Nature does not admit of vacuum — this platitude is pardonable when we consider how it has gained in historical stature and become one of the fundamental truths of the political world. This truth established itself once again in the growth of the Congress socialist movement in 1934.

The Congress leadership adopted the Council entry programme in 1934 after the suspension of the Civil Disobedience Movement and Gandhi became busy with his Constructive Programme. On the other hand, the communists, though not yet a significant political force, went on with their sectarian programme of violent actions under the direction of the Comintern. The younger section of the Congress, despite their faith in Marxism, could not accept either line. They, therefore, organised a socialist party within the Congress, leaning principally on Marxism, but eschewing violence in general and kept itself within the framework of the Congress creed.

The CSP started by championing their positive policy, which was the demand for severance of all connections whatever with British imperialism. They got the first and the only chance to implement this policy during the "quit India" movement after the arrest of the Congress High Command. But the Government machinery being stronger and organised the socialists could not proceed far. However, it must be admitted, unless
the socialist leaders made it a duty to continue the struggle the "Quit India" movement would have nipped in the bud.

The Congress Socialist Party adopted a two-pronged programme of working within and without the Congress. But their working within the Congress always depended upon the mood of the Congress leadership. The socialists got a chance of carrying out their programme during the period when Jawaharlal Nehru was the President of the Congress. But the times was a victim of ambivalence. Jawaharlal Nehru like the socialists were opposed to office-acceptance in the provinces in 1937 and they staged hartal on April 1, 1937 when the Government of India Act, 1935 was invoked. Gandhi was also not favourably disposed to office-acceptance at first, but later on agreed to it because of persistent insistence from a section of the Congressmen. His argument was that, the Congress ministries might help the implementation of his Constructive Programme. But the moment the decision was taken in favour of office-acceptance Jawaharlal Nehru and the socialists virtually had nothing to do with it.

Socialists' decision to remain within the Congress was, undoubtedly, wise. Because they rightly considered the Congress as the only front of national struggle. But they did not have the strength to re-orient the Congress programme and channelise it along the path of class war. The Congress at this time was a national platform of all classes for winning freedom for India. The Congress leadership, therefore, never trusted the
socialists, chiefly because of the belief in the theory of class war.

Socialists' working inside the Congress had another disadvantage. They were young in age and experience as also smaller in number. They also lacked the political acumen of the older Congress leaders. The programme that had been adopted by the Congress in most cases fell short of the socialist ideal, yet, as members of the Congress, they had to accept the programme and work for its implementation.

Sometimes the non-committal attitude of the socialists created confusion. The socialists were on good terms with Subhas Chandra Bose. Yet, their behaviour with him during the Tripuri Congress was very confusing. They withdrew support from Subhas Chandra Bose for the sake of making a common cause with the dominant leadership of the Congress. But the so-called unity that was maintained at the cost of Subhas Chandra Bose's humiliation was of no use. Had the socialists been firm in their support to Subhas Chandra Bose they might at least get a chance of giving the Congress a left-orientation.

But the CSP made the colossal blunder while going to work outside the Congress for left consolidation. With the object of socialist consolidation the CSP opened its door to two other Marxist groups, namely the Royists and the communists, who were more interested in the expansion of their respective parties at the cost of the socialists. Even when these groups openly denounced the CSP, the socialist leadership failed to
take disciplinary action against them. Despite repeated warning by M.R. Masani, Rammonohar Lohia, Achyut Patwardhan and Asoka Mehta, the General Secretary of the CSP, Jayaprakash Narayan faltered in packing the communists off from the Party. The Royists' disruptionist activities could not damage the Party much, but the communists virtually wrecked the Party. The communists reaped the fruit of trade union unity that the socialists had built up with much pain. As a result the AITUC came to be dominated by the communists.

The post-war period witnessed the political faith of the CSP degenerating into a negative stand when the British Government started negotiating with the Congress and the Muslim League. They adopted an indifferent attitude to the Viceroy's Simla Conference and the Cabinet Mission, because they felt that both would end in a fiasco. Their anticipation proved to be true. But their decision to boycott the Constituent Assembly was unrealistic. It was true the nature of Constituent Assembly fell far short of the original demands the socialists or the Congress had put forward, yet it was impolitic on their part to boycott it. Because the Constituent Assembly had been given a substance of power. Their absence from the Constituent Assembly deprived the country of the benefit of socialist opinion on different provisions of the Constitution of India.

But they were not free from an ambivalence which expressed itself clear in their abstention from voting at the AICC meeting on the resolution accepting partition. This
attitude of neutrality at a critical moment in the history of the country proved to be extremely injurious to the interests of the party and jeopardised its future.

However, the socialists must be credited with all earnest efforts to develop a healthy party system. They tried their best to save the Congress from being turned into the public relations department of the Government. In this effort they got the blessings of Gandhi. But Jawaharlal Nehru and Vallabhbhai Patel stood in their way. The socialists sought to turn the Congress into a real party of the people and invest it with a controlling power over the Government. The socialists worked inside the Congress handicapped by many limitations; but their honest criticism of the Congress policies at the Working Committee and AICC meetings and the Congress sessions was of immense value. They worked sincerely for the Congress with no expectation for offices. By their exit from the Congress the Congress leadership was relieved of unpalatable criticism, but the Congress at the same time lost a good band of sincere and honest workers. This was ultimately responsible for the vacuum which manifested itself after their exclusion from the Congress.

The socialists should also be credited with giving India the doctrine of democratic socialism. At the Madras Conference of the Socialist Party in 1950 the nature of democratic socialism in India was explained. In the opinion of Jayaprakash Narayan, democratic socialism is not merely anti-capitalism nor statism. Nationalisation of industries and
collectivisation are important parts of socialism, but they do not add up to socialism by themselves. Socialism implies a society with equality both for men and women in different walks of life having its basis on social and political justice. And it is only through the democratic method a socialistic society can be built up. By democratic method the Socialist Party included both parliamentary and non-parliamentary activities including the organisation of peasants and workers. No other party in India worried so much about the principles of personal, economic and political freedom as the socialists did. This raised high hopes in the mind of the people. But the poor performance of the Socialist Party in the First General Election induced the socialists to concentrate later on parliamentary work and the Party started entering into strange alliances for electoral victory. The non-parliamentary programme of constructive work was shelved. The chief reason of the Socialist Party's electoral debacle was its turning into a mass party without having a corresponding well-knit party machinery. Some have argued that the socialists should have worked for some more years as a party of the select. That might have helped the socialists to consolidate. They might have gone in for broadening the organisational basis after such consolidation. After the temporary merger of the Socialist Party and the Krishak Majdoor Praja Party the organisation became much too unwieldy and they failed to stand firm against the clandestine communist propaganda that, the socialists formed the B team of the Congress. To-day it is not the
socialists but the communists who are very close to the Congress. But the socialists are so much fragmented that they cannot pay back the communists in their own coin. The communists may be open to criticism on grounds of principle, but they most certainly succeeded in winning their goal which was to little the socialist movement and democratic socialism.

The socialists are now passing through continuous disintegration and subsequent re-integration. But their success lies in that, the doctrine of socialism, for whose adoption they persistently fought and failed during their tenure in the Congress, was at last adopted by the Congress. The Congress at its Avadi session in 1955 resolved to build up a 'Socialistic Pattern of Society'; at the Indore Congress in 1957, it spoke of the 'Socialist Co-operative Commonwealth', and at last adopted democratic socialism at the AICC meeting held at Jaipur in 1963. Today the ruling party has accepted democratic socialism as its ideal. The Socialist Party may be weak today, but history will gratefully record how it helped in the socialist reorientation of Indian politics. It was the Socialist Party that for the first time placed the ideal of democratic socialism before the Indian people and perceived the danger to freedom that lurked in the communist revolution peddled by the USSR and their satellites in the different countries of the world.
NOTES AND REFERENCES


2. Presidential Address by Prof. N.C. Bhattacharyya at the Indian Political Science Conference, Agra, 1965, 18, Aswini Dutta Road, Calcutta-29.