THE CONGRESS SOCIALIST PARTY AND GANDHI

The Non-Co-operation Movement under Gandhi's leadership created undoubtedly an emotional and intellectual environment of discontent, fearlessness, defiance and revolt which became indirectly a decisive factor in the origin of left-wing within the national freedom movement. For the first time in the history of national freedom movement the Congress became a mass organisation reaching the hearts of the masses and compelled them to join the political struggle. Addressing the Federal Structure Committee in the Second Round Table Conference in London in 1931, Mahatma Gandhi had declared, "Above all, the Congress represents, in its essence, the dumb-starved millions, scattered over the length and breadth of the land in its 7,00,000 villages, no matter whether they come from what is called British India, or what is called India. Every interest, which in the opinion of the Congress is a genuine real clash, I have no hesitation in saying on behalf of the Congress that the Congress will sacrifice every interest for the sake of the interest of these dumb millions". However, some leaders with socialist leaning had the impression that Gandhi's soft attitude towards Capitalists may result in the dominance of Capitalists in the Congress.

The emergence of Congress Socialist Party on October 21, 1934 within the Indian National Congress was the consequence of this and several other political factors.

The Civil Disobedience Movements of 1930-31 and 1932-34 generated high hopes and mass enthusiasm and a deeper sense of disillusionment after their withdrawal, particularly for the left-wingers and the socialists in the Congress. After his unconditional release from jail on August 23, 1933 when Gandhi started paying more attention to his constructive activities (campaign against untouchability, Temple entry etc.), the revolutionary youth was no more happy with what they called, reformist politics of Gandhi. His leadership was viewed by them as "thoroughly inadequate and regressive". They also considered it 'deviation from the main aim' and 'diverting the issues by shifting the attention from the political to the social field'. Also they held him entirely responsible for the abandonment of Civil Disobedience Movements which brought about a greater dissatisfaction to these socialist elements. Being radical, they wanted to play more progressive and dynamic role in the national freedom movement. In this way, the socialist philosophy attracted these energetic youths more than Gandhi's slow-going reformist nationalism. Obviously, it can be stated that Gandhi's political approach became a decisive factor directly or indirectly to the birth of the CSP.

3. C.W.M.G.; Vol. 58, pp. 460-64.
Along with this his theory of Trusteeship (the philosophic and religious tone in it), the establishment of Ram Rajya, cow protection etc., they held as status-quoist and hence repugnant to the revolutionary means of socialism. To achieve the socialism with national independence was their main aim. They stood for complete economic and political emancipation of the masses. Some of the younger Congressmen of socialist leaning were not happy with the Karachi Resolutions which they termed as "Vague and inadequate". Hence they wanted to give the national movement a new orientation by a socialist movement.

Despite their different approach towards basic issues, the Congress Socialist Party leaders decided to remain within the national stream as they felt that keeping aloof from the Congress would be a grave mistake as had been done earlier by the Communists when they formed separate party (the formation of CPI in 1925), who had developed anti-national attitude towards freedom struggle led by Gandhi.

In this connection it is necessary to recall the incident on January 26, 1930, when the 'national flag' (the Congress Flag) was unfurled at Chaupati, the communists did not participate in it. As such, the socialists adopted different attitude than the communists. Jaya Prakash Narayan observed, "the very formation of the CSP was a protest and revolt against the Third International had pursued in India".\(^5\) As such, the immediate cause of the

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emergence of the CSP within the Congress has been viewed by many socialists as an anti-national attitude of the Communists who had their loyalty outside India. Again in the words of Jayaprakash Narayan,

"When I returned to India, the national movement here was at its peak. The very next year Mahatma Gandhi launched his famous Salt-Satyagraha. As was natural, I jumped into this movement with heart and soul. But, I could not find Indian Communists in this movement anywhere. On the contrary, they were dubbing Gandhi as an agent of the Indian bourgeois movement. It appealed to me that the Communist Party of India had become a tool in the hands of Russia and from there its strings were being pulled... All these events and experiences forced me to do some rethinking about the fundamentals of Marxism.\(^6\)

Excessive insistence on non-violence by Gandhi during national liberation movement, too, became another factor for the rise of CSP. For, they believed class-war as inevitable in their struggle against imperialism. To attain freedom from the despotic rule, they held non-violence as self-deceptive and advocated strongly the methods of class-conflict as historical necessity. Hence, socialist leaders felt it necessary to have a proper front to propagate socialist doctrines and also influence the Congress thereupon.

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\(^{6}\) Narayan Jayaprakash; \emph{Meri Vichar Yatra} (Hindi) Translated by the author (Varanasi; Serva Seva Sangh, 1974), p. 28.
Emergence of Swarajya Party in 1934 with Gandhi's open consent and blessings was felt by many leftists inside the Congress as his surrender before the rightists. The leftists could not appreciate this which led them to form a separate group. Not only this, Gandhi even made canvassing in their favour in the election. This strategy of Gandhi made socialists suspicious who feared that Congress would be dominated by the Swarajists.

Thus, it could be said that "the CSP emerged in a sense to influence Gandhi, both to restrain him where he was not wrong, and again where there was a danger of his being let down by the Right-Wing".

On the question of social change through class conflict there appeared a great interaction between Gandhi and CSP. At Patna Conference on May 17, 1934, the All-India Congress Socialist approved that the CSP stood for "elimination of princes, landlords, capitalists, Zamindars, moneylenders and all other parasitic and exploiting interests". CSP's Patna Conference disturbed the capitalists and landlords who met Gandhi and asked for his clarification on his attitude towards them. But Gandhi wanted co-operation of all classes to forge anti-imperialist front.

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9. All-India Congress Socialist Agenda, Patna, May 17, 1934.
To him, the role of capitalists and landlords in the national struggle was as important as of masses. Obviously, Gandhi never appreciated this class-war approach of CSP, who thought it would harm the national movement and weaken the national unity. In his letter to Narendra Deva he wrote, "I do not contemplate the elimination of princes and landlords, nor do I contemplate redistribution of land to peasants". CSP in its first conference in Bombay adopted 15-point programme. The CSP with its radical programmes was surely to come into clash with Congress leadership. To Gandhi, the cause of national independence and unity of all sections was of greater significance than ideological issues. The CSP talk of class-war and confiscation of private property was bound to create division in the common front in the struggle against imperialism. Gandhi opposed the class-war idea of CSP. It is, therefore, not surprising that the Congress Working Committee came down heavily on the socialists and passed a resolution on June 18, 1934, as follows:

"While the Working Committee welcomes the formation of groups representing different schools of thought, it is necessary, in view of the loose-talk about confiscation of private property and necessity of class-war, to remind Congressmen that Karachi Resolution, as finally settled by the AICC at Bombay in August 1931, which lays down certain principles neither contemplates confiscation of private property without just cause or compensation, nor advocacy of class-war. The Working Committee is further of opinion that

confiscations and class-war are contrary to the Congress creed of non-violence. At the same time the Working Committee is of opinion that Congress does contemplate wiser and juster use of private property so as to prevent the exploitation of the landless poor and also contemplates a healthier relationship between capital and labour". 12

This resolution brought about sharp reactions from the CSP leaders. They had their apprehensions about the Congress and its resolution that perhaps intention behind it was 'to drive them out'. They further stated, "We feel that the opinion of CWC is based on entire mis-conception of nature of class-struggle inherent in the capitalist order of society". 13 In his letter to General Secretary of AICC Jayaprakash Narayan wrote,

"Non-violence as preached by Gandhiji means a good deal more than peaceful and legitimate. Neither the Congress nor the overwhelming majority of Congressmen has accepted non-violence as its creed in the sense which Gandhiji attaches to it. It is likely, I say likely because I do not fully understand non-violence, that some items of our programme may not be in keeping with the spiritual and religious meaning of non-violence. Yet it cannot be doubted by any one who has read our programme that every single item on it is fully consistent with the present creed of Congress". 14

He stressed further;

"It can be opposed only if it is accompanied by violence (i.e., in the common sense of the term and not its esoteric sense). Nowhere in the programme of the Congress Socialists, the use of violence has been advocated. Therefore, the question of Class-War being opposed to Congress creed does not arise."  

Criticising the class-war approach of the socialists Gandhi said, "Class-War is foreign to the essential genius of India". According to him, "I do not think there is any natural antagonism between them (the capital and labour)". He was of the view that socialists' outside inspirations of believing in the inherent class-war approach would surely bring about degeneration in human relationship. He represented the approach which is in consonance with the spirit, tradition and value system of our nation expressed in Varnasharma Dharma. So, he frankly told to Masani that, "the socialist programme in that form is not applicable to this country". But Jayaprakash was vehement on Gandhi's charges on CSP's philosophy. Hence he argued,

"We have no desire to disregard either the peculiar problem of India or its historical background. It would indeed be utterly non-Marxian to do so."  

17. Young India; January 8, 1925, p. 10.
He further viewed, "the basic economic problem of our society - the problem of exploitation of the many by the few - which arises from the monopoly of land and other instruments of production, did not exist in its present universal form at the time of Manu, nor quite naturally, did any solution of it." 20

Gandhi was fully conscious of the existence of classes, their interests and class struggle, but his difference with the CSP was for the reason that he wanted to harmonise the class conflicts through his moral appeal of truth and non-violence. While on the other hand the approach of CSP was consisted in creating the class conflicts by organising workers' and peasants' unions.

Being a great unifier of Indian National Movement and a big strategist of the unity of all classes, he adopted such a policy that he neither liked to loose the landlords and capitalists nor the Congress Socialists by modifying the 'loose-talk resolution' by including the words 'bonafide non-violent socialists'. So he said, "the resolution did not refer to bonafide non-violent socialists, but to those who talk about violently overthrowing the present capitalist order and confiscation of private property". 21

CSP had many other proposals such as abolition of princely states, socialization of key industries, abolition of landlordism, cancellation of debts by the peasants and workers and separation of religion from politics. 22

20. Ibid., p. 71.
22. C.W.M.G.; Vol. 58, pp. 36-37.
But Gandhi was optimistic enough in his class-collaboration approach aimed at winning the national freedom with the unity of all. At such a juncture he never liked to antagonise the princes, landlords and capitalists. So, he said,

"I do not like the assumptions underlying many of its propositions which go to show that there is necessarily antagonism between the classes and the masses or between the labourers and the capitalists such that they can never work for mutual good. My own experience covering a fairly long period is to the contrary".  

On the question of independence also, there appeared a great interaction between Gandhi and CSP. Gandhi stood for freedom from 'foreigners' but CSP developed its own class oriented look. Their slogan was "freedom from exploitation". The word 'exploitation' was emphasised by the CSP because they believed that Indian exploiters (the Zamindars and Capitalists) were partner of the imperialists. They believed that the bourgeoisie paid only lip sympathy to the cause of national freedom, because their class interests were best served as long as British rule continued.  

Gandhi wanted Capitalists' and Zamindars' active participation in freedom movement but CSP regarded them as "the junior imperialists". Clearing their stand J.P. raised a question in Annual Conference of the AICSP at Faizpur in 1936:

23. Ibid.; Vol. 58, p. 36.

"As a concrete instance, we ask a peasant to fight for Swaraj i.e. freedom from foreign exploitation, but he sees his exploiter, the Zamindar, is not a foreigner, but his own countrymen, and therefore our proposals do not appeal to him; on the other hand, you ask him to help you to get rid of Zamindari system, and you see how rapidly he responds". 25

In this way CSP's approach towards independence is linked with total independence from both exploiters i.e. Imperialists and Zamindars and Capitalists. According to them, the question concerning independence is ultimately linked with economic exploitation of the masses. So CSP's strategy was to bring the masses and the upper classes in conflict. The masses included peasants, workers and lower middle classes as the only genuine anti-imperialist elements. 26 For that purpose they sought to form revolutionary unions of masses, workers and peasants based on their distinct class interest. But Gandhi opposed this view. Stressing on the unity of all classes he said:

"We would be fools if we wantonly set labour against capital. It would be just the way to play into the hands of a government which would greatly strengthen its hold on the country by setting capitalists against labourers and vice versa". 27

27. Young India; April 20, 1921, p. 124.
Obviously, Gandhi was aware of the CSP's Class War approach and this made him unhappy at many times but he never developed an attitude of hostility towards them. This is evident from his statement he made on socialist programme on September 17, 1934 as:

"I have welcomed the formation of the socialist group. Many of them are respected and self-sacrificing co-workers. With all this, I have fundamental differences with them on the programme published in their authorised pamphlets. But I would not, by reason of the moral pressure I may be able to exert, suppress the spread of ideas propounded in their literature with the spread of those ideas, however, distasteful some of them may be to me."

Many of the Socialists had great reverence for Gandhi and his political techniques of mass organisation and Satyagraha against the imperialists. But there appeared fundamentally and ideologically difference of thought between them. To fill up this ideological gap Gandhi tried his best and had regular exchange of views through correspondence.

In October 1934, with Gandhi's resignation from the Congress a new situation developed. Gandhi's own remark, "If they gain ascendency in the Congress, as they well may, I cannot remain in the Congress," put a state of confusion. Could his resignation from Congress be accepted as an escape or fear of socialists in the Congress. But Gandhi's retirement from active politics was not any challenge to his position or ascendency of socialist camp

in the Congress. Gandhi had something more positive that he decided to devote himself more to the cause of constructive activities. Constructive programme was deemed by them as "which suits the Britishers and retreat from the goal of complete independence". He was criticised as a "reformist" whose "insistence on the preservation of traditional hierarchical structure was regarded nothing than status quo which favoured British and propertied classes".

Gandhi proposed many suggestions at Bombay Congress session, 1934, to the Congress Constitution designed with his efforts to make Congress 'indigenous' and save from 'disruption'. These were:

I. Congress creed be changed from "peaceful and legitimate" methods to "truth and non-violent".

II. Spinning be made essential for the Congress membership.

III. Khadi wearing necessary for voting right in the party election.

IV. Reduction in Congress delegates from six thousand to one thousand.

The CSP leaders feared that these amendments were aimed against them to drive them out of the Congress. In the Congress session of 1934, the CSP leaders could neither prevent Gandhi's amendments to the party constitution nor were able to substitute


31. John Patrick Haithcox; Communism and Nationalism in India, op. cit.; p. 218.
their programme for his constructive programme. They doubted
that these amendments might eliminate them. But after discussion
with Gandhi they got assurance from him not to press his amendments
more. The CSP fear was most undesirable because Gandhi never
intended to intimidate or drive out any faction from anti-
imperialist front. Actually these amendments were designed to
make congress socialists more practical and Indian socialists
since Gandhi doubted on the efficacy of imported socialism in the
context of Indian problems. He wanted to harmonise the CSP to
the Indian value system. His endeavour was to substitute the
violence-prone-socialism of the West with the indigenous non-
vviolent socialism.

The policy towards 562 Princely States also became subject
of interaction between Gandhi and the CSP. The CSP put forward a
short-cut approach "The elimination of Princes" as one of the
principles on which "the future constitution of Indian State
shall be based".32 According to Jayaprakash, "Princes will only
have to be removed from their gaddis and reduced to the status
of ordinary citizens".33 Gandhi's role in the formation of
policy towards Princes was based on his pragmatic non-violent
nature. In this context he told Masani, "To say you will do
something which is entirely beyond your power is unnecessarily
to make the Princes your enemy."34 Explaining his attitude in this

32. AICSP Conference at Bombay, October 20, 1934.
respect Gandhi said, "Let the Princes know that I am their well-wisher from the bottom of my heart". He further said, "My attitude towards the Indian states and their rulers is that of perfect friendship. I desire a radical reform in their constitution. But reform has to come from within and alarmed the Princes along with that the Socialist leaders of the Congress were talking of pensioning off the petty states. Convincing them further Gandhi told, "that they need not to be afraid".  

In view of the fear of socialist leaders, Gandhi advised the Princes to help the cause of constructive programme i.e. Khadi, village industries, Harijan uplift, prohibition etc. This was the technique of Gandhi in getting their support to the nation-building. He aimed at purification of Princes' relation with their people. To Gandhi, "a Prince is acceptable if he becomes a Prince among his peoples' servants. The subjects are the real masters..." So Gandhi said, "Princes would at once recognise the force of such enlightened and forceful public opinion".  

In reply to the hardline policy of CSP towards elimination of princely rule, Congress under Gandhi's guidance adopted a policy of non-interference with states. The CSP policy of interference, Gandhi thought would have led to violence, confrontation and bloodshed which would have weakened the national movement.

Gandhi opposed the Class War approach of the CSP because, for the British it would be divide and rule and to the nationalist

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36. Young India; January 8, 1925, p. 15.
forces it would be divide and destroy. Hence he laid great stress on unity of all classes. He had a very clear vision and therefore, wanted to be benefitted by the long experience and expertise of rich classes which they had earned so far. Unlike the leftists, he never developed hatred and class-war approach towards capitalists and zamindars.

Despite vehement criticism by the CSP leaders, there were many namely Narendra Deva and Jayaprakash Narayan, who realised the need of value-based politics and came very much closer to Gandhism. In the words of Narendra Deva, "It would be earnest endeavour to follow the ideals and traditions of Mahatma Gandhi". There were many other socialists who regarded Gandhi much and had personal friendship with him. The CSP leaders participated in all the movements led by Gandhi, despite their criticism of Gandhi. They got influenced by his personality when they came closer to him during the struggle movements and this brought about a change in their ideas as they turned from the Marxism to Gandhism.

Jayaprakash Narayan became a leading follower of Gandhi. M.L. Dantwala and M.R. Masani also came to better understanding of Trusteeship concept.

The Trusteeship was not only moral or philosophic concept. It had socialist tone which shows socialists' influence on Gandhi. The practical trusteeship formula was prepared by M.L. Dantwala with the help of K.G. Mashruwala and Narhari Parikh.37

37. Harijan; October 25, 1952, pp. 300-301.
Neither Socialists nor Gandhi in his Trusteeship keep property under the control of individual for his personal profit motive but subserve for the common use under society. This brings the two ideologies nearer and shows the fruitful consequence of the interaction that took place between different ideologies.