

MARXIST

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AMAR FAROOQUI

The October Revolution and the National Movement in India

The Great October Socialist Revolution was of momentous significance for the oppressed peoples of the world. It inspired new revolutionary movements; radicalized people's struggles; and had a profound impact on national liberation movements. Further, it made Marxism-Leninism a potent ideological force internationally. By the end of the First World War the old imperialist powers, particularly Britain and France, were exhausted and much weakened. They could no longer rule over their colonies with the same coercive methods that they had employed for over nearly two centuries. The Russian Revolution demonstrated the need for mobilizing masses, for organizing peasants and workers, to intensify the struggle against colonial exploitation. It is not surprising that there were mass upheavals extending from Egypt to China in the years immediately following the success of the October Revolution. The 1919 uprising in Egypt led by Zaglul Pasha forced the British to accept the sovereign status of the country; the March First Movement in Korea in 1919 against Japanese rule was a decisive moment in the struggle for Korean independence; the widespread revolt of 1920 against British rule in Iraq could only be suppressed through extensive aerial bombardment; and the Mongolian Revolution of 1921 made Mongolia the second socialist state in the world (1924).

In China, the May Fourth Movement which began in 1919, and which had its roots in the intellectual and cultural resurgence

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in the years following the 1911 revolution that had led to the establishment of the republic, was a crucial stage in the fight against imperialism. The movement rapidly acquired a popular character, paving the way for the emergence of the Chinese Communist Party in 1921. The influence of the Russian Revolution was vital in shaping these developments in China. In Turkey, between 1919 and 1922, nationalist forces under the leadership of Kemal Ataturk were engaged in a prolonged campaign against the military onslaught of imperialist powers which had been victorious in the war. Turkey became a republic in 1923, following which a wide-ranging reform programme was initiated by the new republican state over which Kemal Ataturk presided for the next fifteen years. The active assistance of the Bolshevik government was a major factor in the success of nationalists in defending the independence of Turkey; continuing Russian support guaranteed stability, enabling radical reforms to be undertaken under the leadership of Kemal Ataturk. The historical role of socialist Russia in the emergence of modern Turkey was conveniently forgotten by subsequent right-wing regimes. The national liberation struggle in French Indo-China, especially Vietnam, acquired a revolutionary thrust under the influence of the October Revolution. The establishment of the socialist state in Russia, and Lenin's understanding of the colonial question, propelled Ho Chi Minh in the direction of Marxism and Bolshevism. Ho Chi Minh was in France when World War I came to an end. Woodrow Wilson's empty rhetoric about the right of peoples to self-determination had no concrete implications for the independence of French Indo-China. Around 1919, Ho Chi Minh began organizing for the struggle against colonial rule in Vietnam, laying the foundations of a prolonged resistance led by Communists which was to eventually decisively trounce three imperialist powers—Japan, France and USA. In later years, recalling his ideological initiation Ho Chi Minh stated:

After World War I, I made my living in Paris.... I would distribute

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leaflets denouncing the crimes committed by the French colonialists in Viet Nam.

At that time, I supported the October Revolution only instinctively, not yet grasping all its historic importance. I loved and admired Lenin because he was a great patriot who liberated his compatriots; until then, I had read none of his books. ...

[Then] a comrade gave me Lenin's "Thesis on the national and colonial questions" published by *l'Humanite* to read. There were political terms difficult to understand in this thesis. But by dint of reading it again and again, finally I could grasp the main part of it. What emotion, enthusiasm, clear-sightedness and confidence it instilled into me! I was overjoyed to tears. Though sitting alone in my room, I shouted out aloud as if addressing large crowds: "Dear martyrs compatriots! This is what we need, this is the path to our liberation!" ["The Path Which Led Me to Leninism", 1960, *Selected Works of Ho Chi Minh*, Vol.IV.]

During the war, Social Democratic parties, including the once great German Social Democratic Party, supported their respective governments in what was essentially a conflict between imperialist powers for a redivision of the world, thereby betraying the cause of socialism. In this historical situation it was envisaged that national liberation movements in colonies would have a much bigger, and more important, role to play in the worldwide struggle against imperialism and capitalism. This was underlined by Lenin in *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*. The struggle against colonial rule was very much part of revolutionary movements seeking to overthrow capitalism, and was closely linked with proletarian struggles in advanced capitalist countries. Perhaps for the time being the latter had been much weakened, something that had to be recognized after the defeat of the German Revolution, and the brutal assassination of its leaders Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht in early 1919. In his *Draft Theses on the National and Colonial Questions* (June 1920) Lenin clearly spelt out the

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position of the Communist International (Comintern), at its Second Congress, on this issue:

The world political situation has now placed the dictatorship of the proletariat on the order of the day. World political developments are of necessity concentrated on a single focus — the struggle of the world bourgeoisie against the Soviet Russian Republic, around which are inevitably grouped, on the one hand, the Soviet movements of the advanced workers in all countries, and, on the other, all the national liberation movements in the colonies and among the oppressed nationalities, who are learning from bitter experience that their only salvation lies in the Soviet system's victory over world imperialism.

Consequently, one cannot at present confine oneself to a bare recognition or proclamation of the need for closer union between the working people of the various nations: a policy must be pursued that will achieve the closest alliance, with Soviet Russia, of all the national and colonial liberation movements. The form of this alliance should be determined by the degree of development of the communist movement in the proletariat of each country, or of the bourgeois-democratic liberation movement of the workers and peasants in backward countries or among backward nationalities.

In India, news of the October Revolution was received with great interest and excitement among nationalists. By 1917 there was growing resentment over the massive use of India's resources in a war that was being fought for furthering Britain's imperial interests. Apart from money and supplies, India was forced to contribute nearly 15 lakh soldiers as part of its war effort. The soldiers fought in distant theatres, in the killing fields of Europe, Ypres (in present-day Belgium) for instance, under the most appalling conditions, for a cause that ultimately would prolong the subjugation of the Indian people. About 75,000 Indian soldiers were killed in the fighting. The colonial authorities resorted to coercive measures to procure supplies of Indian soldiers as

cannon-fodder. Informally conscription was introduced in major recruiting zones such as Punjab, where quotas for enlistment were imposed on villages. This led to widespread disaffection that would become a significant factor in the popular anti-colonial post-war upsurge in Punjab.

It was against this backdrop that the British government announced that some concession would be made to nationalist sentiment after the war. In August 1917 Edwin Montagu, as secretary of state for India, officially declared in the House of Commons that Britain was committed to 'the gradual development of self-governing institutions with a view to the progressive realization of responsible government in India.' This was followed by the Montagu-Chelmsford Report of 1918, which in turn led to the Government of India Act of 1919. The key feature of the report and the act was a constitutional scheme of limited autonomy for provincial governments. These governments were supposedly answerable to provincial legislative assemblies, elected on the basis of a severely restricted franchise. In practice the provincial governments remained firmly under British control. A few subjects, such as education and health, were 'transferred' to these governments. In any case the colonial state hardly had any interest in these areas of governance.

The timing of the Montagu declaration and the Montagu-Chelmsford Report is noteworthy. The declaration came within a few months of the February Revolution in Russia. The so-called 'reforms' which the report offered were seen as a necessary sop to prevent the radicalization of the national movement due to Bolshevik influence. The report itself acknowledged that the revolution in Russia 'was regarded in India as a triumph over despotism' and had 'given an impetus to Indian political aspirations.' Several sections of nationalists in India were aware of the immense historical significance of what was happening in Russia. Shortly after the February revolution the Allahabad-based *Abhyudaya*, of which Madan Mohan Malaviya was the guiding spirit, wrote in an

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issue of March 1917 that 'The Russian revolution convinces us that there is no power in the world which an animating and life-giving nationalism could not have overcome'.

However it was the October Revolution that really enthused the nationalists. As might have been expected there was a vicious propaganda offensive by the colonial state against the Bolsheviks. This itself motivated nationalists to identify with the Bolshevik cause. Lenin came to be regarded as the leader not just of the Russian people but of oppressed people throughout the world. Tilak came out strongly in defence of Lenin in *Kesari* (29 January 1918), denouncing British slander against him and praising the Russian Revolution. Subramania Bharati composed an ode, 'New Russia', celebrating the revolution:

Life of the people as they themselves order it/A law to uplift the life
of the common man/Now are there no bonds of slavery/No slaves
exist now.

In 1920-21, R.S. Avasthi published several popular booklets in Hindi on the subject. These included *Russian Revolution* and *Lenin: His Life and His Thoughts*. G.V. Krishna Rao's *Nikolai Lenin: His Life and Activities* came out from Madras in 1921. Another biographical account penned by B.I. Bhargava, entitled *Lenin*, was published from Lucknow in 1922. Together these, and several other writings spread the message of the October Revolution. There was growing admiration for the Russian communists, and their statements and actions were followed carefully.

On 8 November 1917 the Bolshevik government came out with a Decree on Peace calling for immediate peace 'without annexations and indemnities'. The imperialist powers were engaged in a bloody conflict that, irrespective of which side was victorious, could only mean enslavement of peoples of colonies:

The government considers it the greatest of crimes against humanity

to continue this war over the issue of how to divide among the strong and rich nations the weak nationalities they have conquered, and solemnly announces its determination immediately to sign terms of peace to stop this war . . .

The decree then went on to announce that the nefarious designs of the imperialist powers would be made public by publishing secret treaties and agreements that the Tsarist and Lvov/Kerensky regimes had entered into for territorial gains. The Bolshevik government undertook to do away with secret diplomacy in its dealings with foreign states. Much to the consternation and embarrassment of the belligerents, Russia proceeded to publish the secret treaties forthwith (10 November onwards) initially in *Izvestia* and *Pravda*, and subsequently in a series of volumes of which seven were published between December 1917 and February 1918.

What impressed the nationalists most was the genuine commitment that the Bolsheviks had to national self-determination. Its commitment was demonstrated by the urgency with which Finland was granted independence in December 1917. This was in pursuance of the Declaration of the Rights of People of Russia (15 November 1917). The declaration was a charter for the liberation of oppressed nationalities. It enunciated the following basic principles:

1. Equality and sovereignty of the peoples of Russia.
2. The Right of the peoples of Russia to self-determination up to secession and the formation of an independent state.
3. Abrogation of all national and national-religious privileges and restrictions.
4. The free development of the national minorities and ethnographic groups inhabiting the territory of Russia.

This was a radical departure not just from the policies of the Tsarist state but policies also of western powers generally. It

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was greeted with immense fervour and hope by people fighting for freedom from colonial rule. We need to bear in mind that censorship and war conditions, combined with the massive misinformation campaign against the Bolsheviks, often prevented detailed or accurate news about developments in Russia from circulating in India. Nevertheless what could not be concealed was that a huge upheaval had occurred in the vast empire ruled over by a powerful Tsar, that the monarchy had been overthrown, that for the first time in history the rule of workers and peasants had been established, and that this was a state that would directly as well as through its example strengthen the struggle of the oppressed people of colonies. Moreover, a large amount of material circulated underground, keeping nationalist circles informed about what was happening in Russia. A lot of this material reached India through networks of Indian revolutionaries in different parts of the world. These networks were particularly active during the period of the war, operating from locations in Germany, Canada, USA, Afghanistan, Japan and London itself. Many of the left-wing and radical revolutionaries living abroad quickly turned towards Russia after November 1917.

Already in December 1915 a 'Provisional Government of Free India' had been formed by nationalists in Kabul, with Raja Mahendra Pratap Singh as president, Barkatulla as prime minister and a cabinet that included Obeidullah Sindhi. The provisional government had the support of a section of Afghan authorities, mainly those loyal to the crown prince, Amanullah Khan who was opposed to the commanding influence that the British had over Afghanistan. The pro-British ruler of Afghanistan, Habibullah Khan was assassinated in February 1919 and shortly afterwards Amanullah Khan became the ruler of Afghanistan. This precipitated a brief war with Britain (Third Anglo-Afghan War, 1919). The outcome of the war was that the British recognized Afghanistan as an independent state. Henceforth, Afghanistan under Amanullah became an ally of Bolshevik Russia. This had important implications

for the nationalists based in Kabul. Amanullah's support for the provisional government headed by Raja Mahendra Pratap Singh had facilitated regular contact between Russia and the Indian government-in-exile. Mahendra Pratap Singh visited Petrograd in March 1918. The following year Barkatulla travelled to Moscow where he met Russian leaders. *Izvestia* published an interview with him. Then in May 1919 a delegation led by Mahendra Pratap Singh met Lenin at the Kremlin in Moscow. Reminiscing about this meeting Mahendra Pratap recalled vividly the warmth with which the delegation was received by Lenin:

We entered a big room with a big table at which was sitting the famous Red Leader Comrade Lenin. I being at the head of the party entered first and proceeded towards the figure sitting right before me. To my astonishment the man or the hero stood up suddenly, went to a corner and fetched a small chair and put the chair near his office chair. And as I arrived by his side he asked me to sit down. For a moment I thought in my mind, where to sit, asking myself, should I sit on this small chair brought by Mr. Lenin himself or should I sit on one of the huge easy chairs covered with Morocco leather. I decided to sit on that small chair and sat down, while my friends, Moulana Barkatulla and others, took their seats on richly upholstered chairs.

Comrade Lenin asked me, in what language he was to address me—English, French, German or Russian. I told him that we should better speak in English. And I presented to him my book *Religion of Love*. To my astonishment he said that he had already read it. Quickly arguing in my mind I could see that the pamphlets demanded by the Foreign Office a day earlier were meant for Lenin himself. Mr. Lenin said that my book was “Tolstoyism”. I presented to him also my plan of having notes repayable not in gold or silver but in more necessary commodities such as wheat, rice, butter, oil, coal, etc. We had quite a long conversation.

Meanwhile, another group living in self-exile in Europe

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was active in the cause of freedom. This comprised nationalists who were based in Germany, mainly operating from Berlin. The leading figure of this group was Virendranath Chattopadhyay. In 1915 Chattopadhyay and his associates had established an Indian Independence Committee. Barkatulla, who later shifted to Kabul, and Har Dayal, were part of this initiative. The German government provided some logistical assistance to the Committee. After the October Revolution, Chattopadhyay and several other members of the Berlin group established contacts with Russia, and at the same time came under the influence of Marxism. In 1919 the Indian Independence Committee was dissolved, though the activities of the Berlin group did not cease. For Chattopadhyay, links with the Bolsheviks became increasingly crucial for nationalist activity.

The ideological shift towards Marxism, of left-wing revolutionary groups based in Afghanistan, Germany and elsewhere, saw expression in the formation of the Communist Party of India in October 1920 at Tashkent (which was at that time the capital of the Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic). One might mention that there was another ideological trend among groups working abroad, one that articulated opposition to British rule in terms of religious identity (Hindu nationalism; Pan-Islamism). This trend was reflected in the growth of communal politics and the promotion of divisive agendas in the 1920s in India. In turn this politics undermined the unity of the anti-colonial struggle. In the post-war years émigré groups and individuals representing this trend quickly distanced themselves from the communists even though they claimed to be working for the nationalist cause.

At the end of the war several thousand *muhajirs* who opted to live in exile to protest against Britain's role in dismantling the Ottoman empire, had travelled to Afghanistan swelling the ranks of nationalist émigrés in that country—now ruled by Amanullah Khan whose hostility to the British we have already noted. A section of the *muhajirs* had become ardent champions of the

socialist cause which, they were convinced, was the way forward for India. Some of these émigrés, of whom Mohammad Shafiq was perhaps the most prominent, proceeded to Tashkent where they joined other communists such as M.N. Roy and Abani Mukherjee in an endeavour to establish the Communist Party of India. Their organizational efforts at Tashkent were coordinated by Comintern. The decisions of the Second Congress of Comintern (1920), to which reference has been made earlier, had provided the stimulus for such an initiative.

While discussing the antecedents of the new phase of the anti-colonial struggle in India under the impact of the October Revolution we need to make a special reference to the Ghadar revolutionaries. As is well known, the Ghadar Party was founded by nationalists in San Francisco/California in 1913, under the leadership of Sohan Singh Bhakna. Within a short time the Ghadarites were able to extend the scope of their activities to Indian migrant labour in Canada, the Caribbean, Philippines and Singapore. The Ghadarites linked the struggle against inhuman conditions in which Indian migrants in North America and South-east Asia had to work, and the racial discrimination they faced, to the larger struggle against colonial rule and for the liberation of India. As a result of the infamous *Komagatamaru* episode of 1914, in which the Canadian authorities demonstrated their racial bigotry by denying entry to passengers aboard the ship when it reached Vancouver after a long and arduous journey from Hong Kong, and the violence unleashed against the passengers by British authorities at Budge Budge when the *Komagatamaru* arrived in India upon being forced to return from Canada, the Ghadar movement acquired a militant character. With the outbreak of the war the Ghadarites intensified their activities in several parts of the Indian subcontinent, especially among peasants in Punjab. In Punjab they strove to undermine the authority of the British raj, making it difficult for colonial officials to recruit soldiers in the province. Attempts were made to rally Indian soldiers (of whom

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a very large proportion was recruited from Punjab) for a mutiny in the British Indian armed forces. The plan did not succeed and provided the pretext for brutal repression of the Ghadarites. The Defence of India Act of 1915 was a legislative measure directed mainly against the Ghadarites. About fifty Ghadarites were executed, while several more were sentenced to transportation for life, or sentenced to life-imprisonment. The martyrdom of Kartar Singh Sarabha, who was barely nineteen years old when he was executed in 1915 was to inspire an entire generation of young revolutionaries of whom Bhagat Singh was the most prominent. Many of the leading Ghadarites became part of the communist movement after the October Revolution. The 1915 Act was used to incarcerate large numbers of revolutionaries for several years without trial. This was the prelude to the Rowlatt Satyagraha and the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre. The post-war mass upsurge, and Gandhian mobilization from 1919 onwards, occurred in this political context. The Non-Cooperation Movement did not take place in a vacuum.

While on the one hand the British attempted to put the brakes on the radicalization of the nationalist movement by offering some minor concessions in the form of the Montagu-Chelmsford proposals and the Government of India Act of 1919, on the other hand they widened the scope of the Defence of India Act of 1915 through the more draconian and stringent provisions of the Anarchical and Revolutionary Crimes Act (Act XI of 1919), better known as the Rowlatt Act. This is how Indians were rewarded for their outstanding (albeit largely involuntary) contribution to the Allied victory in the First World War. It needs to be underlined that the main objective of the act, and of the continuing repressive measures to stamp out 'revolutionary crimes' (the wording of the title of the act is significant), was to restrain the rising tide of popular resistance and revolutionary mobilization. This, however, was no longer possible. Massive participation in the anti-Rowlatt agitation launched towards the end of March 1919 was a reflection

of the anger which the act had aroused. More importantly such participation clearly showed that conditions were now ripe for mass mobilization against British rule. The *hartal* of 6 April 1919 was a huge success. Punjab was the epicentre of the agitation where Amritsar, Lahore and Gujranwala were the key locations of the agitation. The horrific massacre at Jallianwala Bagh on 13 April cannot be attributed merely to the aberrant personal conduct of Reginald Dyer. It was very much part of the brutally repressive regime that had been imposed on Punjab during the war, and the relentless persecution of Ghadarite and other revolutionaries. Jallianwala Bagh was meant to be a lesson to opponents of British authority. Historically it is immaterial whether it was an individual decision or had the general sanction of Dyer's superiors. The entire colonial machinery was complicit in the massacre, as was made more than apparent by the exoneration of Dyer and the endorsement of his action in white racist circles. What could have been a better illustration of this than the provocative gesture of collecting nearly £27,000 to be given to the 'butcher of Amritsar' by way of felicitating him?

The anti-Rowlatt agitation and the wave of popular unrest that followed the Jallianwala Bagh massacre ushered in an era of mass mobilization against colonial rule. It goes without saying that Gandhi played a major role hereafter in shaping the national movement, and leading it for the next two decades. Nevertheless, standard nationalist historiography has tended to downplay or ignore the fact that the ground had already been prepared in the preceding years for the political shift, involving mass participation and novel forms of protest, which occurred from 1919 onwards. The radical and popular thrust which the anti-colonial struggle acquired due to the impact of the October Revolution made such a shift almost inevitable. Moreover, satyagraha in its strictest Gandhian sense, which required the satyagrahi to have accumulated considerable spiritual and moral strength, was only one of the several methods adopted by people. More militant methods too were resorted to.

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For instance R.K. Das in his pioneering *Factory Labour in India* (Berlin, 1923) lists a series of industrial strikes in 1919 and 1920 involving thousands of workers: 35,000 jute workers in Calcutta; general strike by two lakh workers in Bombay in January 1920; strike by 25,000 mill workers in Ahmedabad; strike by 60,000 mill workers in Bombay in the third week of March 1920, to mention a few examples. The All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) held its inaugural session at Bombay in October 1920. Lala Lajpat Rai presided over the session and several nationalist leaders including Motilal Nehru and Annie Besant were among those who attended. Within a few years communists established their hold over AITUC.

The Non-Cooperation Movement of 1920-22 was indeed a huge mass movement. Gandhi was both its architect and foremost leader. The movement was unprecedented in its scope, and had an all-India spread. By 1921 it gained a momentum of its own. Peasants were drawn into the movement in large numbers transforming the movement into a fight against landlordism. Communities dependent upon forest produce for their daily subsistence took to incendiarism to register their protest against colonial policies, as happened in Uttarakhand. Militant trade union action in Calcutta saw the emergence of a group of dedicated communists in the city during 1921-22. Muzaffar Ahmad played a leading role in this process, which marked the beginning of his life as a great communist revolutionary. And in Malabar the struggle of the Mappila tenants for their rights, against the backdrop of the Non-Cooperation Movement, acquired a violent character. Communal historiography has invariably presented the Mappila uprising in terms of a religious conflict, in which Mappila peasants are demonized, and this version continues to be a favourite theme in communal propaganda. Gandhi and sections of the nationalist leadership were getting worried by late 1921 about the radical nature that the Non-Cooperation Movement had assumed in several parts of the country, especially among dispossessed sections of society. Consequently the abrupt suspension of the

movement in February 1922 due to the violent incidents at Chauri Chaura was not really unexpected. But it did cause widespread demoralization.

This demoralization prompted a leftward shift among several sections of nationalists after 1922. The experience of the October Revolution in Russia and the excitement over the revolutionary initiatives of the Bolsheviks, attracted an increasing number of activists to socialist ideas and communism. At the same time there were many who took the path of communal politics, so that the communal situation became particularly serious in the later half of the 1920s. Gandhi had made the Khilafat issue the central issue of the Non-Cooperation Movement. Though this remains a matter of debate, it is undeniable that the choice of the issue was perhaps somewhat inappropriate for this phase of the anti-colonial struggle. It diluted the immense radical potential of the Non-Cooperation Movement. The Khilafat problem, as distinct from the larger question of Turkish independence and imperialist territorial aggrandizement in the erstwhile Ottoman lands, was devoid of possibilities of progressive politics, as events in Turkey soon demonstrated. The Khilafat was abolished in 1924, thus making the problem irrelevant from the point of view of carrying forward the anti-colonial struggle. The implications of banking upon the emotive appeal of what was essentially a religious issue, for mass mobilization became clear soon after the Non-Cooperation Movement was withdrawn. As it is sections of nationalists both within and outside the Congress who had engaged in politics of religious identity, seeking to define the Indian nation in terms of the superior claim of 'Hindus' (regarded, as the colonial state did, in terms of a monolithic and homogeneous pan-Indian community) had not been enthusiastic about the Khilafat agitation, notwithstanding that Gandhi himself was genuinely committed to it. Unfortunately the constant reference to the need for 'Hindu-Muslim Unity' by leaders of the Khilafat agitation reinforced the notion, which the colonial state vigorously promoted, that the two

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communities, conceptualized as being internally undifferentiated, were inherently antagonistic to each other. The British were not entirely unhappy about the rapid growth of communal politics, and the state did not really have much interest in preventing riots and situations of conflict often over the most trivial issues, issues which were articulated in terms of some (usually imagined) religious grievance. The unintended long-term consequence of focussing on the Khilafat issue was the legitimization of such grievances. Communalism could always be used to disrupt the national movement.

It is not easy to assess the huge historical impact that a revolutionary upheaval of the magnitude of the October Revolution in Russia has had on the course of history, or even specifically on the course of Indian history. A century might not be adequate for such an assessment, the more so as the Soviet Union has itself disowned, at least officially, the Great October Revolution and erased nearly seventy-five years of its history. The superhuman sacrifices of the Soviet people, especially during the Second World War, to rescue the world from fascism and Nazism, have been shamefully repudiated not just by Russia and most of the constituents of pre-dissolution USSR, but by regimes extending from Poland to the Czech Republic which were liberated with the assistance of the Soviet Red Army. Yet, in the words of E.J. Hobsbawm, 'There is no way in which the Soviet era can be written out of Russian or world history, as though it had not been. There is no way in which St Petersburg can return to 1914' (*The Age of Extremes: 1914-1991*).