

Extracts from the book, "Communism And Nationalism In India" by John Haithcox.

Chapter 9. page 219.

Socialism at this time was in vogue among young, educated Indians, but it more closely represented an ill-defined sentiment than a distinct ideology. The leadership of the CSP in the 1930's reflected the inchoate nature of Indian socialism.

Among the party's ten most influential leaders, not less than three disparate political orientations were to be found. Narayan and Acharya Narendra Deva were Marxists. Minoo R. Masani, a former member of the British Labour Party, and Asoka Mehta were democratic socialists. Achyut Patwardhan and Rammonahar Lohia shared Gandhi's faith in governmental and economic decentralization and non-violent revolution as applied to both the nationalist struggle and class conflict. (b)

The platform and policies of the party represented a tenuous balance between the various contending points of view of its leaders. The party was described as Marxist, but not Marxist-Leninist - the latter would have implied a commitment, which was not shared by all, to the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat. As a compromise, the party was not affiliated either with the Second (socialist) or the Third (communist) Internationals. (12) Marxists did not constitute a majority within the leadership cadre, but they were the most influential group among the party rank and file. Consequently, CSP pronouncements were heavily larded with Marxian terms, which gave the party a more radical appearance than was, in fact, the case.

Footnote (b) - How varied were the political views of these early socialist leaders can be seen in tracing their subsequent careers. Narayan came under the influence of Gandhian ideas in the 1940's, and later, in 1954, formally eschewed politics in order to devote himself to work in the Bhoodan Yagna movement of Vinobha Bhave, a disciple of Gandhi. Masani resigned from the CSP in 1939 and in 1959 helped found the Swatantra (Freedom) party, which is a firm advocate of the free enterprise system. Asoka Mehta left the Praja Socialist Party (PSP), the successor of the CSP, in 1962 and joined the Congress Party. In January 1966, he became planning minister in Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's cabinet. The late Rammonahar Lohia was expelled from the PSP in 1955 because of his views and unaccommodating attitude. Lohia, who died in October 1967, was the founder of the Samyukta Socialist Party. (SSP)

Note to No. 12 - Masani, pp. 53-54. See also Thomas A. Rusch, "Dynamics of Socialist Leadership in India," in Richard L. Park and Irene Tinker, eds., "Leadership and Political Institutions in India" (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959), p. 189.

The most important unit of the all-India CSP was in the industrial city of Bombay, where many of the party's early leaders, such as Asoka Mehta, Minoo Masani, Purnshottam Tricundas, Achyut Patwardhan, and Yusuf Meherally were active. Bombay was also the major center of the Royists, many of whom joined the Bombay CSP. Among the most prominent of these, in addition of Mascarenhas, were: Maniben Kara, secretary of the All-India Trade Union Council (AITUC) in 1936; R.A. Khedgikar, vice-president of the AITUC in 1937 and a member of the Bombay Legislative Assembly in 1937-39; and Dr. M.R. Shetty, a founder of the Bombay Transport and Dock Workers' Union. V.B. Karnik, another prominent Royist in Bombay, did not formally join the CSP, but was active in the trade-union field. Although Tayab Shaikh made his base in Bombay, he was also engaged in organizational efforts on behalf of Roy throughout India. During the years 1933-35, however, he was in prison. Despite their numbers, Royists in Bombay were continually frustrated in their efforts to exert influence within the CSP due to the unsympathetic attitude displayed toward them by such socialist leaders as M.R. Masani and Purnshottam Tricundas. (46)

Note to no. 46 - Letter from Bombay associates to Roy, Bombay, Dec. 12, 1934, File No. 111/2, Roy Archives.

Roy's Break With The CSP

It was hoped, according to Narayan, that because of their early association with the CSP, the Royists would eventually merge with the party. (55) But this was not to be. When the CSP was first formed, Roy had felt that if its more radical leaders were encouraged, the party might conceivably become, in his words, "the rallying ground of the radical elements of the de-classed intellectuals - the elements objectively heading toward the party of the proletariat." Although he found several of the party's leaders, such as M.R. Masani and Purshottam Das, "objectionable," he felt that some of them, such as Kamaladevi and Meherally, were "promising." For this reason, he has urged his followers "to meet them half-way and guide them forwards." (56)

He regarded the party as a whole, however, with disdain as representing merely a "vague, heterogeneous radical tendency in the national movement." (57)

Given the nature of its politically disparate membership, he suspected that the CSP, if left to its own devices, would very likely "degenerate" into "reformism," i.e., "bourgeois-parliamentarianism." (58) Roy held, however, that nowhere had a strong communist party developed before such "reformist" parties were split. He felt that in China, for example, the nationalist Kuomintang, which he also regarded as "petty-bourgeois," had been the source of the most active cadre of the Chinese Communist Party. Consequently, he directed his followers to join the CSP with the object, not of merging with it, but of splitting it and absorbing the "real proletarian elements." (59)

In June 1936, an alleged Royist document was brought to the attention of the CSP executive in which Roy's followers were exhorted to "liquidate" the party. However, the matter was dropped when the two Royist members of the executive, Charles Mascarenhas and Rajani Mukherji, repudiated the document as spurious. (60)

On the eve of Roy's release from jail in late 1936, the CSP, despite growing doubts about Roy's intentions, issued a statement extending to him a "most hearty welcome," and expressing the hope that "this veteran revolutionary" would "utilize every opportunity to unify the anti-imperialist struggle and unite the socialist movement in the country." (61) Soon thereafter Roy received a visit from Narayan, the general secretary of the CSP. Although Roy was critical of certain policies of the CSP, Narayan left the meeting feeling assured of Roy's cooperation and support. (62) Roy's subsequent behavior came as a rude shock to the party.

Soon after the meeting Roy began to issue a series of public statements attacking the policies of the CSP. Finally, at a meeting of Royists in New Delhi in March 1937, a decision was reached to resign from the CSP. Furthermore,

Roy instructed his followers to resign in groups at intervals, rather than en bloc, in order to create the impression of a collapse of the party. To secure maximum effect, each group resignation was to be accompanied by a press statement expressing dissatisfaction with CSP policy. (63)

When the CSP executive learned of the Delhi meeting, its members could not agree on a course of action. Masani called for the immediate expulsion of the Royists from the party. The party's only response, however, was the issuance of a circular letter which accused both the Royists and the CPI of "fractionalism" and warned them of the possibility of disciplinary action. "Fractionalism" was defined as including any of all of the following activities: creating a group hostile to the party leadership for the purpose of capturing or splitting the party; libelling the party, the making of statements or committing of acts with the aim of discrediting the party; and attacking members of the party or a section of its leadership in order to cast doubt on their good faith and thus isolate them. (64)

At about the same time, three Royists, Charles Mascarenhas, Madan Shetty, and Dr. M.R. Shetty, were expelled from the Bombay CSP for working in behalf of Congress candidates instead of the CSP's own candidates in the February elections to the Bombay PCC and the AICC. (65) The first two were members of the newly-elected Bombay PCC. The CSP leaders suspected collusion between the Royists and the Congress right wing in an effort to keep socialists out of the AICC; for after the elections, Maniben Kara, a Royist who had resigned earlier from the CSP, was coopted to the AICC with the support of a right-wing Congressman. (66)

From April through August, as planned, groups of Royists located in various provinces of India resigned from the CSP. As a result of these maneuvers Roy and his group earned the undying enmity of the socialists. Narayan felt that Roy had acted in bad faith and that his behavior had constituted a betrayal of the socialist cause. Writing some years later, he commented bitterly on the affair. "After more than a year and a half of close cooperation our Royist friends left us with a parting kick . . . The entire responsibility," he charged, "for disrupting the measure of unity that had been achieved must be laid at the door of the Royists, and above all of Shri Roy." (67)

By alienating the socialists, Roy denied himself the support of a group that achieved a considerable measure of influence in the Congress party in the latter half of the 1930's. The CSP had the sympathy of Jawaharlal Nehru, though he steadfastly ~~refrained~~ refrained from joining the party. As we shall see, when Nehru was chosen President of the Congress party in 1936, three of their members were nominated to the Congress Working Committee, and socialists were represented on several important committees. Moreover, a study of the votes taken at the annual Congress sessions and the session of the AICC between 1936 and 1939 has revealed that the socialists were able to attract during this period the support of approximately a third of Congress delegates. (68) Their influence, however, far exceeded their actual numbers. In 1936 the CSP could claim a membership of only two thousand, in contrast to the Congress claim of two million. (69)

Note to no. 55 - Narayan, "Socialist Unity and the Congress Socialist Party",
p. 4.

Note to no. 56 - Letter from Roy to Bombay associates, Dehra Dun, May 5, 1935,
File 111/3, Roy Archives.

Note to no. 57 - Ibid; October 29, 1934, File No. 111/2, Roy Archives.

Note to no. 58 - Ibid; March 12, 1935, File No. 111/3, Roy Archives.

Note to no. 59 - Ibid; October 29, 1934, File No. 111/2, Roy Archives.

Note to no. 60 - "CSP Reply to the Royists," loc.cit.

Note to no. 61 - Congress Socialist (Bombay), Nov. 21, 1936, p. 11.

Note to no. 62 - Ibid.

Note to no. 63 - Minocher R. Masani, "General Secretary Indicts M.N. Roy,"
Congress Socialist (Bombay), June 26, 1937, pp. 18-19. See also Independent
India (Bombay), July 4, 1937, p. 9.

Note to no. 64 - Congress Socialist (Bombay), April 10, 1937, p. 17.

Note to no. 65 - Minocher R. Masani, "Good Ridance of Bad Rubbish," Congress
Socialist (Bombay), March 13, 1937, p. 18.

Note to no. 66 - Ibid; March 6, 1937, p. 6.

Note to no. 67 - Narayan, "Socialist Unity and the Congress Socialist Party",
pp. 6-8.

Note to no. 68 - Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, "The Working Committee of the Indian
Congress Party: Its Powers, Organisation and Personnel" (Paper No. D/52-2,
Center for International Studies, Massachusetts Institute of Technology,
Cambridge, Mass; 1955), p. 33.

Note to no. 69 - Rusch, "Role of the Congress Socialist Party," p. 169.

In contrast to the fortunes of the communists, the socialists, as a result of the alliance, nearly lost control of their own party. By 1937, members of the CPI were holding a number of high offices in the CSP. Two of them, E.M.S. Namboodripad and Sajjad Zaheer, were joint secretaries of the CSP, and two others were on its executive committee. In the 1938 elections to the CSP executive committee, the communists, not satisfied with the "official" list of candidates, which allotted them a third of the seats and two of the four joint secretaryships, sponsored an alternative list which would have given them a majority on the executive. The communist list was defeated, but only by a narrow margin. (78)

In the face of this and similar provocations, members of the CSP executive could not agree among themselves on what to do and consequently matters were allowed to drift. As a result of exposures by M.R. Masani of confidential CPI documents which revealed the communists' intention of either capturing the CSP or destroying it, it had been decided as early as August 1937 to discontinue the policy of admitting communists to the party. However, those who had already joined had been allowed to ~~remain~~ remain. (79) In an attempt to secure the expulsion of the communists, M.R. Masani, Asoka Mehta, Achyut Patwardhan, and Ramnathan Lohia resigned from the CSP executive in May 1939. (80) But it was not until May 1940 that their aim was accomplished. By this time the communists had become so well entrenched in the party that they were able to take with them from one-third to one-half of the party membership in Bengal and the Punjab, as well as the greater part of the party organization in Travancore-Cochin, Andhra, and Madras, important areas of communist influence today. (81) Moreover, as a result of the split, the CSP eventually lost control of the All-India Students Federation, the All-India Kisan Sabha, and the All-India Trade-Union Congress. (82)

Note to no. 78 - Masani, pp. 68-71

Note to no. 79 - Narayan, "Towards Struggle", p.175.

Note to no. 80 - Rusch, "Role of the Congress Socialist Party", p.354

Note to no. 81 - Ibid. Before the CSP-CPI split, these last three areas were already under the control of E.M.S. Namboodripad, P. Sundarayya, and P. Ramamurti respectively.

Note to no. 82 - Rusch, "Role of the Congress Socialist Party", p.356

Gandhi felt that Nehru's elevation to the presidency would serve to wean him from the socialists, and he assured his colleagues that if placed at the helm, Nehru would act responsibly and impartially in response to majority opinion among party leaders. Members of the Working Committee acceded to Gandhi's wish on both occasions. They knew that if Nehru got too far out of line, they could pull him back. Gandhi's maneuver worked. After Nehru had been asked to lead the party for a second time in succession, M.R. Masani lamented, with justification, that his acceptance had deprived the CSP "of its natural leader, who was so well fitted to lead it, to rally the radical forces." (3)

Note to no. 3 - Minoo R. Masani, "From Lucknow to Faizpur," Congress Socialist (Bombay), Dec. 5, 1936, p.6.

Roy was a persistent critic of Gandhi almost from the time he first appeared on the Indian scene. Gandhi was a nationalist, not only in the sense that he wanted to secure India's political independence but also in his attachment to Indian culture, and he appealed to Hindu religious values to gain support for the nationalist movement. In the debate between Roy and Lenin at the second Comintern Congress in 1920, Lenin had maintained that as a leader of a nationalist, anti-imperialist movement, Gandhi was a revolutionary; whereas Roy had insisted that "as a religious and cultural revivalist, he was bound to be reactionary socially, however revolutionary he might appear politically."⁽⁵¹⁾ In support of this view, Roy had cited Flekhanov's similar judgment of Russian Populist and Social Revolutionary movements, which Roy felt corresponded with Gandhism in that, believing in the special genius of the Slavic race, they had denounced capitalism as a Western vice and championed a return to the village and the revival of the mirs.^(b)

Footnote (b) - Flekhanov's early faith in the populist movement was shaken by the resort of a section of its members to terrorism, which he considered irrational and senseless, and by mounting statistical evidence that the village commune was a dying institution. In 1884 he published an attack on populism entitled, Our Differences in which he held that, contrary to the views of his erstwhile allies, capitalism was the dominant economic force in Russia and that the hope of the future lay with the proletariat rather than the peasantry. (Georgii V. Flekhanov, 'Our Differences' in ~~his~~ 'Selected Works', I, prepared by the Institute of Philosophy of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1961), pp. 141-400).

Note to no. 51 - M.N. Roy, "Disagreement with Lenin," Radical Humanist, XVII: 25 (1952): 292.