Appendix 5

The Colonial Question

5a. M.N. Roy: Theses on the Eastern Question

Presented to the Third Congress of the Communist International

I.

1.) The fact that, in spite of its general bankruptcy, European capitalism is still holding its own against the increasingly powerful attack of the proletariat in the Western countries proves that capitalism, as a world-domineering factor, has not yet reached such a state of decay that its immediate downfall is inevitable. Since the time that capitalism entered into its last and most highly developed phase – imperialism – its stronghold was no longer kept confined only in the industrially advanced countries of Western Europe. The innate contradictions of the capitalist system inevitably led to overproduction and its consequence, the recurring commercial and financial crisis; in imperialism was found a way out of this entanglement. Of course, it was a temporary solution bound to prove ineffective for saving the capitalist mode of production from collapse under its own contradictions. But the fact is that till today imperial expansion and exploitation do render strength to capitalism to maintain its position in Europe.

1. The text, ‘Draft Theses on the Oriental Question Presented to the Third Congress of the Communist International’, is taken from an English original found in Comintern archives, RGASPI, 490/1/6. Minor corrections have been made on the basis of a comparison with the Russian text in Narody Dal’nogo Vostoka (1921), columns 337–42.
The great imperialist war shook the very foundation of the capitalist order in European countries, and had not these states had other sources to draw strength from, they would not be able to continue defending the right of capital till today as they are actually doing. These sources of strength lie in the imperialist character of present-day capitalism, which holds in its hands the entire economic, political, and military control of the whole world, and thus finds itself in a position to put up a stiff and continued resistance against the proletariat in its home countries. The existence and power of the European bourgeoisie do not depend wholly and exclusively on its ability to wring the greatest amount of surplus value out of the labour power of the workers in the home countries. The imperial right of exploiting the vast non-European markets and peoples has supplied and still supplies it with additional modus vivendi and a weapon to defend its position at home in spite of the apparent precariousness and impossibility of maintaining its power there for any length of time.

2.) As a result of the War, the world finds itself divided today into two great colonial empires, belonging to two powerful capitalist states. The United States of America endeavours to assume supreme and exclusive right of exploiting and ruling the entire New World, while Great Britain has annexed to its empire practically the entire continents of Asia and Africa. Then, continental Europe, owing to its utter economic bankruptcy and industrial dislocation, is bound to be an economic dependency of either of these two great imperialist states, which are preparing for another giant struggle for world domination. As far as the power of the American bourgeoisie is concerned, the European war has not affected it very much. On the contrary, the control of world finance, which has been for a century the monopoly of the British capitalists, had been to a great extent transferred to the hands of the American capitalists, who cannot be considered to have reached the period of decay and disintegration as yet. In order to consolidate its newly acquired world power, the American capitalist class inclines towards keeping temporarily away from the infectious ruins of Europe. Thus, the British bourgeoisie is the supreme ruler of the Old World and the backbone of the capitalist order.

Now, where lies the source of strength of the British bourgeoisie? Judging from the industrial conditions obtaining in the British Isles at the present moment, it would appear that if its resources were limited to the productivity of those islands and the power of consumption of continental Europe, the capitalist order in Britain would certainly stand on the very brink of collapse. But despite all its chronic contradictions and the difficulties it is having in reconstructing the industrial fabric of the home country on the prewar basis, the capitalist class of Britain proves to be quite firm in its power. It still suc-