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**Non-violent Action and Socialist Radicalism:
Narendra Deva in India's freedom
movement**

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Non-violent Action and Socialist Radicalism: Narendra Deva in India's Freedom Movement*

Anil Nauriya

1. Introduction

The dynamic that linked non-violent movements for Indian freedom in the first half of the twentieth century with socialist participation in these movements along with socialist initiatives in peasant and workers' movements is reflected in the understanding that socialists led by Acharya Narendra Deva (1889–1956) developed especially on prevailing national and international class relations, particularly those between the imperial regime and dominant landed interests. While not wishing to confine themselves within a theoretical frame of truth and non-violence, Socialists theorized their participation in the non-violent movements. As the pre-eminent theoretician of the Congress Socialist Party established in 1934, Narendra Deva's understanding is of significance in providing an alternative Marxist and radical understanding of the Indian movement for freedom.¹ In writings on possible areas of agreement between Marxism and the Gandhi-led movements, Narendra Deva addressed matters concerning possibilities of convergence of the two strands of thought and method. This discussion traversed a fascinating range of issues, including matters concerning the ideological or

* Revised version of the paper 'Non-violent Action and Indian Socialists: A study of Narendra Deva in the freedom movement' presented at a conference titled 'Non-violent Resistance in South Asian History' held at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi, 20–21 February 2014.

¹ He has been appropriately described as "the leading exponent in the socialist movement in India of Marxism". See Paul Brass, *Factional Politics in an Indian State: The Congress Party in Uttar Pradesh*, Bombay, Oxford University Press, 1966, p. 38.



organizational “ownership” of Marxism itself, ultimately confirming socialist participation in the Gandhi-led movements including the constructive programme of the Congress in the pre-independence period.

Born in the same year as Jawaharlal Nehru, Narendra Deva was to become a scholar of ancient India and of Buddhism, a lawyer and, after the Bolshevik Revolution, a keen student of Karl Marx and Lenin. He presided over the founding convention of the Congress Socialist Party held in Patna in May 1934. The early Indian socialists, like Narendra Deva, did not range themselves against the erstwhile Soviet Union or Marxism. The Congress Socialist Party came into being within the Congress as a Marxist party. Julius Braunthal notes, quite perceptively, that “(i)n its origins ... the Congress Socialist Party was not simply a Marxist party in the tradition of the European Social Democratic parties, but rather a party of the Bolshevik version of Marxism”.² Narendra Deva stands at the head of the particular Indian Marxist tradition which was not part of the communist movement, associated itself organically with the national struggle, and also remained for a long time open to possibilities of co-operation with other Left groups, including the communists. Narendra Deva remained a Marxist throughout his life. Even as late as 1950 the Socialist Party was seen as a Marxist group having, in the words of Braunthal, “evolved from the Bolshevik version of Marxism to a Marxist version of humanitarian democratic socialism”.³ In May 1952 at the Pachmarhi Convention of the Socialist Party, when Narendra Deva was away in China, Dr. Rammanohar Lohia, who was voted to the chair, took the opportunity to expound his doctrine, widely seen as marking the party’s departure from Marxism. In the ideological ferment and the political developments that followed, Narendra Deva shared his thoughts on 3 September 1952 in a letter to Asoka Mehta, his party colleague, making it clear that he would rather give up the party than abandon

² Julius Braunthal, *History of the International*, Vol. 3, (1943–1968), London, Victor Gollancz, 1980, p. 224.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 236.



Marxism.⁴ The position adopted by Narendra Deva, who was to live only for another three-and-a-half years, was in contrast to that of other leading figures, like Jayaprakash Narayan, who had by this time already turned their back on Marxism.

Narendra Deva's place in the history of Marxist socialism in India may be gauged from the remarks made by E.M.S. Namboodiripad, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) leader, at a function held at Teen Murti in New Delhi on 19 February 1989 to observe Narendra Deva's 33rd death anniversary. At this function, held around the time also of Narendra Deva's birth centenary year 1989–1990, Namboodiripad recalled that it was with Narendra Deva's speech at the Foundation Conference of the Congress Socialists held at Patna in May 1934 that he had first been exposed to Marxist socialism.⁵ Later he read Jayaprakash Narayan's "*Why Socialism?*", published in 1936.⁶ Another speech by Narendra Deva that influenced Namboodiripad was the one Narendra Deva made while seconding the Congress election manifesto at the All India Congress Committee in 1936.⁷

2. In the Freedom Movement

Brought up in an atmosphere suffused with patriotic feeling, Narendra Deva made an early translation into Hindi of Aurobindo Ghose's Bengali language articles on nationalism.⁸ He was drawn simultaneously to the Indian National Congress and the Home Rule League; of the latter Narendra Deva established in 1916 a branch in Faizabad district, United Provinces, where he was

⁴ Madhu Limaye, *Age of Hope*, Delhi, Atma Ram & Sons, 1986, p. 335.

⁵ Based on notes taken by the author at the meeting.

⁶ For text see *Jayaprakash Narayan Selected Works*, Vol. 2, Bimal Prasad (ed.), New Delhi, Manohar, 2001, pp. 1–89.

⁷ A report of this speech is available in Hari Dev Sharma (ed.), *Selected Works of Acharya Narendra Deva*, (hereinafter SW-AND), Vol. 1, New Delhi, Radiant Publishers, 1998, pp. 76–77.

⁸ See "Jatiyata", in *Acharya Narendra Deva Papers* (VI to X instalments, printed material, serial no. 2), Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi.

practicing as a lawyer, and became its secretary.⁹ Three years later he was a delegate at the Congress session held in Amritsar in the wake of the political crisis of 1919 and the massacre at Jallianwala Bagh.¹⁰ After the Nagpur session of the Congress in 1920, Narendra Deva suspended his legal practice and joined the non-co-operation movement.¹¹ No pre-independence Congress movement thereafter was without some significant contribution or participation by him.

From a relatively early stage, Narendra Deva discerned the interconnectedness of many incipient developments. In 1921, an agrarian agitation in the United Provinces culminated on 7 January in police firing at Munshiganj in the Rae Bareilly district.¹² At least seven persons were killed and many were wounded in the agitation and the firing incident. The *kisans* (peasants) had been demanding restrictions on evictions and on forced labour and abolition of illegal cesses and exactions. The movement affected Pratapgarh, Rae Bareilly and many districts of Oudh. Narendra Deva did not view the non-co-operation movement and the peasant risings as competing phenomena; he saw the dialectic between these movements:

⁹ See Mukut Behari Lal, *Acharya Narendra Deva*, Varanasi, Acharya Narendra Deva Samajwadi Sansthan, 1967, p. 1; Vishvanath Sharma, *Acharya Narendra Deva*, Benares, Samaj Vigyan Parishad, Kashi Vidyapith, n.d.; and Raghukul Tilak, "As a Speaker and Writer", in B.V. Keskar and V.K.N. Menon (eds), *Acharya Narendra Deva: A Commemoration Volume*, New Delhi, National Book Trust, 1971, p. 111.

¹⁰ Sri Prakasa, "Combination of Greatness and Goodness", in Keskar and Menon (eds), *op. cit.*, p. 121.

¹¹ "Acharya Narendra Deva", Yusuf Meherally in *Socialism and The National Revolution* by Acharya Narendra Deva, Yusuf Meherally (ed.), Bombay, Padma Publications, 1946, p. xi (representative selection from political writings of Acharya Narendra Deva). On the evolution of the non-co-operation movement see *Indulal Yajnik Papers*, (Serial No 16: Loose Articles; Indulal Yajnik, "Memories of Non-co-operation"), Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Teen Murti, New Delhi.

¹² "Kisan Movement in the U.P.", *Congress Socialist*, 28 November 1936; reproduced in *Socialism and The National Revolution*, Meherally (ed.), *ibid.*, pp. 56–61 at p. 60. See also H.N. Mitra (ed.), *Indian Annual Register*, 1921–22, Vol. 1, [Reprint], New Delhi, Gian Publishing House, 1990, p. 6 and p. 156.

The strongly organized kisans compelled the Oudh officials to reconsider the rent-revenue legislations. Evictions by notice were stopped. ... At that time the non-co-operation movement was at its height. The Government did not want the Kisan agitation to get linked up with that movement. For this reason also the Government became more responsive to the Kisan demands.¹³

An understanding of this symbiosis between the national movement and the peasant and workers' struggles illumines Narendra Deva's political and ideological positions. Narendra Deva's involvement with the non-co-operation movement was expressed also in his association with the "national schools" that emerged at the time. At the behest of Jawaharlal Nehru, he joined the faculty of the Kashi Vidyapith, the national university founded in Benares in 1921, which evolved into a famous seminary of the Indian freedom struggle. Of this institution he became the Principal in 1926.¹⁴

Associated with the Independence of India League established in 1928 by Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhas Bose, and others, Narendra Deva became, towards the end of the year, secretary of its UP provincial branch. In the midst of his commitments as an educationist, Narendra Deva also played a role in the agitation against the Simon Commission in Benares.¹⁵ The all-white Commission, intended to gauge India's "fitness" for further Constitutional development, had visited Benares in February 1928. Narendra Deva was thinking not merely in terms of Constitutional advance but also on the need for an economic programme that could be taken up or supported. In early 1929 he wrote to Nehru stressing the need for "providing intellectual food for our people";

¹³ "Kisan Movement in the U.P.", *Congress Socialist*, *ibid.*, p. 60.

¹⁴ "Acharya Narendra Deva", Yusuf Meherally in Yusuf Meherally (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. vii.

¹⁵ Narendra Deva does not refer to this. But Raghukul Tilak, an associate of Narendra Deva, and himself a freedom fighter from the then United Provinces, mentions Narendra Deva's role in the Simon Commission boycott in his note on Narendra Deva in S.P. Sen (ed.), *Dictionary of National Biography*, Vol. 3, Calcutta, Institute of Historical Studies, 1974, p. 237.

towards this end he suggested that the Independence of India League should have a weekly paper, organize study circles and the like and also have a clear economic programme.¹⁶ Later in the year, the United Provinces Trade Union Conference was held under the Presidentship of Jawaharlal Nehru at Kanpur on 7 September 1929. At this conference Narendra Deva urged that “the future constitution of India should pay due regard to the rights of labour” and emphasized the need to guarantee a minimum living wage, free education, and medicine and to declare land as “the property of the community and not of any individual”.¹⁷ While Narendra Deva had come early into contact with Nehru, his close association with Gandhi dates, according to the Congress leader Sri Prakasa, from the annual convocation of Kashi Vidyapith in 1929 where Gandhi delivered the convocation address in the last week of September.¹⁸ Later the same month, within a few days of the convocation at Kashi Vidyapith, Gandhi was named as Congress President at the All India Congress Committee session held at Lucknow, a nomination which he declined. Thereafter the names of Vallabhbhai Patel, with the positive glow of his recent leadership of the peasant struggle in Bardoli, and of Jawaharlal Nehru were in the field for the office.¹⁹ Indicating his preference for Nehru, Narendra Deva joined Balkrishna Sharma of Kanpur in seeking to create some pressure, such as it may then have been, on Patel not to let his name go forward.²⁰ This perhaps caused the first of

¹⁶ Letter to Jawaharlal Nehru, 9 February 1929, SW-AND-1, p. 3.

¹⁷ SW-AND-1, p. 8.

¹⁸ Sri Prakasa, “Combination of Greatness and Goodness”, in B.V. Keskar and V.K.N. Menon (eds), *Acharya Narendra Deva: A Commemoration Volume*, New Delhi, National Book Trust, 1971, p. 123. Sri Prakasa was the son of Dr. Bhagavan Das and close to Jawaharlal Nehru and Narendra Deva. He was general secretary of the United Provinces Provincial Congress Committee at this time. For Gandhi’s convocation address on this occasion, see *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (CWMG), Vol. 41, pp. 463–466.

¹⁹ *Indian Annual Register*, 1929, Vol. 2, p. 262. Jawaharlal Nehru’s name was proposed by Balkrishna Sharma of Kanpur, Patel’s by Pandit Gourishanker. Apparently on Gandhi’s intervention, Patel declined the consent to Pandit Gourishanker’s proposal.

²⁰ Rajmohan Gandhi, *Patel: A Life*, Ahmedabad, Navajivan Publishing House, 1991, p. 181.

the strains that would occur between Narendra Deva and Patel.²¹ Irrespective of these events, however, Narendra Deva was invited to deliver the convocation address at Gujarat Vidyapith which followed barely over three months later on 11 January 1930, with Gandhi presiding over the event.²²

Narendra Deva participated in the Civil Disobedience movement of 1930; he was arrested at Basti in the United Provinces in June 1930 and sentenced to three months rigorous imprisonment. News of the nature of the sentence, if not the arrest itself, seemed to have caused some surprise to Jawaharlal Nehru, then already incarcerated in Naini Central Prison, Allahabad.²³ Narendra Deva had already involved himself with peasant struggles and when, in the wake of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact of 1931, the Congress in UP appointed a committee to inquire into the prevailing agricultural situation and into such acts of the government as were in breach of the Pact, Narendra Deva became a member of the further inquiry committees set up for Gorakhpur and Basti districts.²⁴ The reports on Gorakhpur and on Basti

²¹ Narendra Deva makes an allusion to the September 1929 events a decade later in his statement on the Congress Presidential election of 1939, asking, "... is it not a fact that Mahatmaji experienced some difficulty in persuading Sardar Patel not to contest the ... election with Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru". (*National Herald*, 28 January 1939, SW-AND-1, p. 146).

²² See CWMG, Vol. 42, pp. 387–390.

²³ Jawaharlal Nehru, "Prison Diary", in *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru* (SWJN), Vol. 4, New Delhi, Orient Longman, 1973, p. 367.

²⁴ *Agrarian Distress in the United Provinces: Report of the Committee Appointed by the Council of the U.P. Provincial Congress Committee to Enquire into the Agrarian Situation in the Province*, September 1931, republished, Gurgaon, Prabhu Publications, n.d., p. 49. The report can also be found as an appendix to B.R. Nanda (ed.), *Selected Works of Govind Ballabh Pant*, Vol. 5, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1996. The province-level committee comprised Govind Ballabh Pant, Rafi Ahmad Kidwai, and Venkatesh Narain Tiwary. The police-zamindar nexus is also well-documented in the report and its annexures. In some other provinces there were at this time still more direct police interventions against the peasantry. See, for instance, Rev. Fr. Verrier Elwin, *In the Deserted Villages of Gujarat*, Bombay, published by Chimanlal J. Shah, 1931. Elwin wrote this a month before the Gandhi-Irwin Pact.

documented, inter alia, police and administrative connivance in the reign of the zamindars and their illegal exactions.²⁵ In the following year when he led a batch of his students to participate in the no-rent campaign, Narendra Deva was again arrested in October and imprisoned in Benares District Jail from where he was released in June 1933.²⁶ At the beginning of 1934 Jawaharlal Nehru thought of Narendra Deva as a possible general secretary of the United Provinces Provincial Congress Committee in succession to Sri Prakasa who had wished, for personal reasons, to give up the assignment which he had held since 1928.²⁷ Narendra Deva's name was considered by Nehru particularly in the light of the fact that "the person who takes up the secretaryship must be prepared to go off to prison at any moment".²⁸

A few months later, in May 1934, the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) was formed within the Congress with Narendra Deva presiding over its founding convention at Patna. Various factors contributed to its formation, including the feeling among its initiators that the Congress was not doing enough to organize the peasants and workers. Nearly two decades later Madhu Limaye would point out yet another aspect which had contributed to the sentiment behind its formation, related not to Congress omissions as such but to an attitude taken up by the Communists especially after 1928. Writing in 1952, Limaye observed: "Had the communists taken up a friendly attitude towards nationalism ... it is doubtful whether the CSP would have come into existence at all."²⁹ In July 1934, Gandhi visited Benares and a Socialists' deputation led by Narendra Deva called on him to press the

²⁵ *Agrarian Distress in the United Provinces*, op. cit., pp. 190–197.

²⁶ SW-AND-1, p. 330.

²⁷ Jawaharlal Nehru to Sri Prakasa, 11 January 1934, SWJN, Vol. 6, New Delhi, Orient Longman, 1974, pp. 84–87.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

²⁹ Madhu Limaye, *Evolution of Socialist Policy*, Hyderabad, Chetana Prakashan, 1952, p. 2. Cited after Braunthal, op. cit., p. 225. The language in the quote by Braunthal differs slightly from the words quoted by me here from Limaye's booklet but the meaning is the same.

socialist programme as outlined at Patna.³⁰ They had come to express their resentment especially of a Congress Working Committee resolution, adopted in June following upon the socialists' Patna conference of May 1934, and the reference in the resolution to "loose talk about confiscation of private property and necessity of class war", which the socialists saw as directed at themselves.³¹ Gandhi offered to place their suggestions before the Congress Committee but advised the socialists "to abide by the Congress decision without attempting to create unnecessary splits in Congress ranks or take over charge of the Congress machinery including its executive".³² The diary maintained by Mahadev Desai, Gandhi's secretary, suggests that there were at least two such meetings in Benares between Gandhi and the socialists on this occasion; Narendra Deva had made a number of observations and put some searching questions.³³ For example, he observed : "The constructive programme you drafted at Wardha is unable to lead towards the path of attaining freedom"; "(t)he Congress has made no effort to organize the Indian labour"; "(f)rom the viewpoint of independence a constructive programme is of no consequence"; "(i)f the political education of the people or their orientation about the economic principles is undermined, freedom might not come for thousands of years"; and that "(i)f a mass organization of peasants and workers has to take place, it can be only on the basis of class and therefore class consciousness must be created".³⁴

Narendra Deva reminded Gandhi: "Capitalism today is sustained by British imperialism. You have already said that you

³⁰ "Discussion with Socialists' Deputation", 27 July 1934, CWMG, Vol. 58, p. 253.

³¹ For the Congress Working Committee Resolution of 17–18 June 1934 see *Indian Annual Register*, Vol. 1, p. 300.

³² "Discussion with Socialists' Deputation", 27 July 1934, CWMG, Vol. 58, p. 254.

³³ "Dialogue with Narendra Dev etc...", 28 July 1934, Mahadev Desai [Mahendra Valjibhai Desai (ed.)], *Mahadevbhai's Diary*, Vol. 19, New Delhi, National Gandhi Museum, 2010, pp. 11–17.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 12–13.



did not object if class consciousness is awakened by non-violent means. We have become socialists only to attain freedom.”³⁵ In a letter to Narendra Deva a few weeks later, Gandhi described the conversations as “hearty” but advised him and other socialists to think in terms of a “practical socialism” as against their “scientific socialism”.³⁶ Yet the dialogue with the socialists gave impetus to a reflexive thought process in Gandhi, a process already underway in his creative tension with Jawaharlal Nehru. Fifteen days later Gandhi wrote to Nehru about books that Narendra Deva and his socialist colleague Minoo Masani had recommended: “I have read one of the books Masani gave me and now I am devoting all my spare time to reading the book recommended by Narendra Deva.”³⁷ And within the next fortnight, towards the end of August, Gandhi had begun to give expression to his idea of leaving the Congress.³⁸ In a letter to Patel in the first week of September, Gandhi explained the reasons: he felt he had become a dead weight upon the Congress and his presence was estranging the intelligentsia from it; he referred to “the growing group of socialists” among whom he counted many “self-sacrificing co-workers”; and he desired that their “reason must be set free”.³⁹ Gandhi’s political connection with the Congress and with many leading socialists remained strong despite his formal retirement from the Congress organization which he announced in mid-September and gave effect to at the end of October.⁴⁰

Contrary to the oft-projected image of radical political figures being pushed to the margin of Congress politics, Narendra Deva remained, as we shall see, strongly entrenched within the Congress for much of the period till March 1948 when socialists parted company with the parent party. In April 1936, Jawaharlal Nehru,

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

³⁶ Letter to Narendra Deva, 2 August 1934, CWMG, Vol. 58, p. 274.

³⁷ Letter to Jawaharlal Nehru, 17 August 1934, CWMG, Vol. 58, p. 318.

³⁸ Letter to Vallabhbhai Patel, 26/27 August 1934, CWMG, Vol. 58, p. 371.

³⁹ Letter to Vallabhbhai Patel, before 5 September 1934, CWMG, Vol. 58, p. 405.

⁴⁰ Statement to the Press, 17 September 1934, CWMG, Vol. 59, pp. 3–12; Letter to Rajendra Prasad, 30 October, 1934, CWMG, Vol. 59, p. 270.

who had already had a fairly long association with Narendra Deva, included him in the Congress Working Committee that he constituted as Congress President; Narendra Deva would remain on it till March 1938.⁴¹ At this time Narendra Deva served also as the President of the UP Pradesh Congress Committee.⁴² The years 1937–39 saw Congress ministries being formed in various provinces, including UP, under the Government of India Act 1935. The CSP had decided not to join these ministries and Narendra Deva explained his position at the All India Congress Committee meeting at Delhi in March 1937.⁴³ He warned against the notion that the legislatures under the new Act would be “reservoirs of mass power”; he wanted the Congress to engage in such work as would be “conducive to strengthening the power of the masses”.⁴⁴ In fact, the UP Premier, Govind Ballabh Pant had, in 1937, invited Narendra Deva, who had been elected to the UP Assembly, to join his government.⁴⁵ Narendra Deva, given his opposition to office acceptance, naturally declined the offer.⁴⁶ During these years he maintained the stance of a well-wishing critic, retaining his focus on mass struggle. The All India Congress Committee session at Delhi in September 1938 saw Narendra Deva lead a walk out on a resolution on civil liberties to which the Congress Working Committee had declined to accept an amendment of concern to kisans.⁴⁷ The resolution moved by Bhulabhai Desai referred to

⁴¹ *Indian Annual Register*, 1936, Vol. 1, p. 252; see also Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *The History of the Indian National Congress*, Vol. II, Bombay, Padma Publications, 1947, p. 106.

⁴² Mukut Behari Lal, *Acharya Narendra Deva: Jeevan Aur Siddhanta*, Varanasi, Acharya Narendra Deva Samajwadi Sansthan, 1971, p. 14; see also *Acharya Narendra Deva Vangmaya*, Khand 1, New Delhi, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, 2002, pp. 400–401.

⁴³ *Indian Annual Register*, 1937, Vol. 1, p. 204.

⁴⁴ *Idem.*

⁴⁵ G.B. Pant to Jawaharlal Nehru, 19 July 1937 in B.R. Nanda (ed.), *Selected Works of Govind Ballabh Pant*, Vol. 7, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 189.

⁴⁶ C.B. Gupta, *Autobiography: My Triumphs and Tragedies*, Lucknow, published by Umakant Mishra, 2003, p. 51.

⁴⁷ Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *The History of the Indian National Congress*, Vol. II, Bombay, Padma Publications, 1947, p. 106; see also *Indian Annual Register*, 1938, Vol. 2, pp. 278–279.

the increasing advocacy of violence “in the name of civil liberty” by “some people, including Congressmen” and reiterated the support to Congress governments on measures for “the defence of life and property”.⁴⁸ Narendra Deva and others apparently felt that the resolution, if passed as it stood, “would give a handle to the CID and police to harass Congressmen”.⁴⁹

Anxious that the national struggle be resumed early after the resignation of the Congress governments in 1939, Narendra Deva was keen on the Civil Disobedience programme conceived in the following year. However, he raised questions about the Individual Satyagraha programme which he found wanting in some respects.⁵⁰ He felt that the proposed agitation ought not to be confined to a mere expression of India’s right to oppose the war, as Gandhi’s statement had suggested, but be directed against the utilization of Indian human and material resources for the war. Be that as it may, Narendra Deva was for a while, until he was arrested in January 1941, provincial “dictator” of the individual civil disobedience movement in UP and acting President of the PCC.⁵¹ Narendra Deva was taken from Lucknow, where he was arrested, to Gorakhpur District Jail and then to the Agra Central Prison; he was released from the latter in September. He had reportedly taken ill in prison and Gandhi had expressed much concern over his health during the incarceration.⁵² The following year found Narendra Deva in Gandhi’s Sevagram on the eve of the meetings leading to the Quit India movement and he was involved in the drafting of some of the preliminary resolutions in 1942. A

⁴⁸ B.R. Nanda (ed.), *Selected Works of Govind Ballabh Pant*, Vol. 8, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 305.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 305n.

⁵⁰ Acharya Narendra Deva, “Vyaktigat Satyagraha Aur Azadi ki Ladai: Mahatma Gandhi Ke Vaktavya par Ek Drishti”, *Sangharsha*, 28 October 1940.

⁵¹ See Bhupen Qanungo, “The Individual Civil Disobedience (October 1940–December 1941)”, in B.N. Pande (ed.), *A Centenary History of the Indian National Congress (1885–1985)*, Vol. 3, New Delhi, All India Congress Committee (I) and Vikas Publishing House, p. 422; and Visalakshi Menon, *From Movement to Government: The Congress in the United Provinces, 1937–42*, New Delhi, Sage Publications, 2003, p. 298n.

⁵² CWMG, Vol. 74, p. 268 and fn, p. 270, and p. 344.

resolution drafted by Gandhi in April 1942 called upon Britain to “let go her hold on India”.⁵³ Of this, Gandhi wrote to Jawaharlal Nehru: “Acharya Narendra Dev has seen the resolution and liked it.”⁵⁴ In the course of information-gathering by British intelligence on the financing of the struggle, at the end of 1942 it was also reported, inter alia, that “according to a CSP worker from Bombay”, Gandhi had in May 1942 handed over a sum of seven hundred thousand rupees, collected from a Bombay businessman for the Tagore Memorial Fund, to Narendra Deva and other CSP leaders “for the nationalist movement”.⁵⁵ Whether or not this was true, it attested to the growing acknowledgement of a closeness between the Gandhi and the socialists.

Given the state of his health, Narendra Deva’s presidential address at the All India Kisan Conference at Bedaul, Muzaffarpur in June 1942 had to be read out in his absence. He questioned the People’s War thesis canvassed by the Communist Party of India and asserted that the World War could cease to be an imperialist war only if India “could feel free and obtain a charter of freedom for her millions of Kisans and labourers”.⁵⁶ During Narendra Deva’s prolonged stay with Gandhi at his Ashram in the summer of 1942 there was much interaction between them. Whether or not Narendra Deva co-drafted with Gandhi a draft of the resolution asking for British withdrawal passed by the Congress Working Committee in July 1942, as one scholar has suggested, there is

⁵³ “Draft Resolution for A.I.C.C.”, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (CWMG), Vol. 76, New Delhi, Publications Division, 1979, pp. 63–65 at p. 64.

⁵⁴ CWMG, Vol. 76, p. 66. The resolution passed in May 1942 at the AICC meeting in Allahabad, not attended by Gandhi, was less direct, emphasizing merely what India would have done in relation to the War had the country been free. See *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru* (SWJN), Vol. 12, New Delhi, Orient Longman, 1979, pp. 276–279.

⁵⁵ P.N. Chopra, *Quit India Movement*, Vol. II, New Delhi, Interprint, 1991, pp. 50–51. A year later, the office of the Secretary of State informed a British MP in regard to reports of this kind that these were largely “based on hearsay” and most such information “certainly does not amount to proof” (Chopra, op. cit., pp. 88–89).

⁵⁶ SW-AND-2, p. 28.

no doubt that he exercised appreciable influence on Gandhi's thinking at this time.⁵⁷ On 8 August 1942, Narendra Deva spoke at the All India Congress Committee meeting at Bombay in support of the Quit India resolution and on the following day he was arrested and later detained in Ahmednagar Fort.⁵⁸ He would not be released until 1945 after being moved in March of that year first to Bareilly Central Prison and next, in June, to Almora Jail. He continued to view the Quit India movement as a "majestic struggle" which breathed "a lofty spirit of internationalism".⁵⁹

3. Narendra Deva's Theoretical Construct

It was Narendra Deva's view that "The Zamindari system in India could not be destroyed unless British Imperialism in India was destroyed. With the end of British Imperialism would also end the princely order in India. It was, therefore, absolutely necessary to concentrate on the ending of British Imperialism."⁶⁰ That the colonial administration had utilized the landlords as the "underpinning" of their rule is well-documented.⁶¹ This alliance was not only embedded in the legal and economic structure but was also political. In the United Provinces too, Narendra Deva pointed out in 1938, the landlords' party, the National Agriculturist Party, "was born as the result of the midwifery of Sir Malcolm

⁵⁷ For the suggestion that a draft of the CWC resolution was done jointly by Narendra Deva and Gandhi, see K.C. Mahendru, *Gandhi and the Congress Socialist Party, 1934-48*, Jalandhar, ABS Publications, 1986, p. 272. On this matter, Mahendru relies mainly on oral conversations or indirect materials. A noteworthy suggestion that Mahendru makes is of Narendra Deva acting at this stage as a bridge between Gandhi and Nehru.

⁵⁸ A gist of Narendra Deva's speech at the Bombay AICC on 8 August 1942 appears in *The Indian Annual Register*, July-December, 1942, Vol. 2, pp. 247-248.

⁵⁹ Yusuf Meherally (ed.), op. cit., p. 187.

⁶⁰ SW-AND-1, (Speech at Kisan Conference in Motihari, 29 February 1940), p. 212.

⁶¹ See, for instance, P.D. Reeves, "Landlords and Party Politics in the United Provinces, 1934-7", in D.A. Low (ed.), *Soundings in Modern South Asian History*, London, Wiedenfeld and Nicholson, 1968, p. 262.

⁶² "Lecture on Political Parties in India", Kanpur, 31 August 1938, SW-AND-

Hailey”, the Governor of the province.⁶² That Hailey had put the weight of the “entire administrative machinery” behind the organization of this party is borne out by the evidence.⁶³ These efforts by Hailey went back virtually to the time of his appointment as Governor in 1928 and were made in the wake of the Report of the (nationalist) Motilal Nehru Committee to determine the Principles of the Constitution of India, which had recommended adult franchise entailing, if implemented, enfranchisement of millions of tenants; the Statutory Commission headed by Sir John Simon was also then due to arrive in the UP.⁶⁴ Hailey’s efforts to build a landlords’ party became “the central theme of his governorship”.⁶⁵

The essential unity between Narendra Deva and other socialists, therefore, lay in their understanding that the socialist tradition could not cut itself off from or be at cross purposes with the national movement but should instead be in the vortex of it. As Narendra Deva would put it at a party conference held at Hardoi, United Provinces, in 1952: “...our party moulded Marxism to the conditions of our country and enriched it. Our party maintained that keeping distance from national movements in the colonies was not Marxist but opportunistic and reactionary; later the communists also accepted this”.⁶⁶

In an article and pamphlet written and published in 1950–1951 Narendra Deva observed that “no injustice is done to any Marxist principle by accepting Satyagraha. Neither does it amount

1, p. 132.

⁶³ Reeves, “Landlords and Party Politics in the United Provinces, 1934–7”, in D.A. Low (ed.), *Soundings in Modern South Asian History*, op. cit., p. 265.

⁶⁴ John W. Cell, *Hailey: A Study in British Imperialism, 1872–1969*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992, pp. 156–161.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

⁶⁶ Acharya Narendra Deva, “Hardoi Socialist Sammelan Mein Bhashan”, *Acharya Narendra Deva Vangmaya*, Khand 3 (1947–1956), New Delhi, Nehru Smarak Sanghralaya Evam Pustakalaya (NMML), 2004, p. 386. My translation of this speech was published as Acharya Narendra Deva, “The Socialists Prevented Perversion of Marxism”, *Janata*, 25 April 1993.



to a synthesis of Marxism and Gandhism. Marxism has never been fond of violence. If the objective can be achieved by non-violent means, Marxism would give it (non-violence) topmost preference.”⁶⁷ Narendra Deva’s position was well-founded in his study of Marx and Marxism. In Marx’s speech at a meeting held in Amsterdam on 8 September 1872 at the time of The Hague Congress of the International Working Men’s Association, he had said:

We know of the allowances we must make for the institutions, customs and traditions of the various countries; and we do not deny that there are countries such as America, England, and I would add Holland if I knew your institutions better, where the working people may achieve their goal by peaceful means. If that is true, we must also recognize that in most of the continental countries it is force that will have to be the lever of our revolutions; it is force that we shall some day have to resort to in order to establish a reign of labour.⁶⁸

Marx’s implication was clear: the existence of certain circumstances obviates resort to violence.⁶⁹ This is why Narendra Deva insisted that acceptance of Satyagraha did not mean a *synthesis* of Marx and Gandhi. Even in later years, the Congress Socialist tradition was prepared to conceive of situations where force might be required. The democratic socialist Asoka Mehta seems also to agree with the Narendra Deva’s interpretation when he writes: “As I have already said, this is true of negative states

⁶⁷ Prem Bhasin, “The Heritage of Acharya Narendra Deva”, *Janata*, 21 February 1971. Bhasin quotes from Mukut Behari Lal, *Acharya Narendra Deva: Yug Aur Netritv*, p. 290. See, however, for the original source, Acharya Narendra Deva, “Marxvaad Aur Socialist Party”, *Acharya Narendra Deva Vangmaya*, Khand 3, op. cit., p. 241.

⁶⁸ Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. 2, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977, pp. 292–294 at p. 293.

⁶⁹ Narendra Deva refers to Marx having “cherished the belief that in democratic England and America socialism could be achieved without recourse to violence”. (Address of Acharya Narendra Deva, Chairman, Reception Committee, Fifth Annual Congress Socialist Party Conference, Cawnpore, 1 March 1947, reproduced in SW-AND-2, pp. 160–165.)



(i.e., states without democratic traditions: A.N); in their case there is no other alternative. Surely, you cannot capture Nepal from the infamous Ranas by winning elections, for there are no elections! You have to resort to extra-parliamentary, even insurrectionary methods in Nepal.”⁷⁰

In studies on the period, many scholars have in recent years tended to employ a vocabulary that denies a prominent place to the Congress Socialist and to unlabelled Congress traditions in the organization of the peasantry. This is probably a mistaken approach as in most provinces the peasantry had, especially after the entry of Gandhi into national politics, gradually become the backbone of the Congress support structure. The role of the unlabelled Congress in bringing this about was significant. This was a point that Narendra Deva recognized when he said in 1939, while warning of the dangers of “peasantism” that the “Congress, if it claims to be a national organization, will have to become pre-eminently a Kisan organization because the Kisans constitute the bulk of the organization”.⁷¹ In this context it may be noted that the expression “Left” even now is occasionally used, restrictively, for the communist tradition alone. Many members of the Communist Parties are not even aware of the unlabelled Congress and Congress socialist contribution because their party literature seldom mentions it.⁷² Moreover, many socialists themselves now

⁷⁰ Asoka Mehta, *Democratic Socialism*, Hyderabad, Chetana Prakashan, 1954, p. 63.

⁷¹ “Presidential Address at All India Kisan Conference”, Gaya, 9 April 1939, SW-AND-1, p. 169 and p. 176.

⁷² For example, in his *The History of the Kisan Sabha*, Harkishan Singh Surjeet makes short work of the All India Kisan Conference held at Meerut in January 1936 under the Presidentship of the socialist Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay at which the decision to establish an “All India Kisan Congress” was taken. Surjeet writes: “The formation of AIKS was preceded by a meeting in Meerut in 1936 where the necessary preparations were made...”. (see Harkishan Singh Surjeet, *The History of the Kisan Sabha*, National Book Agency, Calcutta, 1996, p. 25). Yusuf Meherally, on the other hand, writes: “On the occasion of the Second Annual Conference of the Socialists at Meerut in January 1936, a Convention of Kisan workers from all over India was also held. Out of this meeting grew the All India Kisan Sabha.” “Acharya Narendra Deva”, Yusuf

use the term “Marxist” interchangeably with “Communist”. That there was a strong and vigorous Marxist tradition outside the Communist Parties therefore is seldom acknowledged. There is also a post-independence nomenclature complication connected with prevalent tendency on the part of many to identify the socialist movement in India almost exclusively with the Lohia tradition. While Lohia was a prominent socialist leader before independence, the ideology associated with his name is largely a post-independence development. Historically speaking, it is not synonymous with the Indian socialist tradition. The Congress Socialist Party (CSP), founded in 1934, was defined expressly in Marxist terms. The socialist retreat from Marxism came much later, and largely after 1947.⁷³ Narendra Deva, the doyen of Indian socialists, did not give up his commitment to Marxism.⁷⁴

Meherally in Yusuf Meherally (ed.), op. cit., p. xiii. The general secretary’s report at the Socialist Party’s annual conference in 1948 stated : “It was mainly on the initiative of the Party, assisted powerfully by Swami Sahajanand Saraswati and later by Professor N.G. Ranga, that the All India Kisan Sabha was created”. (*Report of the Sixth Annual Conference held at Kotwalnagar, Nasik, March 19th to March 21st, 1948*, Bombay, Socialist Party, p. 88).

In Sumit Sarkar’s ‘*Popular Movements and ‘Middle Class’ Leadership in Late Colonial India: Perspectives and Problems of a ‘History from Below’*, (Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, K.P. Bagchi & Co., 1983) the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) is mentioned a couple of times in 95 pages, though about half the work is concerned with the 1930s and 1940s, and seen essentially as a “legal cover” for the activities of leaders such as P. Krishna Pillai, E.M.S. Namboodiripad, and A.K. Gopalan.

⁷³ Even in 1948 aspects of the report presented by Jayaprakash Narayan, the Socialist Party general secretary, at the Nasik session of the party, were criticized by party members as tending toward abandonment of Marxism. See “Debate on the report of the General Secretary presented at the Sixth Annual Conference of (the) Socialist Party, Nasik, 19–21 March 1948”, in Bimal Prasad (ed.), *Jayaprakash Narayan Selected Works*, Vol. 4, New Delhi, Nehru Memorial Museum & Library / Manohar Publishers and Distributors, 2003, pp. 452–454.

⁷⁴ This is acknowledged, for example, in (i) N.G. Goray, “Father of Democratic Socialism in India”, in B.V. Keskar and V.K.N. Menon (eds), *Acharya Narendra Deva: A Commemoration Volume*, New Delhi, National Book Trust, 1971, p. 88. Goray was a leading socialist; (ii) Brahmanand, “A Marxist who understood the Indian situation”, *Sunday*, Calcutta, 27 January 1980, pp. 28–29. Brahmanand had edited *Towards Socialist Society*, a compilation of some

As we have noted, Narendra Deva's speech and later Jayaprakash Narayan's *Why Socialism?* brought E.M.S. Namboodiripad to Marxism and Congress socialism. In his contribution to the Narendra Deva Birth Centenary Volume, Namboodiripad wrote:

The first memory that comes to my mind is of the speech that he delivered at the first preparatory meeting of the Congress Socialist Party held at Patna in May 1934. Listening to his speech was, in fact, my first exposure to the ideology of socialism as applied to Indian conditions. That was long before I read JP's *Why Socialism?*⁷⁵

The text of the 1934 speech by Narendra Deva was later published in Yusuf Meherally's classic compilation.⁷⁶ Narendra Deva's address at the founding convention of the Congress Socialists at Patna in May 1934 created, in Yusuf Meherally's

of Narendra Deva's writings, published by the Centre of Applied Politics, New Delhi, in 1979; and (iii) Hari Kishore Singh, "The Rise and Secession of the Congress Socialist Party of India (1934–1948)", in Raghavan Iyer (ed.), *South Asian Affairs: Number One, (St. Antony's Papers: Number 8)*, London, Chatto & Windus, 1960, pp.116–140 at p.131.

⁷⁵ E.M.S. Namboodiripad, "Acharya Narendra Deva: The Scholar Politician", in Prem Bhasin, Madhu Limaye, Hari Dev Sharma, and Vinod Prasad Singh (eds), *Acharya Narendra Deva: Birth Centenary Volume*, New Delhi, Radiant Publishers, 1990, p.18. In his earlier work, *How I became a Communist* (Trivandrum, Chinta Publishers, 1976), Namboodiripad mentions the Patna Socialist Convention and Narendra Deva's address (p. 163). He does not here mention its influence upon him, while acknowledging further on the fact that Jayaprakash Narayan's *Why Socialism* "became our guiding document in our day-to-day activities for quite some time" (p. 166). However, this is spelt out in Namboodiripad's contribution dated 16 October 1956 sent to the editor of the socialist journal *Sangharsh*. Here Namboodiripad refers to various speeches by Narendra Deva, including the May 1934 speech, as having inspired not only him but all anti-imperialist young people who like him came into the socialist struggle in the fourth decade of the century. (E.M.S. Namboodiripad, "Ek Samyavadi Neta Ka Patra", *Sangharsh* [Acharya Narendra Deva Ank], 1956, Number 26, p. 126).

⁷⁶ Yusuf Meherally (ed.), op. cit., pp. 3–29.

words, “quite a stir”.⁷⁷ Narendra Deva stressed that “The Russian experiment is slowly though surely helping the masses to take the centre of the world stage.”⁷⁸ He wanted an intertwining of the emerging forces and the national movement, urging that working class struggles and Congress struggles must synchronize: “All the great national struggles that have been conducted by the Congress have been preceded by strikes and other forms of industrial unrest. It is only when the two struggles have synchronized with each other that the national struggle has reached its highest watermark.”⁷⁹ In 1919, for example, the agitation against the Rowlatt Act had coincided with railway workers’ strikes.⁸⁰ The same had been the case during the non-co-operation movement in the early 1920s especially in the south.⁸¹ Likewise, when the workers of the Assam-Bengal Railway went on strike in 1921 Gandhi had lent support to them.⁸²

Narendra Deva saw how the working class movement and the national movement’s mobilizations in the countryside could lend strength to each other. Explaining the benefits of policy co-ordination, Narendra Deva argued: “One more advantage would have accrued to us as a result of such a policy. In India where the labour force is drawn from villages and where the industrial worker remains a villager at heart the worker can act as a standard bearer of revolution in villages.”⁸³

⁷⁷ “Acharya Narendra Deva”, Yusuf Meherally in Yusuf Meherally (ed.), *ibid.*, p. xii.

⁷⁸ Yusuf Meherally (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 7.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁸⁰ See, for example, Lajpat Jagg, “Colonial Railwaymen and British Rule: A Probe into Railway Labour Agitation in India, 1919–1922”, in Bipan Chandra (ed.), *The Indian Left: Critical Appraisals*, New Delhi, Vikas Publishing House, 1983.

⁸¹ See, for example, C.S. Krishna, *Labour Movement in Tamil Nadu*, New Delhi, K.P. Bagchi & Company, 1989, especially pp. 173–177.

⁸² “Speech to Railway Workers, Chittagong”, 31 August 1921, CWMG, Vol. 21, pp. 24–28.

⁸³ Yusuf Meherally (ed.), *op. cit.*, p.11. Interestingly, when in the aftermath of the Meerut-Maliana incidents in Uttar Pradesh in the late 1980s this writer, along with some others, met the CPM leader, B.T. Ranadive, to urge a working



There was yet another vital factor. While admitting “that the Congress today has defects and shortcomings”, Narendra Deva argued that “yet it can easily be the greatest revolutionary force in the country”, reminding the delegates that “We should not forget that the present stage of the Indian struggle is that of the bourgeois democratic revolution and therefore it would be a suicidal policy for us to cut ourselves off from the national movement that the Congress undoubtedly represents.”⁸⁴ There was here not merely depiction of the ideological stage of the national movement; there was also some introspection about those who made up the Left and what they themselves had gained from their involvement in the national movement: “Most of us today within the Congress are only intellectual socialists, but as our long association with the national struggle has repeatedly brought us into intimate contact with the masses, there seems to be no danger of our degenerating into mere theorists and doctrinaires.”⁸⁵

The 1934 speech by Narendra Deva is a basic and foundational document of Indian socialism, frankly Marxist in approach and hailing the Russian experience as “slowly though surely helping the masses to take the centre of the world stage”—a point Narendra Deva reiterates in 1939 at Gaya—and yet firmly locating the socialist forces in India in the vortex of the Indian national movement. This was in accordance with the precepts initially set out in 1920 by Lenin,⁸⁶ whose writings had been studied very

class intervention, the latter echoed a similar thought about the Indian working class being only “half a working class”, that is, rooted in the peasantry. The difference was that while Narendra Deva saw this fact as a basis for revolutionary mobilization in the villages, Ranadive used it to explain or plead for non-intervention by the working class in an inter-communal conflict. However, the mobilization done in the 1980s under the leadership of Shankar Guha Niyogi in the Chattisgarh area appeared to exhibit the possibilities that Narendra Deva had outlined in his 1934 speech. See in this context, Anil Nauriya, “What Chattisgarh Movement Means”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 30 November 1991, pp. 2735–2736.

⁸⁴ Yusuf Meherally (ed.), *ibid.*, p. 4.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁸⁶ See G. Adhikari, (ed.), *Documents of the History of the Communist Party of India, Volume I, (1917–1922)*, People’s Publishing House, New Delhi, 1971

closely by Narendra Deva. The 1934 address also charted out the key role that peasants were expected to play in the Indian struggle. A few weeks before the Bombay session of the Congress, Narendra Deva advised that “mere diffusion of knowledge of socialist theories would not do” and it was necessary to move beyond a mechanistic approach : “We have also to study the Indian problems in a new light, i.e., from the Marxian point of view. We should not lose sight of the Indian background.”⁸⁷ That is, Marxism had to be applied to the specific conditions of time and place.⁸⁸ This did not mean that he was prepared to give up on the essentials of a Marxist understanding. Significantly, he opposed the proposal at the Bombay Congress in 1934 that “truth and non-violence” be substituted for “legitimate and peaceful means” in the Congress creed.”⁸⁹

for Lenin’s Theses on National and Colonial Questions at the Second Congress of the Communist International in 1920 and also for M.N. Roy’s supplementary theses and the changes made by Lenin in the latter.

See also M.N. Roy, *Memoirs*, Delhi, Ajanta Publishers, 1964 (Reprint 1984), p. 379. There is some discussion of Lenin’s and M.N. Roy’s views on the role of Communist Parties in relation to nationalist movements in colonial countries, in my articles “Gandhi and the Indian Resurgence”, *Janata*, Bombay, 27 February 1983 and “Criticising Gandhi”, *Mainstream*, New Delhi, 27 January 1996.

⁸⁷ Acharya Narendra Deva, “The Task Before Us”, *Congress Socialist*, 29 September 1934, SW-AND-1, p. 36.

⁸⁸ This point was made repeatedly by Narendra Deva till the end of his life. In June 1952, speaking at a provincial party conference at Hardoi he argued: “...our party moulded Marxism to the conditions of our country and enriched it. Our party maintained that keeping distance from national movements in the colonies was not Marxist but opportunistic and reactionary; later the communists also accepted this”. See my piece, “The Ideology of Narendra Deva”, and translation of Narendra Deva’s speech in *Janata*, Bombay, 25 April 1993.

Nor did the early socialists nurture an allergy towards the Soviet Union or Marxism. The CSP organ in undivided Punjab during the Second World War, for example, was known as the *Bolshevik* and was produced by socialists like Yamin Dar (see K.L. Johar, *Unsung Torchbearers: Punjab Congress Socialists in Freedom Struggle*, New Delhi, Harman Publishing House, 1991, pp. 368–370).

⁸⁹ SW-AND-1, p. 38.



Narendra Deva delivered the Presidential address at the Gujarat Congress Socialist Conference held at Ahmedabad on 23 and 24 June 1935. Skillfully maintaining the balance between internationalism and nationalism, he addressed the criticism that as internationalists they could not be depended upon in the fight for independence. Narendra Deva asserted that there was “no antagonism between independence and socialism.”⁹⁰

As a matter of fact, socialism cannot be built without the conquest of power and in the present conditions of India the anti-imperialist struggle is only a prelude to socialism. We are not lacking in national pride either. Of course we hate chauvinism and do not subscribe to the notion of “my country right or wrong”.... Lest it should be doubted in certain quarters whether I am correctly stating the socialist position, I would like to fortify myself with the following passage from the writings of Lenin: “Is the emotion of national pride foreign to the Greater Russian Class-conscious proletariat? Certainly not. We love our language and our native land ... and it is for that reason specially that we regard with a peculiar hatred our past serfdom.... (and) ... our present serfdom.”⁹¹

Narendra Deva responded also to another concern, raised “from the right”, about the socialist role in the national struggle: “The other criticism is that we are disrupting the struggle for independence ... by raising the issue of class struggle at this stage. We may be forgiven for pointing out that under present conditions it is impossible to win independence without mobilizing the workers and peasants for the political struggle....”⁹².

To the Congress he urged that it pay greater attention to the working class; to the working class he issued the reminder that

⁹⁰ “Presidential Address at the Gujarat Congress Socialist Conference”, Ahmedabad, 23–24 June 1935 by Narendra Deva, Yusuf Meherally (ed.), op. cit., p. 67.

⁹¹ Idem.

⁹² Yusuf Meherally (ed.), *ibid.*, p. 68.



it was still weak. He advised that

... the working class can extend its political influence only when by using its weapon of general strike in the service of the national struggle it can impress the petty bourgeoisie with the revolutionary possibilities of a strike....Unfortunately some of the working class leaders do not seem to accept this point of view.⁹³

Labour, Narendra Deva believed, could “with the application of proper tactics ... easily develop into a mighty political force and can establish hegemony over the national movement”.⁹⁴ He identified 1928 as the juncture in time after which the working class leadership initiated its isolationist policy: “Ever since 1928 they have followed a policy of isolation and it is this suicidal policy which has isolated them not only from the working masses but also from the national struggle ...”⁹⁵ Opposing such sectarianism, Narendra Deva argued that “A party which that wants to establish its hegemony over the national movement must send its members to all the classes....”⁹⁶ “We regard ourselves as custodians of Congress honour ...”, Narendra Deva declared.⁹⁷ Narendra Deva’s address in Gujarat was very well received, recalled Dinkar Mehta who had participated in the Salt Satyagraha in Gujarat, was Joint Secretary of the all-India CSP between 1935 and 1940 and who later joined the Communist Party.⁹⁸ Even so, the address did not, Mehta maintains, help soften the attitude of the local Congress in Gujarat towards the CSP and Narendra Deva was viewed by some of the, presumably regional, newspapers as a “communist agent”; Mehta suggests that it was on account of

⁹³ Yusuf Meherally (ed.), *ibid.*, p. 70.

⁹⁴ *Idem.*

⁹⁵ *Idem.* A similar idea had been expressed by Narendra Deva in his Presidential address at the First Session of the All-India Congress Socialist Conference at Patna on 17 May 1934; see “Socialism and the Nationalist Movement” (1934), Yusuf Meherally (ed.), *ibid.*, p. 10.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

⁹⁸ Dinkar Mehta, Oral History Transcript, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi.

the unsympathetic attitude of the local Congress that he himself started to spend his organizational time mostly outside Gujarat and often in south India.⁹⁹ It was not merely one end of the political spectrum that was difficult to bring around. Problems of socialist unity would continue to frustrate Narendra Deva throughout his career. In 1938 we find Narendra Deva lamenting: "... our Communist friends were not prepared to concede the Marxist character of our party. Efforts at unity hence prove futile but they show that the CSP has ceaselessly striven for unity in (the) socialist movement from its inception".¹⁰⁰ He often recalled that the Nazis in Germany had benefited from disunity among socialists and communists.¹⁰¹

In the August 1936 speech, mentioned by Namboodiripad, Narendra Deva described the Congress Election Manifesto of 1936 as a revolutionary and not a reformist document.¹⁰² Narendra Deva made a point here also about the "communal award" announced in 1932 by the British Prime Minister, Ramsay Macdonald, setting out, inter alia, the proposed legislative seat shares among various religious communities and, within the majority community, a demarcation on the basis of caste. Narendra Deva said he was aware that "a few handful of people whether Moslem or Hindu" wished to take advantage of the "award" and asserted that "... a few Hindus who had been strongly opposing the 'award' would be the first in the field demanding separate electorate as against joint electorate".¹⁰³ The Congress manifesto according to him had taken these facts into consideration and was crafted in a manner "as not to give a handle to any reactionaries".¹⁰⁴ On "office acceptance" (in the provincial governments established under the Government of India Act of 1935), Narendra Deva differed with the election manifesto, saying that the question should be decided

⁹⁹ Idem.

¹⁰⁰ SW-AND-1, p. 120.

¹⁰¹ Narendra Deva, "Fascism ka Vastavik Roop", in *Rashtriyata aur Samajwad*, Banaras, Gyan Mandal Prakashan, 1949, p. 719.

¹⁰² SW-AND-1, pp. 76–77.

¹⁰³ Idem.

¹⁰⁴ Idem.



by the Faizpur Congress coming up in December 1936 rather than after the provincial legislative elections were over.¹⁰⁵ We have seen above that Narendra Deva declined to join the Congress Government that came to be formed in the United Provinces in 1937.

4. Kisans, Land Reforms And Land Struggles

With the enforcement of the Government of India Act, 1935 and particularly as a sequel to the provincial elections that followed in which Congress governments came to power in several provinces, peasant expectations from the new dispensation grew exponentially. The constitutional and political background to these developments was set out prior to government formation in a note by Narendra Deva, K.T. Shah, and Jawaharlal Nehru.¹⁰⁶ This reiterated the Congress Working Committee resolution of 7 July 1937 which had clarified that although the Congress would accept cabinet responsibilities, it did not subscribe to the doctrine of partnership as according to it “the proper description of the existing relationship between the British Government and the people of India is that of exploiter and exploited...”¹⁰⁷ Narendra Deva was conscious of the limitations of the political and statutory framework in which these governments functioned. In his presidential speech at the Gujarat Congress Socialist Conference in June 1935 he made a thorough criticism of the 1935 Act and more particularly for its protection of vested interests.¹⁰⁸ In his speech on the Tenancy Bill in the United Provinces Assembly on 11 November 1938, Narendra Deva attacked the Zamindari system. The Zamindars had been given rights not based on equity and these rights must now go.

The Zamindars were not doing anything for promoting the good of the society. They were merely tax gatherers. The Congress was out to kill imperialism and since landlordism

¹⁰⁵ SW-AND-1, p. 77.

¹⁰⁶ “Note on the Constitutional Impasse”, SW-AND-1, pp. 250–253.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 252.

¹⁰⁸ Yusuf Meherally (ed.), op. cit., pp. 78–84.

was the creation of Imperialism both of them must perish. In fact landlordism would live in India so long as Imperialism lasted. There should be no sympathy for the landlords who had all along joined hands with Imperialism to crush national movements.¹⁰⁹

Pleading for abolition of Zamindari (which happened subsequently) Narendra Deva declared that the Kisans were not satisfied with the Tenancy Bill.¹¹⁰ Even so, Narendra Deva had, as member of the Select Committee which examined the Bill's provisions, influenced the drafting to no small extent. Ajit Prasad Jain who, as Parliamentary Secretary in the Congress government, had helped steer the Bill through the Legislative Assembly, would recall: "There was not one proposal which he had made that was not accepted, and there was no proposal which he had disapproved that was included; yet when Rafi asked Narendra Deva to sign the Select Committee Report, he declined. We felt annoyed. What other reason could there be except that the Congress Socialists wanted to show off their extremism?"¹¹¹

Actually, Narendra Deva's concerns lay outside committee rooms on the need to strengthen the movement outside. Although various kisan demands were pressed on the Congress, it is quite evident, as we have seen, that Narendra Deva was conscious of the statutory constraints within which the Congress governments were functioning. He did not wish to cede the opposition space to others. In his tour of UP in December 1938, Narendra Deva described the Hindu Mahasabha and the Nationalist Agriculturist Party as "dead organizations which had failed"; they "had no programme for the uplift of the masses, who were being ruthlessly exploited by capitalists and taluqdars and the zamindars with the help of British Imperialism"; the reason for their failure lay in the fact that "the leadership of those bodies was in the hands of capitalists and wealthy persons who hardly found time to attend

¹⁰⁹ SW-AND-1, p. 141.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 142.

¹¹¹ Ajit Prasad Jain, *Rafi Ahmad Kidwai*, Bombay, Asia Publishing House, 1965, pp. 49–50.

to the needs of the masses”.¹¹² Earlier, in April 1938 Narendra Deva had spoken at the Delhi Provincial Congress Socialist Conference. He stressed the need to build class organizations and was equally firm that these organizations must not lose their anti-imperialist thrust by getting into an antagonist relation with the Congress. On the contrary, they must strengthen and reinvigorate it. They must also “quicken the pace of the social struggle in this country”.¹¹³ Similar points were being made at this time by Jawaharlal Nehru in his speeches at Kisan meetings.¹¹⁴ As President of the All India Kisan Conference held at Gaya in 1939, Narendra Deva returned to the theme, acknowledging that it is the peasants’ support which had placed the Congress in power.¹¹⁵ He was able to add now that “Kisans constitute the bulk” of the Congress.¹¹⁶ Narendra Deva’s brief survey, in his address, of the growth of peasant organizations across the country and the origin of the All-India Kisan Sabha is significant as one of the authoritative socialist accounts of the growth of the kisan movement.¹¹⁷ In an article in November 1936 and in the Gaya address of 1939, the role of the non-communist and even pre-socialist peasant organizations is mentioned and frankly acknowledged by Narendra Deva. N.G. Ranga, a leading socialist and peasant leader in the pre-independence years, has also written lucidly about the path-finding struggles by peasants in south India and elsewhere.¹¹⁸

¹¹² “Speech at Partabgarh”, *National Herald*, 17 December 1938, SW-AND-1, p. 142.

¹¹³ SW-AND-1, p. 124.

¹¹⁴ See e.g., an official report of Nehru’s meeting with peasants at Doiwala, Dehradun in 1937 [subject files: Part IV, (D) Reports (1937), serial No. 22, Jawaharlal Nehru Papers, NMML]; for Nehru’s meetings in Bihar see Walter Hauser, “Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha, 1929–1942: A Study of an Indian Peasant Movement”, Doctoral dissertation, Chicago, 1961, p. 126 (Microfilm, NMML, New Delhi).

¹¹⁵ SW-AND-1, p. 163.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

¹¹⁷ See, SW-AND-1, especially pp. 170–178.

¹¹⁸ See, for example, N.G. Ranga, *Revolutionary Peasants*, Amrit Book Co., New Delhi, 1949.

In North India, particularly Bihar and UP, organizations going by the name

Interestingly, Narendra Deva, in his Gaya address lauds the Bihar Kisan movement as the “best organized unit of the All-India Kisan movement.”¹¹⁹ “The Kisans of Bihar,—men, women and children – have fought the grimmest fights against the Zamindar and have won many victories.”¹²⁰ About the United Provinces, Narendra Deva observed:

Since the Congress took the reins of administration in its hands in these provinces the Kisan movement has looked up. The Kisans of U.P. are politically developed and can easily become the backbone of the peasants’ fight for economic freedom but they have lacked organization so far.

Kisan Sabha were active by 1928. The Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha and the UP Kisan Sabha were represented at the All Parties National Convention held at Calcutta in 1928. The fact of pre-Congress peasant mobilizations (i.e., say, pre-1917 mobilizations) is more readily acknowledged in current writings than the fact of simply *Congress* or even *Congress Socialist* mobilizations of peasants prior to independence. A somewhat rare reference—to the role of Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan in relation to the Punjab peasantry—is to be found in Master Hari Singh, *Punjab Peasant in Freedom Struggle, Vol. 2*, New Delhi, People’s Publishing House, 1984, p. 187. The Frontier Gandhi’s visit to rural Punjab in August 1931 drew more than a lakh persons, mostly peasants. Bilga came to be known as the “Bardoli” of Punjab. Ryot Sabhas were set up in several Assam districts by the 1930s largely on Congress initiative. (See K.N. Dutt, *Landmarks of the Freedom Struggle in Assam, Gauhati*, Lawyers’ Book Stall, 1958, pp. 69–70.) Also, Purshottam Das Tandon, identified in later years primarily as a “Hindiwallah” and conservative, emerged on the political scene in UP as a mobilizer of the peasantry. (See, for example, Majid Hayat Siddiqi, *Agrarian Unrest in North India: The United Provinces, 1918–22*, New Delhi, Vikas Publishing House, 1978, pp. 121–122; for the 1930s see also, “The Allahabad Tenants’ Conference”, *Indian Annual Register*, 1931, Vol. 2, pp. 304–308). Narendra Deva acknowledges Tandon’s role in taking up the cause of the Kisans (SW-AND-1, p. 171). Similarly, socialist leaders like Yusuf Meherally were also constantly on the move in later years. Meherally “had presided over a big Kisan conference held in Central Punjab in mid-1936”. (See Prem Bhasin, “Yusuf Meherally”, *Janata*, Bombay, Annual Number, 1997.) The Utkal Congress Samajwadi Karmi Sangh was formed in February 1933. This later became the provincial branch of the All-India Congress Socialist Party and the promoter of the *Krushak Sangh* in the province.

¹¹⁹ SW-AND-1, p. 171.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

This drawback is being remedied by the re-organisation of the U.P. Provincial Kisan Sangh, which has started functioning effectively.¹²¹

He identified Bengal as “a weak spot” in kisan organization and advised kisan organizations there to work with the various socialist parties and as far as possible with the Krishak Praja Movement.¹²² It is noteworthy that he does not in this context in Bengal suggest alliance with the Congress as a whole. The reason was obvious. The Congress in Bengal was known to be landlord dominated. In his address Narendra Deva acknowledged contradictions between the Congress and kisans in some areas where “the Congress organization is controlled by professional men, merchants and moneylenders of the city and as their interests collide with those of the rural population, they cannot be expected to safeguard the interests of the peasantry”.¹²³ He recognized that

the level attained by the Congress organization is uneven in different provinces and as several committees are controlled by Zamindar elements... (i)n such places, peasants will not receive that assistance from the Congress committee to which they are entitled.... It is exactly in such places that the existence of the Kisan Sabha will be mostly needed....¹²⁴

These inter-provincial comparisons need pursuing especially because of the paradox that Congress-initiated land reforms fared badly in Bihar where the Kisan Sabha, according to Narendra Deva, was strongest; the reforms were relatively more successful in UP both before and after independence. Was this related in part to the differential strategies pursued by kisan organizations in the two regions? In his speech at the kisan conference at Motihari in February 1940, Narendra Deva made a critical point, often lost sight of in many later studies of pre-independence peasant struggles: “The Zamindari system could not be destroyed unless

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 172.

¹²² Ibid., p. 174.

¹²³ Ibid., pp. 168–169.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 162.



British Imperialism in India was destroyed.”¹²⁵ According to him, “(i)t was impossible to remove poverty and unemployment without first removing British domination over India”.¹²⁶ Essentially, as Narendra Deva maintained in his Gaya address in 1939, “the colonial exploitation from which the peasant suffers cannot be ended without achieving complete independence” and “as he cannot enjoy political freedom without political power, so long as India is in bondage it is necessary that peasants should strive for national freedom in co-operation with other classes”.¹²⁷ So the Congress, as the “biggest anti-imperialist front working in India for the last 54 years” had to be strengthened:

We have great expectations from the Congress. If a few Zamindars manage to enter into this great organization, there is no danger; but, when the number is large and the Congress organization is captured and its policy and programme guided by the Zamindars then the danger becomes grave. It would be a bad day when Kisans and Kisan Sabha workers would sever their connection with the Congress. They should continue to be with the Congress in spite of the grave provocation. *They could not alter the Congress programme by walking out of the Congress.* (emphasis added)¹²⁸

Particularly after the outbreak of the Second World War, Narendra Deva was keen on resumption of the anti-colonial struggle; he found it odd that the United States, otherwise closely aligned with England, “is neutral while India is dragged into the war!” and attributed this to India’s status as a “slave country”.¹²⁹ While deploring the delay in resuming the struggle, he criticized “attempts to lower the Congress in public estimation”:

We have full confidence in the Congress. We can make our voice intensely heard and its influence keenly felt through this great organization of ours. We can change its leadership

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 212.

¹²⁶ Idem.

¹²⁷ SW-AND-1, p. 164.

¹²⁸ SW-AND-1, p. 212.

¹²⁹ SW-AND-1, p. 213.

if required, but we should not disturb the solidarity of the same. Let us strengthen the Congress. *Let the organization feel our strength.* It is a bad policy to have a separate organization other than the Congress. The Indian National Congress is the only all-India Indian political organization on national lines. This is the only national organization. The Kisan Sabha is a class organization, but class organization is not the only thing which is wanted; what is wanted is a truly national organization competent to speak in the name of the nation as a whole and this is the Congress. (emphasis supplied)¹³⁰

Congress initiatives on reform of land relations in the immediate pre-war were not inconsiderable; so also were peasant expectations from the Congress, often without adequate consideration for the statutory restraints under which Congress regimes functioned. In provinces like the UP, the reforms had the support of the bulk of the Congress. Some of the ground had been prepared for this by the report of the Congress Agrarian Enquiry Committee which submitted its report in November 1936.¹³¹ It was not always smooth sailing. In Orissa the reform Bill of 1938 was reserved by the Governor for consideration by the Governor General under Section 299 of the Act of 1935 and assent was withheld. The Bill had sought to reduce rents in Zamindari areas in parts of Orissa to the rate of land revenue payable in the nearest ryotwari areas with a compensation for the zamindars to be computed at 2 annas in the rupee.¹³² In Madras province the Congress government was considering that in the areas under the Permanent Settlement the ryot was the “owner of the soil” and also opted for restoration of the levels of rent existing in 1802 when the Settlement was made.¹³³ This could not be implemented before the Ministry resigned. The UP Tenancy Act of 1938

¹³⁰ Idem.

¹³¹ The Committee, appointed by the U.P. Provincial Congress Committee in May 1936, was headed by Govind Ballabh Pant and had as its members, Purushottam Das Tandon, Sampurnanand, Venkatesh Narain Tiwary, and Lal Bahadur Shastri.

¹³² Reginald Coupland, *The Constitutional Problem in India, [Part II: Indian Politics, 1936–1942]*, London, Oxford University Press, 1944, pp. 137–138.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

provided for security of tenure by giving all statutory tenants hereditary rights and placing restrictions on resumption of lands by the zamindars.¹³⁴ Provisions for arrest on failure to pay rent were done away with.¹³⁵ In the Bihar legislation rent increases made since 1911 were done away with, as were provisions for damages on arrears; interest was also reduced by 50 per cent.¹³⁶ The rent relief in Bihar was given on the basis of an assessment of areas where the rents had gone up steeply; in such cases rent reduction could go even to eight or ten annas in the rupee.¹³⁷ Occupancy tenancies were protected and ejection for non-payment of rent was restricted.¹³⁸ Sub-tenants could become tenants if they had been cultivating the land for 12 years.¹³⁹ Illegal exactions by landlords became penal offences.¹⁴⁰ Transfer of holdings by Kisans was made lawful subject to a fixed rate of commission to be received from the tenant upon the transfer.¹⁴¹ Rajendra Prasad claimed that the reforms in Bihar were “a solid achievement which perhaps no other province could boast of” and that “had the kisan leaders acted more wisely and in greater concert with the Ministry, they might have gained even more”.¹⁴² This claim can be questioned and it has been suggested that in Bihar, where the reforms were based on a compromise arrived at with the landlords, it was not possible for the peasants “to extract concessions like their UP counterparts”.¹⁴³ This is to some extent

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 138.

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 139.

¹³⁶ Idem.

¹³⁷ Rajendra Prasad, *Autobiography*, New Delhi, National Book Trust, 1994 (First published, Bombay, Asia Publishing House, 1957), p. 456.

¹³⁸ Coupland, op. cit., p. 139; See also, Rajendra Prasad, *Autobiography*, op. cit., p. 457.

¹³⁹ Thomas A. Rusch, *Role of Congress Socialist Party in Indian National Congress, 1931–42*, Doctoral dissertation, Chicago, (Microfilm, NMML, New Delhi), p. 232.

¹⁴⁰ Idem.

¹⁴¹ Rajendra Prasad, *Autobiography*, op. cit., p. 457.

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 459.

¹⁴³ Kaushal K. Sharma, “Nationalist Struggle and Agrarian Movement in Bihar, 1927–1947” in Kaushal Kishore Sharma, Prabhakar Prasad Singh, and Ranjan Kumar (eds.), *Peasant Struggles in Bihar, 1831–1992*, Patna, Centre for Peasant Studies, 1994, at p. 112.

a paradox because of the strength of the kisan movement in Bihar to which Narendra Deva drew attention. One major source of conflict in Bihar was provided by the inability of the provincial government to prevent zamindars from keeping fallow such lands as they had purchased in execution of court decrees so as to prevent the creation of any other tenancy rights upon them.¹⁴⁴ An effort was made to deal with this problem through the Restoration of Bakasht Land Act of 1938 which was intended to restore lands sold in execution of decrees for arrears of rent during the depression years.¹⁴⁵ Bakasht lands were the “lands in possession of landlords, in which tenants had acquired occupancy rights ... which would be revived if given to settled Ryots”.¹⁴⁶ The working of the Act of 1938 was weakened on account of certain provisions of which the landlords took advantage.¹⁴⁷ Narendra Deva spoke in support of the struggles in Bihar for restoration of such lands “to the actual tillers of the soil” and in this connection condemned the incident at Amwari, in Saran district, where there had been a “brutal and cowardly assault, in police custody, on the renowned Buddhist scholar Shri Rahul Sankrityayan by the goondas of the local Zamindar”.¹⁴⁸ Narendra Deva paid tribute also to the “brave and dauntless Kisans of Rewara, where the biggest Bakasht fight was fought and won....”¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁴ Rajendra Prasad, *Autobiography*, op. cit., p. 459.

¹⁴⁵ Kaushal K. Sharma, op. cit., at p.118.

¹⁴⁶ Narendra Deva’s Presidential address at the All-India Kisan Conference, Gaya, 9 April 1939; SW-AND-1, p. 171.

¹⁴⁷ There is an illuminating discussion in Kaushal Sharma’s work, cited above, of some aspects of this legislation. One provision was that the land in question would not be restored to the original tenant if it had already passed to another tenant. This also enabled landlords to introduce dummy tenants and defeat the legislation. See Kaushal K. Sharma, op. cit., at p.118.

¹⁴⁸ Narendra Deva’s Presidential address at the All-India Kisan Conference, Gaya, 9 April 1939; SW-AND-1, p. 171.

¹⁴⁹ Idem. On the struggle in Reora (Rewara) and the role of Jadunandan Sharma, see Sho Kuwajima, “The Reora Satyagraha (1939): Its Contemporary Relevance”, in William R. Pinch, *Speaking of Peasants: Essays on Indian History and Politics in Honor of Walter Hauser*, New Delhi, Manohar, 2008, pp. 233–246.



One difference in the Bihar and UP situations was in the psychological atmosphere created by the Congress in UP; Narendra Deva's observation in his presidential address at the All India Kisan Conference at Gaya in April 1939 about kisans constituting the bulk of the Congress organization was especially true of the United Provinces. In a letter to Nehru sixteen months earlier, Narendra Deva had, as we note below, foreseen trouble in Bihar on account of the attitude of some Congressmen there. It is probably true that many kisan leaders too did not adequately recognize the constitutional constraints under which the ministries functioned. Interestingly, this omission continues to be reflected in some contemporary scholarship which proceeds on an implicit assumption of unlimited possibilities of reform and even revolution within a constitutional context of colonialism. The thought that it might have been useful and even rational to keep some measures for legislation in an independent India (much as several aspects of land relations in China would change *after* the 1949 revolution) does not figure significantly or at all in the scholarship on the period; there is a tendency to categorize the Congress-oriented movements into two mutually exclusive camps, usually described as "left" and "right" (or classified as non-compromising, revolutionary or, "popular" on the one hand and "compromising", "reformist" or 'elitist' on the other), these appellations being determined merely or mainly on the basis of positions taken by specific individuals or groups within the colonial context of the 1930s and 1940s.¹⁵⁰ This tendency is to some extent a reflection of the specific left-wing politics of this period which often, by

¹⁵⁰ See, for instance, D.N. Dhanagare, *Agrarian Movements and Gandhian Politics*, Agra, Institute of Social Sciences, Agra University, 1975; Gyanendra Pandey, *The Ascendancy of the Congress in Uttar Pradesh: Class, Community and Nation in Northern India, 1920–1940*, London, Anthem Press, 2002; and Maya Gupta, *Experiment with Swaraj: The U.P. Legislative Politics, 1937–1939*, NMML monograph, New Delhi, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, 2003. For Narendra Deva's account of post-revolution land reforms in China, see "Land Reform in China", *Bulletin No. 19 of the National Geographical Society of India*, Benares, May 1953, being the text of his lecture delivered at the Society on 20 November 1952; also reproduced in SW-AND-4, pp. 3–8.

not paying adequate attention to the limitations of the colonial context, virtually outed itself by the time, on conclusion of the colonial period, that the new objective context might have enabled such political groups to have made a greater difference.¹⁵¹

Given the colonial ambit within which the provincial governments functioned, the debt relief measures proposed by the Congress governments were also fairly drastic. In UP, for example, the Congress Agrarian Enquiry Committee Report in 1936 had paid special attention to this matter, apart from questions of land tenure, tenancy, rents, and illegal exactions.¹⁵² An examination of some of the debt relief legislation brought forward at the time suggests appreciable progress in this sphere.¹⁵³ The UP Agriculturists and Workmen Debt Redemption legislation and the Money-Lenders' legislation of 1939 sought to scale down debts according scheduled rates of interest between 5 per cent and 8 per cent; it was also provided that debts would not exceed "the difference between twice the principal and the amount paid by the debtor towards the principal or interest, or both of the loan".¹⁵⁴ The Madras Debt Relief Act of 1938 abolished outstanding interest on debts incurred before 1 October 1932 until 1 October 1937.¹⁵⁵ The North West Frontier legislation closely followed the Madras law with some variations.¹⁵⁶ Caps were specified to the rates of

¹⁵¹ This is precisely the denouement that Narendra Deva had wished to avoid, but which in the end would overwhelm the socialists as well in 1947–48.

¹⁵² *Report of the Committee Appointed by the U.P. Provincial Congress Committee to Enquire into the Agrarian Situation in the Province*, 1936; republished Gurgaon, Prabhu Publications, n.d.

¹⁵³ K.G. Sivaswamy, *Legislative Protection and Relief of Agriculturist Debtors in India*, Poona, published by D.R. Gadgil, Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics, 1939.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 367–368. The sequel to the Debt Redemption Bill was the UP Debt Redemption Act, 1940 which was enacted with changes by the Governor under his special powers in 1940, after the Congress ministries had resigned on India being dragged, without proper consultation, into the Second World War; the legislation was re-enacted after Indian independence through U.P. Act XIII of 1948. There are some differences in the interest rates specified in the original legislative proposals and the Act as passed.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 237.

¹⁵⁶ *Idem.*

interest at 6.25 per cent simple interest in Madras (as in the North West Frontier Province) and 9 per cent in Bihar.¹⁵⁷

Bad health dogged Narendra Deva. His Presidential address at the All India Kisan Conference in June 1942 at Bedaul, Muzaffarpur had to be read out in his absence. A report with some details of the Bedaul address has been reproduced in the second volume of his *Selected Works*.¹⁵⁸ According to Narendra Deva, the Second World War could cease to be an imperialist war only if India could “feel free and obtain a charter of freedom for her millions of Kisans and labourers”. However, such differences over the characterisation of the war cast their shadow over the Kisan Sabha. Tall leaders like N.G. Ranga and Indulal Yagnik had dissociated themselves from the Sabha by 1944. After the 1942 movement in particular, with the arrest of those then engaged in the struggle against British rule, the Kisan Sabha had come to be dominated by those who were affiliated with the communist movement. Narendra Deva expressed his deep disappointment with this state of affairs at a meeting of kisan leaders at Bombay after his release in 1945. A short report regarding this is reprinted in his *Selected Works*.¹⁵⁹ It is based on M.A. Rasul’s account.¹⁶⁰ Narendra Deva’s concern was understandable. The implications of this disarray in the Kisan movement would be serious, especially in the context of the evolving CPI line on the Pakistan scheme. Even otherwise, the split in the kisan movement between the socialists and Swami Sahajanand, the leader of the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha (BPKS), was “reflected by 1941 in the division of the BPKS”.¹⁶¹ This year marked also the break between Congress Socialists and the Communists in the All India Kisan Sabha, with rival organizations coming into being.¹⁶² This was

¹⁵⁷ Coupland, op. cit., p. 140.

¹⁵⁸ SW-AND-2, pp. 27–28.

¹⁵⁹ SW-AND-2, p. 89.

¹⁶⁰ M.A. Rasul, *A History of the All India Kisan Sabha*, National Book Agency, Calcutta, 1989, p. 339.

¹⁶¹ Walter Hauser, “Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha, 1929–1942: A Study of an Indian Peasant Movement”, op. cit., p. 35.

¹⁶² N.G. Ranga, *Kisans and Communists*, Bombay, Pratibha Publications, n.d., p. 4.

prior to the still more severe socialist-communist differences which surfaced over the Quit India movement initiated in August 1942. As Walter Hauser points out about the break in 1941:

This left Sahajanand alone at the head of the Bihar movement and when he assumed the anti-national ‘People’s War’ position with the communists in 1941–42 and stood apart from the popular August rising, the BPKS was to all intents and purposes dead; it could not sustain the loss of popular support which the Swami’s actions incurred despite his subsequent break with the communists and his effort to seek new associations with the Congress.¹⁶³

There was now hesitation even in the Krishak Praja Party in Bengal to associate with Sahajanand. Humayun Kabir, representing the Krishak Praja Party, put his finger on the crux of the problem when he assessed the post-1945 scenario:

Our party is the strongest organisation composed of Kisans alone. It has been there since 1936–1937. Our party fought the elections in 1936 and is going to do so this time. When Swamiji visited Bengal, we told him we were ready to affiliate with his AIKS but not now. We will do so after the elections. *We have to fight the League in the elections, and affiliation at this moment will have an adverse effect on us. The question of Pakistan is to be decided in Punjab and Bengal.*¹⁶⁴ (emphasis added)

Narendra Deva and Humayun Kabir understood the critical role that the Kisan movement could have played by strengthening forces that may potentially have helped keep the subcontinent together. N.G. Ranga has written about the anti-sectarian struggle

¹⁶³ Walter Hauser, “Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha, 1929–1942: A Study of an Indian Peasant Movement”, op. cit., p. 35.

¹⁶⁴ M.A. Rasul, op. cit., p. 340. As is evident also from Rasul, op. cit., p. 329, Swami Sahajanand developed differences related to such issues as the CPI’s policy on the Pakistan scheme and this contributed to a schism in the All India Kisan Sabha at least by February 1945, if not earlier.

that had to be waged at this time in the Kisan movement.¹⁶⁵ Congress Socialists waged a spirited struggle among peasants and workers in the 1946–47 period against the divisive ideologies. Obviously disillusioned with the erratic policies pursued by the CPI, Sahajanand resigned as President of the All-India Kisan Sabha in March 1945 and established an all India Kisan body of his own.¹⁶⁶ By this time Sahajanand was veering round to Narendra Deva's position on Congress-Kisan relations. In January 1945 Sahajanand, in a letter to the Gujarat-based peasant leader, Indulal Yajnik expressed satisfaction at a statement made by the latter: "I am also glad that you emphasized the point that the Kisan Sabha would not come in conflict with the Congress in matters political and this also appeared in the Press."¹⁶⁷ A few days later in a statement of his own, Sahajanand said on 17 February 1945:

It must be borne in mind by all concerned that I want very much and am trying my level best for the consolidation, if possible, of both the Congress and the Kisan Sabha, the former as the national organ of Indian people fighting for complete freedom and full democratic rights and symbolizing our collective revolt against and resolve to fight out slavery and subjugation and the latter as the independent class organ of the Indian peasantry, fighting for their rights and interests and symbolizing their revolt against and resolve to fight out feudalism, capitalism and their allies and supporters.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁵ See N.G. Ranga, *Revolutionary Peasants*, New Delhi, Amrit Book Co., 1949.

¹⁶⁶ Rakesh Gupta, *Bihar Peasantry and the Kisan Sabha*, New Delhi, People's Publishing House, p. 177. Gupta acknowledges: "Another crisis came in AIKS when Swami Sahajanand left it on questions relating to 'organization' and Communist Party's policy on 'Pakistan'."

¹⁶⁷ *Indulal Yajnik Papers*, File No. 23, "1942–45: Correspondence exchanged between Indulal Yajnik and Swami Sahajanand Saraswati regarding All India Kisan Sabha", (Letter dated 25.1.1945 from Swami Sahajanand Saraswati to Indulal Yajnik), pp. 16–17, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Teen Murti, New Delhi.

¹⁶⁸ *Indulal Yajnik Papers*, File No. 23, "1942–45: Correspondence exchanged between Indulal Yajnik and Swami Sahajanand Saraswati regarding "All India Kisan Sabha", pp. 20–21, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library.

In the event, these developments perhaps came too late in the day to make an adequate impact on the now fast-moving developments.

5. Religious-Sectarian Questions

Narendra Deva had warned in his Presidential address at the All India Kisan Conference in Gaya in 1939:

In certain parts of the country, where the bulk of landowners are not of the same religion as the mass of peasants, Kisan organizations have assumed a communal character. Such organizations have come into existence chiefly because the Congress organization of the province grossly neglected the interests of the peasants. The All-India Kisan Sabha has to contend with real difficulties in such places.¹⁶⁹

Religious-sectarian questions became important and would have a bearing on aspects of the Kisan struggles as well as the manner in which the socialists and the Left as a whole would relate themselves with the non-violent struggles for freedom. Narendra Deva was forthright on the religious-sectarian question. In June 1934 he had demanded that no member of any communal party should be a member of the Congress. He stressed the economic factor in resolving the Hindu-Muslim question. Speaking at a public meeting in New Delhi, he was reported to have

...attacked the Hindu Mahasabha who had no following and whose only aim seemed to be straining the relations between the communities¹⁷⁰

The UP Provincial Hindu Sabha and National Agriculturist Party, he saw in 1936 as being the “bulwark of reactionary forces”.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹ SW-AND-1, p. 168.

¹⁷⁰ SW-AND-1, p. 34.

¹⁷¹ SW-AND-1, p. 80.

According to M. Hashim Kidwai, among others, the proposal for a coalition government between the Congress and the Muslim League in UP in 1937 fell through on account, *inter alia*, of the opposition of “Congress-Socialists” and “Congress Communists”, both of whom feared that the land reforms programme of the Congress might be stalled as a result of such a coalition.¹⁷² This question, of whether to oppose the League or to ally with it, remained a classic Congress dilemma. Hashim Kidwai names Narendra Deva from among the Congress-Socialists, and Dr. Ashraf and Dr. Z.A. Ahmad from among the “Congress Communists” as being partly responsible for the alliance proposal not coming through. Jawaharlal Nehru wrote to Rajendra Prasad on the subject on 21 July 1937. Nehru referred to a meeting between himself, Maulana Azad, Narendra Deva, Govind Ballabh Pant, and others in which it was decided to “offer stringent conditions to the UP Muslim League group...”.¹⁷³ Interestingly, the autobiography of Dr. Z.A. Ahmad is silent on the subject.¹⁷⁴

On 10 December 1937, Narendra Deva suggested in a letter to Jawaharlal Nehru that in the elections to the *local* bodies due in 1938 possibilities might be explored for a “bloc of the Congress and the League for the specific purpose of these elections on the basis of a common ... programme”.¹⁷⁵ The letter is noteworthy for many reasons. Narendra Deva wanted to avoid a clash with the League in the elections to the local bodies. He was wary of Congressmen doing anything that might give a “handle” to the League to alienate the Muslims from the Congress. He would have preferred Congressmen not to contest these elections at all. Hence the loud thinking on a possible “bloc” with the League. The proposal is not made without reservations; he was not sure if the

¹⁷² M. Hashim Kidwai, *Rafi Ahmad Kidwai*, New Delhi, Publications Division, Government of India, 1986, p. 104.

¹⁷³ See Valmiki Chowdhury (ed.), *Dr. Rajendra Prasad: Correspondence and Select Documents, Vol. I, 1934–38*, New Delhi, Allied Publishers, 1984, pp. 63–67.

¹⁷⁴ Z.A. Ahmad, *Mere Jeewan Ki Kuch Yadein*, Lucknow, Sankalpa Systems, 1997.

¹⁷⁵ SW-AND-1, p. 109.

arrangement would be “feasible” and was not quite clear about its desirability. Narendra Deva shared his doubts with Nehru over the question of a larger alliance:

It is clear in my mind that there can be no question of a compromise with the Muslim League as it is constituted today. That will mean compromise with the fundamental principles which govern us today for although the League has changed its creed and broadened its programme the truth is that there is no fundamental change either in its objective or in its programme. The leadership continues to be reactionary as before and unless it is altered no one can believe that the new programme will be put into action or honest efforts will be made to achieve the new objective.¹⁷⁶

The suggestion made by Narendra Deva in December 1937 with regard to *local bodies* (in contrast to his position in June–July 1937 when Ministry-making in the province as a whole was being discussed) appears to have been based on the expectation that the rest of the League could be isolated from its leadership. Ironically, while this may have been a possibility in UP in and around June 1937 it was perhaps no longer so in December 1937 even on a limited local body scale.

Narendra Deva questioned the position of the Muslim League and other communal-sectarian organizations with growing emphasis in the next few years. The crunch appears to have come with the land reform legislation of the UP Government. By November 1938 the Tenancy Bill was before the UP Legislative Assembly. Narendra Deva made some hard-hitting points. Continuing a theme he had dwelt on in May 1938 when he questioned the Muslim League’s commitment to independence, he saw the League as being the “props and pillars” of the Zamindari system. He argued that if the League was really in sympathy with the kisans as claimed in its manifesto, there was no reason why it should not support the proposals made.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., pp. 108–109.

¹⁷⁷ SW-AND-1, p. 141.

A month later Narendra Deva was in Partapgarh, declaring that organizations like the Hindu Mahasabha and the National Agriculturist Party were being exploited by zamindars with the help of British imperialism. Yet, while criticizing the Muslim League, he had still not lost hope. He was reported to have said that “the day was not far off when both the Congress and the League would march hand in hand, forgetting all communal differences, with the common object of fighting British imperialism and capitalists alike.”¹⁷⁸

A year later, in October 1939, he was moved increasingly to stress the similarities between the League and the Hindu Sabha, both of which he saw as representing vested interests.¹⁷⁹ In a lecture in February 1940 on communal problems, Narendra Deva observed that the League’s demands “were not only increasing but were being changed from time to time with the result that the League ... was seriously thinking of dividing India....”¹⁸⁰

Unlike the organized communist movement, he saw through the fallacy of defining ‘nation’ on the basis of religion. As a Marxist, he realized that this was not secular nationalism. He therefore emphasized other factors in addition. He argued:

The language of the communities was not different, and in provinces, like Bengal and the Punjab, Hindus and Muslims spoke Bengali or Punjabi. Even in UP, where the problem of Hindi and Urdu was more acute, the two languages were really one, possessing the same grammar, the same style and the same vocabulary. In any literature *which had to be written for the masses*, this difference had to cease and neither of the tendencies to enrich Hindustani with Sanskrit or Arabic words would succeed.¹⁸¹ (emphasis added)

Narendra Deva emphasized the role and importance also of other Muslim organizations apart from the League. He noted, for

¹⁷⁸ SW-AND-1, pp. 142–143.

¹⁷⁹ SW-AND-1, p. 200.

¹⁸⁰ SW-AND-1, p. 207.

¹⁸¹ SW-AND-1, p. 208.

example, that the “Shias had disclaimed the Muslim League and so also (had) the Momins”.¹⁸² Earlier, in May 1938, he had observed that the Shias led by Wazir Hassan disfavoured separate electorates because with Sunni predominance they “had no chance of being returned”.¹⁸³ Later, in June 1945, he reiterated the authority of the Shia Conference to speak in the name of Shias.¹⁸⁴ The British authorities, in their bid to strengthen the League, never conceded this and similar facts. In his lecture on the communal problem in 1940, Narendra Deva stressed the Colonial role in dividing the communities, a continuing theme in Narendra Deva’s writings and speeches.

Narendra Deva differed sharply from the communist line after 1940 of equating Hindu-Muslim unity with “Congress-League unity”. According to him, “...unity between communities is essentially the result of a long process of integration. Pacts are, however, temporary expedients to serve temporary ends. But the unity of communities is a different affair. It is a slow and painful process”.¹⁸⁵

Pakistan, he maintained in June 1945, was no solution: “Pakistan or no Pakistan, the communal problem will have to be tackled all the same and can be tackled only by laying emphasis on the economic issues which equally affect the Hindu and Muslim masses of the country.”¹⁸⁶

He added:

I shall no doubt welcome a settlement of the communal question with the League, but this does not mean that I should

¹⁸² SW-AND-1, p. 209.

¹⁸³ SW-AND-1, p. 135.

¹⁸⁴ SW-AND-2, p. 69. Wazir Hasan’s concern at the propagation of the idea that there were very few Muslims in the Congress and that the League was the true representative of the Muslims was set out early in his letter dated 11 February 1938 to Jawaharlal Nehru. (See *A Bunch of Old Letters*, Bombay, Asia Publishing House, 1960, pp. 276–277.)

¹⁸⁵ SW-AND-2, p. 68.

¹⁸⁶ *Idem.*

advocate unity of action in the political field. Without identity of outlook and objectives such a unity will be either short-lived or will only end in strengthening the reactionary forces in the country. Congress-League unity in the political sphere will prevent a new orientation in the League itself and will stabilize the present reactionary leadership. This, of course, does not exclude a joint front with the League on specific issues on which an agreement is possible.¹⁸⁷

In October 1946, he repeated this position.¹⁸⁸

At the Meerut Congress, in November 1946, Narendra Deva spoke at length on the nature of the League and characterized it as a “fascist body” with “gangster methods”. “The present hate complex must be ended. Mr Jinnah on the one hand says that he deplures riots but in the same breath says if Pakistan is not conceded the present riots will continue.”¹⁸⁹ Interestingly, Subhas Bose’s understanding of the League had been similar. He had described it as a backward clique with plutocratic vested interests.¹⁹⁰ While agreeing with Abul Hashem of the Bengal Muslim League that “the British imperialistic hand was behind the Bengal riots” (of August 1946), Narendra Deva was not willing to exculpate the Muslim League Ministry.¹⁹¹ At the same time, speaking at the Meerut Congress, Narendra Deva warned Hindus against a tit-for-tat policy. The Bihar riots had taken place only a few days before the Meerut session.¹⁹² Narendra Deva’s critique of Colonial policy on the inter-communal question and of communal-sectarian parties including the League and the Hindu Mahasabha is relentless.¹⁹³ He criticized the Hindu Mahasabha as

¹⁸⁷ Idem.

¹⁸⁸ SW-AND-2, p. 121.

¹⁸⁹ SW-AND-2, p. 133.

¹⁹⁰ T.R. Sareen, *Subhas Chandra Bose and Nazi Germany*, Delhi, Mouton Publishing House, 1996, p. 301. See also, *Subhas Chandra Bose: Pioneer of Indian Planning*, New Delhi, Planning Commission, 1997, pp. 138–139.

¹⁹¹ SW-AND-2, p. 130.

¹⁹² Report of the 54th Session of the Indian National Congress, Meerut, 1946, pp. 80–81 (Microfilm) Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi.

¹⁹³ For example. SW-AND-2, p. 130 and pp. 141–46.



a preposterous movement “launched by a group of reactionaries to mislead the masses in the name of religion”.¹⁹⁴ “Where were these people,” he asked, “when Mahatma Gandhi launched his campaign against untouchability and rejuvenated about six crores of Hindus?”

And further:

“Will these reactionaries support the economic programme of the Congress Government for abolition of Zamindari and nationalization of the industries, which would ameliorate the lot of 98 per cent of the Hindu masses who are at present being exploited by barely 2 per cent of supporters of the Sabha?”

And that:

“The Sabha is trading on communalism of the middle classes who were fighting for the crumbs of petty offices for amongst the masses there was no difference between a Hindu Kisan or Muslim Kisan as both were equally exploited by Hindu and Muslim Zamindars.”¹⁹⁵

6. Beyond Non-Violence

At this stage we may take a step back and consider Narendra Deva’s positions in relation to Subhas Bose (1897–1945?) as these provide an interesting study in his political perspectives on modes of struggle. As Subhas Bose was a votary of militant and even armed struggle, the extent to which the socialists were or were not willing to ally with him, and he with them, is revealing. Gandhi had suggested the name of Narendra Deva, among others, for the Congress President towards the end of 1938 (for 1939). In January 1939 Subhas Bose also offered to withdraw from the contest for the Congress President if Narendra Deva were chosen.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁴ SW-AND-2, p. 191.

¹⁹⁵ Idem.

¹⁹⁶ D.G. Tendulkar, *Mahatma: Life of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi*, Vol. 5, New Delhi, Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, First edition, 1952, pp. 29–30.



Jawaharlal Nehru wrote in February–March 1939:

Indeed, so far as Gandhiji was concerned, he expressed his wish repeatedly in my presence that he would like a socialist as President. Apart from my own name, he mentioned Acharya Narendra Deva's name. But... I did not like the idea of a socialist President at this stage.¹⁹⁷

Evidently, the contest for the presidency of the Congress between Bose and Pattabhi Sitaramayya in 1939 had been avoidable. It obviously weakened the Congress at a critical time in India's history. It is therefore of significance that it was the socialist Narendra Deva on whose name the contending sides had been in agreement. Narendra Deva's own sympathies were initially with Bose. In a statement issued in January 1939 he said "(w)hen elders are not ready to take up the burden, Mr Subhas Chandra Bose seems clearly marked out for the Presidential *gaddi*".¹⁹⁸

At the Tripuri Congress session in 1939, Narendra Deva's approach differed with both groups. He was not prepared to accept the Bose group's description of certain members of the Working Committee as "Rightists". While not abjuring this usage in his own speeches and writings, Narendra Deva sought to relativise such expressions to the struggle at hand. According to the Press report of his speech at the Tripuri Congress on 9 March 1939:

Defining the Rightists, he said that they were those who were prepared to align with British Imperialism and if anybody could think that a member of the old Working Committee could be called a Rightist in that sense, there could be no hope of freedom for this country. They were not Rightists, they were anti-Imperialists to the core and revolutionaries. The question of Rightists and Leftists could only arise after

¹⁹⁷ Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Unity of India: Collected Writings, 1937–40*, London, Lindsay Drummond, 1948, p. 127.

¹⁹⁸ "Statement on Congress Presidential Election", SW-AND-1, p. 148.



there was a social revolution.¹⁹⁹

Yet Narendra Deva had misgivings at the time about the Congress “high command”, which he set out in a letter to M.R. Masani, one of the founders of the CSP, written a few days later, on 19 March 1939:

¹⁹⁹ “Speech at the Subjects Committee Meeting”, SW-AND-1, p. 148. Jawaharlal Nehru wrote similarly to Subhas Bose on 4 February 1939: There has been a lot of talk of Leftists and Rightists, of Federation etc., and yet, so far as I can remember, no vital matters affecting these questions have been discussed by us in the W.C. during your Presidentship. I do not know who you consider a Leftist and who a Rightist. The way these words, were used by you in your statements during the Presidential contest seemed to imply that Gandhiji and those considered as his group in the W.C. are the Rightist leaders. Their opponents, whoever they might be, are the Leftists. That seems to me an entirely wrong description. It seems to me that many of the so-called Leftists are more Right than the so-called Rightists. Strong language and a capacity to criticize the old Congress leadership is not a test of Leftism in politics. (Jawaharlal Nehru, *A Bunch of Old Letters*, Bombay, Asia Publishing House, Second Edition, 1960, p. 318).

This caution against mechanical labeling is not infrequently encountered in the Congress context. Seven years later, in 1946, P.R. Ramachandra Rao, an artist, advocate, and progressive intellectual, was sent by V.V. Giri, then Minister for Planning in the Government of Madras, to tour Congress-ruled provinces and “make a report on their plans”; on his conversation with Keshav Deva Malaviya, a leading radical Congressman from UP, Rao would write : “In U.P., he said, the Rightists were more Left than the Socialists...” (P.R. Ramachandra Rao, *First Person Singular*, Hyderabad, Akshara, 1989, p. 37). Whether this was actually so or not, Malaviya’s remark was a reflection of the fact that on kisan issues the mainstream, or “unlabelled”, Congress in UP (and many other provinces) was itself in the forefront of the struggle. It was often such leaders who had reached the peasantry first and organized it though not necessarily or always on a class basis. This is evident in the case of UP also from accounts even by CPI figures such as Z.A. Ahmad (see Z.A. Ahmad, *Mere Jeewan Ki Kuch Yadein*, Lucknow, Sankalpa Systems, 1997). The matter is not free from ambiguity and there is yet another aspect that may be worth bearing in mind in the context of Malaviya’s remark. A scholar of 20th century UP writes about the Narendra Deva, Rafi Ahmad Kidwai, Tandon relationship: “Acharya Narendra Deva and his band of followers, strangely enough, were closer to Tandon than to Kidwai.” (Paul Brass, *Factional Politics in an Indian State: The Congress Party in Uttar Pradesh*, Bombay, Oxford University Press,



Undue condemnation of Subhas Bose and praise of the High Command should be ruled out. I do not understand why we should go out of our way to praise them when we know that they have no consideration for us. Is it not clear to you that when they talk of purge they mean to eliminate the left-wing from the Congress?²⁰⁰

But Narendra Deva became increasingly critical of the positions taken by Subhas Bose thereafter. In 1940, a Congress Socialist tract by Narendra Deva offered this sharp comment:

It is difficult to grasp the theory that underlies the activities of Shree Subhas Chandra Bose.... He talks of an immediate struggle and does all that lies in his power to make it difficult.... If one were to believe him, the greater obstacle today is the present leadership of the Congress and not British imperialism.²⁰¹

There is in this tract a passage which may be quoted at greater length because it represents a point of view now seldom referred to:

It is difficult to say how much of his (Subhas–A.N.) anti-compromise talk is serious. It may, of course, just be a good stick to beat the Congress High Command with. Shree Subhas Chandra Bose has not always stood out against compromise like this. During his Presidentship he was for negotiations with the British Government over the issue of the war. Today, he asserts that the Constituent Assembly can only be convened after the conquest of power.

But he conveniently forgets what he wrote in his organ, the *Forward Bloc* on September 9, under the caption ‘Lead from

1966, p. 39.) Had Brass expanded the geometry by adding Nehru, to whom too Narendra Deva was close, it might have puzzled him even more. If academic “types” or categories break down often, it may be because these are too rigidly applied in the pre-independence context, or because, alternatively, the “types” themselves might require greater scrutiny.

²⁰⁰ SW-AND-1, p. 151.

²⁰¹ “The Indian Struggle: Next Phase”, SW-AND-1, p. 219.

Wardha'. He says there that the 'Congress must press the national demand on the government and insist on its immediate **fulfilment**'. In the same article he proceeds to observe: 'Let not our leaders who are now deliberating at Wardha ask for a whit less than what is our inherent birthright. If they are called on to negotiate, let them do so honourably.'

A year back at the Malda Divisional Conference and the Bengal Provincial Conference held at Jalpaiguri, Subhas Babu framed a resolution which foreshadowed the possibility of the government conceding the demand of the Congress, in which event a Constituent Assembly was to be convoked for framing a Constitution to be embodied in a treaty of alliance between India and Great Britain. This, according to him, could happen very well without recourse to a struggle. How can he now condemn Gandhiji for meeting the Viceroy or negotiating with him?

It is [sad?] however, that such things appeal to the average Leftist. He has been fed upon slogans and his political education has been neglected. He is politically immature. He acts, therefore, as an unwise ally. Proper schooling of political workers and youngmen is the greatest need.²⁰²

Narendra Deva's critique of Bose in the 1940 tract centered on the need to maintain the unity of the Congress as an instrument of the anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggle:

This is our grievance against Shree Subhas Chandra Bose. We had trusted that he would not try to break the integrity of the Congress. The passionate appeal for unity that he made at the outbreak of the war is still ringing in our ears. He opposed in the past the present leadership but never worked against the Congress itself. A great change has come over him since. He seems to be bent upon splitting the Congress now.

²⁰² SW-AND-1, pp. 223–224. The source has "said" in place of "sad" and is possibly an error.

He wants the present Congress to be converted into a rightist Congress out and out and asks leftists to leave the Congress and help him in creating a new Congress of leftists. He seems to have taken a dangerous turning on the road to independence.²⁰³

In this tract Narendra Deva asserted that the “task is to move the entire Congress” and this required working for unity.²⁰⁴

Towards the end of the 1930s, Bose had desired that the national struggle be resumed early. As the Congress gradually veered around to this position in the next three years, Bose, and also Gandhi, came to a relatively greater appreciation of each other’s role. This is reflected in their statements and particularly, on the part of Bose, from the time of his broadcasts from Tokyo and Bangkok on 24 June and 2 October 1943.²⁰⁵ In the 1940s, how did Narendra Deva view the struggle being conducted overseas? For much of this period Narendra Deva himself was in prison successively in Ahmednagar Fort, Bareilly, and Almora (1942–45). But we have his perspective on the war through a pamphlet he wrote in 1942.²⁰⁶ Here Narendra Deva refutes the people’s war thesis:

A genuine people’s war should lead to the destruction of both imperialism and of capitalist democracy and of fascism. But he will indeed be a bold man who would say that the present war is being fought to destroy imperialism. That would mean that the British and the American governments are waging war to destroy themselves.²⁰⁷

He refers to a similar argument made at the time of the First World War and Lenin’s refutation of it.²⁰⁸ Narendra Deva reiterated

²⁰³ SW-AND-1, p. 223.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 224.

²⁰⁵ *Selected Speeches of Subhas Chandra Bose*, Publications Division, Government of India, New Delhi, 1962, pp. 170–173 and pp. 200–204.

²⁰⁶ “The War: Imperialist or People’s”, SW-AND-2, pp. 8–23.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., pp. 17–18.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 18.



this view three days after his release from prison on 15 June 1945.

A couple of months later followed the report of Subhas Bose's death and Narendra Deva in his statement did not gloss over their differences. The whole nation mourned Bose, he said: "Though they did not agree with some of the methods of Mr Bose, nobody could question the purity of his motives. India would feel strengthened in the idea that the memory of Mr Bose would be cherished and the lessons of his life learnt."²⁰⁹

While with Bose there were differences in method, with the communists Narendra Deva's differences turned on their dismissive approach in treating the Congress organization as bourgeois in opposition to which another organisation was required to be built. Although he felt that a healthier Communist attitude towards the Congress had emerged after 1936–37, this too had undergone a relapse with the old communist line having resurfaced during the Second World War. Narendra Deva rejected as illogical the notion of "united front from below", that is unity with the Congress "rank and file as against the leaders".²¹⁰ He argued that "...it should be plain to the meanest understanding that it is impossible to call the Congress-minded masses to a common struggle without the co-operation of those to whom they give their confidence and look up for guidance".²¹¹ This idea, Narendra Deva pointed out, was self-defeating: "In short, they aspire today to acquire influence over the masses in the fold of the Congress by attacking the present leadership and trying to undermine its influence. They seem to stand for an immediate struggle but, in effect, they produce disorganization in the forces of struggle."²¹²

This understanding governed also Narendra Deva's attitude towards M.N. Roy (1887–1954), a leading figure in international

²⁰⁹ SW-AND-2, p. 80.

²¹⁰ "The Indian Struggle: Next Phase", Bombay, Congress Socialist Party, 1940, reproduced in SW-AND-1, p. 218.

²¹¹ *Idem.*

²¹² "The Indian Struggle: Next Phase", Bombay, Congress Socialist Party, 1940, reproduced in SW-AND-1, p. 219.



communism and intellectual who had on return to India gradually branched out to establish the Radical Democratic Party in 1940. At least till 1940 both Narendra Deva and Roy, so far as acceptance of the Congress as an instrument for struggle was concerned, seemed to be on the common ground “that ultimately by a process of transformation the Congress can become a fit instrument for the achievement of our objective”.²¹³ The vital difference between them was that Roy believed that no relentless struggle was possible until there was a change in the leadership of the Congress.²¹⁴ For Narendra Deva, on the contrary, it was the struggle itself that would throw up new leaders. In the socialist view as propounded by Narendra Deva, Roy appeared to disregard the impact and dynamics of mass struggle. Narendra Deva argued that:

The pressure for struggle releases forces that move and metamorphose the leadership. New leadership is created in the course of the struggle. A mass struggle always throws up new leaders of the masses. It is only by showing qualities of leadership, by leading the masses from victory to victory, that one can win their confidence and achieve a place in the national leadership.²¹⁵

A practical demonstration of this would come about in the next round of struggle in 1942 when socialists emerged as prominent leaders of the national movement. For Narendra Deva the Quit India movement of 1942 was an advance in the national struggle. He acknowledged also the role played by the Indian National Army (INA). In November 1945, he reportedly remarked:

...had the revolution of August 1942 not taken place, there would not have been so much enthusiasm in the country... He made particular reference to Mr Jai Prakash Narain, Dr Lohia and others... (who) were subjected to various forms of torture... (He) made a feeling reference to the INA men

²¹³ Ibid., p. 220.

²¹⁴ Ibid., p. 216.

²¹⁵ Ibid., p. 221.

and said that there was widespread resentment amongst all sections of people against their trial.²¹⁶

It was not of course a philosophical commitment to the idea of non-violent struggle that made Narendra Deva carefully mark out his positions in relation to Bose, the communists, and M.N. Roy, though of course, his preference was to accord primacy to the non-violent struggle. It would be relevant to recall Narendra Deva's opposition at the time of the Bombay Congress in 1934 to the proposal that "truth and nonviolence" be substituted for "legitimate and peaceful means" in the Congress creed.²¹⁷ No one has ever suggested that falsehood ought to be part of our creed, he argued. Nonviolence, he maintained, was subject to varying interpretations and was a metaphysical concept. If in substance and meaning it did not differ from "peaceful means", there was no need for the new phraseology. Three years after the Bombay Congress, Narendra Deva had written on 10 December 1937 to Jawaharlal Nehru: "Truth and nonviolence are noble ideas and as such every decent man must have high regard for them. But I feel that they are so much being misused today in India that the day is not far distant when they will begin to [stink] in our nostrils."²¹⁸ Narendra Deva's approach to the question of relations between the Congress and the kisan movement was different from that which characterized the movement in places like Bihar. He thought that both violence and consequent tensions between kisan organizations and the Congress could be avoided with some tact, sensitivity, and vigilance. In his letter to Nehru, Narendra Deva remarks:

So far as the agrarian situation is concerned I have every hope that with a little goodwill combined with firmness we can succeed in avoiding a conflict with the peasant organizations. The way in which some of our Behar Congressmen are proceeding is the sure way of inviting trouble which is bound to weaken the Congress organization.

²¹⁶ SW-AND-2, p. 97.

²¹⁷ *Congress Socialist*, 29 September 1934, SW-AND-1, p. 38.

²¹⁸ SW-AND-1, p. 106.

We can also easily prevent outbreaks of violence in the countryside if we only tighten up our organization & keep a watch on the activities of our workers.²¹⁹

Yet, so far as the colonial power was concerned, Narendra Deva was prepared to countenance a degree of violence. In his reminiscences Narendra Deva recalls telling Gandhi when he met him in Poona in 1945, after being released from Ahmednagar Fort Prison and Almora Jail, that while truth was fine, he did not think that state power could be snatched from the British without resort to a modicum of violence.²²⁰

7. Socialists and Constructive Work

Narendra Deva had given up his legal practice after the passage of the resolution on non-co-operation at the Nagpur session of the Congress in December 1920.²²¹ Associating himself with the reconstruction effort to nurture national educational institutions, he joined, at the suggestion of Jawaharlal Nehru, the faculty of the newly-established Kashi Vidyapith.²²² Narendra Deva found

²¹⁹ SW-AND-1, pp. 107–108.

²²⁰ “Mere Sansmaran”, *Rashtriyata Aur Samajwad*, Banaras, Gyan Mandal, 1949, p. 691. An account of this visit to Pune by Narendra Deva, along with Suraj Prasad Awasthi, also an MLA, and some of this conversation with Gandhi in late August or early September 1945, appears in CWMG, Vol. 81, pp. 209–210. Narendra Deva and Awasthi had inquired whether the Hindustan Mazdoor Sevak Sangh like the Indian National Congress could use the words “peaceful and legitimate” instead of “truth and nonviolence”. Gandhi told them that “truth and nonviolence” were also political terms though “in the political context, the words ‘peaceful and legitimate’ were considered to be more appropriate”. Reminding them that even these latter words had been introduced by him in the Congress constitution, Gandhi seemed to indicate, in answer to their query, a preference for the expression “truth and nonviolence” as, in a working class context, the “workers must be told in a straight and direct way as to what they should or should not do”.

²²¹ “Mere Sansmaran”, *Rashtriyata Aur Samajwad*, Benares, Gyan Mandal, 1949, p. 686. For the text of the non-co-operation resolution passed at the Nagpur session, see CWMG, Vol. 19, Appendix 1, New Delhi, Publications Division, 1966, pp. 576–578.

²²² “Mere Sansmaran”, *Rashtriyata Aur Samajwad*, op. cit., p. 686.

the work here more to his taste than the legal practice at Faizabad; later, in 1926, he would succeed Dr. Bhagvan Das as the head of this national institution. Although Narendra Deva had been involved with the educational aspects of the national movement, even as late as 1929 he had observed that “the constructive programme of the Congress is regarded as dull & tame” by many who “cared more for a live programme of immediate work”.²²³ This did not, however, prevent his involvement in these activities. For example, in May 1930 he had himself organized charkha training classes in Banaras in support of the khadi, that is, hand-spun cloth, promotion programme.²²⁴ In this matter the socialists came gradually to be influenced by Gandhi. Likewise, Gandhi too kept evolving and expanding his conception of constructive work. Born essentially out of the non-co-operation movement of the 1920s, the programme was later explained in a small compendium by Gandhi in December 1941 listing activities connected with communal unity, removal of untouchability, prohibition, khadi, other village industries, village sanitation, new or basic education, adult education, women, education in health and hygiene, leprosy, provincial languages, national language, that is, Hindustani (inclusive of Hindi and Urdu), economic equality, kisans, labour, adivasis, and students.²²⁵ This was further revised and enlarged in 1945.²²⁶ The political implications of such constructive activities were vividly underlined by Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, the “Frontier Gandhi” as he was known, at the Bombay session of the Indian National Congress in 1934. Referring to his tour of Bengal, the leader from the North West Frontier Province said that in subdivisions where the khadi programme had reached, resulting in some increase in incomes howsoever small, people were willing to come forward to attend Congress meetings; the contrary was true in other subdivisions

²²³ Letter to Jawaharlal Nehru, 9 February 1929, SW-AND-1, p. 3.

²²⁴ Jagdish Chandra Dikshit, *Acharya Narendra Deva*, Lucknow, Sochna Evam Jansampark Vibhag, Uttar Pradesh, 1989, p. 27.

²²⁵ CWMG, Vol. 75, pp. 146–166.

²²⁶ M.K. Gandhi, *Constructive Programme: Its Meaning and Place*, Ahmedabad, Navajivan Trust, 1945.

where *charkha* activities had not reached and where people were fearful of associating with Congress activities.²²⁷

It was Gandhi who had in 1934 initially drawn the attention of socialists through Narendra Deva to what he described as a “glaring omissions” from their draft programme; these omissions included, according to Gandhi, untouchability removal, communal unity, khaddar and prohibition.²²⁸ Having been more attentive to Gandhi and the evolution of his ideas than many writers and ideologues of the communist tradition, Narendra Deva, like most socialists of his time, was aware, for example, of Gandhi’s attempts at breaking social barriers and of his critique of caste.²²⁹ He pointed out that Gandhi advocated “interdining and intermarriage not only between different castes but between different communities”.²³⁰ Narendra Deva noted of Gandhi that “He is in no sense an orthodox Hindu. On the contrary, he breaks almost every rule and practice enjoined by orthodox Hinduism. He does not believe in the institution of caste and its observances and practices. He advocates

²²⁷ Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan’s speech reproduced in *Report of the 48th Session of the Indian National Congress: Proceedings*, Bombay, 1934, pp. 111–112. By this time the spread of the movement for handspun cloth was widespread enough for the Viceroy Irwin to acknowledge after the Gandhi-Irwin pact that “although the boycott has been dropped as a political weapon, Lancashire must realize that the movement against foreign cloth has attained great influence which it is going to retain”. (Irwin to Viscount Goschen, 30 March 1931, National Archives of India, Halifax Papers, Microfilm, Accession No. 3898.)

²²⁸ Letter to Narendra Deva, 2 August 1934, CWMG, Vol. 58, p. 274.

²²⁹ SW-AND-2, p. 119. See also Madhu Limaye’s work, *Manu, Gandhi and Ambedkar, And Other Essays*, New Delhi, Gyan Publishing House, 1995. One may make an instructive comparison between this work and B.T. Ranadive’s *Caste, Class and Property Relations*, Calcutta, National Book Agency, 1982. While Ranadive’s understanding of Gandhi’s position on untouchability, caste, and on *varna* distinctions remains frozen in the early 1930s, the socialist leader Limaye makes an attempt to understand the evolution of both Gandhi’s and Ambedkar’s ideas. In his *Atmakatha* (New Delhi, Bharatiya Prakashan Sansthan, 1998, p. 229), Limaye makes the point that the weaker Dalits, even in Maharashtra, which was Ambedkar’s base, were not against the Congress.

²³⁰ SW-AND-2, p. 119.



widow marriage ... He has devised his own marriage ritual and in this matter pays no regard to the existing laws.”²³¹

It is true, however, that leading socialists did not accord the importance to constructive work that many others in the Congress were prepared to give it. Years later Jayaprakash Narayan would recall:

Looking back it seems to me that we would have done well to associate ourselves with the constructive work of the Congress to a far greater extent than we did. We were responsible—and I more than others perhaps—in creating the feeling that all constructive work was unrevolutionary and, for socialists, a waste of time. I should like to put on record that that was an immature and mistaken view. Possibly, if we had come into the field of constructive work we might have developed aspects or types of it that would perhaps have enriched it. But whether that would have happened or not there is no doubt that we have impoverished ourselves a great deal by keeping out of that valuable field of activity, which would have given us experience and wider mass contact and enabled us to understand rural India in a more intimate manner.²³²

Many aspects of the “constructive programme” formulated by Gandhi gained the support of Narendra Deva who was included in the body set up by the Congress to prepare a plan for the development of Hindustani.²³³ Narendra Deva urged also that the educational system be remodeled “on the lines suggested by the Wardha scheme”.²³⁴ This was the scheme drawn up, on Gandhi’s inspiration, by a Committee appointed in 1937 with Dr. Zakir

²³¹ Idem.

²³² Bimal Prasad (ed.), *Jayaprakash Narayan Selected Works*, Volume 4, New Delhi, Nehru Memorial Museum & Library/Manohar Publishers and Distributors, 2003 pp. 229–230. More than forty years later this would be echoed by the socialist Limaye, who said of Gandhi: “Through his constructive programmes he penetrated the village India.” (Madhu Limaye, “Gandhi, Nehru and Quit India”, *Janata*, Quit India Number, Bombay, 1991, p. 13.)

²³³ See *Indian Annual Register*, 1938, Volume 2, p. 279.

²³⁴ SW-AND-1, p. 140.



Husain as its President, for free and compulsory education and with emphasis on handicraft/vocational training.²³⁵ This was reflected in Narendra Deva's work on basic education in the United Provinces and in the report of the UP Primary and Secondary Education Reorganisation Committee (1938), headed by him. This report had potentially significant ramifications. The Committee came down heavily against the distinction between "vernacular" and "Anglo-vernacular education".²³⁶ After the Committee submitted its report in February 1939, the United Provinces Government recorded in August that it had "already accepted the proposal of the Committee regarding the introduction of Basic Education—a term embracing education through concrete life situations and co-related with one or more forms of manual and productive work and the social and cultural environments of the child".²³⁷ The first Basic School was established in Begumsarai near Allahabad and speaking at inauguration in August 1939, UP Premier Govind Ballabh Pant said: "Gandhiji must be thanked for the idea, and Acharya Narendra Deva for the scheme and Mr Sampurnanand for putting the system into practice in U.P."²³⁸ The Committee's proposals were actually not confined to U.P. alone but were formulated with a view to being useful for other Indian provinces as well. As the U.P. Government noted: "Among the several recommendations made by the Committee one of the most important is that compulsory primary education should be imparted on a nation-wide scale free of charge and should extend for a period

²³⁵ The report of the (U.P.) Primary and Secondary Education Reorganisation Committee is a document of abiding relevance, even today, nearly eight decades later. Its observations on (i) compulsory and primary, that is, basic education, (ii) the unnatural distinctions between education intended for rural and urban populations, (iii) the examination system, and (iv) the high drop-out rate in schools, could have been made with today's situation in mind.

²³⁶ Report of the Primary and Secondary Education Reorganisation Committee, Lucknow, Government of the United Provinces, Department of Education, 1939, p. 35.

²³⁷ Paragraph 4 of the Government of U.P., Education Dept resolution, 4 August 1939.

²³⁸ B.R. Nanda (ed.), *Selected Works of Govind Ballabh Pant*, Volume 9, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 250.

of seven years beginning from the age of seven.”²³⁹ In the south, N.G. Ranga too accorded great significance to the constructive work movement and its impact. According to Ranga, “Gandhi and the nationalists outstripped the Liberals through revolutionary action and constructive work...”²⁴⁰ In Orissa, Malati Choudhury and Rama Devi had been active in the salt satyagraha and the former played an important role in establishing a branch of the Congress Socialist Party; Malati Choudhury was active also in the Kisan movement, presiding over various peasant conferences in 1938.²⁴¹ This positioning fitted well with Narendra Deva’s perspective. He appreciated and supported constructive work but felt that unless these activities were supplemented by mass organizations they could not lead to mass action.²⁴² The villages, according to him, needed to be the focus of a “New Life Movement” that “should have in view the removal of the cultural backwardness of the people” so as to give them “new aims and aspirations and developing co-operative and democratic habits among them”.²⁴³

On the question of inter-communal relations, a cardinal element in the constructive programme, Narendra Deva, like

²³⁹ Paragraph 5 of the Government of U.P., Education Dept. resolution, 4 August 1939.

²⁴⁰ N.G. Ranga, *Outlines of National Revolutionary Path*, Bombay, Hind Kitabs, 1945, p. 132.

²⁴¹ Bina Kumari Sarma, *Indian Historical Review*, Volume XXI, Numbers 1–2, pp. 78–112 at p. 94.

²⁴² The Swarajists in the 1920s had taken a similar position though without the emphasis on mass action that Narendra Deva had in mind. Motilal Nehru wrote in 1924: “We believe in the Constructive Programme, but we do not believe that by itself and without any other activity it will or can lead to Swaraj within a reasonable period of time.” See Ravinder Kumar and Hari Dev Sharma (eds), *Selected Works of Motilal Nehru*, Volume 4, New Delhi, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library/Vikas Publishing House, 1986, p. 223. Such reservations served to explain the focus of interest evinced by particular groups but do not appear to be moot or germane as Gandhi’s own political activities made it amply clear that he himself did not believe that the constructive programme, *by itself*, would bring about swaraj.

²⁴³ Acharya Narendra Deva [Yusuf Meherally (ed.)], *Socialism and The National Revolution*; Padma Publications, Bombay, 1946, p. 183.

Gandhi and Nehru, accorded importance to local neighbourhood-level work. Speaking in September 1946 at a meeting of Faizabad residents, Narendra Deva emphasized the need to organize Mohalla Committees: "...it was the poor people who suffered most during a communal riot. *Educated gentlemen goondas, more than anybody else, were responsible for riots.* It must be the concern of every Mohalla Committee to prevent communal disturbances from breaking out or extending to that Mohalla" (emphasis added).²⁴⁴ The importance of such neighbourhood groups has been neglected in recent decades as was evident yet again in the events in Muzaffarnagar in 2013 where neighbours were incited to turn upon their neighbours.

8. The Socialist Departure from the Congress

Soon after Indian independence in August 1947, the All India Congress Committee met in November at Delhi where the then Congress President, Acharya Kripalani announced his resignation. Gandhi, who attended the Working Committee meeting at which the new President was to be chosen, suggested Narendra Deva's name as Kripalani's successor.²⁴⁵ It was the second time that Gandhi had proposed Narendra Deva's name, the first occasion having been in the late 1930s. This episode and Gandhi's reasoning are recorded by his secretary and biographer, Pyarelal:

Gandhiji would have liked a Congress Socialist to be the President as there was no outstanding Congress leader outside the Government to take charge and he did not want the Congress to be turned into a mere rubber-stamp of the

²⁴⁴ SW-AND-1, p.117. Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Shah Nawaz Khan make similar suggestions. See (i) *Harijan*, 2 April 1938, 18 June 1938, and 15 September 1940; extracts compiled in M.K. Gandhi, *The Way to Communal Harmony*, Navajivan Trust 1963, pp. 288–291; and (ii) Jawaharlal Nehru's and Shah Nawaz Khan's statements after the Calcutta riots in 1946, *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru* (SWJN), Volume 15, New Delhi, Orient Longman, 1982, p. 316 and *Indian Annual Register*, 1946, Volume II, pp. 112–113.

²⁴⁵ D.G. Tendulkar, *Mahatma: Life of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi*, Volume 8, New Delhi, Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, New Edition, 1963, p. 191.



Government in power. He suggested the name of Acharya Narendra Deva but it was not acceptable to the Congress leaders.²⁴⁶

According to Kripalani's own account, this time Gandhi's choice of Narendra Deva had been supported by Nehru but was opposed by Sardar Patel.²⁴⁷

What kind of India was to be built? Tensions between the socialists and Sardar Patel in particular had been mounting. The Congress Socialists were usually in dissonance with Patel and resented his influence over the Congress organizational machinery. As Narendra Deva appeared to have foreseen, there was a symbiotic relation between the Left-wing propensity to plough their own respective furrows, in isolation from the national struggles, and the growth in "right-wing" influence within the movement and party. On his part, Patel viewed the socialists as the "sappers and miners of the Communist Party" in the context of the united front the socialists had formed with the communist group at the end of the 1930s.²⁴⁸ The widespread resentment that came about within the Congress on account of the attitude of the Communist Party of India both on the Pakistan question and on the Quit India movement of 1942, came ironically to be translated into a resentment against the socialists as well even though the latter by now shared the negative sentiment towards the communists in even greater measure than did the rest of the Congress.

Gandhi was assassinated on 30 January 1948. Barely eight or nine weeks after the assassination, the socialists resigned from the Indian National Congress. Jayaprakash Narayan had charged

²⁴⁶ Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi: The Last Phase*, Part 2 [Volume X], Ahmedabad, Navajivan Publishing House, First Edition, 1958; Reprint, 1997, p. 520.

²⁴⁷ J.B. Kripalani, *Gandhi: His Life and Thought*, New Delhi, Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, Revised Edition, 1991, p. 297.

²⁴⁸ M.R. Masani, *Bliss Was It in That Dawn ...: A Political Memoir Upto Independence*, 1977, New Delhi, Arnold-Heinemann, p. 96.



Home Minister Patel with communal bias and also with neglect of Gandhi's security.²⁴⁹ Meanwhile, the changes in the Congress constitution ensured that though persons belonging to non-communal organizations could enrol as members of the Congress, they could not hold any office in it. The socialists saw this as affecting their influence in the party.²⁵⁰ Instead of resisting and seeking to reverse this change, they decided to quit the Congress. On the eve of the socialists' departure, the Sixth Annual Conference of the Socialist Party was held at Nasik from 19 to 21 March 1948. Narendra Deva spoke his mind:

There is a vast disparity between what the Congress stands for and what the Congress governments do. The Congress claims that communalists have no place in it. And yet rank communalists are members of the government. Sardar Vallabhai Patel assures the capitalists by telling them that Shanmukham Chetty (the Union Finance Minister—A.N.) is their representative and therefore they need have no apprehensions. He wants the Leaguers to disband the League and join the Congress. He welcomes Hindu Mahasabhaites into the Congress. He pats the RSS and welcomes them too. By one door the Congress expels the socialists. Through another, it admits in capitalists and communalists. God alone can save the Congress.²⁵¹

One who was a strong defender of the Congress as the country's premier anti-imperial organization was now preparing to sever his ties with it. Eight years earlier, Narendra Deva had cautioned some of those in favour of leaving the Congress that as a result of their actions the party could be "converted into a rightist Congress out and out".²⁵² Now he was on the verge of following

²⁴⁹ Jayaprakash Narayan's speech at Surat, 29 February 1948, reproduced in Bimal Prasad (ed.), *Jayaprakash Narayan Selected Works*, Volume 4, New Delhi, Nehru Memorial Museum & Library/Manohar Publishers and Distributors, 2003, pp. 219–221.

²⁵⁰ Hari Kishore Singh, *A History of the Praja Socialist Party*, Lucknow, Narendra Prakashan, 1959, p. 99.

²⁵¹ SW-AND-2, p. 225.

²⁵² "The Indian Struggle: Next Phase", Bombay, Congress Socialist Party, 1940, reproduced in SW-AND-1, p. 223.

suit. The logic of his politics so far had implied that once British power was removed, the Congress including the socialists would fashion the country along the lines of the economic programme that they had conceived and supported. The socialists had emerged as nationally acclaimed personalities, especially after the Quit India struggle. Had they dug in their heels, it would have been difficult, if not impossible, for anyone to dislodge them from the Congress. Yet Narendra Deva's strategy of 'moving the entire Congress' had apparently come to naught, perhaps not for any intrinsic fault of his own but for causes and reasons that he was unable to control, effectively influence or perhaps even foresee.

In the couple of years immediately before independence, the Congress leadership had been in talks seeking to bridge the gulf even with the CPI; suggestions had been made by both Nehru and Patel that if the CPI's Pakistan line could be given up, past issues such as differences over the Quit India movement, would be put aside leaving little to hinder normal relations between the CPI and the Congress.²⁵³ These efforts did not fructify as the CPI appeared to be unwilling to change its line. But considering the fact of this approach towards even the CPI, a question arises as to what precipitated the breach between the Congress and the Socialists and whether this breach need necessarily have resulted in an organizational rupture.

Apart from Sardar Patel's general resentment towards the Left-wing as a whole, differences between him and the Socialists had been growing over individual issues in the post-war period. In August 1946 there were reports that some workers' unions affiliated to the Hindustan Mazdoor Sevak Sangh, which was committed to non-violence, were resorting to violent methods in Jamshedpur. Sardar Patel wrote to the Socialist and trade unionist, Prof. Abdul Bari, cautioning him about this.²⁵⁴ Prof. Bari was not

²⁵³ Javeed Ashraf, "Pakistan Movement and the CPI", *Secular Democracy*, March 1997, pp. 13–18.

²⁵⁴ Sardar Patel to Prof. Abdul Bari, 15 August 1946, in G.M. Nandurkar (ed.), *Sardar's Letters—Mostly Unknown*, Volume IV, Ahmedabad, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel Smarak Bhavan, 1977, p. 288.

only a founder, along with Rahul Sankrityayan, Jayaprakash Narayan, and others, of the Bihar Socialist Party formed in July 1931, but was also the first President of this party, a precursor of the Congress Socialist Party.²⁵⁵ Sardar Patel appears to have had a high opinion of Prof. Bari.²⁵⁶ Apparently, Prof. Bari had developed differences with Jayaprakash Narayan and Bari's appointment as President of the Bihar Provincial Congress Committee in 1946 became a sore point with Narayan in his relations with Patel.²⁵⁷ Incidentally, Prof. Bari was assassinated in March 1947 in an unconnected incident.²⁵⁸ Sardar Patel appears also to have accepted official reports that the Congress Socialists were undermining police discipline in Bihar and felt embarrassed by these as a member of the Interim Government.²⁵⁹ As prospects

²⁵⁵ Hari Dev Sharma, "The Formation of the Congress Socialist Party", *Samata Era*, 1984, Volume 4, Nos 5–7 (Special Issue on Fifty Years of Socialist Movement in India), pp. 1–13, at p. 2.

²⁵⁶ For Sardar Patel's opinion of Bari and his work, see letter from Patel to Jayaprakash Narayan, 15 August 1946, reproduced in Durga Das (ed.), *Sardar Patel's Correspondence*, Volume 2, Ahmedabad, Navajivan Publishing House, 1972, p. 400 and letter from Patel to Bari, 12 June 1946, reproduced in G.M. Nandurkar (ed.), *Sardar's Letters—Mostly Unknown-I*, Ahmedabad, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel Smarak Bhavan, 1977, p. 287. On the establishment of the Bihar Socialist Party in 1931, see Hari Dev Sharma, "Acharya Narendra Deva: A Biographical Sketch", in SW-AND-1, p. xxix.

²⁵⁷ See Jayaprakash Narayan to Patel, 29 May 1947, in Bimal Prasad (ed.), *Jayaprakash Narayan Selected Works*, Volume 4, New Delhi, Nehru Memorial Museum & Library/Manohar Publishers and Distributors, 2003, pp. 153–158. Clearly, the Patel–Socialists' dispute had wheels within wheels.

²⁵⁸ For Gandhi's warm tribute to Prof. Abdul Bari on 29 March 1947 upon his death earlier in the month, see *Harijan*, 13 April 1947, CWMG, Volume 87, pp. 177–178; see also Bimal Prasad (ed.), *Jayaprakash Narayan Selected Works*, Volume 4, op. cit., p. 156n. Earlier, the internment on 28 January 1945 of Abdul Bari (who was then Deputy Speaker of the Bihar Legislative Assembly), along with some other Bihar leaders, "on the charge of open preparation for another struggle" had led to an eloquent defence of Bari and others by Gandhi who said they were only carrying out the constructive programme (see CWMG, Volume 79, pp. 129–132).

²⁵⁹ Sardar Patel to Lord Mountbatten, 8 May 1947 and Sardar Patel to Sri Krishna Sinha, 8 May 1947 in Durga Das (ed.), *Sardar Patel's Correspondence*, Volume 5, pp. 100–101 and pp. 102–103.

for independence grew, Patel took an interest in efforts to bring the non-communist trade unions together under one platform and this led to the formation of the Indian National Trade Union Congress. In this connection he appears to have been put out by the fact that “Socialists, except Pandit Harihar Nath Shastri of Cawnpore, have not been able to make up their mind to join the INTUC”.²⁶⁰ The matter seems to have assumed some importance for Patel as a week later he wrote to the Congress General Secretary about it and referred to “the direct or indirect hostility” of the socialist group.²⁶¹ A few weeks later Patel wrote to Sampurnanand, a socialist and at the time Minister of Education and Finance in U.P.: “If our friend Narendra Dev could be persuaded to change his attitude, the Socialist Party would throw in its weight” in favour of the INTUC.²⁶² Apart from such organizational matters, the socialists had also been in disagreement with Jawaharlal Nehru and Sardar Patel over the attitude to be taken towards the proposals made by the British Cabinet Mission to India in the summer of 1946.²⁶³ The socialists were not enthused by the proposals or by the kind of Constituent Assembly that was under consideration; they therefore wanted to prepare for another round of struggle.²⁶⁴ Even in February 1947, Narendra Deva insisted that it was “by pinning our faith on the organized strength of the masses and not in negotiations that we shall win”.²⁶⁵ In July 1946 Sardar Patel in a letter to D.P. Mishra, a Congress leader from the Central Provinces, had remarked sarcastically in an obvious reference to

²⁶⁰ Sardar Patel to Pandit Govind Ballabh Pant, 14 May 1947, in Durga Das (ed.), *Sardar Patel's Correspondence*, Volume 5, p. 330.

²⁶¹ Sardar Patel to Shankarrao Deo, 22 May 1947, in Durga Das (ed.), *Sardar Patel's Correspondence*, Volume 4, p. 98.

²⁶² Sardar Patel to Sampurnanand, 18 June 1947, in Durga Das (ed.), *Sardar Patel's Correspondence*, Volume 5, pp. 331–332.

²⁶³ Bimal Prasad (ed.), *Jayaprakash Narayan Selected Works*, Volume 4, New Delhi, Nehru Memorial Museum & Library/Manohar Publishers and Distributors, 2003, p. 18.

²⁶⁴ Jayaprakash Narayan's speech at Public Meeting, Bombay, 11 May 1946 reproduced in Bimal Prasad (ed.), *Jayaprakash Narayan Selected Works*, Volume 4, New Delhi, Nehru Memorial Museum & Library/Manohar Publishers and Distributors, 2003 pp. 11–12.

²⁶⁵ Narendra Deva's interview to the Press, *National Herald*, 24 February 1947, reproduced in SW-AND-2, p. 159.



some of the Socialists and their role in 1942: “The underground variety of Congressmen, who call themselves ‘Augusters’, think they created the August revolution. Like a dog walking under a fully loaded cart they feel that the whole load is on their shoulders and they are dragging the whole cart”.²⁶⁶

With the approach of independence, pressure was brought upon the socialists to make certain changes in their organizational functioning. Changes were made at the Annual Party Conference of the Socialists that took place at Kanpur in late February and early March 1947 after a gap of nine years. The word “Congress” was now dropped from the name of the Congress Socialist Party and a decision was taken to admit non-Congressmen also into the party. At the same time it was claimed by Jayaprakash Narayan on behalf of the socialists that “(o)ur relation with the Congress will remain the same as before and, and the question of snapping the bonds of the Socialists with the Congress has not arisen”.²⁶⁷ The Kanpur decisions do not appear to have been thought through and were obviously self-contradictory. The changes were made in the wake of criticism that the socialists were acting contrary to Congress policies. If the Socialists wished to retain the Congress connection as before the decision to admit non-Congressmen into the party was quite illogical. The decision to drop the appellation “Congress” and to admit non-Congressmen was consistent only with preparing to break the organizational link with the Congress. That break came at Nasik a year after the Socialists’ Kanpur session of February–March 1947. The resolution passed by the socialists at Nasik referred to the “role of the Congress as a joint front of the Indian people” as having come to an end and also maintained that the “new constitution of the Congress specifically outlaws, for the first time in its historic career, organized groups and parties from functioning in the Congress”.²⁶⁸ Though the onus

²⁶⁶ Sardar Patel to D.P. Mishra, 29 July 1946 in Durga Das (ed.), *Sardar Patel’s Correspondence*, Volume 3, p. 155.

²⁶⁷ Bimal Prasad (ed.), *Jayaprakash Narayan Selected Works*, Volume 4, New Delhi, Nehru Memorial Museum & Library/Manohar Publishers and Distributors, 2003, pp. 117–118.

²⁶⁸ *Report of the Sixth Annual Conference held at Kotwalnagar, Nasik, March 19th to March 21st, 1948*, Bombay, Socialist Party, pp. 39–40.

for the break was sought to be placed in Nasik largely on constitutional change within the Congress, Kanpur had already paved the way for it. How did Narendra Deva, given his ideological understanding throughout the years of struggle, countenance the internal inconsistency of the Kanpur decisions taken a year earlier? Narendra Deva's speech as chairman of the reception committee at Kanpur furnishes no clue to this as it focuses primarily on the question of democracy being consistent with socialism and on problems of socialist unity.²⁶⁹ The socialist Madhu Limaye who was present at the Kanpur session has shed some further light on Narendra Deva's position. Replying to the debate at Kanpur on the question of continuing relations with the Congress, Narendra Deva had denied that the decisions being taken there were a first step towards leaving the Congress.²⁷⁰ According to him the reference to the Congress was being deleted from the name of the Party only because some Congress members had said that socialists tend to misuse the Congress name; he indicated also that the change was being made after consultation with leading Congress figures.²⁷¹ Narendra Deva in fact maintained at Kanpur that the Congress still had great capacity to serve as a vehicle for change and for running the state in a proper manner.²⁷² Madhu Limaye records that listening to Narendra Deva at Kanpur he understood the meaning of the whole of Narendra Deva's speech; but Limaye himself doubted whether the fast-changing situation would permit the socialists to remain in the Congress for long.²⁷³ Clearly, Narendra Deva was not inclined towards the socialists leaving the Congress. There were other forces pushing and pulling in that direction. Minoo Masani, who tried in vain to prevent a split, hinted at this in a letter to Patel requesting him to ensure that a lack of contact between Patel and the socialists did not result in a new alignment which "would be unfortunate for both the

²⁶⁹ *Address of Acharya Narendra Deva, Chairman, Reception Committee, Fifth Annual Congress Socialist Party Conference, Cawnpore, 1st March 1947*, reproduced in SW-AND-2, pp. 160–165.

²⁷⁰ Madhu Limaye, *Atmakatha*, New Delhi, Bharatiya Prakashan Sansthan, 1998, p. 492.

²⁷¹ *Idem.*

²⁷² Madhu Limaye, *Atmakatha*, op. cit., pp. 492–493.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 493.



Congress and the country”.²⁷⁴ At this time Patel was pre-occupied with negotiations that would lead to the partition of India itself. Indeed, the acceptance of the Mountbatten plan would also become a point of contention between the socialists and the Congress leadership, particularly Patel. Gandhi told the socialists that the need of the hour was to counter communalism, not create new parties: “You have simply not understood what socialism means.... Even in Russia their policies have not succeeded completely. Why don’t you try to save the country from the calamity that has befallen it today? So long as this communal virus has not been eradicated, socialism will never come.”²⁷⁵ He asked them to talk things over, writing in July 1947: “If we do not unite and work together, I think neither the Congress nor the Socialists will succeed.”²⁷⁶

In the following year Narendra Deva in his speech at the Nasik session of the Socialists would say:

It is not that we are in a hurry to quit the Congress. The Congress is compelling us to get out of it. Once the Congress President asked us to drop the prefix ‘Congress’ from our Party name. He also pleaded that our Party doors be thrown open to non-Congressmen. He suggested that this would enable us to continue in the Congress. We did all that at Kanpur. Today they have adopted a constitution which has left us no other alternative.²⁷⁷

If Narendra Deva did not wish to leave the Congress, it was apparently a somewhat strange and counter-intuitive piece of advice for him and the socialists to have accepted from the then Congress President, J.B. Kripalani, resulting in the changes made at Kanpur. As Limaye’s account of Narendra Deva’s speech at Kanpur indicates, Narendra Deva was in fact reluctant to part

²⁷⁴ Minoo Masani to Sardar Patel, 26 May 1947, reproduced in Ganesh M. Nandurkar (ed.), *Sardar’s Letters—Mostly Unknown*, Part 2, Ahmedabad, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel Smarak Bhavan, 1980, pp. 214–215.

²⁷⁵ Discussion with Socialist Workers, 7 June 1947, CWMG, Volume 88, pp. 96–97.

²⁷⁶ Letter dated 22 July 1947, CWMG, Volume 88, p. 396.

²⁷⁷ SW-AND-2, p. 224.



company with the Congress. It went against what he had stood for; yet he ultimately went along with the dominant view among socialists as represented by Jayaprakash Narayan who had by now burnt his boats with Patel and the organizational machine of the parent party. Later Narendra Deva would write that it was the new rule that was sought to be introduced in the Congress constitution that made him decide to quit; for him that became the litmus test after which “all my doubts cleared up”.²⁷⁸ Years later Jayaprakash Narayan would have second thoughts. He was reported in July 1964, a few weeks after Nehru’s death, to have said that “leaving the Congress in 1948 to form the Socialist Party” was a mistake committed on account of “the wrong assessment of the character of the Congress”.²⁷⁹ According to him “(m)ost of his partymen thought at that time that the Congress would slowly develop into a conservative-cum-liberal party just like ‘what the Swatantra Party is today’. But history belied this assessment”.²⁸⁰ Ironically, the then assessment may have provided an accurate description of the *later* Congress towards the last two decades of the twentieth century. By then, several possibilities and alternate policies the socialists could have meaningfully expanded and expounded and to which they might conceivably have made a greater contribution, were lost to them.

9. Some Further Post-Independence Developments

Not all socialists left the Congress. Many stayed on but this is not the place to trace their story. We may conclude this essay, without going into subsequent organizational and electoral twists and turns, with a brief reference to such post-independence developments as may be necessary to appreciate how socialist

²⁷⁸ Narendra Dev, “My Recollections”, in B.V. Keskar and V.K.N. Menon (eds), *Acharya Narendra Deva: A Commemoration Volume*, New Delhi, National Book Trust, 1971, p. 16. This piece is a translation of Narendra Deva’s article, “Mere Sansmaran” published in *Janvani*, in September 1948.

²⁷⁹ *The Hindustan Times*, 4 July 1964, cited in Girja Shankar, *Socialist Trends in the Indian National Movement*, Meerut, Twenty-First Century Publishers, 1987, p. 294n.

²⁸⁰ *Idem.*

politics came subsequently to stand in the context of Narendra Deva's ideas. Narendra Deva reiterated the relevance of non-violent struggle and Satyagraha even in the post-independence years. In 1949, on the occasion of the agitation carried on by Ram Manohar Lohia in favour of the democratic forces in Nepal, Narendra Deva commended Lohia not only for the peaceful satyagraha that Lohia led outside the Nepal embassy in Delhi; he backed Lohia also on the civil liberties questions about the way the protest was handled by Delhi's Police.²⁸¹ In later years too, Narendra Deva lent support to Lohia on various civil liberties issues such as those related to the Farrukhabad peasants' agitation and the struggle for democratic rights in Manipur in India's north-east in 1954.²⁸² The differences between them over a political crisis that arose in Travancore-Cochin and on other matters that soon followed were also marked. Some of these issues, which assumed an organizational-disciplinary form, have been dealt with adequately elsewhere and do not fall within the scope of this essay.²⁸³ In post-independence Indian socialism, Lohia was the principal figure associated with the socialist retreat from Marxism and the attempt to offer another ideological framework which came to be associated with later Indian socialists. The principal intellectual reason for this retreat was the increasing material that was becoming available on political intolerance and restriction of individual liberty within the Soviet Union. The Pachmarhi Convention of the socialists in May 1952 which was presided over by Lohia can be said to mark the socialist break with Marxism.

²⁸¹ Narendra Deva, "The Weapon of Satyagraha", *National Herald*, 26 June 1949, reproduced in Acharya Narendra Deva, *Towards Socialist Society* [Brahmanand (ed.)], New Delhi, Centre of Applied Politics, pp. 362–364.

²⁸² "Statement on Dr Lohia's Arrest", *National Herald*, 28 July 1954, SW-AND-4, pp. 67–68; "Statement on Manipur Satyagraha", 24 December 1954, published in *Janata*, 2 January 1955, SW-AND-4, pp. 84–86.

²⁸³ See, for example, Hari Kishore Singh, *A History of the Praja Socialist Party*, Lucknow, Narendra Prakashan, 1959, pp. 200–215 and Hari Dev Sharma, "Acharya Narendra Deva: A Biographical Sketch", in SW-AND-1, pp. xl-xliv for two interpretations of the events that led to an internal split among the socialists.



Narendra Deva and Lohia had had close personal relations from the days of the latter's father Hiralal Lohia who had been jailed in various nationalist struggles.²⁸⁴ In his writings, such as *Saptakranti*, or “seven revolutions”, published in 1963, Lohia may be seen in relation to Narendra Deva somewhat as Antonio Gramsci may be in relation to Karl Marx, that is, in certain respects, an extension, though by no means a replacement.²⁸⁵ Narendra Deva (and Lohia in such writings), placed emphasis on the dissolution of caste which the former quite clearly regarded as an anti-democratic institution. Both believed that in a socialist society civil liberties ought to be deepened, not curtailed. In actual policy and praxis the differences between the approaches represented by them become further marked for, in his anti-Congressism, Lohia later sought and pursued alliances even with forces that Narendra Deva had shunned.

Both Narendra Deva and Lohia had come into close contact with Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru. But Lohia has left behind among his followers a largely post-independence legacy of often bitter anti-Nehruism, which tendency is absent in Narendra Deva. With Narendra Deva's political life in the pre-independence Congress entwined with Nehru's, the two remained personally close even after the socialists as a party left the Congress in 1948.²⁸⁶ On their geopolitical perspectives, the differences between Narendra Deva's ideas and those of Ram Manohar Lohia can, of course, be discerned in their stated ideological positions; but these

²⁸⁴ SW-AND-2, p. 98.

²⁸⁵ For a broad summary of some of the ideas in Lohia's *Saptakranti*, see “Seven Revolutions”, *Janata*, 9 August 2009 (excerpted from the latter part of the preface to Lohia's, *Marx, Gandhi and Socialism*, Hyderabad, Rammanohar Lohia Samata Vidyala Nyasa, 1963). He refers to various “revolutions”, including that for national freedom, the *satyagraha* against weapons and armed might, the social revolution, including the struggle for gender equality, and the struggles against caste and against racial and colour discrimination, the economic struggle of the poor against the rich and the “revolution” aiming to protect privacy against encroachment by the collective.

²⁸⁶ See also in this connection Narendra Deva's article on Nehru, written in April 1949 more than a year after the former's departure from the Congress: SW-AND-3, pp. 147–154.

become more visibly evident in the actual post-Narendra Deva political trajectory of the socialists. Narendra Deva was not inclined to embrace the Western alliance even as a response to what he saw as some grave provocations to Indian nationalism and Indian socialism from the pre-independence Indian communist movement which had sought simultaneously to claim a sole-spokesmanship on behalf of Marxism. Although a critic of certain aspects of Soviet development, Narendra Deva was emphatic that socialist criticism of the Soviet Union must be friendly and must not lower her image in the eyes of the world. This did not, of course mean that he was uncritical of the Soviet Union. For example, in his presidential address at the Bihar Congress Socialist Party Conference on 16 February 1947 he had referred disapprovingly to the “undemocratic nature of the Soviet Russian administration”.²⁸⁷ Two weeks later, in his address at the Kanpur session of the socialists on 1 March 1947, Narendra Deva was again critical of the absence of political freedom in Soviet Russia.²⁸⁸ As Narendra Deva died a few days before Khrushchev’s disclosures in February 1956, this has given rise to hypothetical propositions about how he would have reacted to these; but given the criticisms he had already made, it is implausible to utilize Khrushchev’s revelations to set Narendra Deva on a posthumous path of anti-Marxism and pro-Americanism of the kind that a section of later Indian socialists took. He had made a sharp critique of American imperialism and, in his correspondence with Asoka Mehta, had also made it clear that he would rather leave the party than give up Marxism. Narendra Deva’s article in *Janvani* on “America’s New Imperialism” was published in 1947.²⁸⁹ Even prior to Indian independence, when the United States had appeared in the 1940s to be pressuring Winston Churchill on Indian independence, Narendra Deva cautioned against relying too much on the US: “The tendency exhibited during the war to count too

²⁸⁷ SW-AND-2, p. 158.

²⁸⁸ SW-AND-2, pp. 162–163.

²⁸⁹ An English translation was published decades later. See Narendra Deva, “American Imperialism”, *Janata*, Bombay, 15 January 1989. The 1947 article, *America Ka Naya Samrajyavad*, was translated from the Hindi by H.B. Mehndiratta.



much on the goodwill and support of the USA is to be deprecated. It seems as if in the days to come the USA would more and more refuse to interfere in the domestic affairs of the British Empire.”²⁹⁰ In like manner, though Narendra Deva left the Congress in 1948, he was not prepared to be pushed on the rebound into unsavoury alliances or platforms that could encourage or politically strengthen the sectarianism of any religious community or other group whether for electoral or for other tactical purposes. He had understood also the complexities of peasant movements and warned against acquiescing in the development of these struggles along casteist or religious-communal lines.

²⁹⁰ Narendra Deva, “India and the Post-War World”, *Amrit Bazar Patrika*, Annual Pujā Number, 1945, reproduced in Yusuf Meherally (ed.), op. cit., pp. 162–167, at p. 164.