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The Congress Socialist Party & The Communists

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IT is full 50 years since the formation of the Congress Socialist Party whose beginning can be traced to a preliminary consultation held at Patna in May 1934, where an organising committee was formed with Jayaprakash Narayan as convener.

This was followed by the regular all-India conference held in Bombay in October where the constitution of the party was adopted and the first national elected.

Being one of those who participated in the two conferences, I can take legitimate pride in the role played by that organisation in radicalising the then congressmen and developing a powerful anti-imperialist united front in the 1930s. I was therefore extremely happy when I was informed by one of those who have been in the socialist movement for the last half a century that the jubilee of those two conferences is being observed.

I was asked to associate myself in some way with this project. I shall certainly cherish the sweet and bitter memories of the struggle inside that party which took me from the Gandhi-Nehru ideology to Marxism.

I however, cannot endorse the view of the friends who proposes to observe the year 1984 as the "golden jubilee of the birth of India's socialist movement." For, though a very important stage, the formation of the Congress Socialist Party did not signify "the birth" of India's socialist movement. The socialist movement was in existence much earlier.

Pioneers of The Movement

The beginning of the propagation of socialist ideas in India should be

traced to the year 1912 when, within a few months of each other, a Hindi and a Malayalam biography of Karl Marx were published. The former was written by the well-known revolutionary, Lala Hardayal, and the latter by Ramakrishna Pillai.

Four years earlier, in 1908, the first political strike of the working class in the India had taken place-the strike of the Bombay workers in protest against the arrest and conviction of the militant nationalist leader from Maharashtra, Lok Manya Tilak. The two prerequisites for an organised socialist movement-the emergence of a politically conscious working class and the propagation of Marxism-had thus been present in India at least two decades before the CSP was formed.

The big revolutionary upsurge of the years immediately following the end of the First World War took the militant national movement several steps forward. For the first time in the history of India's freedom movement, the working class, the peasants and the fighting middle classes rallied behind the non-cooperation-Khilafat movement led by Mahatma Gandhi. Industrial strikes, citywide hartals, huge demonstrations and rallies of all sections of the working people-those became common features of our political life.

This led to the emergence of that typical form of militant proletarian action, the strike, and the corresponding organisation, i.e., the trade unions strike committees, etc. Along with these started the more systematic propaganda of the teachings of Marx, Engels and Lenin.

Communist – Socialist ideas came to India, as to the rest of Asia, through the reports (distorted though they were) about the epoch-making events, which led to the emergence of Bolshevik Russia. To paraphrase Mao Se Dong, "it was the salvoes fired in revolutionary Russia that brought the message of communism" to India.

Stirred by the stories of the revolutionary overturning of society in Bolshevik Russia and frustrated at the compromising policies of the Congress leadership, rank and file Congressmen turned to two alternative paths: either the doctrine of individual terror against the British rulers and their Indian agents, or communism.

It may be noted that the well-known revolutionary leader, Bhagat Singh, in his last days moved towards communism and that many of his colleagues subsequently joined the CPI.

Several others who were thrilled by the world-shaking revolution in Russia undertook their "pilgrimage" to the land revolution, braving the ordeals of the Himalayan snows and the difficult terrain which they had to negotiate. Thus were the seeds of socialism/communism sown on Indian soil.

Emergence of Communist Groups

The birth of India's socialist movement should, in other words, be properly traced to the early 1920s when two parallel developments took place – the birth of the All-India Trade Union Congress and the emergence of the early communist groups. These latter, like pioneers in any country, had to cross many hurdles, which their successors cannot even imagine. No socialist of later days can forget the grim conditions under which the first generation of communists had to fight and pave the way for the subsequent formation of the organised socialist movement.

Those who propose to celebrate 1984 as the completion of half a century after "the birth of India's socialist movement" are therefore less than fair to those pioneers whose self-sacrificing work of propagating socialism preceded the formation of the Congress Socialist Party.

To state all this is not to deny the positive contribution made by the Congress Socialist Party in carrying forward the work that had earlier been done by the pioneers. Nor is it to claim for the pioneers that they did not suffer from various weaknesses and shortcomings, which prevented them from developing an all-India party with branches in the major states. Despite these weaknesses and shortcomings, however, the communist groups, which operated for over a decade before the birth of the CSP were the real pioneers of India's socialist movement. The pioneers of India's communist movement were persecuted at every step by the British rulers who launched three conspiracy cases- Peshawar, Kanpur and Meerut- in the course of less than a decade in a planned drive to prevent the growth of communism on Indian soil. Hundreds of militant trade unionists and

radical Congressmen were hunted as communists, while those who were members of any communist group in any part of the country had to undergo various kinds of persecution.

Politically, too the communists whose job it was to master and apply the theoretical principles of Marxism-Leninism had to face such a powerful adversary as the Indian bourgeoisie, the most nature and cleverest of that class rowing in any colonial, semi-colonial or dependent country. the ideological – political difficulties arising out of this could have been overcome to a large extent, and mistakes speedily corrected if only the various communist groups functioning in the country could have had the opportunity to hold continuous discussion among themselves and with the leadership of the deliberate policy adopted by the British rulers.

These difficulties, however, did not prevent the small and scattered communist groups from developing a militant trade union movement, popularising the main objectives and slogans of revolutionary socialism among the rapidly growing group of radical Congressmen and shaping, though only in a limited way, the policies of the Indian national Congress itself.

The manifesto issued to the delegates of the Ahmedabad session of the Indian National Congress and various other pronouncements made in the name of the CPI informed the mass of Congress about the existence, of and the revolutionary programme adopted by, the slowly emerging Communist Party. The small band of communist working within the Congress allied themselves with radical Congressmen in popularising the concept of complete independence and pushing forward with the programme of direct mass action.

Above all the communists were more active than anybody else in developing the militant trade union and other mass movement through the popularisation of the advanced ideology of Marxism-Leninism was combined with militant mass action.

With these activities did in a small way influence the thinking and activities of anti-imperialist militants in the Indian National Congress, and while a section of the Congress leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Bose were also influenced by them, the mass of Congressmen were outside the influence of the organised communist

movement. They, in fact, were the victims of anti-communist prejudices spread by the British rulers. The main reason for this is that, at the very time when a furious battle was going on between the left and the right in the leadership of the Congress, culminating in the Lahore session of the Congress adopting complete independence as the goal of the Congress and President Jawaharlal Nehru declaring that he was a socialist, all the top and middle-level leaders of the Communist Party and pro-party unionists were going through the Meerut conspiracy case trails.

This all India case and scores of lesser known persecutions shattered the organisation of the Communist Party from top to bottom so that for full four years (1929-33) there was no all- India center of the Communist Party. It is therefore unfair of the socialist and other critics of the Communist movement in India to argue (as was seriously argued by the leaders of the newly formed congress Socialist Party) that the communists were “completely out of touch with the congress and having no influence on the national movement.” (Meerut Thesis adopted at the second all-India conference of the Congress Socialist Party in January 1936)

Epoch-Making Developments

The mass of Congressmen and other anti-imperialists in the country were, however influenced by the epoch-making developments in the world. The deepest crisis of the capitalist world economy stood in marked contrast to the epoch-making first five-year plan being successfully implemented in the Soviet Union. No more were the theories of socialism abstract questions of philosophy to be debated by economists, but principles that were being applied in a part of the world and proving its superiority in the face of the crumbling economy of capitalism. India's anti imperialists saw in the speedy development of socialism in the Soviet Union a picture of their own country's future if only they were able to win freedom throwing the British rulers out. This opened the eyes of rank and file Congressmen who began to rally round the ideas of Marxism-Leninism. This found reflection in the thinking and pronouncements of those all-India leaders of the Congress who were moving to the left, Nehru's presidential address at the Lahore session being an example.

Developments In India

Development inside the country too made the bulk of militant anti-imperialist have a second look at the strategy and tactics of the struggles against imperialism. Followed as the Salt Satyagraha of 1930 and the second Civil Disobedience Movement of 1932-33 was by the compromising politics of the national leadership represented by Mahatma Gandhi, on the one hand, and the advocates of the parliamentary programme, on the other, radical Congressmen started having serious reservations on the Gandhian ideology, programme and policies. They were disillusioned also of the parliamentary programme advocated by a section of the top leadership of the congress-a programme with which Gandhi said he had reservations but which he "blessed". On the other hand, the efficacy of the weapon of working class strikes and other forms of mass direct action was proved during the 1930-32 satyagraha. This made the mass of anti-imperialist political activists look for ways and means of organising the working class, which drew them towards communism and socialism.

The meeting of the All-India Congress committee held in Patna in May 1934 and the following all-India session of the Indian National Congress held in Bombay in October 1934, became the scene of a furious battle between Gandhi, the Parliamentary programme- *wallahs* and other sections of the right leadership on the one hand, and the leftist headed by the socialists, on the other. The newly born Congress Socialist Party came out more or less as the "leader of the opposition" to the "ruling group" in the Congress, which consisted of the Gandhians, the parliamentary and other rightists.

As for the communists, they had just come out of the condition into which they had been driven during the years of the Meerut conspiracy case. Although the various communist groups had come together under a centralised leadership just before the formation of the CSP the newly set up all India center of the CPI had to work underground, since the British government imposed a ban on it. Their contribution to the development of the left at this stage was therefore, minimal.

Genesis of the CSP

The Congress Socialist Party, as is known, was directly born out of the above-mentioned developments inside the Indian National Congress. The first preliminary conference to take steps to form the party was held in Patna a couple of days before the AICC session in May 1934. The first regular all-India conference too was held in October the same year in Bombay, just preceding the all-India session of the Indian National Congress. The two sessions of the party were thus preparations on the part of the socialist for the battle that was ahead in the AICC and the Congress session. The attempt was thus to clearly define the attitude of the leftists to the problems being placed before the Congress.

Among the voluminous material on the birth and development of the Congress Socialist Party, a prominent place should be given to a book written by Jaya Prakash Narayan under the title, *Why Socialism*. That opened the eyes of a large number of young Congressmen and women who were grouping towards a new path since they had become frustrated with the utter futility of the programmes and practices adopted by the rightwing leaders of the Indian National Congress.

Striking a personal note, I may state that J P 's *Why Socialism* showed us, the young Congressmen of Kerala, that the path mapped out by socialism was for superior to Gandhism, the parliamentary path as well as individual terrorism-three ideological approaches which were then contending for ascendancy in the Congress. *Why Socialism* therefore became the textbook through which we imbibed the elements of the new ideology. This was true of young Congressmen and women all over the country who were all yearning for a new ideology.

The crux of j P's book consisted not so much of its advocacy of socialism as the ultimate objective towards which India should move after attaining freedom, as of its assertion that the ideology of socialism enables the radical Congressmen to rally the mass of working people in the struggle for freedom. In other words, socialism was not *desirable as the final objective but also the effective method for the country's attainment of independence*. The programme advanced in the book therefore contained an exposure of the Gandhian programme of khadi and village industries, non-violent

resistance, etc; the parliamentary path advocated by another section of the right-wing Congress leaders with the full blessings of the Mahatma himself and the programme of individual terrorism practiced by groups of revolutionaries throughout the country.

As opposed to every one of those methods J P advocated mass struggles waged by the industrial and agricultural labourers, the peasants and sections of the working people. The new perspective outlined and the new programme advocated by Mahatma Gandhi, on the other hand, would transform the Congress from a fighting organisation into a combination of non-political Seva Sangh and an efficient machine for waging electoral battles.

Once again striking a personal note, I cannot but recall two incidents, which moulded my political development. The first was J P 's visit to Kerala after the preliminary conference held in Patna in May 1934. The visit was in his capacity as the Secretary of the Organising Committee, which was to prepare for the foundation conference of the CSP to be held in October. The speeches he delivered during that visit and the informal discussions he held with us underlined the importance of organising the trade unions and the kisan sabha without which no determined struggle could be waged for independence, or could the compromising policies of the Congress leadership be fought. He sought to generalise the experience of the strikes and hartals which took place during the civil disobedience movement and pointed out how these forms of militant mass action helped in paralysing the administration. Improving on this experience and developing the united strength of the working class, he pointed out, was the only methods through which the mighty British rule could be broken. We saw in this the real alternative to the satyagraha, parliamentary and terroristic methods with which we were so far familiar.

The second incident occurred in February 1935 when a meeting of the first National Executive of the CSP was being held in Nagpur. In between the formal sessions of the executive, J P held an informal meeting at which he outlined his idea of developing the CSP in to an effective organisation in the struggle against the British rulers. Pointing out how a bourgeois leader of the Congress, Sardar Patel, created his Bardoli, J P asked: "Can we not create our own socialist Bardoli?" This was not meant, he clarified, for merely realising some economic demands but for preparing the peasants to develop their parallel governments. "Seisure of the thana" was the term he used to

indicate the direction in which the peasantry should be organised.

The two incidents mentioned here would show that, although using the term socialist and sharing many of the ideas of “democratic socialism” with the leaders of the Socialist International, J P was above which would challenge the leading position occupied by the established bourgeois leadership of the freedom movement. The path shown by him was so attractive to the young Congressmen and women that thousands of them plumbed for it in a few months.

J P and his comrades, however, were not operating in a vacuum. They had before them the experience gathered by the first generation of Indian socialists who declared themselves to be communists and were working under the leadership of the Communist International. These pioneers could not, as was noted above, consolidate themselves into a well-organised party since imperialism put insuperable obstacles in their way. Furthermore, their ideas of how the struggle for socialism should be organised in India came into conflict with those of the new group that was emerging within the Indian National Congress. Questions arose whether the Congress being bourgeoisie, could develop into an instrument of struggle for socialism.

The Meerut Thesis

Serious discussions took place between the spokesmen of the CSP and those of the Communist Party of India, which had in the meantime overcome the split in its ranks and established a united all-India organisation. The results of these discussions were spelt out in the document adopted at the second national conference of the CSP held in Meerut in January 1936. That document, popularly known as *The Meerut Thesis*, runs as follows:

“The Congress Socialist Party grew out of the experiences of the last two national struggles. It was formed at the end of the last C d (civil disobedience) movement by such Congressmen as came to believe that a new orientation of the national movement had become necessary; a redefinition of its objectives and a revision of its methods. The initiative in this direction could be taken only by those had theoretical grasp of the forces of our present society. These naturally were those Congressmen who had come under the influence

of, and had accepted, Marxism socialism. It was natural, therefore, that the organisation that sprang up to meet the needs of the situation took the description: 'socialist'. The word 'Congress' prefixed to 'socialist' only signified the organic relationship –past, present and future- of the organisation with the national movement.

“The socialist forces that were already inexistence in the country were completely out of touch with congress and had no influence on the national movement. Therefore, there did not take place, as otherwise there would have, a fusion of the emerging Congress Socialist Party with the groups previously existing. Giving the adoption of correct and sensible tactics by all the parties concerned, there is every-likelihood of such a fusion-taking place at a later stage.

“The immediate task before us is to *develop the national movement into a real anti-imperialist movement-a movement aiming at freedom from the foreign power and the native system of exploitation. For this it is necessary away its present bourgeois leadership and to bring them under the leadership of revolutionary socialism.* This task can be accomplished only if there is within the Congress an organised body of Marxian socialists. In other words, our party alone can, in the present conditions, perform this task. The strengthening and clarification of the anti-imperialist forces in the Congress depends largely on the strength and activity of our party. For fulfilling the party’s task it will also be necessary to coordinate all other anti-imperialist forces in the country.

“Consistent with its task, *the party should take only an anti-imperialist stand on congress platforms. We should not in this connection make the mistake of placing a full socialist programme before the Congress.* An anti-imperialist programme should be evolved for this purpose suiting the needs of workers, peasants and the lower middle classes.

“It being the task of the party to bring the anti-imperialist elements under its ideological influence, it is necessary for us to be as tactful as possible. We should on no account alienate these elements by intolerance and impatience. *The Congress constructive programme should not be obstructed or interfered with. It should, be scientifically criticised and exposed.*

“In Congress elections, “we should not show keenness to ‘capture’ committees and offices nor should we form alliances with politically undesirable groups for the purpose.

“This does not mean that the party shall not carry on socialist propaganda from its own platform. It must continue to do so-and do it more systematically and vigorously.

“It follows that the party’s own programme must be a Marxist one: otherwise, the party will to fulfill its task and leadership. Marxism alone can guide the anti-imperialist forces to their ultimate destiny. Party members must, therefore, fully understand the technique of revolution, the theory and practice of the class struggle the nature of the state and the processes leading the socialist society.” (Emphasis added)

Conference in Faispur

A year after The Meerut Thesis was adopted, the third conference of the CSP was held in Faispur. It developed some of the ideas contained above and said:

“It is the Congress that we must take as the basis and starting point, and we must attempt to make it an all-embracing united front against imperialism. The Congress has already succeeded to a extent in uniting wide forces in the Indian people for the national struggle and remains today the principal existing mass organisations of diverse elements seeking national liberation.... While the Congress is a mass organisation, its leadership is predominantly bourgeois. This leadership is unable to develop, while the framework of its conception and interests, the struggle of the masses to a higher level. At the same time it should be kept in view that the Congress leadership is no longer undivided. Recently a conscious left has been forming within the Congress and this development is reflecting itself in the leadership also.... Our task within the Congress is not only to wean away the anti-imperialist elements from the bourgeois leadership but also to develop and broaden the Congress so as to transform it into a powerful anti-imperialist front.”

Such a transformation of the Congress, the Faispur Thesis went on is

necessary to consolidate the socialist forces. "These forces are unfortunately still divided. *The party from the beginning has stood for unity in the socialist ranks... Apart from unity or agreement among socialist ranks, it is necessary that the forces of the left are also consolidated and an under standing developed* within its leadership." (Socialist Movement in India, Asim Kumar Chaudhari, Cal., Appendix – II, pp. vi-vii, emphasis added)

CSP-CPI Agreement

It can thus be seen that the leadership of the newly formed CSP was making a bid for bridging the gulf between the earlier groups of socialist-communists and those who rose within the ranks of the Congress in the wake of the international and national development of the early 1930s. Central to this perspective was united action between the reorganised all-India leadership of the Communist Party of India and the Congress Socialist Party. A formal agreement was arrived at between the two parties. P C Joshi and Jaya Prakash Narayan, the General Secretaries of the two parties signed a formal agreement on behalf of the two parties.

That agreement played a big role in the anti-imperialist upsurge of the years immediately preceding the outbreak of the Second World War. It helped in the unification of the trade union movement as well as in the development of the kisan and student movement, both oriented towards the unity of all anti-imperialist forces. At the same time, it helped the radical section of Congressmen, the emergence of a well-organised left in the Congress organisation and a weakening of the hold of the right wing leadership of that party. The electoral defeat of Mahatma Gandhi's candidate for congress president ship, characterised by the Mahatma as his own defeat, was the high watermark of this developing unity of the left.

The agreement between the newly formed Congress Socialist Party and the reorganised all-India leadership of the CPI, however united not only these two parties but a large number of anti imperialist throughout the country. the top leaders of the left in the Congress, like Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose, were in broad agreement with them. The pronouncements of Nehru as Congress President for two years and Bose for reflected the views not only for these two individual leaders but of the entire left inside the Congress as well as outside.

Such a broad agreement among all the leftists was possible because of the epoch-making struggle between capitalism and socialism, between war and peace, in world politics. While stirring a large number of Congressmen and drawing them towards socialism, these historic developments helped those who had already organised themselves in the communist, socialist or other leftist parties to extend their activities. The formation of the CSP helped in the crystallisation of process by providing a forum where disillusioned Congressmen could come together, organise united action with the communists and other leftist forces outside the Congress and help in the emergence of a powerful anti-imperialist united front.

The work of developing a powerful anti-imperialist front, however, was not smooth or easy. The struggle was hard, since the differences among the various parties and groups were wide and sharp. This was particularly true of the difference between the communists on the one hand, and other leftists, including the Congress Socialists, and the mass of left Congressmen, on the other.

The Congress socialist Party, as its very name implies was an organisation of Congressmen, with its commitment to socialism being an extension of the congressmen's commitment to the Gandhian, Nehruite and other ideologies of the Congress party. For them and left Congressmen, socialism was a development from the resolution of the Lahore and Karachi sessions of the Congress.

Communist Programme of Action

The communists, on the other hand, tried from the very beginning to apply to the concrete condition of India the proletarian world outlook, strategy and tactics of struggle and organisation. The draft programme of action formulated by the party in 1930 stated, "In this connection, world history and the lesson of class struggle in India prove that only the leadership of the working class can ensure fulfillment of the historic task of emancipating the Indian people, abolishing national slavery, sweeping aside all the fetters which check national development confiscating the land and effecting a far-reaching democratic reconstruction of revolutionary character. The working class of India, organised by the industrial process itself and by the class struggle well, under the leadership of the communist vanguard, perform its historic task of organising the scattered masses of peasantry and town poor for struggle against British domination and landlordism.

“But in order to organise the mass of workers, in order to rally the proletariat as a distinct class, conscious of its distinct class interests and fighting for the leadership of the national movement for emancipation, in order to bring about the revolutionary alliance of the workers and peasantry in order to liberate the working class, the peasantry and the town poor from the hands of national reformism and direct their revolutionary struggle towards an anti-imperialist, anti-feudal revolution, for all these purposes the working class requires its own proletarian Communist Party.”

The latter half of the 1930s witnessed sharp changes in the international situation and, following them, the situation in India changed as well. The 1935-1936 years marked the beginning of the unification of the anti-fascist forces all over the world for which the call was given by the Communist International in August 1935. In India, too, the bourgeois-led freedom movement saw in the Soviet Union and other socialist-communist forces in the world a reliable and strong ally against British rule. It was this that got reflected in the radical postures adopted by the Congress-not only its left leaders, like Nehru and Bose, but even the right leaders headed by Gandhi.

Even before these developments, the communists were trying to give a proper agrarian orientation to the programme of the Indian National Congress. An amendment along these lines was moved at the 1928 session of the Congress, which, of course was defeated. This struggle enabled the communists in the 1930s, in cooperation with the congress socialist and other radicals to undertake the task of seriously organising the peasantry under the kisan sabha. This was one of the most significant gains of the developing anti-imperialist unity of the latter half of the 1930s in which the CPI-CSP unity played the decisive role.

Battle Between Right and Left

However, as the leftists consolidated themselves and grew strong in the wake of the growingly united anti-imperialist front, the right became panicky. They tolerated three years of leftist presidents of the Congress-Nehru and Bose-since it helped the consolidation of the Congress as an organisation capable of winning the electoral struggle in 1937. They however, saw to it that the leftists were in a

minority in the Working Committee. Nehru and Bose occupied the post of president ship only because they were allowed to do so and on condition that they should have Working Committee composed predominantly of rightists.

The development of the leftist movement during those three years naturally unnerved the right leadership. While it helped in the mobilization of the masses behind the congress in its electoral struggle, it stood in the way of the Congress leadership coming to a negotiated settlement with the British rulers. They, therefore, refused to give another year during which the leftist leaders Subhas Bose would occupy the post of Congress President. A fierce would fought between the right and the left for the post of Congress president ship for the fourth year, the respective candidates of the two sides being Subhas Bose for the left and Pattabhi Sitaramayya for the right.

That epic battle, in which the left came out successful, followed by a still more fierce battle in which the right succeeded in manoeuvring the elected Congress President out of office, was the beginning of the break-up of the anti-imperialist front formed three years earlier. If the Lucknow Congress of 1936 marked the beginning of the united anti-imperialist front in which the communists and Congress Socialist cooperated with leftist Congressmen, the Tripuri Congress of 1939 was its end.

This found reflection in the relation between the CSP and the CPI. Although confirmed anti-communists like Masani were in control of the organisational machine, the political leadership of the CSP was provided by Jaya Prakash Narayan, who was more convinced than anybody else in the CSP, of the need for communist-socialist unity. He was the author of *Why Socialism*, and the chief architect of the Meerut and Faizpur Theses. Following as he did, the significant developments in the world indicated the rapid advances of the anti-fascist movement and its betrayal by the bourgeois leaders of the western capitalist countries, he was all for communist-socialist unity on a world scale. In India too, he was for united action leading, if possible to the merger of the communist and socialist parties. He agreed with his anti-communist comrades, like Masani, that cooperation with the two parties would strengthen the communists. He, however, did not mind it because, according to him, the Socialist Party would also grow.

The situation, however, radically changed in the latter half of the 1930s. The Moscow trials against the Trotskyites, including several top officers of the Red Army, made liberal socialist like Jaya Prakash indignant. They began to doubt whether all that Masani and company were saying against the Soviet Union and the communists were as baseless as they had thought earlier. These doubts became enormously strengthened when the Soviet leaders signed the non-aggression treaty with Nazi Germany.

These developments in the world brought J P closer to such rabid anti-communists among the leaders of the CSP as Masani, Ashoke Mehta Patwardhan and so on. However, a large number of young congressmen and women who had joined and worked in the CSP on the lined laid down in the Meerut and Faizpur theses did not J P in moving away from the earlier pro-soviet and anti- fascist to the new anti-communist line. They thought that in the then world situation, the Soviet Union, which was the most dependable bastion of the anti-fascist forces in the world, had to defend itself against enemy agents. They therefore gave wholehearted support to the leadership of the Soviet Union and the communist international.

As for the Soviet-German agreement, it undoubtedly understood, that when imperialism was using every diplomatic and political means to isolate and weaken the Soviet Union, the leaders of the latter were obliged to do everything possible to get out of the isolation into which their country was being forced. Subsequent developments in the world situation-the perfidious Nazi attack on and the heroic resistance put up to it by the Soviet people, culminating in the final defeat of fascism-proved the correctness of the positions adopted by the Soviet leadership.

Break-up of Relations

The months preceding the outbreak of the Second World War and the first years of the war, therefore, led to a break-up of the relations between the CSP and the CPI. Some of the state, district and local units of the CSP (including the entire membership of the CSP in Kerala) transformed themselves in their entirety from the CSP to the CPI. This is ascribed by anti-communist historians of the CSP to the wily machinations of the CPI leaders who are supposed to have made several know communists to “infiltrate into the CSP” and disrupt if

from within. Since I happen to be one of those who are thus supposed to have “infiltrated” himself into the CSP, I may state the actual facts. I was elected one of the four Joint Secretaries of the all-India congress socialist Party along with Masani, Goray and Gautam at the very first conference in October 1934.

None of the delegates who attended the Bombay Conference from Kerala (including Krishna Pillai, A K Gopalan and myself) had in fact any earlier contacts with the Communist Party at that time. No question therefore arises of “EMS, a communist, being permitted to infiltrate into the CSP.”

It was a year after the Bombay Conference of the CSP that the late Krishna Pillai and I had the first contact with the Communist Party of India through Sundarayya. It took almost two more years after this first contact in 1937 to form the first unit of the Communist party of India in Kerala.

During this whole period, the CSP leaders of Kerala worked as honest and loyal workers in the cause of socialism, to develop the trade unions, kisan sabha and other mass organisations as well as to develop the Congress as a radical anti-imperialist organisation in Kerala. It was this solid work in the urban and rural areas of the state and not the mercy of Masani and Co., that made us leaders of the trade union and the peasant movement, members of the AICC, etc., making me the Secretary of the Kerala Provincial Congress committee and a member of the then Provincial Legislative Assembly of Madras.

Krishna Pillai, AKG and I, in other words were Congress Socialist leaders in our own right and not because JP or somebody else “put us in charge” as the anti-communist “historians” want the people to believe. Why, then, did the congress Socialist of Kerala join the Communist Party *en bloc*? Because they were tremendously impressed by the gigantic strides taken by the Soviet Union in its (first) five year plan. They naturally came to the conclusion that the socialist revolution in Russia showed the revolutionaries of India, as the revolutionaries of other countries fighting for freedom, the path forward. They, therefore, joined the very first group of congressmen who declared socialism to be their final objective, the group headed by JP, Masani, etc.

It may be added here, that, if in fact the founders of the CSP in Kerala had come into contact with the then illegal CPI before the formation of the all-India CSP, they might have probably plumed for that party. For, unlike Masani and Co., that did not have the background of the British Labour Party whose 'socialism'; was infected with anti-communist, anti-soviet prejudices.

Naturally, therefore, the moment they got the first opportunity to contact the then illegal CPI, the Congress Socialists of Kerala entered into serious and businesslike discussion with them, and on weighing the merits and demerits of the policies laid down by the leaders of the CPI, on the one hand, Masani and Co., on the other, they found the former more correct. Their change over from congress Socialism to communism was thus as natural as the earlier transition of Gandhite or Nehrite Congressmen into Congress Socialists.

What happened in Kerala, however was no exception. In several other states, the same development took place. It was natural for those who came into the socialist movement through J P's *Why Socialism* and whose convictions were strengthened by the Meerut and Faizpur Theses to refuse to be subjected to the anti- Soviet and anti-communist prejudices which Masani and Co., tried to create in them. If Socialism provided the more effective method of winning independence, as J P pointed out in *why Socialism*, the socialists cannot afford to join the chorus of anti-sovietism and anti - communism. J P, too, in the first years the CSP refused to too the line of Masani and Co., though subsequently he succumbed to it. May others, including the entire CSP of Kerala and of some other areas in the country, refused to follow J P into the anti-communist camp.

Why The Break

The years preceding and immediately after the outbreak of the war thus saw a clear break between the CPI and CSP his unity in action had helped the consolidation of left forces in the latter years of the thirties. The path traversed by the two parties since then have been so divergent that it would be unimaginable for anybody who does not know the facts that the two parties together had given effective leadership to the left movement at a particular stage in its development. The question arises as to why the break came, the line adopted by which party has been proved more correct.

The stand adopted by the CPI during the latter part of the war, i.e., after Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union, did undoubtedly lead to the temporary isolation of the Party from the mainstream of India's patriotic masses. People could not understand how a war waged by the British rulers of India could be "people's war"; as it was characterised by the CPI. The CSP, on the other hand, came to the center of the stage, played the leading role in organising the popular revolt against British imperialism during the days of the *Quite India* struggle. The socialist leaders therefore hoped that, in the contest between themselves and the communists, they would get the overwhelming support of the people.

It was in fact with this calculation that, following the attainment of independence on August 15, 1947, the then Congress Socialist Party removed the prefix "Congress" and transformed itself into the Socialist Party. Its leaders had the ambition of coming out as the major, if not the only opposition, to the new ruling the Congress. In 1952, when the first general elections under the new constitution were held, the socialist leaders staked their claim for being the major opposition party in the country as a whole and the ruling party in a few states.

The results of the elections, however, were quite contrary to their expectations. Not only was the Socialist Party humiliated by the massive defeat administered by the electorate, but also the communist Party came out as the major left opposition group. The united front led by the party was in a position to stake its claim for forming the first non - Congress Government in the two southern states of Travancore- Cochin and Madras, while in two other states- West Bengal and Hyderabad- the CPI became the recognised opposition. In the two houses of Parliament, too, the CPI came out as the largest group in the opposition.

These humiliating electoral reverses were followed by intense ideological and political confusion in the ranks of the Socialist Party, which led several anti-communist leaders of the CSP to different paths- J P to sarvodaya, Masani to the Congress and then Swatantra, Patwardhan to Sanyas, and so on. The rest followed the tortuous course of the initial merger of the Socialist Party with the Praja Party to form the PSP, the break-up of that party into the PSP and SP; the merger of the two into the SSP; the break-up of the latter; the final

merger of all existing socialist groups into the Janta in 1977; the subsequent division into various groups formed out of the old Janta, etc. The path traversed by the Socialist Party since its first electoral defeat in 1952, showed the deep crisis into which it fell.

It is true that the Communist Party too got split into the CPI(M) and CPI. Followed as this was by the rise of the Naxalite groups from the CPI(M) and that of the Dange group from the CPI, it may be superficially compared to the disintegration of the Socialist Party. In fact, there is no comparison between the ideological, political and organisational struggle among the communists and the disintegration of the Socialist Party. For, unlike the socialists the communists fought on question of ideology and politics. It therefore became possible after a time for the two major organisations of communists, the CPI(M) and the CPI, to learn from experience and come together in united actions. The area of unity in action has been steadily expanding, though major ideological issues still remain. No such question of ideology and politics was involved in the mergers and break-ups of the various socialist groups.

The Difference

This difference in the paths traversed by the two parties can be traced to the fact that while the communists with all the weaknesses revealed and mistakes committed on several occasions, stood on the solid ground of the proletarian outlook on international as well as national issues, the CSP has its foot firmly set in bourgeois policies. This was so when the communists joined the CSP in working inside the Congress and tried to develop it into a genuine anti-imperialist organisation. Unlike the CSP, whose membership was confined to those socialists who were primarily Congressmen, the communists joined the Congress as communists. The former had their basic loyalty to the Congress organisation, while the latter's loyalty was basically to their class and party.

During the *Quit India* struggle of August 1942, and in the subsequent years, the CSP was undoubtedly with the anti-imperialist masses but they were only carrying out the decisions of the congress. When the Congress gave up the path of mass struggle and went in for negotiated settlement with the British rulers, therefore, the CSP could do nothing to prevent it. The CPI, on the other hand, was able rapidly to overcome its war-time isolating from the anti-imperialist

masses and come out as the most energetic organiser of such heroic actions a Telangana, Punnapra-Vayalar, Tebhaga, etc; it plunged fully into such anti-imperialist actions as the demonstrations in support of INA prisoners and the RIN revolt. The role played in these militant mass actions brought the Party one again into the mainstream of the anti-imperialist movement.

Although this was taken to left-sectarian lines after the Second Congress of the CPI (1948), the party was even at this stage not in conflict with the mood of the masses; although over-stepping the lines within which the people were giving expression to their discontent against the new Congress regime, the Party was not swimming against the main current, as it was during the days of the *Quit India* struggle. That was why the Party's performance in the 1952 general elections was much better than that of the socialists.

Ideological Struggle

It is now full 32 years after the respective lines of the CPI and the Socialist Party were put to the first test of electoral support. The rich experience gained in this period has taught the CPI(M), the CPI and the various socialist groups into which the original CSP got divided the lesson that they should unite their forces and, together with other democratic forces fighting the ruling party's drive towards authoritarianism and for the preservation of democracy, they should base themselves on the mobilisation of the working people independently of the bourgeoisie.

In this struggle for the unity of left opposition, the ideological difference between the communist and socialist movements should nevertheless be borne in mind.

The communist movement in India arose over six decades ago, as part of the international proletarian movement and withal its ups and downs, stuck to that position; the mistakes and deviations, which no doubt crept in, were overcome, due largely to its basic character, proletarian outlook on international and national questions.

Although to a large extent influenced by the international proletarian movement, the various socialist parties, whose origin should be

traced to the formation of the CSP 50 years ago, were, and continue to be, by and large non-proletarian democratic parties.

The two together could make a big contribution in the prewar years, but drifted apart during the war and after. The unity of action, which has of late been developing is no doubt a positive development, but it should not make anybody blind to the gulf that still separates the two (proletarian and non-proletarian) trends.

Let it be stated in conclusion that the CPI(M) is itself conscious of the need for eternal vigilance and continuous struggle against the non-proletarian trends that may crop up in a mass revolutionary party of the working class. Hence the emphasis laid in the party documents on continuous ideological struggle against right as well as "left" deviations the use of the method of criticism and self-criticism, without which the party cannot develop itself into a mass revolutionary party of the working class.