in Calcutta to form an all-India organization, of which P C Joshi was a member of the working committee. While the Workers and Peasants Party was formed at the initiative of individual communists, who were in any case not many, and the Communist Party of India existed as the Workers and Peasants Party, many left-inclined Congressmen were active in it and played an important part in it. P C Joshi was also in constant touch with Jawaharlal Nehru after the latter's return from the Soviet Union and borrowed books on Marxism from him not otherwise easily available.

P C Joshi also worked in Kanpur among workers and organized students in Allahabad University. He played an important role in the youth wing of the Workers and Peasants Party, known as Young Comrades League. The Workers and Peasants Party was soon dissolved at the diktat of the Comintern (Communist International), of which Communist Party of India was a part, since it was a blasphemy to have a two-class base for a working class party. Comintern also declared Gandhi and Nehru as agents of imperialism, who had to be opposed tooth and nail if the masses were to be freed from their influence and if the anti-imperialist struggle was to grow.

P C Joshi joined the Communist Party formally in 1929. Immediately after in March 1929, along with 31 other communists and trade union workers, he was arrested and tried in the famous Meerut Conspiracy Case.

Joshi was released from jail in 1933 when he resumed work among

Kanpur workers. Another short period of arrest followed in 1935 but he was released after a few weeks because of good work as a gardner in the jail garden.

By 1935, it was decided to reorganize the Party which had already been banned by the Government of India in 1934 and had been reduced to less than 50 members and stood isolated from the national movement and the masses.

By now, the Comintern had once again changed its political line for European as also colonial and semi-colonial countries. The communist parties were now urged to form a united front with other nationalist and anti-fascist forces. In India's case, this line was reflected in the Dutt-Bradley Thesis of 1935. This political line was already being worked out by some of the Communists out of their own experience and was therefore readily adopted by them.

The scattered Communist Group met in Surat in late 1935 and chose P C Joshi as the General Secretary of the Communist Party of India. He was to be assisted by Ajoy Ghosh and R D Bhardwaj as members of the Political Bureau. PC Joshi was to serve as the General Secretary of the Party for 12 long years till late 1947. Perhaps Joshi's experience in working in close cooperation with Congressmen and other left-wing persons during 1927-29 in the W&P Party was a factor in his being made the General Secretary of the Party under the changed circumstances of the Comintern's new united front line.

The Party's initial headquarters were in Calcutta from where it brought out, probably from September 1935, *The Communist*, an irregular journal in cyclostyled-form as organ of the Central Committee of the Party. It was edited by P C Joshi. The Party also decided to put Ajoy Ghosh, R D Bhardwaj and S V Ghate in charge of party building in three zones of the country. The party headquarters were moved from Calcutta to Bombay because the Party could function there openly after the formation of the Congress Ministry there. This was true of other Congress provinces too. But even in non-Congress provinces, the Party could breathe easier. Joshi and the whole-timers of the Party living in Bombay lived in a commune, which in its simplicity and austerity of style of living resembled as also equalled Gandhiji's ashrams.

The Party started in Bombay its first legal organ, *The National Front*, in February 1938 with P C Joshi as its editor.

With a smiling cherubic face, P C Joshi with the help of able comrades set out on the hard task of building up the Communist Party almost from scratch. He had an outstanding ability for the task and set out to perform it with exemplary planning and execution of his plans.

He had great ability to spot talent, to recognize what a person could do best and where he or she could help the party most and to carry people with him.

In 1936-37 Joshi toured all provinces and from scratch formed provincial party committees. He successfully continued to build the Party during 1939-41 when, after the Congress Ministries resigned, the Party once again faced severe repression. During these years a large number of party leaders and activists were arrested. But under such severe conditions, the Party had in 1943, when the First Party Congress was held 17000 full or 'candidate members. Of course Joshi was lucky to have brilliant and dedicated colleagues, such as Ajoy Ghosh, R D Bhardwaj, Dr Adhikari and S V Ghate. A major contribution of Joshi was that he instilled an immense pride in the Party among its members and sympathizers, the like of this pride has not been seen since then. This pride was to enable party members and sympathizers—and I was not one of them at the time—to face the period of their utter isolation from the mainstream nationalist opinion after 1942.

Once the Party weekly, the *National Front*, was launched, other party publications came up in many other languages. Joshi enthused Party members and sympathizers to sell them by leading from the front, so to speak, by himself participating in hawking them in the Bombay streets as well as in public meetings even of other parties.

During Joshi's period, there was a resurgence of peasants' workers', writers', and students' movements in which the Communist Party played an important role. Various organizations like All-India Kisan Sabha, All India Trade Union Congress, Progressive Writers Association and All India Students Federation were formed or promoted when already formed, on a joint basis by various left groups and parties during the Joshi period. In fact, all of these organizations had their hay-day during this period.

The Party also organized several massive mass struggles of the people around their demands during this period. Kayyur, Punnapravayalar, Tebhaga, Worli, Telengana, are names which easily come to mind. The Party also played an important role in the Naval Revolt of 1947 and in the campaign to get the INA officers and soldiers released. The party members and leaders also did commendable work during the 1947 communal holocaust both in Bengal and Punjab.

Joshi had great ability to attract intellectuals working in a variety of areas of life: writers, artists, academics, journalists, scientists, lawyers, and doctors. As Mohit Sen has pointed out: "Joshi had the knack of expressing in a national idiom even what was a nationally unacceptable political line."<sup>1</sup>

Joshi admirers included intellectuals like Sushobahn Sarkar, Bishnu De, P C Mahlonobis, D P Mukherjea, D D Kosambi, Rahul Sankritayan, Satyen Bose, B N Ganguli, Gian Chand, Ravi and Uday Shankar, Sumitra Nandan Pant, Yashpal, Shambhu Maharaj, Balraj Sahni, Dr. Joshi, General S.S. Sokhey and a host of writers and poets who were to gain great fame in later years. In fact Joshi was respected by diverse sections of Indian society as no communist leader has been respected since then.

Never was Gramsci's concept of hegemony regarding the role of intellectuals applied so well. Gramsci argued that in democratic or semi-democratic conditions it is necessary for the communist party to occupy all intellectual ground from political parties and the press to education, gender relations, and all cultural and intellectual activity. Joshi period witnessed giant steps forward by the communist movement in this direction.

Another example of Joshi's instinctive grasp of the notion of hegemony was his direction to all intellectuals under Party's influence to be the best wherever they worked. In particular he applied this exhortation to students: They must be academically the best students in their class or university despite their being involved in intense political work. This was not just an advice similar to that given by all parents to their children. A profound political, hegemonic reasoning lay behind this advice, namely that, they would then be respected by the student community which would then accept the ideological—and not merely trade-union type—leadership of the party. He said this ideological acceptance would stay with them even after they graduate and will not disappear in their lifetime.

I can myself vouchsafe for the soundness of this advice. Even though I was opposed, even hostile, to the Communist Party and its 1942 line, I was very impressed by the academic record of communist students: Satypal Dang, Inder Gujral, Romesh Chandra and Rajbans Krishna—in fact one of my first ambitions after reaching Lahore as an undergraduate student was to listen to Satypal Dang or Rajbans Krishna. Among my near contemporaries was a communist student, now Prof. Randhir Singh. I and many others were thrilled, despite our political differences, when we heard that he had stood first in M.A. Political Science though he had appeared in the examination as a detenu.

Joshi also asked communist students to reach out to all, even those who were opposed to communist politics. They must take every opportunity to put across Party's point of view to them.

Joshi did not accept the notion that in colonial countries nationalism was a bourgeois concept and that this concept clashed with

internationalism. Instead he put forth the notion of multiple loyalty to party, people and India. He did not see any clash among these three loyalties either. Consequently, Joshi was quite proud of all that was progressive and forward looking in India's national culture and civilization as also in India's great historical achievements which he saw as the achievements of the Indian people.

A concrete example of his attachment to Indian culture was the manner in which he nurtured the Indian People's Theatre Association or IPTA, of which he was the major inspiration. He gathered a brilliant team of artists—singers, dancers, poets and playwrights and forged an organization the like of which did not exist in the past and has not existed since.

P C Joshi also inspired a galaxy of Urdu and Hindi writers to work for the progressive left movement, Faiz Ahmad Faiz, Sardar Jaafri, Sahir Ludhianvi, Jan Nissar Akhtar, Kaifi Azmi, Majaz, Krishan Chander, Rajinder Singh Bedi, Makhdoom Mohiuddin, Yashpal, Dinkar and Nagarjun are some of the names which readily come to mind.

One of the high watermarks of the work of the party under Joshi's leadership was the active part it played in providing relief to the victims of the terrible Bengal famine of 1943—and this role was not confined to providing food, shelter and medicines to the victims of the famine in Bengal. The party mobilized people all over the country for this relief work. The IPTA, especially its song squad, travelled all over the country, and made the entire country aware of the havoc caused by the famine. I still remember the impact that IPTA's "Bhookha Bengal" made on me as a student in Lahore. Joshi also saw Bengal relief as a special task of the students in particular. Student squads travelled all over the country raising funds for Bengal relief. Medical students from all over the country from Lahore, Bombay and Madras, travelled to Bengal to provide medical relief.<sup>2</sup>

Joshi's work among artists, writers and other intellectuals and for Bengal relief was another example of his grasp of what hegemony meant, though unfortunately he never theorized his own practice in this respect.

Unfortunately, if I may say so, work by the communists among intellectuals went into decline after Joshi was thrown out, even though sporadic and individual attempts continued to be made in this direction. This was primarily because Joshi had encouraged individuality among intellectuals and their growth and development along their own personality and taste, their own trajectory, even while urging them to put their talents at the service of the Indian people. In the Ranadive period, the intelligentsia felt stifled and their individuality threatened.

Writers in particular left the party in hordes under the Stalinist stewardship of Dr. Ram Bilas Sharma as General Secretary of the Progressive Writers Association. The entire hegemonic project has never been revived by the left since 1948.

All those who came in contact with Joshi testify to his intensely humane character. This found reflection in his dealings with most persons and their problems. This I found out when I and my wife came into contact with him after 1973 when he shifted to JNU Housing Complex.

Despite Herculean efforts of Joshi and other brilliant committed leaders and the wide attraction as also acceptability of Marxism in India, Communist Party continued to be a small political force in India if the size and population of India is kept in view. The Party was more or less isolated from the mass of people despite its reach among writers, artists and other intellectuals. And this was not entirely because of its stand on the 1942 movement. We will try now to shed light on this failure, especially that of P.C. Joshi, who had otherwise many of the qualities which would have made him a great political success.

## II

Ultimately, however, a political leader has to be evaluated by his political acumen in leading his or her party and movement along historically viable policies and thus putting them on the path of growth and development. And it is by these criteria that P C Joshi has to be ultimately evaluated, for after all he was above all a political leader.

The question to be asked in this respect is: why did CPI remain such a small force, such a peripheral or insignificant social and political force till 1947-48, i.e. even at the height of Joshi period and despite recruiting in its ranks or around it some of the best young people of this country and despite possessing a remarkable group of leaders?

P C Joshi and the party worked under several handicaps. Firstly, they were not free agents. It was difficult and even impossible to avoid communist international's or Comintern's control in the 1920s and 1930s even though Comintern's control was increasingly dysfunctional as it had increasingly come under the control of the Soviet Union and Stalin. Secondly, Comintern was utterly ignorant of the political and social structure and situation of Asia in general and India in particular.

It was difficult and impossible for any Communist Party to survive in opposition to Comintern and Stalin in the 1920s, 1930s, 1940s, and



even 1950s. After all, the Soviet Party was the legitimate heir of Lenin and of a party and country which had made the only successful socialist revolution.

Secondly, unlike other major parties in the Afro-Asian countries, CPI had no representative of its own in Comintern Headquarters in Moscow.

Instead, the Comintern put it under the 'guidance' or hegemony of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), which made Ben Bradley, stationed in Britain as the guide and mentor of the CPI.

P C Joshi was chosen at the very young age of 28 as the General Secretary of the Party because older leaders were constantly bickering. And, in any case, he or his fellow Political Bureau members, equally young, were not to lead the Party in developing programme and policies on the basis of the 7th Comintern resolutions, but only to execute or implement Comintern policy as interpreted by the CPGB. For example, CPI was asked to implement the Dutt-Bradley thesis on India, which was drafted in Britain without any consultation with the leaders of CPI. Even Jawahar Lal Nehru was consulted in Switzerland in this regard by R. Palme Dutt but not the CPI at all.

P C Joshi became General Secretary of the CPI at a critical period when the implementation of the 6th Congress thesis on colonial and semicolonial countries had reduced the Indian Party as also other communist parties to a negligible existence.

In 1935 the 7th Congress of the Comintern switched to the line of united front of all anti-fascist forces for capitalist countries and alliance of communist and nationalist forces in the colonial and semi-colonial countries. For India, this meant implementing Dutt-Bradley thesis. This PC Joshi did with great success. Communists worked actively within the Indian National Congress and the Congress Socialist Party and in both the organizations communists were accepted warmly by the left-wing Congressmen. By 1939 CPI had emerged as a nationalist force with an independent base among workers, peasants, students and intellectuals. Moreover, the Communist Party had developed local leaders in many regions.

P C Joshi and the Party leadership were just learning to think on their own, beginning to understand the significance of the national consciousness and the role of the national movement, beginning to understand that Marxism was, under colonial conditions, not a negation of but an affirmation and further extension of nationalism, when in 1939 came the left-turn associated with the Soviet-German pact and

then the People's War line, and the pro-Pakistan tilt, with their disastrous consequences. With the end of the war and of the People's War line, as also the dissolution of the Comintern, P C Joshi was again coming into his own, when came the B T Ranadive era and the end of Joshi's leadership of the Party.

Let me deal very briefly with the events and policies during 1939-45. At the outbreak of the war, the Congress leadership felt that it was essential to fight German Fascism and, therefore, support the allied powers but to be able to do so India must be given effective independence and power to mobilize Indian resources for the war effort. In the meanwhile, the Congress was willing to wait and not start a movement. And when it did so in 1940, the movement did not take a mass form.

The CPI, on the other hand, initially believed that the war was one between two imperialist powers and Indians must adopt a policy of equidistance between the two warring blocs. Indians also must use the opportunity provided by the war to intensify the struggle for independence.

There was a difference between the two approaches, i.e., the nationalist and the Communist, but it did not create a divide between the two. The divide occurred to an extent when, under the direction of the Comintern, the CPI changed its categorization of the war and declared that the Anglo-French imperialism was the aggressor and not Fascism, even though the war was between two imperialist camps for division of the world between them.

The CPI thus declared: "The present war is only a minor skirmish to prepare the stage for a grand alliance under the hegemony of British imperialism against democracy and against the Soviet Union." The CPI further declared: "Britain has brought about the war. Britain wanted to continue the war. Britain wanted to spread the war. All these because of Britain's policy of smashing the Soviet Union". The war had, therefore, created an opportune moment to weaken Britain and that it was "a crime—politically and morally—to aid Britain, that aiding Britain means harming the cause of world democracy". This formulation of the CPI still did not create much of a divide between the CPI and Congressmen. Nor did the CPI's criticism of the Congress in what it described as adopting a passive approach in its opposition to the war and British rule did so as average Congressmen in any case harboured strong feelings against British rule.

What increasingly created this divide was the CPI's belief that in view of the reluctance of the Congress leadership to start a mass

movement against British rule, the CPI had a major opportunity to expose what it described as the compromising elements of the national leadership and to establish working class hegemony over the movement which was co-terminus with the hegemony of the CPI. In particular, it was an opportunity to expose Gandhi and the Gandhian leadership of the national movement. In fact, this meant going back to the more stringent left-sectarian approach of the 6th Congress of the Comintern, an approach which had never been given up by the CPI leadership, including P C Joshi, and to which it tended to go back again and again whenever it felt even a whiff of the prospects of rapid growth. Thus, the CPI not only counterpoised mass action to the decision of the Congress leadership at Ramgarh to start Individual Satyagraha Campaign, but declared that the Gandhian leadership would not lead India to freedom. The Party described the Congress decision at Ramgarh as an effective method of sabotaging the national struggle and a result of its "policy of hypocrisy, cowardice, blindness, all together".

The CPI continued its anti-British imperialist line for nearly six months after German attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941. This came to be known as the 'two sectors' approach. Indian people should give full support to the Just People's War being waged by the Soviet Union; but it could do so best by "fighting all the more vigorously for their own emancipation from imperialist yoke". Consequently CPI's major demand was "independence and democratic liberty here and now" because through this demand, the Party would be able to convert "this imperialist war into revolutionary war". In other words, as the party leadership declared, the Party's attitude towards "the British government and the imperialist war remained what it was".

Fresh intervention by both CPGB and the Comintern changed all this, and the Party-line changed to extending unquestioned support to the war and British-Indian Government. Though after some initial resistance, P C Joshi once again gave way to Comintern's dictat and accepted the People's War line. The earlier approach of the party was declared to be incorrect because of the Party giving way to 'bourgeois nationalism'. One more attempt by the CPI to think on its own had been snuffed out.

The Party's change of line would not have proved such a disaster but for the fact of its stand on the 1942 movement. The Party condemned this movement, described it 'suicidal' and stood in opposition to it. It was declared to have been organized not by Gandhi and the Congress, who never issued a call for the movement to begin, but by the fifth columnists who had taken advantage of the 8th August resolution and

the people's anger and outburst to organize acts of sabotage, etc. This formulation was adopted by the Party as late as its First Party Congress in 1943. Interestingly, a large number of Party members and local cadres either participated in the first phase of the movement in August 1942 or provided shelter to the activists of the 1942 movement.

The CPI tried to limit the political damage to the party by adopting the approach that Gandhi and the Congress leaders had not initiated the movement and should, therefore, be released, but they organized no mass campaign around the demand and limited it to press statements and Joshi's articles in the People's War and other Party organs. But in any case, in practice, the Quit India Movement was opposed; the damage had been done and the Party stood isolated from the national movement and, therefore, from the mass of the people, including the mass of workers, peasants and students. We need not stress this point as the Party was to acknowledge this mistake later. Also, in 1951, Stalin was to criticize the Party's approach, though he, hypocritically, ignored the fact that the Party had done so on Comintern's bidding.

There were some basic fallacies from which the CPI suffered throughout the Joshi period, which were responsible for the Party remaining a marginal force despite Joshi's leadership qualities and his herculean efforts. These fallacies were also responsible for Joshi's failure to withstand B. T. Ranadive's onslaught on his position in 1947-48 when he tried to make the Party accept the obviously correct position that India had achieved independence in 1947 and that the event should be celebrated by the Indian people as also by the Communist Party. Why was Joshi completely isolated in the Party, deserted by all the major Party leaders and except a handful by all the comrades he had lovingly nurtured.

The reasons lay in the Joshi period itself—B. T. Ranadive in 1948 represented nothing but the working out in full of the underlying assumptions of the Party during its entire history till then, including the Joshi period. Faced with the implications of his own basic formulations Joshi was compelled to plead guilty of heresy.

The Party had, of course, never purged itself of what it called left-sectarianism of the 6th Congress of the Comintern; it had changed to the United Front line of 1935 without abandoning the 1928-29 Comintern approach. For example, Ben Bradley, speaking on behalf of the Indian Communist Party, at the 7th Congress of the Comintern had said in 1935 : "The ideological differentiation of the Communists from the national reformists and the intensified struggle for the liberation of the masses from the influence of Gandhism and all other shades of national

reformism including its 'left' variety—Royism—began in 1929... We were unable to utilize the powerful mass influence we had gathered during the strike struggle in 1928-29 to carry on the fight against national reformism and for the revolutionary hegemony of the proletariat in the anti-imperialist struggle... up till now it has been unable to paralyze the influence of the national reformists among the masses... the masses, while expressing their discontent with the Gandhi leadership and that of other capitulators and vacillators with imperialism, did not at the same time break with the Congress and therefore, in a certain sense, still view the Congress headed by the national reformist bourgeoisie and the liberal landlords as an organization representing the national opposition against imperialism."

What were some of the basic assumptions regarding India and Indian politics which were, in essence, carried on also during the Joshi period?

P C Joshi had to work under certain 'Givens' of the Party and the Comintern of his period of leadership. First came the virtually canonical view that hegemony of the proletariat over the anti-imperialist struggle alone could liberate the country from the colonial yoke. Moreover, proletarian hegemony was seen as synonymous with Communist Party's hegemony, that is hegemony of a party built on the model of the Bolshevik party. Moreover, proletarian or Communist leadership was not to be established over the Congress but in opposition to the Congress because Congress was bound to remain under bourgeois leadership. Then how could the Congress bring about independence, asked B.T. Ranadive in 1948? Any *Azadi* brought about by the bourgeois leadership as in 1947, had to be a *Jhooti Azadi*.

Moreover, even Joshi, following the Cominterns guidelines, equated working class with the Party and working class hegemony exercised through ideology with Party hegemony acquired organizationally.

Secondly, along with this went the Communist view—equally firmly held—that the Congress leadership represented the Indian bourgeoisie and that, as an editorial written by P C Joshi in *the National Front* put it in September 1939, it "hates imperialism less than it fears the masses," and that "it puts class above nation." And since the bourgeoisie was incapable of launching a real mass struggle, and even if it did so under pressure of the masses, it would only use the mass movement to get some petty concessions and then surrender to imperialism. This was because the Indian bourgeoisie and therefore the Congress as its representative was more afraid of the masses than

imperialism. Thus, the Congress was incapable of overthrowing imperialism.

Interestingly, at no stage did the Party or its guiding star, R Palme Dutt, make a concrete analysis of the nature or structure of the Indian capitalist class. It was taken as a maxim that it was not capable of struggling against colonialism and for independence because of its class character as such or because it was more afraid of the working class than of imperialism. The Party inherited from Stalin the maxim that in colonial countries the bourgeoisie was now a spent force and was not capable of opposing colonialism or even wanting independence. While before 1928 the Comintern had decided that the entire Indian bourgeoisie had become reactionary, after 1935 it, i.e., the Comintern, laid down and the CPI followed that while sections of the bourgeoisie could initially oppose imperialism, it would eventually work for accommodation with imperialism and betray the masses. And as pointed out earlier, all this automatically applied to the Congress Party, the direct class representative of the Indian capitalist class.

Thirdly, the Communist Party completely misread the Congress rightwing. While the entire Congress leadership was criticized as bourgeois, its right-wing, usually described as Gandhians, was accused of being compromising and capitulationist, ready to strike a bargain with imperialism and willing to surrender before it.

This was, however, a complete misreading of the Congress right-wing. Its right-wingness lay in its opposition to India adopting radical economic policies after independence and therefore in opposing the left wing or socialist wing of the Congress including Nehru, Subhash, Congress socialists and the Communists. Its right-wingness did not, however, lie in its approach to imperialism. It was as fully committed to anti-imperialism and to the cause of independence and to a mass struggle to achieve it as was the left-wing. It was pro-capitalist and some of its sections were also opposed to abolition of landlordism, at least without compensation. Congress leaders such as Sardar Patel, Dr. Rajendra Prasad and C. Rajagopalachari could not be branded as compromisers, etc. I believe that the error was due in part to the failure of the Indian Communists to make a concrete study of Indian society and history, including the history of Indian national movement, as was advised by Lenin and formed the base of the entirety of Marx's own writings and approach. Instead they relied almost entirely on the encapsulated and under-researched writing of R. Palme Dutt and even more facile formulations of the Comintern.

Perhaps the leaders of the Communist Party, including P C Joshi,

needed its formulation regarding the Congress right-wing to establish that the Congress could not as a party lead the struggle for national freedom and that the CPI alone could then perform that task. And so the Party asserted that the dominant Gandhian leadership had exhausted "all its progressive possibilities" and had entered "its last and decadent phase", and that it was bound to betray the masses in their struggle against imperialism.

In 1941, for example, it described Individual Satyagraha as not merely inadequate as a form of struggle, but also as a policy of "hypocrisy cowardice, blindness" and, therefore, as a method of "sabotaging the national struggle."

Consequently, the dominant Congress leadership had to be isolated from the rank and file of the Congress and the masses and the latter put under the leadership of the Party.

Clearly, the mandate of the Comintern with which the Indian Communists went into United Front with the Congress after 1935 was that of weaning away of the masses and the members of the Congress from the dominant leadership of the Congress. It was with this mandate that the CPI was asked in 1935-36 to cooperate with Nehru so that he could facilitate this task. Nehru was however, soon to disappoint them. But that is another story.

CPI lay low during 1935-36 and the Comintern let P C Joshi have his way from 1935 to 1938 because of CPI's organizational weakness. But as soon as the leadership of the Comintern and CPI felt organizationally strong and political opportunity was provided by the Second World War, it went back to the pre-1935 policy of isolating the dominant Congress leadership. And when, finally, P C Joshi decided to oppose this policy, he was discarded both by the Party and the international leadership of the Communist movement.

P C Joshi's great merit was that, once he was freed from Comintern's dominant influence, he began to understand the nature and character of the freedom struggle at least from 1945, if not earlier. He was virtually alone in this endeavour and also perhaps the endeavour was too late. He was alone in this endeavour because as General Secretary of the Party, he had played a predominant role in inculcating the dominant view among the leaders and members of the Party. After all the Party rules had assured that the dominant party line was publicly propagated through his voice and his pen.

Consequently, when he attempted to change the course of the Party, he was isolated and then unceremoniously thrown out from the Party and almost the entire Party he had assiduously built up turned against him.

Above all, P C Joshi's most important failure lay in his basic approach to Gandhiji, in his failure to understand Gandhiji. He failed to acknowledge Gandhiji as a great nationalist and as a major strategist of popular struggle... Moreover, this was not a failure to understand one individual, for it was not possible to understand Indian nationalism, Indian struggle, even the Indian masses if one failed to understand Gandhiji. Perhaps the most important reason why the CPI remained a marginal force by 1947-48 lay in Communist Party's failure to understand Gandhiji. (Ho Chi Minh story)

Though in 1945, P C Joshi was perhaps the first to describe Gandhiji as "the father of the nation" and to say that he looked upon him "with reverence". Similarly, in 1943, the CPI in a resolution, which bore the Joshi touch, demanding Gandhiji's release when he undertook a 21-day fast, said: "The life of the nation's foremost leader is in peril.." It is "now or never for our entire nation." And some of the CPI leaders said privately that in case of Gandhiji's death the CPI would not be able to support war efforts.

These public sentiments were perhaps the result of the stature that Gandhiji had come to occupy in Indian politics. They were largely tactical, so far as the bulk of the Party was concerned or as was the Party's stand in 1942 that Gandhiji had nothing to do with the 1942 movement. For throughout 1939-41, the Party repeatedly gave a call to 'honest' Congressmen to revolt against Gandhiji's leadership, and set itself the task of weaning away the masses from Gandhiji's leadership. In a statement, issued to the press on 29 March 1940, P. C. Joshi explaining why the Party would participate in the Individual Satyagraha Campaign of the Congress said: "Even in such a movement the Communists shall participate. But they will carry on ceaseless an intense campaign exposing the reactionary character of Gandhiji's new plan to make the Congressmen realize its dangerous consequences."

Similarly, in an inner-party document, dated 13 April 1940, prepared by the Political Bureau, it was stated: "Gandhism in its last phase disrupts and destroys the Congress and seeks to bend it down to a technique of struggle which must end in compromise and disaster at the time when all factors are ripe for its being developed into a victorious revolution. Hence our struggle against Gandhism is not only an exposure of the logic of its political line at every stage and turn; it is also the concrete fight for building the Congress units from below as units of organs of struggle."

As late as December 1941, a resolution of the CPI's Political Bureau stated: 'For the Colonial bourgeoisie the war of their imperialist masters



is always an opportunity for profit-making and extorting concessions from imperialism. This is the key to the understanding of the various groups in the Congress from Gandhi to Congress socialists. The policies of these groups in the National Congress in the present phase of the war are again directed towards the same end—surrender to imperialism and betrayal of the struggle of the masses. They turn their back upon the people and look to imperialism for a settlement."

Earlier still, in February 1940, the Party leadership asserted that "present day Gandhism is an utterly reactionary, disruptive force, that the struggle against Gandhism is an integral part of the struggle to maintain unity of the Congress, that the Gandhian line has to be fought against and isolated..."

In parenthesis, I may point out that Joshi's utter failure to understand Gandhiji was the result of his seeing Gandhiji through the eyes of R. Palme Dutt ever since he came across latter's *Modern India* in 1928. P C Joshi and other Indian communist leaders relied heavily throughout 1920s, 1930s and 1940s on R. Palme Dutt for theoretical understanding of India and Indian revolution. And unlike Lenin who looked upon Gandhiji as a revolutionary—unfortunately to most Indian Communist leaders Lenin was not available except through the distorted writings of Stalin and his History of the CPSU(B). R. Palme Dutt had a totally negative understanding of Gandhiji. He described Gandhiji as a "mascot of bourgeoisie" and as the "evil genius of Indian politics". In fact, as pointed out earlier, a major reason he and Bradley supported Jawaharlal Nehru in 1935-36—and even later—was because they hoped to use him to oppose Gandhiji.

In 1947-48, B T Ranadive came to represent the predominant Communist understanding that freedom could not have been won in 1947 because it had not been won under the leadership of the working class led by the Communist Party. He was fully backed by the Cominform, the reincarnation of the Comintern, whose leadership felt that not only Joshi's formulation that India won independence in 1947 was wrong but that he was unreliable because of his views on Nehru and Gandhiji. The new formulation was that the Congress leadership had betrayed the Indian people and surrendered before imperialism. The Party Congress held in Calcutta in February 1948 also laid down that India was ripe for revolution and was waiting only for proletarian leadership. Nemesis of the elements of his political understanding now came to haunt Joshi and he and his few friends were attacked in a vicious manner. Immense popularity of Joshi in the Party was sought to be destroyed. Joshi himself was treated very shabbily by his old comrades.

For example, he was made to carry his own luggage to the railway station after the Party Congress was over. Young comrades were ordered not to help him.

Despite his saying *mia culpa*—he accepted that his critics were right—and he made 'self-criticism,' he was suspended from the Party in January 1949 and then expelled in December of the same year. Joshi was to regret later that he had failed to stand up for his views and to fight for them.

### III

After 1948, Joshi gradually began to overcome many of his sectarian views or, as he put it, his ideological immaturity. But, though only 41 when he was removed from General Secretaryship of the Party, he was, after 1948, already a lion in winter. He neither had the health nor political stomach to fight for his views inside the Party, though he repeatedly reiterated them inside the Party and sometime also outside it.

After Joshi's exit from the Party leadership, a large number of artists, writers and other intellectuals, who had veered towards the Party as members or sympathizers, felt stifled and left the Party in hordes. The Party itself came down from a membership of about 90,000 to barely 18,000.

P C Joshi was readmitted into the Party in 1951 when Ajoy Ghosh assumed Party leadership and B T Ranadive was put in the dock. However, P C Joshi refused to join the new leadership because he disapproved of the Party leadership trying to do to B T Ranadive what the latter had done to him in 1948.

In 1951-52, he was still highly critical of the Congress government and accused it of using its influence to misguide the Indian people and using "the ideology of bourgeois nationalism (and) successfully indulging in freedom demagogy to cover up its imperialist alliances, its sell out to foreign capital and its anti-people policies". As an alternative to the Congress he advocated formation of a united front of all left parties and progressive individuals.

There came rapid changes in Indian politics in 1955 and Joshi immediately responded to them. The Congress committed itself to "Socialistic Pattern of Society" in its Avadi Resolution. The Second Five Year Plan made a major departure from the First Plan. Then in rapid succession came India's commitment to Non-Alignment and Pançhsheel doctrine, the Bandung Conference, India's role in brokering the Korean

and Indo-China accord, and India's growing closeness to the Soviet Union, China and other socialist countries. Simultaneously, there was the inauguration of the Khrushchev era in the Soviet Union and Khrushchev's and Bulganin's visit to India. Defeat in Andhra elections in 1953 also shattered high hopes of the left-wing of the CPI. And, finally, came the Palghat Congress of the CPI in 1956, preceded by large-scale churning in the Communist ranks and the one and only time that there was large-scale, virtually open, discussion in the Communist Party. The Party Congress at Palghat saw emergence of P C Joshi in Party affairs. Palghat's was also the last political battle he fought.

At Palghat, Joshi argued that though the revolutionary task in India still was to complete the anti-feudal and anti-imperialist revolution, designated in the 1951 Party programme as the Peoples' Democratic Revolution, the Party's stand towards the government led by Nehru had to change and it had to be supported since it was increasingly consolidating independence of India won in 1947 and was developing independent capitalism.

If we put party jargon aside, the basic features of Joshi's position were as follows:

Not only the foreign policy being followed by the Nehru Government was basically anti-imperialist and therefore independent but so was also its internal policy. It was following a policy of independent economic development, albeit independent capitalist development, in trade and industry. Moreover, its agrarian policy was also not what it was earlier. A definite curbing of feudalism had also taken place. There were of course negative features, such as the government following antipeoples' economic policies. There was also the presence of powerful pro-imperialist, pro-feudal and pro-monopoly elements in the government which stood in opposition to Nehru and the pro-national bourgeois elements standing for independent economic development, albeit capitalist development.

An important question arose at this stage: what policy should the Party adopt towards the Nehru government. Joshi advocated the formation of a united front with the national bourgeoisie and its representatives, the progressive Congressmen led by Nehru while opposing their weaknesses and vacillations and anti-people policies.

Interestingly, the dominant group in the Party also decided to adopt a policy of unity and struggle towards the Nehru government, i.e. to unite with it in its progressive policies, internal and external, and to struggle against its anti-people policies and its vacillations in foreign policy. But it was quite vague and indeterminate about when to adopt

unity and when to adopt struggle. Joshi, on the other hand, was quite clear. Unity was to be primary and struggle was to be secondary.

Joshi's policies won the support of nearly 33 percent of Party delegates, and some of the Party's major leaders, such as C. Rajeswar Rao, Bhowani Sen, Somnath Lahiri and Ravi Narayan Reddy. The days of Joshi's isolation in the Party were over, though at the time, he refused the political leadership of his supporters.

I may interrupt the narrative of Joshi's political career to deal with the further development of his approach towards Nehru and the Nehru government.

Joshi's attitude towards Nehru became even more positive over the years. His views on Nehru were crystallized in a seminal article he wrote in 1965 on the first anniversary of Nehru's death. The article, titled 'The Nehru-Legacy—A Self-Critical Communist Evaluation', shows that among all the Communist leaders he was, perhaps, the only one to understand Nehru.

The article opens with the remarks: "There is a fairly wide consensus that the future of our country lies in making Nehru legacy our living national legacy. Nehru helped to make India independent and progressive more than any other son of India, dead or alive." Describing Nehru's contribution as "Revolutionary" Joshi pointed out that Nehru consolidated Indian independence, gave "Indian independence the foundation and framework of a forward looking parliamentary democracy, initiated planning and gave India an independent foreign policy which made him one of the 'immortals of history'.

Nehru, Joshi pointed out, was one non-Communist leader who "drew most avidly from the ideological treasury of Marxism-Leninism and "diligently and passionately" sought to apply ideas of scientific socialism" to "Indian reality to the extent he could".

Joshi was critical of Nehru's softness towards the Rightists in his party, especially the pro-monopoly and pro-imperialist elements. He warned against a Rightist take over of the country because of Nehru's absence. The remedy was to initiate popular movements against these elements and to forge a united front with Nehruite Congressmen in order to build a strong and progressive nation-state.

Joshi concludes his article with the advice: "Post-independence experience in general and post-Nehru experience in particular teaches all Indians loyal to the nation and the people that the Nehru. legacy is India's best national legacy, the sheet anchor of independent national survival. The task of the hour is to defend it with all our might against

the direct onslaught of the Right from without and the silent but deadly scuttle-plan of the Right within the Congress."

As a result of his growing admiration of Nehru, Joshi also softened his attitude towards Gandhiji and began to understand him better, though he did not grasp Gandhiji's revolutionary role as a strategist of struggle for social change. He still, in 1965, identified the 1942 Movement with the politics of Congress Right-wing which he did not see as firm opponents of imperialism. However, in the same article on 'The Nehru Legacy' he wrote: "Nehru inherited the mantle directly from the Father of the Nation and carried it worthily, discarding the Mahatma's anti diluvian ideas but hugging on to his healthy heritage" Girish Mishra narrates in his article 'Remembering Comrade P C Joshi' an interesting incident in this respect. To quote Girish Mishra, "It was he (Joshi) who prompted me to study Gandhi's movement in Champaran by giving me D. G. Tendulkar's book to read. When I went to return it, he asked me several questions to make sure that I had read and understood it. He tried to impress upon me that without understanding the Champaran Satyagraha, it was difficult to make much of the course of India's freedom movement and the change in Gandhi's thinking as regards the peasantry."

Let me revert again to my narration of P C Joshi's life after the Palghat Party Congress in 1956.

The Amritsar Party Congress in 1958 was historic because the Party committed itself to a peaceful transfer of power in India so long as constitutional proprieties were followed. Thus it abandoned the Stalin doctrine, laid down in 1951, that a violent overthrow of the government would be an essential strategy of the CPI. PC Joshi played a prominent part at the Congress and was elected to the Central Committee of the Party at the Congress and then elevated to the Central Secretariat, where he edited the Party weekly, *New Age*, till 1962. He very much regretted this shift to Party headquarters. He was to write later: "The biggest mistake I made in my life was that after my election to the C.C. I agreed to come and work in the Central Party headquarters, instead of U P where I was helping build the mass movement and educate the district and local cadres. Inside the Party headquarters I became a 'political prisoner' and in terms of Party discipline, which I accepted, I was helpless. I edited the Party organ, and very often wrote what I did not believe. I was denied the facilities to improve the paper to prove that I had lost my 'old capacities' These 9-10 years, the most mature years of my life, I literally wasted in sheer frustration breaking my head against the rock of ignorance and bureaucratism which in practice was political

opportunism, plain factionalism and had become a chronic disease."

Increasingly over the years, he got rid of Stalin's ghost which had controlled him as also other Communists' thought and activities during his years of General Secretaryship. As he wrote in 1965, "The historic tragedy of the Indian Revolution was that the Indian Communists were too blinded by Stalinist dogmatism to make positive contribution in shaping the course of events..." An example of his break with Stalinism is provided by his stand in Dubcek's efforts in 1968 to strengthen democratic foundation of socialism in Czechoslovakia and put an end to Stalinist legacy. The Soviet Union intervened and arrested him as a counter-revolutionary. Joshi condemned the Soviet action and described it as the "Soviet Union's greatest single mistake after the 20th Congress." He suggested that the CPI should demand an emergency session of the Consultative Session of the Communist Parties of the World to discuss the Soviet action in Czechoslovakia.

Joshi also gradually arose above party factionalism at a time when the Party was riven with it. Even while condemning Chinese aggression in 1962 and critical of the stand that the left leaders of the CPI took on the Chinese aggression, he strongly opposed the arrests and detention of over a thousand of such Communist leaders and cadres under Defence of India Rules and worked for their release.

He was not in favour of splitting the Party on the issue of Dange letters' controversy because he believed that many of the Party leaders were going with those who later formed the CPM mainly because of their antipathy to Dange. He, therefore, advised the Party to ask for Dange's resignation so that the split, if it occurred, would occur on ideological grounds. He remained with the CPI after the Party split but he refused all pressure to remain and work at the Party headquarters as a leader.

Joshi was one of the few Communist leaders to very early recognize the communal danger. Warning the country against the manipulation of anti-Muslim sentiments by the Hindu communalists, after his study of communal riots in Jabbalpur in 1961, he wrote that these: "riots were staged as a political rehearsal by the Jan Sangh for the coming General Elections, as a part of their political tactic, as their way to win popularity as the protector of the Hindu majority and to defame the Muslim minority as a fifth column of Pakistan and so on". Recognizing the main threat to Indian democracy and development, he held the Right and within the Right the communalists as the main or principal enemy. When after the 1967 elections the CPI deviated from its principles and joined hands with the Jan Sangh in forming Samyukta Vidhayak Dal

governments in several states, Joshi opposed the strategy tooth and nail. Under no circumstances should the Party join hands with nonsecular parties, he said. Instead, he advocated the immediate launch of an all-out political offensive against the communal forces. This stand resulted in his removal from the Party's National Council.

His deteriorating health—doctors, led by a team headed by Dr K P Jain, not only advised him rest but compelled him to give up active politics and his disgust with the way the Party was being led—forced him to retire from active politics. The Party's loss was Jawaharlal Nehru University's gain. Being unable to remain in public action, he took up the task of organizing the Archives of Contemporary History in the University, and to write the history of the Communist Party of India. That is when he shifted to a house in Dakshinapuram in the JNU and became the neighbour and friend of so many of us. He was still hunting for valuable records of the CPI in National Archives and in other archives abroad and drafting a history of CPI's preliminary period when he passed away on 9 November 1980.

I may sum up:

P C Joshi had a brilliant mind, an extraordinary organizational capacity, and the ability to spot talent and to nurture it. Assuming the CPI's General Secretaryship at the young age of 28 he built it into a significant national force by the time he was 41 when he was removed from the party's leadership. Perhaps, among his generation of communists he was the first and to best understand the Indian national movement and Jawaharlal Nehru and to a certain extent Gandhiji. And, upto the end, he remained loyal to the cause of a socialist, secular and democratic India.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. In this connection Mohit Sen also points to two other reasons: "The integrity and intellectual strength of communist leaders at different levels compelled sympathy and admiration even from those who vehemently disagreed with them." The other reason was the strong sympathy aroused by the heroic struggle of the people of China and the Soviet Union against fascist powers. Mohit Sen, *A Traveller and the Road*. New Delhi, 2003, p. 26.
2. It is interesting that the parties of the Left, though not of the Right, were missing from all relief work during such calamities as the earthquake in Maharashtra and Gujarat or the cyclone havoc in Orissa or the Tsunami in coastal Tamilnadu. Not even a call for collection of funds was given in their case.