The Birth of India's Samyukta Socialist Party

Benjamin N. Schoenfeld

Even before Prime Minister Nehru's death on May 27, 1964, the splintered socialist opposition in India had been attempting to find common ground upon which to develop a coherent socialist party program and an effective opposition to the Government. Nehru's declining psychological and political leadership, the Congress party's internal strife over the direction of program development, and its failure to implement a comprehensive socialist program—all created a political vacuum which opposition socialist elements sought to fill. The failure of both the Praja Socialist Party (PSP) and the Socialist Party (SP) to achieve this goal and the increasing strength of the rightist Jana Sangh and Swatantra Party pointed to the need to reassess the character and future role of the split socialist groups.

The search for socialist unity began shortly after the 1948 schism of the Socialists led by Ashoka Mehta and Ramanohar Lohia from the Congress party leadership. The result was the formation of the Kisan Mazdoor Praja Party (KMPP) in 1951. The PSP was born after the disillusioning KMPP showing in the 1952 general elections. Lohia's break from the PSP, which occurred shortly thereafter centered around three main issues: (1) the police firing upon a crowd in Travandore-Cochin under a minority PSP Government in August 1954 and his telegraphic direction from the Allahabad jail to the PSP Kerala Ministry which was viewed as indiscipline against the party by its leaders (this led to the crystallization of differences between Lohia-ites and the party's National Executive); (2) PSP opposition in the fight over the irrigation struggle in the important state of Uttar Pradesh (UP); (3) attacks upon Lohia's viewpoints made by his PSP colleagues.

There were other disagreements. In the UP widespread attacks were made by Lohia's supporters upon the National Executive. In addition, his followers bitterly objected to a year's suspension of the socialist leader Madhu Limaye by the Bombay PSP leadership after he had charged that Ashoka Mehta, the PSP leader, intended to lead the PSP back into the Congress party. Lohia insisted that for these reasons he and his followers were expelled by the PSP while the PSP stated that Lohia left of his own accord.

1 For a masterly analysis of this period, see Weiner, Myron, Party Politics in India, Princeton, N.J., 1957, pp. 49-97.
2 Lohia, Ramanohar, Socialist Unity, Hyderabad, 1957, pp. 4-5.
3 Praja Socialist Party, Facts Relating to Lohia's Attempt at Disrupting the PSP, New Delhi, 1955, p. 3.
The climax of these conflicts led to his decision (at Mehboobnagar, Hyderabad, on June 4, 1955) to form a new party and to tour the country charging the PSP leadership was impotent, diluted and not really opposing the Congress which he believed was the only political party in the country. As a result he was suspended from PSP membership in July 1955.

For over a year before this final split, Lohia had asked J. P. Narayan, the Sarvodaya leader, to take the helm of the PSP because “you alone can be the nation’s leader and can further the cause of socialism.” After the latter’s prompt refusal, no further serious reconciliation was attempted until April 1957, almost two years after the split. At that time Narayan suggested a meeting which was held in Lucknow in July 1957. Lohia insisted the PSP accept the SP Constitution, Policy and Program as a precondition for socialist unity, and that only one of the two parties should function until unity occurred. Responding to these conditions Narayan pointed out that the PSP was not going to surrender to the SP and that he was not a representative for that party but had acted upon his own responsibility as a supporter of Indian socialism and democracy. He withdrew from further efforts to achieve unity saying “this chapter is closed now and I do not have to do anything more in this matter.” Lohia replied that his preconditions were known to the PSP before the talks began and in a postscript he wisely predicted that the political situation would further deteriorate during the next two or three years. There were no immediate major developments toward socialist unity, although both groups maintained informal contacts. But suddenly, the national executives of both parties were faced by a de facto merger in the UP legislature on December 13, 1962. The merger was unique, a unilateral action taken by the UP party leaders without the prior initiative and approval of the national executives of both parties. It resulted from a meeting of 54 UP legislative members of both parties behind locked doors where there was a frank exchange of views. After weighing their differences, they decided to set up a three-man committee to prepare a policy-statement mutually acceptable to both groups.

Several factors operated in favor of the merger. First, although not foremost, was the emergence of the rightist Jana Sangh as a powerful opposition party group both within the Lok Sabha and the UP legislature. Its strength had increased from 4 to 14 seats in the Lok Sabha after the last (1962) election. In the UP it had grown from 17 to 49 seats. Although the Socialist Party’s UP victory of 24 seats surpassed its performance in other states, it won only 6 seats in the Lok Sabha. On the other hand, the PSP fared rather badly in the Lok Sabha, dropping from 19 seats to 12 and from 44 to 38 in the UP legislature. The UP legislators believed their national position would be improved since union would result in a total of 18 op-

---

5 Letter from J. P. Narayan to R. Lohia, dated Gaya, August 20, 1957.
position votes. While not replacing the Communist Party (29 seats) as the leading opposition group in the Lok Sabha, it would challenge the Jana Sangh (14 seats) and Swatantra Party (18 seats). Underlying the UP merger effort was an attempt to head off growing Jana Sangh strength in both the state legislature and throughout the nation in preparation for the national elections in 1967.

The state merger immediately resulted in 59 members for the new United Socialist Group against 49 members of the Jana Sangh and 15 members of the Swatantra Party. Another reason for the UP merger was the reaction against the Congress-Communist alliance on the UP Emergency Surcharge on Land Revenue and Rent Bill in the legislature and the Communist support of the Nehru Government in the Lok Sabha. This working agreement between the Congress and the Communists against both socialist groups led to the conclusion that regardless of their differences, the PSP and SP should nevertheless unite against this coalition. In the UP the resignation of Genda Singh as PSP leader, and his replacement by Balwant Singh, the Deputy Leader, a former member of the SP, meant the disappearance of significant opposition to unity efforts. The state SP leadership under Ugra Sen, a moderate on the merger issue, created a favorable climate for agreement.

The USP in the UP then appointed a three-man committee to formulate its program. It was composed of Triloki Singh, a member of the PSP National Executive Board and Chairman of the PSP State Parliamentary Board; Ram Chandra Shukla, a former President of the UP SP and now a leading PSP member; and Kashinath Misra, a Socialist Party member of the UP legislature.

The reaction of both national parties to this ad hoc merger was sharply contrasting. The SP Chairman, Raj Narain, labelled the merger move a violation of the SP constitution and of its policy. He immediately dispatched R. S. Yadav, leader of the Socialist Group in the Lok Sabha and G. Murahari, Secretary of the Party's Parliamentary Board, to Lucknow to investigate. While the SP leadership appeared stunned by the rapid chain of events, Prem Bhasin, Joint Secretary of the PSP, welcomed the move as consistent with its April 1962 Patna Resolutions. The PSP leadership hoped that the UP merger would catch on in other areas. Almost immediately, talks to accomplish this were begun in Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Punjab, Rajasthan, Bihar, Maharashtra, and Gujarat. On the other hand, SP leaders stood fast upon their earlier demands for merger with pre-conditions. Moreover, there was active movement by the party's leadership including Rabi Roy, General Secretary and Professor Vasudev Singh, the Chairman of the UP Socialist Party, to discipline the SP legislators.

---

Murahari issued a directive to the SP legislators involved to either dissociate themselves from the new group unless it accepted the SP program and principles or face suspension from the party.

Although Raj Narain opposed merger, he recognized the fait accompli in the UP, and after the three-man USP Committee unanimously accepted the SP Election Manifesto of 1962 as a working basis, he indicated that no disciplinary action would be taken against them. This principle of merger unanimously accepted by the USP at its first general meeting on December 25, 1962 at Lucknow, was significant since it became the basis upon which national merger was sought. While the PSP group in the UP hoped that no pre-condition would be laid down in advance of the actual merger, the SP in the UP proposed that the merger accept the principles of the Socialist Party from which the party’s Election Manifesto emanated. Ultimately the group decided that the national problem should be resolved by the National Executive of both national parties.

This issue became the major topic on the agenda of the fifteen-man National Executive of the Socialist Party and of the National Conference of the party which met in Bharatpur at the end of December 1962. Most members of the SP National Executive favored talks with the PSP although a small group of “old timers” (3 out of 15) refused any merger and preferred to see their own party disbanded. Meanwhile, the 24 SP legislators from the UP were told that no disciplinary action would be taken against them but that any future merger would have to be attained upon the basis of the seven-year old Socialist Party Policy Statement. The National Executive then formally approved the UP merger and expressed its readiness to take the necessary steps to achieve national unity among socialists. The Executive Resolution suggesting that the SP would not insist upon PSP’s acceptance of the SP 1962 Election Manifesto, was meant as a concession in view of its earlier statement that it would only merge if its thesis, policy and program were adopted.

The resolution was subsequently approved by the SP Bharatpur Conference by a vote of 221 to 62 which authorized the National Executive to take the necessary steps to complete the unification if the PSP accepted the Election Manifesto. This decision was supported by 75 per cent of the delegates present after seventeen hours of intense discussion and debate. The opponents of the merger insisted that merger would weaken the socialist movement; that it would be preferable to disband the party; and that the National Executive of the Party had forfeited the confidence of the rank and file by its approval of the UP merger. Throughout these events Lohia, the Party’s founder, leader and chief strategist, announced that he would not participate in any phase of the merger talks because of his old age, his lack

---

9 Times of India, December 18, 1962, p. 10.
The Birth of India's Samyukta Socialist Party

of ability to bargain, and the impression that he would create difficulties if he participated, but he did state that the minimum basis of merger talks should be the 1962 SP Election Manifesto. Lohia's control of the SP on the merger issue was evident by the National Executive’s support of this view, and by his popularity with delegates at the Conference, even though he did not attend it.

The PSP reaction to the SP resolutions was one of disappointment. PSP Joint Secretary, Prem Bhasin, thought the SP qualification was unfortunate, and that the unconditional UP merger pattern was preferable. Chandra Shekhar Singh, the General Secretary of the UP PSP, speaking at Patna suggested that an interim working program based on the election manifestos of both parties be developed and that a small joint committee chalk out an interim program until long-term policy matters could be settled by a joint policy commission.

At this point, suspicion, long rankling in both groups, again broke loose. The SP National Executive warned its members that they would suffer disciplinary action if merger was affected at state or district levels before the national issue was resolved. This warning was designed to forestall any further merger progress in Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Punjab, Rajasthan, and Maharashtra, where active merger talks were already being held. The SP leadership was afraid that the PSP would capture its members' loyalty during such talks by pushing for merger, and so the SP attempted to restrain merger activities of its state groups while PSP state groups continued to press hard in the Punjab, Jaipur, Simla, Madhya Pradesh, New Delhi, Bombay and Rajasthan.

The critical phase of the national talks began in New Delhi on January 10, 1963 with the SP demanding PSP acceptance of its Election Manifesto as its pre-condition for merger while the PSP continuously asked for clarification of some of its provisions. This obstacle became the major item on the agenda of the 45-man PSP National Executive meetings which began in New Delhi on January 29, 1963. Several members of the group pointed out that acceptance of the SP pre-condition would result in a merger of the PSP into the SP and would not be made upon the basis of the equality of both parties. Although much of the SP Election Manifesto contained principles to which Praja Socialists could not object, there were obstacles on such issues as the status of English, governing policy toward scheduled castes and untouchables, Chinese aggression, evaluation of political parties, the role of the intelligentsia, the right of public employees other than members of the armed forces and police to actively participate in politics, as well as the uncomplimentary references to the PSP.

Initially the PSP National Executive was divided between those leaders

---

who endorsed a merger with no pre-conditions, while rejecting the 1962 SP Election Manifesto as irresponsible, and those leaders supporting immediate merger on the basis of the Manifesto because of their belief that socialist opposition was desperately needed during the Sino-Indian emergency. In a conciliatory resolution, the PSP National Executive stated that although preferring merger on the basis of the UP formula, since the Manifesto contained positions on various issues to which it could not agree, it suggested a joint committee from both sides prepare mutually acceptable necessary modifications of the Manifesto in the light of the changed national circumstances.\(^3\) To implement this suggestion it appointed a seven-man committee headed by the Maharastrian S. M. Joshi. It also noted that the UP United Socialist Party program confined its efforts to these portions of the Manifesto which outlined a concrete program until the national merger issue was settled and a program was finally formulated by both sides.

The SP National Executive's response to this resolution calling for a joint committee was sharply critical. The SP charged that the PSP was responsible for the collapse of the talks, accused its leaders of duplicity in requesting modification and it appealed to PSP state units to unite with the SP, asking the Rajasthan, UP United Socialist Party, and Tamilnad groups to function as legislative wings of the SP. The SP resolution called upon PSP units in India to join the SP despite the “obstructionist” tactics of PSP leaders. SP Chairman, Raj Narain, stated that the SP Election Manifesto was a just document which the SP National Executive was not authorized to alter and charged that the PSP rank and file supported unity along the lines advocated by the SP. He characterized the PSP National Executive's contention that the PSP legislators in the UP had accepted the Manifesto in part as a “blatant lie.”\(^4\) The SP Chairman's statement that he did not see any prospects for further negotiations was meant to foreclose any further unity drives.

Shortly thereafter, early in February, 1963, Raj Narain and SP General Secretary, Robi Roy, travelled to Lucknow (UP) in an effort to influence SP members of the United Socialist Party to leave the newly formed unit. Some of the SP members attempted to wreck the UP group by demanding that it pass a resolution condemning the PSP National Executive on the question of unity. When the PSP members refused to do so since it would mean a censure of their own leaders, Ugra Sen, the leader of the United Socialist Party, walked out and the group continued under the direction of the Deputy Leader, Balwant Singh, a PSP member. Meanwhile Raj Narain was busily engaged in trying to obtain SP member signatures binding themselves to SP discipline and to secede from the new group. Only 8 out of 24

\(^3\) Ibid., February 1, 1963, p. 1.

250
The Birth of India's Samyukta Socialist Party

SP legislators supported his efforts. Most of the SP and PSP members remained adamant in their unity.\(^\text{15}\)

Although formal merger talks had broken down after SP rejection of the 1963 PSP Resolution, informal talks continued between both parties. The considerable progress toward unity in Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Bihar all served to exert pressure upon SP leadership to accept unity as inevitable. The continuous PSP pleas for further informal discussion kept the national merger issue alive. Throughout the nation various formulae were offered for keeping open the lines of communication between both parties. One suggestion by the PSP Opposition Leader of the Madhya Pradesh Vidhan Sabha, Chandra Pratap Tiwari, was the convening of a national convention of both parties to thrash out differences.\(^\text{16}\)

Triloki Singh, PSP leader in the UP and a member of the PSP National Executive, believed that party leaders should make fresh attempts to develop an acceptable formula which would then be presented to the National Executives of both parties.

The SP's inability to wreck the UP United Socialist Party, the continuing informal discussions between Raj Narain and Triloki Singh, and the final decision of the two groups to merge in Madhya Pradesh in replacing the leading Jana Sangh opposition, all created a continuing pressure to achieve unity.

What then were the differences that blocked unity? Most significant was the conception of each party's role in relation to other political groups. Western socialist political thought has witnessed the development of socialist groups which maintain purist positions and eschew cooperation with non-socialist groups, however close the ties and common their interests. Other socialist groups have, on the contrary, made arrangements ranging from electoral understandings to united-front alliances with like-policies non-socialist groups. This western development is being re-lived again in modern Indian socialist history. It is significant in the context of this process for merger that Lohia's "equi-distance theory" (that the socialist group maintain its equilibrium by equally opposing the Communist Left, the ruling Congress Party, the Rightist Swatantra and Jana Sangh) was a classical exposition of this doctrinaire view. On the other hand, the PSP mentor, Ashoka Mehta, was willing to cooperate with the ruling party so long as its program of national development was consistent with PSP program goals. To SP leaders this policy made the PSP appear as a pale echo of Congress rule and thus a betrayal of socialist principles. There were also significant differences in the internal power-structure of each party. While Lohia's Socialist Party emphasized unlimited freedom of speech for its members, yet his own dominant personality and his pivotal role went a long way to restrain their exercise. There was a greater distribution of power among the

---

\(^{15}\) *Hindustan Times*, February 8, 1963, p. 1.
\(^{16}\) *Statesman*, February 9, 1963, p. 3.
PSP leadership which tended to encourage a broader range of expression of opinion. SP insistence on PSP acceptance of the 1962 Manifesto presented another obstacle to unity. Past references to the PSP as “a wholly opportunistic group,” a “ladder for becoming legislators,” and as assuring protection for private property, supporting caste society, and backers of English-oriented high-caste, moneyed, middle classes, simply could not be accepted by the PSP. These attacks resulted in the PSP request for clarification of the Manifesto and in its plea for a joint committee.

There were also specific programmatic differences which bedevilled unity and were far more serious. One of the most important was the language issue. The SP, with its stronghold in Hindi-speaking areas in Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh was adamant in its Manifesto that public use of English be stopped both at the state and national governmental levels with reservations made for gazetted offices for non-Hindi states for ten years or in the alternative, quotas based on population. Subsequently in September 1962 Lohia expressed views modifying the Manifesto provisions when he divided India into the coastal regions in which languages other than Hindi were spoken, and the mid-lands which utilized Hindi. He suggested that as a last resort, two departments, one in Hindi and the other in English, be established in New Delhi to suit individual state needs, and that coastal regions abandon English, strongly implying the substitution of the local or regional tongue. The PSP on the other hand has supported the government policy that English be utilized as an associate official language where Hindi is not the mother-tongue. Such a policy prevented embarrassment to the PSP in its English-speaking constituencies in South India. Although both parties differed on their language policy there appeared to be sufficiently common ground to negotiate agreement on this subject.

Two additional major issues also prevented merger. The SP had demanded that a 60 per cent reservation in all high positions be given to women, Sudras, Harijans, Adavasis, and backward castes of religious minorities so long as the disabilities of these groups were not wholly removed. While also advocating the abolition of disabilities for these groups, the PSP viewed a percentile reservation as not defensible. The SP had also advocated that all government employees except the armed forces and police should have the right to join and work in political parties. The PSP supported the view that such employees were in a non-political category and that permitting their entry into politics would demoralize the civil service.

As the PSP saw that the probability of merger lessening, it increased the tempo of its direct political action campaign. On February 10, 1963 the PSP National Executive observed Anti-Compromise Day, holding nationwide demonstrations against possible Congress compromise with the Chinese Communists. In March 1963 it withdrew its cooperation with the Kerala Congress Government following its decision to operate as an active opposition, as it was the second largest opposition party of sixteen members.
The Birth of India's Samyukta Socialist Party

following the principal Communist Party opposition. Although it con-
tinued informal talks with the SP, the PSP National Executive on May 5,
1963 decided not to pursue unity talks any further as these served no fruit-
ful purpose. The Spring 1963 parliamentary by-elections produced great bit-
terness between both parties when Lohia decided to contest the Farruk-
habad constituency, a PSP stronghold. The result of the elections further
enhanced his political stature since he defeated his Congress Party op-
ponent, B. V. Keskar, in a four-cornered contest (107,816 to 50,288) with the
PSP candidate, Bharat Singh Rathora trailing with 19,395 votes. The results
also weakened Congress Party prestige since it staked its reputation in the
Amroha District by running the popular Muslim Central Minister for Ir-
rigation and Power, Hafiz Mohammed Ibrahim, who lost against the ven-
erable Acharya J. B. Kripilani, an ex-Congress Party Leader and a driving
force in the Indian cooperative movement, 127,724 to 78,279.

Shortly after the elections an All-India Socialist Unity Conference, spon-
sored by supporters of socialist unity was held in Lucknow early in June
1963. Kripilani made an eloquent plea for socialist unity which would be
based upon a six-point program:

1. A clean and efficient administration without which any programs undertaken by
   the Government would fail.
2. Continued resistance to Chinese aggression until every inch of Indian soil was
   vacated by the enemy.
3. The bringing about of some kind of good understanding with Pakistan.
4. The establishment of social justice; socialism was viewed as a vague term upon
   which all democratic parties might not be able to subscribe partly because it was
   anti-democratic, aggressive and reactionary in some of its forms.
5. No further nationalization of industry and commerce until the present public
   sector schemes were run as efficiently, if not as profitably as those of private
   industry.
6. Effective control over private sector enterprise.

In inaugurating the conference, Kripilani hoped it would lead to a PSP
merger with the SP from which a larger unity of all democratic parties
would develop, and without which there could be no effective opposition to
Congress rule. P. C. Ghosh, former Chief Minister of West Bengal and a
member of the PSP National Executive, in welcoming the conference,
charged the Congress with corruption, neglect and inefficiency while appeal-
ing to the SP and PSP to unite. On June 2, 1963, the Conference passed a
formal resolution asking both parties to continue their efforts to merge and
requested Kripilani and Ghosh to meet with Ashoka Mehta and Lohia to
achieve merger upon an unconditional basis, after which a committee of
prominent socialists would be formed to draft a policy statement, a program
and a manifesto to be approved by a national conference of socialists. In
another resolution the conference formed a nine-man committee to continue
working for socialist unity and agreed to hold another conference after three
months to assess the committee’s work. No direct benefits were realized from the efforts of this group.

Shortly afterwards, on June 8, the Sixth National Conference of the PSP at Bhopal opened after almost three years since the last session. The Conference faced the crucial issue of determining its future role. Ashoka Mehta asked: “What gets the party’s allegiance today: Socialism with limited effectiveness or effective opposition to the regime?” He believed that Chinese aggression and socialist unity both required the PSP to re-evaluate its opposition role. Mehta saw his policy of cooperation with the Congress defeated. Disagreeing sharply with Mehta, the newly elected PSP Chairman S. M. Joshi, an experienced trade-union leader of the Samyukta Maharashtra Movement, who had organized many successful direct action and mass-movements, publicly stated that while the Mehta policy called for cooperation with Congress, the latter had always failed to reciprocate. By resolution the party’s National Executive continued its pleas for unity, blamed the SP for past failures, and called for strengthening the PSP. Its resolution was a summary recital of its political grievances against the SP:

Instead of pursuing efforts for genuine socialist unity, the spokesmen of the Socialist Party have recently spurned unity with the PSP and have pleaded for an alliance with Swatantra Party, Jana Sangh and Communist Party. This new orientation of the leadership of the Socialist Party means that it has jettisoned the Socialist Party’s Election Manifesto 1962. It has thus given up the idea of socialist unity and has sought to substitute in its place a wider alliance between Socialists and avowed opponents of democratic socialism, to which the PSP cannot be a party.

Mehta himself made it clear that he disagreed with the new PSP policy and refused to be included in the National Executive, although he indicated he would not leave the party. While he believed that the Chinese crisis and deteriorating internal conditions required the PSP to re-evaluate its opposition and to support Congress, S. M. Joshi made it clear that “responsive cooperativeness” could no longer be followed since it left the masses helpless. The new policy was designed to move the party closer to the masses and increase the use of direct action techniques.

This policy shift only served to deepen the fissure within the party between those supporting Mehta and those following the Bhopal line. It also exacerbated the differences within the parliamentary wing of the party between those who favored joining opposition groups within the Lok Sabha and those following the Bhopal line which called upon the party to present its own case for a no-confidence vote against the Government rather than pressing for a unified opposition of both socialist and non-socialist character.

The internal crisis within the PSP over its future role crystallized over the issue of Mehta’s party status after his appointment to the position of

17 Report of the Sixth National Conference of the Praja Socialist Party, Bhopal, June 8-10, 1963, p. 44.
18 Ibid., p. 96.
Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission of the Government of India on September 26, 1963. Many leaders felt that acceptance of this top policy-determining position created a conflict with his obligations to the party. The PSP National Executive was badly split on the issue of whether his conduct justified a request for resignation, the vote being seven to four with six abstentions and nine absences.19

Mehta claimed that his actions in accepting the post and supporting the Congress Party on a constructive basis was supported by 75 per cent of the PSP's 95,000 members who were opposed to demands for his resignation. The formula by which Mehta could have gracefully severed his relations with the party without being asked to resign failed when S. N. Dwivedy's attack upon the Planning Commission in the Lok Sabha was viewed by Mehta supporters as a challenge to their leader; they then made the request for his resignation a policy issue.20

Mehta's expulsion forced the PSP to convene its All-Party Conference in April 1964 at Bihar for the purpose of determining the party's future course. While no serious defections developed in Delhi, Punjab, Bihar, Orissa, Andhra and Kerala, yet demoralization and inactivity in Assam, Tamilnad and Maharashtra (Bombay City) had adverse effects. In the UP, pressure from the Congress Party Leader, C. B. Gupta, and the peasant leader Genda Singh supporting Mehta caused serious losses. The United Socialist Party in the UP was divided on the ouster issue. A. J. Faridi predicted that ouster would lead to the party's disintegration while Triloki Singh pointed out that Mehta's actions violated the party rule against permitting members to accept full-time salaried positions. N. G. Goray, the party's former General Secretary believed no single individual was greater than the party and could be permitted to violate its rules while M. S. Gurupadaswamy, PSP Parliamentary Secretary, believed the expulsion was "reactionary" since acceptance of the Planning Commission appointment was consistent with socialist ends.21 Surendranath Twivedy, PSP Parliamentary leader, urged Mehta to leave the party gracefully since he was violating a democratic principle of the party by remaining.22 In Mysore, Mehta supporters controlled the state party apparatus and hostility to the National Executive was in evidence. In Madhya Pradesh, the Congress Chief Minister D. P. Mishra's broad popularity attracted many PSP supporters. In Gujerat, the party's secretary, Sanat Mehta resigned in protest.

The PSP meanwhile continued to build a national opposition as it negotiated with the Maharashtrawadi Gomantak in Goa and reached an ultimate agreement on a common plank advocating the merger of Goa with Maharashtra. It forged a democratic opposition to Congress but refused to

make alliances with the Swatantra Party and the Communist Party. In Maharashtra, the state SP and PSP units agreed to launch a joint satyagraha and direct-action campaign in support of their plans of a guaranteed fair price for farm products. The Congress Party reacted to this unifying opposition by developing plans to recruit 400,000 active party workers, sufficient to have at least one worker for every two villages. It had already rendered a serious blow to the PSP in Kerala when it weaned away Pattom Thanu Pillai, the state PSP leader, by offering him the Governorship of the Punjab; in Madhya Pradesh, PSP leaders like K. C. Bagbel and eight PSP Members of the state legislative assembly announced their intention of joining the Congress.

The SP also was plagued by similar internal strife during this period. On May 24, 1963 at a Special Convention the merger resolution without any pre-conditions was passed with only a sole dissenter, Naresh Modhak of West Bengal. Although Lohia did not actively participate in the work of the SP Committee, the membership of that eleven-man group clearly showed the imprint of his leadership. Opposition to his tactics came into public view when the powerful UP leader Shibhan Lal Saxena resigned upon the grounds that Lohia resented Saxena for his efforts in organizing the USP of the UP over the objections of the SP National Executive. The UP leader, who claimed the support of 10,000 workers, held a rally on October 13, 1963 at Maharaj Ganj at which the dissidents resolved to leave the party. Among Saxena's reasons were his opposition to Lohia's suspension of the party's Delhi Provincial Unit for criticizing Lohia's actions in accepting Jana Sangh support in the Farrukhabad campaign, and Lohia's disagreement with Saxena's defense of Nehru against the charge that Nehru was personally responsible for Indian reverses in the Sino-Indian War of October 1962.

In Madhya Pradesh the SP strength dwindled from 25,000 to 9,000 according to the state party's secretary, Kanhaiyalal Doongerwal. To a great extent these defections were due to the intermittent on-going talks among General Secretary M. Masani of the Swatantra Party, the SP and the Jana Sangh concerning closer cooperation. Lohia proceeded to pursue this policy further when at a Calcutta SP meeting, he advocated resilient tactics and a united opposition front. This plea was favorably received when the Third National Convention of the Swatantra Party at Bangalore passed a resolution seeking a common front with all democratic opposition parties. His success alarmed socialists who balked at the thought of close parliamentary cooperation with a non-socialist group which they believed to be capitalist and reactionary.

While both the SP and PSP were struggling internally towards merger,
The Birth of India's Samyukta Socialist Party

Congress Party policy was having a serious impact upon the country's socialist movement, especially within the PSP. After the meeting between PSP leaders in South India with Congress Leader Kamaraj, there was increased pressure upon the rank and file in both parties to return to the parent group. At the height of his fight against the PSP National Executive, Mehta asked: "Should we not seek closer relations with like minded forces inside the Congress?" Almost immediately the Steering Committee of the Congress suggested such programs as a stricter control over banking, a virtual ceiling on income and private property—all seemingly radical in light of its earlier actions. While the 1957 Avadi session of the Congress Party had pledged itself to the creation of a socialist society and had won two elections on this platform, little progress towards this goal had been achieved. In response to the pressure for progress toward these goals, the Congress Party Working Committee in its January 1964 statement called for a revolution in the economic and social relationships in Indian society and for a limitation on income and property in private hands especially with respect to inheritances and urban properties. It endorsed the elimination of the middleman in agriculture so that the workers of the soil would be in direct contact with the state. These programs were an integral part of the broader goal of democratic socialism. Kamaraj invited all those believing in socialism to return to the Congress banner since the party had specifically pledged itself to establish a socialist state. The appeal was mainly directed toward the PSP rank and file.

S. M. Joshi in evaluating this program observed that while the Congress was trying to build socialism on a capitalist foundation, the PSP was seeking to create a new social structure by peaceful democratic class struggle. However, other PSP leaders, such as S. Swappa of Mysore, adopted a "wait and see" attitude toward Congress socialist intentions. Already desertions began to break ranks in the state legislature where four MLAs dissociated themselves from PSP because it was not keeping up a democratic tradition.

Mehta's appeal was attractive. He asked, "when Congress is seeking how to develop a socialist programme, do we help the cause of either socialism or democracy by letting the socialist forces remain divided and seeking to create a socialist alternative to the Congress?" For Mehta the issue was whether Congress should be treated as a party and opposed by the socialists or whether socialist efforts in the Congress needed to be strengthened. It resulted in the resignation of C. P. Tiwari, a PSP Executive member in the

29 Ibid., January 1, 1964, p. 7.
31 Ibid., January 23, 1964, p. 5.
32 Times of India, February 17, 1964, p. 6.
UP. In the Bombay PSP the chairman, Shivaji Patil, and several other leaders resigned. Several PSP legislators signified their desire to join the Congress. In the UP, the entire USP under Shibbanial Saxena’s leadership, defected to the Congress Party. Saxena, Genda Singh, Ramayan Rai, Kalpanath Singh and A. J. Faridi were all suspended for their anti-party activity. The pro-Mehta group in the PSP decided to dramatize its mass exit from the party by boycotting the party’s national conference at Ramgarh and holding their own All-India Socialist Workers’ Conference at Lucknow in May 1964. In preparation for the mass defection and re-entry into the Congress Party, Ashoka Mehta and other leaders met with Congress President Kamaraj to discuss the means of accomplishing this end. The magnetism of Mehta’s move and the siren appeal of the Congress Party were observed by Lohia who realized that both the PSP and the SP would be left with a hollow shell of Indian socialism unless a speedy merger could stem the movement. As a result the SP Annual Conference at Calcutta proposed alliances with other groups. Lohia was in a mood for compromising, stating that the SP would not insist on any understandings with other groups if the PSP objected and again called for merger without further delay.

The PSP leadership welcomed this plea and reiterated that the basis for merger should be the March 1963 Resolution. While Lohia favored unconditional merger now that Ashoka Mehta was no longer an issue in the PSP, he recognized that the merger was a gamble since the resultant party might be indecisive, looking both ways and having no distinct image. Underlying Lohia’s abandonment of his insistence that the PSP accept the 1962 SP Election Manifesto as a pre-condition was his final realization that the SP had not grown as he had hoped and that the rapid deterioration of Nehru’s health was opening a new phase in India’s political life. The SP National Executive adopted Lohia’s suggestion for unconditional merger and appointed a five-man subcommittee to negotiate with the PSP on February 14, 1964. Two days later the PSP National Executive accepted the SP offer and suggested that the final decision on unification be taken by the national conferences of both parties. It also terminated Ashoka Mehta’s membership “with regret” on the grounds that he violated Article 28 of the party constitution which prohibited breach of discipline in that he wrote and spoke publicly against the party decisions. The ouster came after three hours of heated debate leading to a fifteen to three vote. The three dissenters, Nath Pai, Farid Ansari and Genda Singh feared the resultant party would be weak and disunited. PSP Chairman Joshi said that Mehta was expelled not
The Birth of India's Samyukta Socialist Party

because of his views but "for acting upon them in open defiance" of the party's principles which had been unanimously endorsed at Bhopal. Speculation was rife over the number of defectors who would leave with Mehta. PSP General Secretary Prem Bhasin stated that the 10 per cent of the membership who would leave would be more than compensated for by the merger with the SP, the Forward Bloc and the Peasants' and Workers' Party.

Informal consultation and joint cooperation between SP and PSP units in the states became increasingly frequent after January 1964. Either coordinated or joint demonstrations were carried out. The Bombay Municipal Corporation units of both parties began to function as one. In Maharashtra, both united to threaten prolonged agitation on various economic grievances. Over a hundred volunteers from Maharashtrian farms and Bombay factories were arrested in a mammoth demonstration to spotlight the increased tax burden, steady price rises and their demands for dearness allowances linked with the cost-of-living index. The Hind Mazdoor Sabha and the Hindu Mazdoor Panchayat joined in the marches. In New Delhi, over five hundred SP members and sympathizers held a pre-dawn rally against the Government outside the Parliament. A joint convention of the Delhi units of the PSP, SP, Forward Bloc and a few members of the defunct Congress Socialist Party met in April 1964 to launch a drive for Nehru's resignation. In Rajasthan and Tamilnad, cooperation between the two was the order of the day.

A significant stage was reached when both parties agreed that within fifteen days after ratification of the decision to merge by the conferences of both parties, a national 28-man ad hoc committee composed of an equal number from both sides, would be formed. It was authorized to decide the aims and objects of the new party, its name, flag and election symbol; to set up ad hoc committees at the state and local levels; to appoint a committee to prepare a draft policy-statement, draft constitution and other documents for ratification by the 1964 First National Conference of the new party, and to arrange for that conference on the basis of the existing membership in both parties.

In May 1964 both parties held their national conferences. The PSP convention of five hundred delegates with a membership of over 177,000 met at Ramgarh. Chairman S. M. Joshi formulated the party's objective:

The first and foremost task before us today is to forge mass sanctions against the Congress misrule. A surging tide of extra-parliamentary democratic socialist movement wedded to secular nationalism, socialism and democracy could alone release new forces for social change and provide an effective lever to dislodge the Congress.

---

38 Ibid., February 20, 1964, p. 7.
40 Ibid., May 9, 1964, p. 1.
from power... The tremendous nature of this task makes it imperative for us to unite all the genuine forces of socialism in the country and weld them into a powerful weapon.42

The Conference elected a 12-man National Executive and ratified the merger proposal with only two delegates dissenting.

The Socialist Party with its 125,000 membership, met at Gaya on May 24, 1964, and by a vote of 199 to 1 formally resolved to merge without any pre-conditions. Both parties were anxious to have their joint ad hoc committee functioning before the Mehta-supported All-India Socialist Workers Conference meeting, postponed from May, would hold its meeting on June 10, 1964. The ad hoc committee announced that the Peasants' and Workers' Party (influential in Hyderabad and Maharashtra) and the Forward Bloc (powerful in West Bengal) were joining the new party. Madhu Limaye, the SP trade union leader, in a letter to the left wing members of the Communist Party of India urged they join the united socialist front in light of the Amritsar Declaration of the party which favored reform through existing constitutional means.43 The new party was called the Samyukta Socialist Party (SSP). S. M. Joshi was elected chairman of the ad hoc committee, with Raj Narain its General Secretary; Prem Bhasin, Surendra Mohan and Vasudev Singh, Joint Secretaries. The "hut," a former PSP symbol, was adopted, and the red and white PSP flag was retained with modifications. The aims and tactics of the SSP were stated as follows:44

1. By democratic and peaceful means, to achieve a socialist society which was free from social, political and economic exploitation by nation or individuals.
2. To organize, guide and lead peaceful revolutionary class struggles, mass movements, and civil disobedience.
3. To promote constructive efforts and to use parliamentary means to secure political power to eliminate all forms of injustice and feudal capitalist exploitation.

On the eve of the All-India Socialist Workers Conference, the pro-Mehta leaders believed they could not support merger for three principal reasons: (1) it was not based upon a realist appreciation of the national situation; (2) it visualized an anti-democratic alliance in the future; (3) it was motivated by a destructive animosity towards the Congress Party.

At Lucknow, over nine hundred delegates from eleven states attended the Conference. Mehta called upon socialists both inside the Congress and outside to unite in facing the challenge of India's future in which control over the public sector of the nation's life would be vital. For him the Congress was now committed to achieve socialism. He believed socialists should work to combine the national power of the Congress with popular enthusi-

42 Chairman S. M. Joshi's Address to the Praja Socialist Party, Seventh National Conference, Ramgarh; May 17, 1964, p. 19.
43 Quoted in Hindustan Times, May 2, 1964, p. 4.
The Birth of India's Samyukta Socialist Party

asm to achieve effective socialist development. Congress President Kam- 
araj welcomed the PSP workers in rejoining the Congress in the fulfillment 
of Nehru’s dream of socialism. He warned that socialism could not be 
achieved without complete unity of all socialists. C. B. Gupta, President of 
the UP Congress Committee assured the delegates of an “honorable place” 
in the organization. Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri cabled the con- 
vention welcoming the re-entry of old friends and colleagues. For public 
consumption twenty-five PSP leaders including Ashoka Mehta, Gur- 
upadaswamy (MP, Mysore), Genda Singh (MLA from UP), and Ramyan 
Rai (MLA from UP) all applied for admittance to the Congress Party in 
the presence of the convention. No promises or offers were made to modify 
Congress principles to accommodate these new arrivals; their return was 
achieved without pre-condition.

Raj Narain, General Secretary of the SSP, believed that the purpose of 
the All-India Socialist Workers Convention was to cause the disintegration 
of the socialist forces and that Ashoka Mehta had always tried to sabotage 
the socialist forces. SSP Joint Secretary Prem Bhasin warned his former 
PSP colleagues they were in for a sad disillusionment if they joined Con- 
gress in the hope of capturing or changing it.45

The merger of the SP and PSP was the first step in the consolidation of 
the entire country’s socialist forces. At the initiative of Raj Narain, Lohia 
held an inconclusive two-day talk in New Delhi with J. P. Narayan in 
mid-July 1964 in an effort to find common political ground which could 
cause Narayan to re-enter active political life. Even before their en- 
counter, there was little hope for success. Addressing a public meeting on 
the topic of “Democratic Socialism and the Sarvodaya Movement”, Narayan 
adopted a democratic socialist state as his ideal with a complimentary re- 
lationship between Government and the Sarvodaya Movement.46 This po- 
sition was at variance with Lohia’s belief in more aggressive and inclusive 
state action. On the first day of their meeting, Lohia, in inviting Narayan to 
join the SSP, believed the only way to attain socialism was to destroy the 
Congress by infusing the masses with “revolutionary spirit.” During their 
second day of conversation, Narayan pleaded for consolidation of socialist 
efforts both within and outside the Congress and asked Lohia to give up 
his destructive view that Congress was a coiled cobra sitting tight on all that 
was essential to national progress.47 The gulf between the two men, trace- 
able to their divergent conceptions of political relationships, continued as it 
had in the past.

Lohia’s differences with some of the leadership of the new party also 
promised to mar effective merger. Even before it was finalized, some PSP 
delegates at the Ramgarh Conferences warned that they would not be

Pacific Affairs

guided by any personality cult in the new party. His relationship with the new party also exposed serious differences with its leadership. While he stated he was not a formal member of the new party because he could best serve by not joining it and not attending meetings, SSP officials believed he was a member since all SP members automatically became SSP members at the time of merger. Their difference was clearly relevant to the degree of his responsibility in the merger situation and to his ability to manoeuvre without any limitation of the party's national council. This became important in determining tactics with other parties. While Lohia wished to make common cause with the Communist Party, the Swatantra Party and the communalists to bring down the Congress Government, important leaders in the old PSP who now were in the SSP, as well as SSP units in Jullundur, Bhopal and Lucknow were opposed to such tactics because it did not further socialist unity and meant cooperation with anti-socialist and reactionary groups. This conflict was part of greater differences between the PSP and SP elements within the new party. While Lohia publicly stated that he wished to avoid such differences, his hopes were however not realized. PSP members of the SSP temporary committee were firmly opposed to a "united front"—especially with the Jana Sangh, Swatantra Party and the Communist Party. They disdained cooperation both at the polls and in legislative chambers because they believed that in the long run such cooperation would weaken both the democratic structure of the country and their own party interests even though it might be of immediate advantage. On the other hand, SP members of the committee insisted that it was essential to conduct an all-out drive to destroy the Congress; they would not stop from cooperating with all anti-Congress elements even though they disagreed with the basic policies of their allies.

This conflict within the new party was evident in the development of the tactics in opposing the Congress. The SSP was able to agree to launch a direct participation campaign against the Government on such issues as food prices, grain shortages and corruption. It held mass demonstrations in Meerut, Jullundur, Hapur, New Delhi, Calcutta, Allahabad, Bareilly, Agra, Benares, Baramanki, Bhopal, Gwalior, Ujjain, and Darbanga.48 In the UP the legislative SSP leader notified the Government that the party would defy the law and overthrow it if the food situation did not improve. However, the SSP temporary committee was split on the question of tactics in uniting with other parties and groups in opposing the Government on the high food cost and rise in prices.

By mid-August 1964 it became evident that two major characteristics of the SSP had emerged. The first was the basic difference which existed between both elements of the party. The second was their agreement to launch an aggressive direct action campaign to build an image of a national mass-

48 Ibid., August 1, 1964, p. 3, 9; August 3, 1964, p. 5; July 31, 1964, p. 5.

262
The Birth of India's Samyukta Socialist Party

oriented party. The national ad hoc committee demanded a general election in the country in view of the great changes that had taken place since the 1962 elections. It pledged that it had made adequate preparation for the country's defence against aggressors; that if elected it would maintain the price line and would solve the nation's food problem. It demanded the lifting of the national emergency and the repeal of the Defence of the India Act. By resolution it agreed to undertake a four-point struggle which would include state-wide strikes and hartals (work stoppages), satyagraha, disciplined marches on godowns (warehouses) to enforce the sale of food grains at either fifty naye paise per kilogram (approximately ten cents) or at a fair price, whichever was the lower; and to lead an All-India Hartal or Bharat Bhandh on September 25.49 The conflict over cooperation with other groups on this program again broke out when the committee met on September 3, 1964.

After the committee's disagreement and inability to resolve this conflict, the old SSP leader Madhu Limaye talked with S. A. Dange, Chairman of one faction of the Communist Party about the possibilities for cooperation. His unilateral action was attacked by the PSP members of the committee on the ground that no one had authority to negotiate without a mandate from it. Limaye retorted that he met Dange after the national committee could not agree on a proposal itself but had not prohibited anyone else from meeting with other parties. Moreover, he argued that there was no prohibition against local units entering into joint action agreements with other groups in the absence of national organization orders to the contrary. B. N. Rajhans, the Secretary of the Maharashtra branch of the party which was directly involved, believed Limaye's actions were a revolt within the party since his unit had not authorized the discussions. Farid Ansari, Chairman of the party's Central Parliamentary Board, rejected Limaye's viewpoint as "absolutely untenable," stating that the national ad hoc committee had rejected Limaye's position and ruled the rejection binding upon all members and branches; he called for action against this breach of discipline.50

Limaye's conduct was not an isolated case. Several SP leaders were openly talking about reviving the party. There were reports of an impending split within the SSP. In New Delhi a convention headed by P. Kurfeel revived the SP unit together with its old flag as a symbol. The Delhi Unit Chairman, Brij Mohan Toofan, suspended eight Lohia-ite members while the SP members retaliated by passing a lack of confidence motion directed towards him. In Lucknow, Triloki Singh and Mukert Behari Lal formerly of the PSP had their party credentials challenged by the socialist section of the state party. Dissident SP leaders were making progress in organizing an SP unit in Gurgaon and Gorakpur. They were charged with denying

application blanks to PSP supporters. Lohia was attempting to reach an electoral understanding with the Jana Sangh by which it would withdraw its candidates in favor of those of the SSP in the Phulpur and Monghyr parliamentary by-elections; these negotiations were not authorized by the national ad-hoc committee of the SSP. They conflicted with PSP principles against alliances with such an anti-democratic group as the Jana Sangh. SP workers were busy enrolling new members within the SSP claiming them as their own.\footnote{Ibid., October 31, 1964, p. 5; November 10, 1964, p. 9; Statesman, November 4, 1964, p. 8.}

Such growing conflicts were paralyzing efforts to create an effective national party. They served to prevent the convening of a national conference which could not avoid the conflicts which had crystallized. On every issue conflict was present. Thus, even over a simple resolution mourning the death of Nehru, when the PSP faction wished to frame a constructive memorial, the SP leaders demanded that the resolution condemn the dead leader. Convening the conference itself would precipitate an issue over the seating of delegates and was for this reason delayed. Under the terms of merger, such a conference would be composed of delegates on the basis of membership lists at the time of merger.\footnote{Circular No. 1, Samyukta Socialist Party; June 10, 1964, p. 1, Sec. 2.} The formula would entitle PSP to send 1,200 delegates while the SP could only claim 900. The frantic SP efforts to recruit new party members raised the charge that they were attempting to obtain the seating of delegates representing them, and thereby gaining control of the conference.\footnote{Statesman, November 14, 1964, p. 4.} A national conference might be the rock upon which the weak SSP would founder. For this reason, the emphasis of party program was upon its mass drives rather than the holding of a national conference to organize the party.

Elaborate preparations were undertaken for its September 25, 1964 All-India Hartal. In the UP, a ten-day build-up of demonstrations started on September 15th. Almost 300 SSP workers were arrested on the opening day. The September 25th demonstrations failed to establish the SSP as a successful mass party which could call out huge numbers on a national basis. In Calcutta, while work stoppages did dislocate business activities, Chief Minister P. C. Sen stated that it was only about 12 per cent successful. In Mysore, the shops were closed but Government and commercial activities continued. In Kerala and Madras the response was disappointing. In Bombay, over 200 workers were held, and though the demonstration caused dislocations, it did not reach the proportions predicted by the party leaders. In smaller areas there was widespread looting of food shops. All in all, the demonstration was not effective on a national basis.

The results of the Lok Sabha by-elections drew mixed reactions within the new party. In the Phulpur District, the Congress candidate, Vijayalaksmi
The Birth of India's Samyukta Socialist Party

Pandit, Nehru's sister, who had resigned as Governor of Maharashtra, defeated the main SSP candidate, Salig Ram Jaiswal, and the Jana Sangh candidate, Sita Ram Yadav, despite the heavy campaigning of Lohia, Raj Narain and Triloki Singh. The wide margin of the Congress victory, 110,528 to 52,528 (Jaiswal) with only a 40 per cent voter turnout, was clearly a disappointing experience for the SSP. In the Monghyr District, a similar three-way contest between Sheonanda Bhagat (Congress), Madhu Limaye (SSP) and Murli Manohar Mahton (JS) was bitterly fought. With only a 39 per cent voter turnout, Limaye defeated Bhagat by a vote of 81,620 to 72,706; the Jana Sangh candidate drew only 14,029 votes. In the Saharsa District, B. N. Mandall (SSP) lost 99,435 to L. Chowdhury (Congress) 101,296 votes out of a 222,180 electorate representing 48 per cent of the vote. In the campaigning in these elections, each faction of the SSP charged the other with not exerting maximum effort.

Sharp differences between the two erupted over parliamentary policy. Dr. R. Lohia, K. Pattnayak, Maniram Bagri, Ram Sevak Yadav and Madhu Limaye, all SP-SSP members of Parliament, were suspended for failure to obey the Speaker of the Lok Sabha. The PSP-SSP parliamentary group headed by S. Dwivedy publicly dissociated itself from such tactics. Madhu Limaye suggested that the SSP National Executive should dissolve the party. Other conflicts arose. Two committees, representing each faction, which had been appointed by the National Executive to draft the party's principles, were in fundamental disagreement. In the UP, Dr. Mukut Behari Lal, a prominent PSP leader, resigned as chairman of the UP-SSP because of his differences with his SP colleagues. Raj Narain, General Secretary of the SSP repeatedly denied any pending split. Prem Bhasin, SSP leader at the party's central Office in New Delhi, charged that there were Nazi-like SP elements within the party. The only ray of hope for unity lay in the agreement over a draft of a proposed constitution which had been completed by Triloki Singh (UP). By contrast, at least three widely differing policy statements were proposed. As a result, the National Executive appointed an 11-man committee to examine these conflicting views and to prepare an agreed draft. Among the basic differences was the role of Dr. Lohia. Was he to lead the new party? Would he subject himself to party limitation and discipline? When Chairman Joshi invited Dr. Lohia to attend the founding conference at Varanasi, he refused "unless invited by the conference as a whole."54

In his presidential address, Joshi accused the Lohia faction of imperilling party unity and condemned Hindu fanaticism. The founding meeting was characterized by disruption and exchanges of blows between the supporters and opponents of Dr. Lohia. The climax to these mounting conflicts came in the formal resolution for dissolution of the SSP presented by

---

54 Times of India, January 29, 1965, p. 3.
H. V. Kamath, PSP, on behalf of 12 of the 14 PSP members of the 25-man executive ad hoc committee. The disaffected PSP members charged: (1) the SSP was adopting a personality cult principle; (2) the SP had attacked PSP leaders; (3) the SSP supported a communal alliance and united front with non-democratic groups; and (4) the SSP language policy was fanatical. Chairman Joshi and K. Chandrasekharan, a Kerala SSP leader, disassociated themselves from the resolution. Joshi attributed the break to the temperamental incompatibility between the two groups and believed that PSP conduct in running away in the face of differences was not conducive to the growth of the socialist movement. After the PSP withdrew to hold its own informal meeting to re-activate the party, the SSP convention unanimously approved Limaye’s resolution endorsing the Kerala SSP unit’s agreement to ally with all other anti-Congress elements, including the communists, for the forthcoming Kerala elections to the state legislative assembly. This resolution was in direct conflict with the PSP principle of non-alignment with anti-democratic forces.

How many delegates left with the PSP leaders? While Joshi estimated 350 had bolted, Prem Bhasin said 640 delegates supported the break. Fifty of the 200 delegates from Maharashtra remained, while the Bengal, Bihar and UP units were split. Joshi’s final evaluation was that 80 per cent of the delegates from Rajasthan and Greater Bombay; 66 per cent from Bihar and substantial numbers from UP and Kerala would remain with the party.

What was the course of events after the collapse of the merger at Varanasi? First, the PSP reconstituted itself as a party dedicated to socialism and democracy with a strong anti-Congress Parliamentary Group. H. V. Kamath, PSP leader was sustained by the Speaker of the Lok Sabha who ruled that members of parliament had an unfettered right to quote from secret or confidential documents dealing with a Union Cabinet subcommittee report in its probes against two former Chief Ministers of Orissa, Biren Mitra and B. Patnaik, for financial irregularities. PSP leaders also led an Opposition no-confidence motion against the Shastri Government on March 14, 1965. Outside of Parliament they began re-establishing the popular base of their party. In this effort, the PSP was hampered by the continuing allure of the Congress Party. In December 1964, 2,000 PSP members bolted to Congress in Mahwa, a PSP Saurashtra stronghold, and in Gujarat the party lost 3,000 members to Congress. Congress inducements were extended to PSP leaders. In June 1965, Chief Minister S. Kripilani in the UP included Genda Singh, a former PSP leader, in her cabinet as Agriculture

57 Ibid., March 1, 1965, p. 3.
The Birth of India's Samyukta Socialist Party

Minister and she sponsored the candidacy of 2 ex-PSP men, Kalpnath Singh and Ramayan Rai as legislative whips in the state legislature.

The SSP emerged from the abortive merger in stronger condition. After March 1965 it came under the aggressive leadership of Dr. Lohia. It possessed an increased number of party workers and its prestige was heightened as a result of its showing in the Kerala elections. There it contested 29 seats, winning 13, and polling 498,089 votes. By contrast the PSP contested 8 but won no seats, and polled a mere 22,765 votes. The SSP showing was the result of inheriting significant PSP strength in Kerala and its alliance with the left-wing communists who won 40 of the 73 seats it contested. Since the Central Government had imprisoned many of the elected communists and since the left-wing communists were under the cloud of treason as a result of the disclosure by the Union Home Minister G. L. Nanda that communists had been in contact with Peking under conspiratorial circumstances, the SSP emerged as the minority party which could logically form or lead an anti-Congress coalition government in Kerala. SSP Chairman Joshi characterized the national government's decision to continue presidential rule as artificial and a betrayal of democracy.

The failure of the merger movement had important significance for India's political parties. It continued the vacuum caused by the absence of a national party whose principles are both socialist and democratic. This offered the Congress Party an opportunity to continue appealing to socialist and non-socialist elements of the population without bearing the responsibility for achieving socialist goals. For the critical Indian, this consequence only served to confirm his beliefs in the ineffectiveness of the political process. Such beliefs provide a magnetic attraction to the more extreme appeals of the Jana Sangh and the communist movement which only increase the ranks of the communally-minded and the alienated Marxists. The failure of merger meant that India lost a valuable opportunity to offer its voters a democratic socialist alternative to the ambiguous principles of the Congress. The wake of the failure left the remnant of such a possibility in a moribund PSP. It also had the consequence of reviving a dying SP which seemed better able to galvanize the forces of mass agitation, communalism, crude socialist dogma and political opportunism by means of a strengthened party organization.

Whether the SSP under Dr. Lohia could realize its potential strength would depend upon several variables. First was the degree to which SSP leadership could construct an efficient administrative apparatus for the party; past SP performance created some doubt as to the likelihood of success. In addition, it remained questionable whether the party could develop a constructive and critical posture toward Congress policy without

---

falling back upon its repeated past emphases of mass agitation. While direct-action campaigns have proved valuable in stimulating public opinion, in India such movements often have harmed the democratic process. Finally, and most significantly was the danger of which Dr. Lohia was most aware. By concluding electoral alliances with extreme groups and parties such as the Jana Sangh and the communists, by adopting sectional views, as in the language issue, the party might emerge lacking a public image, without a clearly focused series of logically coherent and realistic principles.

Temple University, Philadelphia