

From National Revolutionism to Marxism: A Politico-historical Narrative of Origins of Socialist Unity Centre of India (SUCI)

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journals.sagepub.com/home/ihr**Bikash Ranjan Deb¹****Abstract**

The national revolutionaries of India while in detention in the first half of the 1930s came in contact with Marxist literature. Imbued by the Marxist view of social change, they gave up 'terrorism' after coming out of jails/camps. However, a sharp debate developed among them on the perception of the Comintern, its colonial policy in general and the policy with respect to the Indian freedom struggle in particular. Instead of joining any of the existing Marxist political parties, these revolutionaries formed their own parties. The Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP) and Socialist Unity Centre of India (SUCI) are two such parties. The RSP was formed in 1940. However, a group of young revolutionaries who were with the RSP dissociated themselves and formed a 'Platform of Action' as Socialist Unity Centre (SUC) in 1946 and then gave birth to yet another political party, SUCI, on the Marxist–Leninist lines in 1948. The process of formation of SUCI has been analysed in this article.

Keywords

Marxism, Comintern, Anushilan Samiti, Congress Socialist Party (CSP), Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP), Socialist Unity Centre of India (SUCI), *Ganadabi*

Introduction

The national revolutionary movement, one of the early trends of Swadeshi Movement, constituted a significant aspect in the history of the Indian freedom movement.

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The colonial rulers, however, preferred the term ‘terrorism’¹ to denigrate the movement. For the purpose of the present study, let us confine the term ‘national revolutionism’ following Gopal Halder, ‘to describe a pattern of activity pursued for a prolonged period of thirty years, from 1904 to 1934’.² Imbued with the spirit of unrelenting fight against British imperial power in India, the national revolutionaries tried to set before the people of the country a bright example of personal courage and heroic self-sacrifice, and thereby wanted to instil a mood of defiance in the minds of the people in the face of colonial repression.

The national revolutionaries represented the uncompromising trend of Indian freedom movement in terms of both their willingness and their activities for complete national freedom and people’s liberation from colonial exploitation, by arousing revolutionary upsurge. But this was not the dominant trend of the national freedom struggle. The reformist and compromising section of the Indian National Congress (INC) playing the role of ‘reformist oppositional’ was the predominant trend during the entire freedom movement. The revolutionary trend in the Indian freedom movement of the twentieth century was most ably represented by the Anushilan Samiti, the Jugantar Federation, the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association (HSRA; formerly Hindustan Republican Association [HRA]) and such other revolutionary parties and groups, and finally by Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and the Indian National Army (INA).

As history unfolded in later years, national revolutionaries gradually realised the change in objective realities of Indian sociopolitical conditions, the most important being the emergence of the working class. Further, they also came to the realisation that their achievements had been disproportionately small compared to their sacrifices. As a result, by the 1930s, a large number of national revolutionaries started feeling that their ‘exclusively petty bourgeois movement ... had reached its climax’. It could not develop further. So the national revolutionaries started engaging themselves in search for a new ideology and programme. Marxism as an idea had come to India much earlier, mainly through the efforts of the Indian revolutionaries abroad. And with the passage of time, it gained strong grounds in India. The search naturally culminated in most of the revolutionaries accepting Marxism. This, however, in the process, gave birth to not one or two but a number of leftist–Marxist political parties in the Indian soil.

¹ In Britain, the term ‘terrorist’ or ‘terrorism’ was popularised by British administrators who worked in India; for instance, Tegart’s speech at Royal Empire Society, London, on 1 November 1932 and subsequent publication of ‘Terrorism in India’ pointed to a particular type of picture of revolutionaries of India, specially of Bengal. Tegart, *Terrorism in India*.

² Leaving aside this British-sponsored label of ‘terrorism’, however, the revolutionary nationalist movement in India has been designated in different nomenclatures also: ‘Revolutionary Terrorism’ (Gopal Halder, Bipan Chandra, David M. Laushey, Tanika Sarker and so on); ‘Revolutionary Nationalism’ (Tridib Chaudhury, Santimoy Roy and so on); ‘Petty-bourgeois Revolutionism’ (B. K. Sinha, Tridib Chaudhury, Shibdas Ghosh, Nihar Mukherjee, M. A. Persits and so on); ‘National Revolutionism’ (S. N. Mazumdar, G. Adhikari, Buddhadeva Bhattacharyya, Nimai Pramanik, Sudhansu Dasgupta, R. Ulyanovsky, M. A. Persits, Ashoke Kumar Mukhopadhyay, Suprakash Roy, S. Irfan Habib and so on); ‘Regional Nationalism’ (David M. Laushey). Halder, ‘Revolutionary Terrorism’, 195; Habib, ‘To Make’, 2.

The Perspective of the Issue

The Indian nationalist movement was a continuous process starting from small-scale local resistance to an all-India movement. During the years following the Great Uprising of 1857, it also traversed from a 'policy of appeasement' towards the British rulers to a movement of the people of India. During this period which spanned for almost ninety years from 1858 (Queen's Proclamation) to 1947 (achievement of Independence), the participants of the nationalist struggle followed variety of strategies, tactics and mode of involving masses of different strata against British rule.

Among these, radical and revolutionary activities were important strategies of the national movement. The attack by Chapekar Brothers on Rand in Pune in 1897 may be treated as the first such event of radical activities. But it was Bengal which saw the upsurge of radical and revolutionary activities mostly from 1904 to 1934. The year 1934 saw the termination of explicit national revolutionary politics, particularly in Bengal and the United Provinces. Most of the revolutionary activists belonging to different revolutionary parties and groups were under detention. About 2,500 men and dozens of women were imprisoned in different jails and detention camps in the main lands. About 400 prisoners from all over India were imprisoned at Andaman Cellular Jail.³ It was during these detention years that the national revolutionaries found time for reviewing their strategies and tactics followed for the last thirty years.

Most of the revolutionaries who were detained in various places in the mainland were released in 1937–1938 (in the case of Andaman detenus, it was 1946). But after coming out of jail, none of them were in the mood of pursuing the former line of action. So, in 1938, the Jugantar and HSRA were formally dissolved. The Anushilan Samiti, though not formally dissolved, also ceased to exist as a separate revolutionary party. The national revolutionaries who were still then in politics either joined the political parties already existing at the time or took part in forming new political parties in line with their newly acquired ideological preferences. Thus, 'terrorism' per se had become a thing of the past with all the parties.

Besides the INC during the 1930s, there had been the Communist Party of India (CPI—1925) and the Communist League (CL—1934),⁴ both of which claimed to have founded on Marxist principles. Further, in the then political milieu, there were also the Roy Group (the followers of M. N. Roy—1931),⁵ the Labour Party (1932)⁶ and the Congress Socialist Party (CSP—1934), having some Marxist leanings.

The national revolutionaries who accepted Marxism, however, failed to organise themselves into a single unified Marxist party. Rather, they remained fragmented as earlier. The revolutionaries who formed the 'Communist Consolidation' in different jails joined the CPI after their release. Another group of Marxists comprising members both from the Anushilan Samiti and the HSRA, instead of joining the CPI, started working with the CSP as a separate group since 1938, though the venture proved to be a short-lived one. The Communist League became the Revolutionary Communist Party of India (RCPI) in 1942 under the

³ Halder, 'Revolutionary Terrorism', 221.

⁴ Laushey, *Bengal Terrorism*, 112.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 111; Roy, *Leftist Politics*, 9.

⁶ Laushey, *Bengal Terrorism*, 113.

leadership of Saumyendranath Tagore. The Roy Group became the League of Radical Congressmen in 1939 and, sometime later, in 1940, took the name of Radical Democratic Party (RDP). The Labour Party established its underground wing in the name of Bolshevik Party of India (BPI) in 1939.⁷ Another important leftist party of the time was the Forward Bloc (FB) founded by Subhas Chandra Bose in 1940. The ranks of the party were swelled by the joining of the national revolutionaries belonging to Bengal Volunteers, Sree Sangha, Dipali Sangha, Benu Group and a number of leading Jugantar activists.

Two political parties, however, were formed exclusively by the national revolutionaries turned Marxists, belonging to Anushilan and HSRA as Marxist parties. These parties are the Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP—1940) and the Socialist Unity Centre of India (SUCI—1946/1948). The Democratic Vanguard (DV) was also formed in 1943 by some of the ex-Jugantar revolutionaries turned Marxists not as a political party but as a vanguard under the leadership of Jibanlal Chatterjee. The DV declared that it would take initiative in building a true party ‘when the time was ripe’.⁸ The DV later became the Workers Party of India in 1960.

It is also to be acknowledged that a number of Marxist groups were also formed before by some revolutionaries who broke away from different national revolutionary parties and groups. They wanted to work among the workers, peasants and the youths on the basis of communist ideology. These were Young Comrades’ League (1928)—the first organisation to have shifted from national revolutionism to Marxism, the Indian Proletarian Revolutionary Party or Gananayaka Party (1931), Jessore—Khulna Youth Association (formed in 1926 but formally accepted Marxism in 1931), Samyaraj Party and Communist Party of Bengal (1930). All of these parties later on merged with the CPI before the Second World War.⁹

The RSP originated in 1940 through the efforts of a number of ‘Anushilan Marxists’ and the HSRA activists who did not join the CPI upon their release from the jails. These converted Marxists had differences with the CPI on the role of the Comintern in a colonial country and the characterisation of the INC-led freedom movement. They rather preferred to work with the CSP since 1938 for providing an ‘alternative to the official Communist line’. However, very shortly, these Anushilan and the HSRA Marxists severed their relationship with the CSP and formed their own party known as RSP.

Again, a group of younger Anushilanites who were associated with the process of formation of the RSP as a separate Marxist party soon started expressing their reservations by way of publishing political pamphlets relating to the organisational structure and the process of formation of the party, the analysis on the role of Stalin and also of the Comintern. As these differences of opinion could not be resolved within the organisational framework of the RSP, this group of Marxists, ‘both in continuity of the struggle within RSP and after a break with it’ evolved a ‘Platform of Action with a party content’ in 1946 with some other like-minded groups and then, in 1948, founded the SUCI (renamed as SUCI-Communist since its Second Party Congress held in 2009) as a political party.

⁷ Basu, *The Political Parties*, 93–94.

⁸ Laushey, *Bengal Terrorism*, 132; Democratic Vanguard, *India to Build*.

⁹ Majumdar, *In Search of*, 163–168, 208–212; Chandra, *Abhibhakta Banglay*, 89–159; Sen, *Bharater Communist*, 41–43.

With the passage of time, most of these parties have either lost their significance and disappeared from Indian politics or joined the CPI and decided to discontinue their independent identity. The exceptions are RSP and SUCI who are still active in Indian politics today. SUCI has often been able to send elected representatives to the assemblies of West Bengal, Bihar, Odisha and Assam. They have sometimes been elected to the Indian Parliament. The party even today plays relatively significant role in Indian left politics, especially in the eastern region. But there is absolutely no discussion on the history of the process of formation of SUCI and the impact of their ideology. Hence, it is expected that the present article would contribute substantially in understanding an important aspect of leftist politics in Bengal.

The RSP Revolt Group: Ideological and Procedural Polemics Within the RSP

In 1938, a large group of national revolutionaries, who adopted Marxism, accepting the proposal of Jayaprakash Narayan, Narendra Deva, Madhu Limaye and Rammanohar Lohia, decided to work within CSP to pursue their objective as a temporary tactic. In 1940, the annual session of the INC was held at Ramgarh in Bihar. Subhas Chandra also convened a parallel all-India session of the Anti-compromise Conference at the same time at Ramgarh. The Anushilan Marxists, by this time, being disenchanted about the expected opportunity to pursue their goals within the CSP also planned to assemble at Ramgarh on that occasion. This group of Marxists, predominantly converted Anushilanites, also met in a separate meeting arranged in the camp of Vir Raghavacharya on 19 March. Revolutionaries from many provinces assembled. After a prolonged discussion, it was decided that a Marxist party will be formed, and the party be named as Revolutionary Socialist Party. A committee was formed to prepare rules, regulations and programme of the new party.¹⁰ Jogesh Chandra Chatterjee was elected as the first convener of the party. Thus, the RSP was born on 19 March 1940.

A close scrutiny of the whole process of conversion to Marxism from national revolutionism would reveal that the Anushilan Marxists who formed the RSP accepted the leaders of the previous outfit as the natural leaders of the new party also.¹¹ So even before holding any conference and convention, the central committee of the party was formed and adopted its first thesis in 1938. Draft Constitution was also framed and circulated among the members. Similarly, the central committee prepared and approved the War Thesis or the Thesis on Russo-German War or the Thesis on National Struggle of August 1942.¹² All these were done even before the first formal convention of the party was held in 1946.

Shibdas Ghosh, Nihar Mukherjee and others who formed the SUCI came to be associated with the Anushilan Samiti in Dhaka in 1936–1937 during the ‘receding phase of Indian national revolutionary movement’. When the RSP was formed in 1940, most of the members of the Dhaka Anushilan Samiti including Shibdas Ghosh and Nihar

¹⁰ Chatterji, *Swahdinatar*, 430.

¹¹ Personal communication with Makhan Paul, 21 June 1996, RSP; Deb, *Origins of the Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP)*, 70.

¹² Saha, *Documents of the RSP*.

Mukherjee became workers of the RSP. In 1942, Quit India Movement was launched and unlike the CPI, the RSP took part in this movement. Ghosh and Mukherjee also participated in the movement as members of the party and were sent to prison towards the end of 1942 along with the other RSP workers.¹³

A group of young members of the RSP started raising some questions within the party while they were inside the jail.¹⁴ The leading members of this group were Shibdas Ghosh, Nihar Mukherjee, Monoranjan Banerjee and Pritish Chanda from the Anushilan Samiti and Sachin Banerjee from Jugantar group. We refer this group as RSP Revolt Group. According to one of the members of the first central committee of the SUCI, these questions were raised, basically, on two issues: (a) how a 'genuine' Marxist party could be built in our country and (b) evaluation of the role of Stalin in leading the international communist movement.¹⁵ Thus, an ideological and polemical debate was initiated by this group, pointing out the alleged failure to follow the proper Leninist principles of forming of a genuine communist party.

They were convinced that if this ideological and polemical struggle was continued sincerely and honestly, it would be possible to build the RSP as a genuine communist party. This would ultimately assist in changing the direction of India's freedom as well as Marxist movements. Since the party structure was very flexible at the time, according to their understanding, there still remained the scope to build the party properly. The members of the Revolt Group also thought that RSP had strong organisational capacity, had branches in different parts of the country, and the leaders attached with the party had long revolutionary heritage and were enjoying a lot of respect from the people. Therefore, their objective was to initiate an 'uncompromising' struggle to overthrow petty-bourgeoisie mentality and the old tradition.¹⁶

They felt that the RSP was not built following the Leninist principles of party formation, but it was formed 'overnight' just by adopting the name 'RSP in lieu of the Anushilan Samiti'. The extent to which historical data supports this argument is subject to judgement, as the members of the Anushilan Samiti had been thinking and preparing for the formation of a Marxist party since 1934. They left altogether, as has been noted earlier, the 'politics of terrorism' after their release and joined CSP for the purpose of forming a Marxist party. Accordingly, they also wrote their thesis, and there were discussions and debates on that thesis within a certain section of them.¹⁷ So the formation of a party overnight perhaps was not entirely true. However, for the Revolt Group, before giving a constitutional-organisational shape to an RSP on Marxist lines, some basic conditions are to be fulfilled. First, a Communist Party being the vanguard of the working class, its membership should be restricted to the best elements with revolutionary spirit and selfless devotion to the cause of the proletariat. Second, the party must be equipped with a revolutionary theory. Third, in order to establish working-class leadership over the people, strong cultural movement is necessary among the

¹³ SUCI, *The Great Leader*, 16; Mukherjee, 'Bharat Charo', 10; Ghosh et al., *Mahan Biplabi*, 16–17.

¹⁴ Personal communication with Nihar Mukherjee, 20 and 21 September 1996, SUCI; Ghosh, *Oitihasyik Patabhumikay*, 22.

¹⁵ Personal communication with Nihar Mukherjee, 20 and 21 September 1996, SUCI.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Samanta, *Terrorism in Bengal*, 768–771.

members. Lastly, the party should be based on the principles of democratic centralism to ensure solidarity and iron discipline.¹⁸

With this aim in view, they discussed the issue with Pratul Ganguly in the jail. But as Mukherjee told, he remained non-committal. Shibdas Ghosh, when transferred to Rajshahi Jail, discussed the matter with Kedereswar Sen also. But Sen rejected their proposal outright. These rejections, however, did not deter them to move away from their view. Their argument was that Anushilan Samiti was based on the principles of individual terror and heroism and was not developed as a mass party with a view to accomplish socialist revolution in the country. Mere declaration of acceptance of Marxist–Leninist principles could not transform a party formed by the middle-class intelligentsia of Bengal ‘automatically’ into a Marxist party. So they continued to raise these questions when they came out of imprisonment. In an attempt to draw the attention of the RSP workers in general towards these issues, a pamphlet was written by Shibdas Ghosh titling ‘Oitihāsik Patabhumikay Revolutionary Socialism’ (Revolutionary Socialism in Historical Perspective) in Bengali by the beginning of 1946 with the call: ‘DOWN WITH ANUSHILAN SAMITI—LONG LIVE RSP!’¹⁹

After the publication of the pamphlet, they had a talk with Tridib Chaudhuri, one of the fore ranking leaders of the RSP. By this time, the announcement of First All India Convention of the RSP was made public. In their discussion, they urged the leadership not to give the RSP a formal structure before the completion of the process of party formation, and, further, acceptance of any constitutional structure at this formative stage would hamper the whole process of party building on Marxist–Leninist lines. They were assured that they would be given scope to participate in the Delhi Convention as delegates. So without circulating the pamphlet further, all the copies were handed over to the party. However, only one member from the group, namely Prithish Chanda, got the chance of attending the convention as a delegate and allowed to speak for few minutes. Others attended the convention as mere observers.²⁰ The then RSP leadership was not ready to pay heed to the points raised by the Revolt Group members. After the completion of the First All India Convention of RSP held in Delhi on 11–13 May 1946, about thirty members, mostly of South Kolkata, belonging to the revolt group were expelled from the RSP, alleging that they were ‘Stalinist’. Protesting against this expulsion, the whole of 24 Parganas district committee of RSP, including the then secretary, Subodh Banerjee, joined this group.²¹ The group, however, claimed that even before the expulsion, they formed a propagandist platform, Socialist Unity Centre (SUC) on 1 May 1946 in Kolkata. But from an analysis of content of the thesis, Platform of Action (POA), it appears that it was adopted after 15 August 1947, as it made references of the creation of two sovereign states, India and Pakistan.²² So it may be assumed that the formation of the POA took place not on 1 May but sometime later or information was not made public initially. The actual date of adoption of the thesis is still shrouded in mystery, and this might have been printed and circulated after the partition. In any case, the

¹⁸ Ghosh, *A Critique*, 11–14.

¹⁹ Ghosh, *Oitihāsik Patabhumikay*, 25, 36.

²⁰ Personal communication with Nihar Mukherjee, 20 and 21 September 1996, SUCI; Personal communication with Buddhadeva Bhattacharyya, 22 and 27 June 1996, RSP.

²¹ Roychowdhury, *Yugasandhir*, 157–158.

²² Socialist Unity Centre, *Platform*, 5.

expulsions effectively stopped the ideological and organisational debates within the RSP and, consequently, they decided to continue with an objective of combining all socialist forces through the platform towards forming another party for implementing their idea of 'a genuine Marxist party'.

Platform of Action, 1946: Journey Towards a New Party

The POA was formed as a 'propagandist platform' and a 'temporary instrument for the unification of all socialist forces' with a Provisional Central Executive Committee (PEC) selecting Shibdas Ghosh and Makhan Chatterjee as joint conveners and a few others including Sudhindra Pramanik, Biswanath Dubey and Nepal Bhattacharyya as members.²³ The document of the 'Platform of Action' declared that it was 'not a Party nor a sectarian group in any sense'. Four different political groups of like-minded revolutionaries assembled under the banner of SUC. These political groups were: first, the members of the expelled RSP Revolt Group; second, the group led by Sudhindra Pramanik, a trade union leader of national and international repute and, earlier, an associate of M. N. Roy; third, a group led by Nepal Bhattacharjee, founder of Workers and Peasants League, and leader of Port & Trust Union, Kidderpore; and, fourth, people associated with Biren Bhattacharjee, leader of Port & Dock Majdoor Union, Cossipore.²⁴ The principal objective of the POA was to fulfil the prerequisites 'to pave the rise of an effective working-class party'.²⁵

The establishment of the SUC in 1946 as a POA, which had a party content according to their claim, was the first phase of building the party, also in the name of the SUCI, a couple of years later. However, both the claims that the POA had a party content and was the first phase of party formation appear as afterthoughts. None of the early documents available to us substantiates these claims. The POA declared that it has come into being in a critical period of India's freedom movement. Their principal task would be to do some 'solid ground work' for consolidating all uncompromising forces against imperialism and feudalism, for bringing all Marxists closer and closer through an agreed programme of action as far as possible in the present context and to pave the rise of a 'genuine working-class party' of this nature in the very process of their struggle for unity in order to achieve their tasks. It would be content to work for the objectives on the basis of 'maximum possible agreement' among the socialist forces, learn by actual experiences and events, and resolve the points of disagreement as far as possible. It would cease to exist, as the objectives to build up an effective working-class party were accomplished. 'In that eventuality it shall merge in it'.

The pamphlet published by them at that time explained the historical necessity of formation of such a platform as follows:

The absence of an effective working-class party makes it imperative on us to create preconditions for the rise of a Party of our concept, capable of leading the working class

²³ Personal communication with Rathin Sen, 21 June 1996, SUCI.

²⁴ Personal communication with Nihar Mukherjee, 20 and 21 September 1996, SUCI; Mukherjee, *Founder of Komsomol*, 11.

²⁵ Socialist Unity Centre, *Platform*, 1.

and other popular forces in the struggle against imperialism and feudalism in the immediate present and against capitalism for its overthrow in no distant future to achieve the ultimate task of socialism which is assuming an increasing importance in the new situation.²⁶

However, when put to actual practice, the leaders of the organisations and groups of the POA differed among themselves in their understanding of Marxism–Leninism and, as written by Nihar Mukherjee, they did not engage themselves in the process to resolve these differences through ideological struggles to pave way for the formation of a ‘genuine’ communist party. As claimed by SUCI leadership, a few of them were not ready to take part in the struggle for forming a ‘genuine communist party’. They rather were in favour of retaining the POA character. Further, the members of different groups failed to give up their group identity. So no cohesion or integration of thought or work developed. The POA became defunct and could not function properly just after the beginning. The attempt to build up a communist party through the POA failed.²⁷ SUCI considers this as a second failed effort to build up a genuine communist party, first one being the struggle within the RSP.

The Beginning of the SUCI as a Party

There have been a number of SUCI publications on the process of origin of the party in 1948.²⁸ The SUCI demands that the ‘ideological and organisational’ struggles carried on from 1946 till the Founding Convention had ‘fulfilled’ the necessary preconditions for shaping out a communist party of their choice in India. The structural shape of the SUCI was given through a ‘Founding Convention’ held in 22–24 April 1948 in Jaynagar in West Bengal. In the opinion of the SUCI, the Founding Convention fulfilled most of the tasks which are generally done in a party congress. ‘Though termed a convention, it had the contents of a party congress’. It had not been termed as a Congress, the party argues, for two reasons: First, all the formal requirements, such as holding the lower-level conferences, had not been fulfilled. Second, at that stage of development of the party, it was a historical necessity to have informal structures in the party and be governed by conventional methods. Under these informal structures and governed by informal methods, the workers and leaders of all categories in the party and all the party bodies—from the central committee to the lowest units of the party—were drawn into a socialist movement within the party. The objective was to develop one process of thinking, uniformity of thinking, oneness in approach and singleness of purpose among the members. Importance was given to acquire the communist character, that is, a lifestyle in which the private life and the party life got merged into one and the same. Workers and leaders of the party had to be educated to acquire dialectical materialism which would then ensure the uniform process of thinking. The concept of democratic centralism should remain at the core of all body functioning. Only on the basis of

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

²⁷ Mukherjee, *Founder of Komsomol*, 11; Personal communication with Nihar Mukherjee, 20 and 21 September 1996, SUCI.

²⁸ Socialist Unity Centre, *Lariyer Bhumika*; SUCI, *Make Historic*; Mukherjee, *Founder of Komsomol*; Ghosh et al., *Mahan Biplabi*.

democratic centralism a Marxist–Leninist party could become monolithic and collective leadership could be established.²⁹ As a result, unlike the RSP, the SUCI did not adopt any party constitution before holding its first party congress in 1988. However, an informal structure seems to be an aberration of Leninist principle for the practice of democratic centralism. According to Lenin, it is ‘inconceivable without formal rules’.³⁰

A report published in a party pamphlet ‘On the Path to Struggle’ on May Day 1948 first declared that All National Convention of SUC was held successfully with delegates from the then ‘East Pakistan’ (now Bangladesh), West Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and UP. The convention adopted a thesis of the party known as ‘National and International Situation’ along with some other resolutions. The pamphlet further announced that the convention constituted a ‘new central committee’ comprising ‘eleven members’ selecting Shibdas Ghosh as its general secretary.³¹ Presently, the SUCI proclaims the 1948 convention as the party ‘Founding Convention’. But the reason of declaring it as ‘the Founding Convention’ instead of ‘All National Convention of SUC’ is not understandable.³² Even the cover page of the SUCI party thesis on ‘The National & International Situation’ published by the politburo of the central committee stated: ‘*Adopted in the First All-National Convention of the Socialist Unity Centre of India, April, 1948*’ (emphasis added). So it seems that in the beginning, the party considered the 1948 convention as ‘All-National Convention’ of the POA but later on chose to declare it as ‘Founding Convention’. So far our study of the SUCI literature goes, the term ‘Founding Convention’ was first coined in a 1987 party pamphlet ‘Make Historic Party Congress a Grand Success’. It is more astonishing that the party’s fortnightly Bengali mouthpiece *Ganadabi*, first published on 29 July 1948, after a few days of holding the so-called ‘Founding Convention’ does not contain single information on the party convention. If it was the Founding Convention of the party, then a report would certainly have been published on the formation of a new party in the first issue. On the other hand, this very issue reported that SUC attended a left unity conference held in Patna on 15–16 April 1948 convened by Swami Sahajanand.³³ It appears, thus, the party did not consider the convention as important as they thought about the Patna conference. Yet another issue merits discussion in this context. In some of the SUCI pamphlets, the party foundation year has been mentioned as 1946.³⁴ Promod Singha Roy’s pamphlet in Bengali ‘*Dal O Daler Sangathan*’ (Party and the Party Organisation) published in June 1948, which had an introduction by the general secretary of the party, stated that the SUCI was born in May 1946 and *after that two years had already been passed* (emphasis added). It was also stated that the party

²⁹ Personal communication with Nihar Mukherjee, 20 and 21 September 1996, SUCI; SUCI, *Make Historic*, 10–11.

³⁰ Lenin, *One Step*, 385.

³¹ Socialist Unity Centre, *Lariyer Bhumika*, 6.

³² SUCI, *Make Historic*.

The Patna meeting led to the adoption of Samyukta Vampakshi Morcha Ghosanapatra (15–16 April 1948), which was followed by the Calcutta meeting during 28–30 October 1949. The Calcutta meeting tried to set up a new organization called Bhartiya Samyukta Samajvadi Sabha.

³³ Formation of United Left Front to Crush Present Fascist Rule (In Bengali), Page 3. <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1QAvUQt0fq3JW52EMOc1Z9WNtrst6mm6H> Pradhan, *The Struggle*.

³⁴ Socialist Unity Centre, *Lariyer Bhumika*, 5.

had recently completed the First All-National Convention successfully (1948).³⁵ All these historical facts strongly indicate that the party during the time did not consider the 1948 convention as the founding one.

Another contentious issue that emerged in the course of our study is the composition of the party central committee and whether it is an altogether new central committee or reconstitution of the 1946 PEC? The SUCI Central Committee website provides a list of members of the first central committee of the party. The list includes these names: Shibdas Ghosh (General Secretary), Subodh Banerjee, Nihar Mukherjee, Sachin Banerjee, Prithish Chanda, Hiren Sarkar and Rathin Sen (total seven members).³⁶ In his conversation with the present writer, Nihar Mukherjee informed that the *first* 'political bureau of the central committee' was constituted of two members: Shibdas Ghosh and Subodh Banerjee.³⁷

But we have noted earlier that the first report on 1948 First All-National Convention stated that a 'new central committee was constituted with eleven members' electing Shibdas Ghosh as the general secretary. However, the pamphlet did not give the names of the members of the new central committee. Scrutiny of the news items published time to time in the *Ganadabi* helps in retrieving some other names of the first central committee. Except those seven names found on the SUCI website, the other names mentioned in the party literature are as follows:

1. Promod Singha Roy: First Bengal Provincial Secretary of the SUCI, central committee member and trade union leader.³⁸ However, he was expelled from the party by a central committee meeting held in October 1949 on the charges of misconduct.³⁹ He later became the leader of the Revolutionary Workers' Party (RWP).
2. Monoranjan Banerjee: Involved with the party in the beginning and was elected as a member of the first central committee but retired from active politics sometime after 1954.⁴⁰
3. Radheshyam Saha: Party trade union organiser and the first central committee member. He was expelled from the party on the charges of breach of trust and misconduct by a central committee meeting held in October 1948.⁴¹
4. Tribeni Bardhan: No information on Tribeni Bardhan was found in any issue of *Ganadabi*. However, he was the publisher of 1946 document 'Platform of Action' and might have been the member of the PEC of the SUCI at its POA phase. On the basis of this, it may be assumed that he was a member of the SUCI central committee for a short time after the All National Convention of 1948.

³⁵ Singha Roy, *Dal O Daler*, 31; SUCI, *Sarbahara Sramik*, 31; Roychowdhury, *Yugasandhir*, 158.

³⁶ Source: <http://www.sucicomunist.org/history/>

³⁷ Personal communication with Nihar Mukherjee, 20 and 21 September 1996, SUCI.

³⁸ *Ganadabi*, 1 November 1948; November Revolution Day Observed (In Bengali), Page 3 <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1QAvUQt0fq3JW52EMOc1Z9WNtrst6mm6H>

³⁹ Expelled from the Party (In Bengali), Page 8.

⁴⁰ Personal communication with Monoranjan Banerjee, 26 June 1996, SUCI.

⁴¹ Radheshyam Saha expelled from Socialist Unity Centre, Page 5 <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1QAvUQt0fq3JW52EMOc1Z9WNtrst6mm6H>.

The SUCI (C) claims at present that Hiren Sarkar was one of the members of the first central committee. But the party's old documents do not substantiate this. A party pamphlet of 1954 mentions him as a peasant leader of Bihar, where the members of the central committee are mentioned as central committee members. It indicates that he was included in the central committee sometimes after 1954. Thus, six out of seven mentioned by SUCI along with the four names given above were surely in the first central committee, and the name of the eleventh member could not be retrieved, as of now, in spite of efforts.

Another pertinent question also arises: Why does the SUCI presently publicise the name of *seven* central committee members in lieu of *eleven* as published in 1948 pamphlet? One explanation may be that the party had to expel a number of members including at least two central committee members of the party within a very short time of the beginning of the party activities in 1948. Two other members took retirement from active politics shortly after the convention. Both Singha Roy and Saha were the well-known students' leaders of Bengal in the 1940s and led a number of students' protest movements against the colonial rule. Such well-known personalities were expelled from the party so early, which could have raised questions on the efficacy of the SUCI's party formation process. So, this may be an explanation of omission of names.

The 1948 Thesis of the SUCI

The thesis adopted in the First All National Convention of the SUCI held in April 1948 analysed the then international situation and stressed on the issues such as the revolutionary significance of the victory of Soviet Red Army; establishment of the people's democratic powers in countries of Eastern Europe, North Korea and so on; and defeat of the purpose of the world capitalists and imperialists who dreamt of wiping out the Soviet Union. Further, for the SUCI, Soviet Union emerged as the centre of the world revolutionary struggle and the best friend and ally of the world proletariat, of the freedom loving people in the colonial and semi-colonial countries.⁴²

The thesis adopted at the All National Convention also made an analysis of the socio-economic changes taking place at the national level: the transfer of political power to the 'Indian national bourgeoisie'; the end of the British colonial rule in India through transfer of power; the country attaining its political independence; the partition of India into two separate independent sovereign states—India and Pakistan; and the emergence of a 'sovereign independent bourgeoisie national state in India'. The thesis further expressed its belief that the phase of the national democratic revolution, although half-baked and many of its tasks remaining unaccomplished, culminated into a new historic phase, the phase of the 'anti-capitalist socialist revolution'. It became so as

The Indian national bourgeoisie, so long playing a reformist oppositional role in the anti-imperialist liberation struggles against the British colonial rule, had made a final deal of compromise with the British imperialists, taking full advantage of the post-2nd world war situation and being afraid of the advancement of revolution.

⁴² Socialist Unity Centre, *The National*, 2–33.

This deal resulted in the transfer of political power and the emergence of the Indian bourgeois state on 15th August 1947.⁴³

While analysing the Indian national situation and the consequent stage of revolution as 'socialist revolution', the SUCI thesis, it appears, was deeply influenced by the *April Theses* by Lenin written between the February and November Revolution of Russia in 1917. An interesting observation in this connection is that the stage of revolution of post-independence India was characterised as 'socialist' both by the RSP and the SUCI.

If we turn our attention to the second issue of the debate, that is, the role of Stalin both in the Comintern and as the leader of the international communist movement, the declared position of the SUCI was completely opposite to that of the RSP.

In the opinion of the RSP, as a national section of the Comintern, the CPI was bound to follow all its decisions. So the failure of the CPI in taking a leading role in the Indian bourgeoisie democratic revolution was actually a fault of the Comintern. However, as opposed to this, the SUCI believed that for the failure of CPI, neither the Comintern nor Stalin could be held responsible. The SUCI, though not in full conformity with the RSP, had some reservations on the role of the Comintern in leading the international communist movement. The national and international theses adopted by the SUCI in 1948 declared that the objective conditions for socialist revolution in many countries of Europe were fully matured during the Second World War, but for the 'incompetence' of the Comintern in leading the world proletarian revolutionary movement, these conditions could not be utilised. The acceptance of united front as the general international political theory as adopted by the Seventh Comintern Congress, and the programmes of anti-fascist people's front with the democratic imperialist were definite 'blunders' and a swing to the right wing of liberalism.

The SUCI in its theses in 1948 incriminates Comintern as 'corrupt and incompetent' and, according to them, precisely for this reason Comintern

utterly failed to prepare grounds for socialist revolution in the highly developed countries of Europe at the most opportune moment and also failed miserably in guiding the colonial countries to fight for democratic revolution under the leadership of the proletariat in association with the peasants and petty-bourgeoisie revolutionary section.⁴⁴

The party further observed that 'far from being conductor of world Communist movement, Comintern turned to be factor hindering further development of the Communist parties and a useless instrument for carrying the world revolutionary movement in the newer international situation.'

So the SUCI supported the decision to dissolve the Comintern. However, while denouncing Comintern, particularly for Seventh Congress decision, we find that the SUCI expressed high regards to the leadership of Stalin. It seems that, as opposed to the RSP position, the SUCI never equated Stalin with the deeds of Comintern.⁴⁵

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 34–49.

⁴⁴ Socialist Unity Centre, *The National*, 13.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 12–13, 28–29.

Epilogue

Ideological differences between the RSP and the SUCI pertain to issues such as the process of formation of party, analysis of national and international situation—particularly the role of Comintern—evaluation of Stalin as a Marxist theoretician, role of Soviet Union as a leader in the socialist camp and defining the stage of revolution in post-Independence period of India. Although both the parties define the stage as ‘socialist’, the RSP formulates that with reference to ‘permanent’ or ‘continuous’ revolution, which basically is a proposition by Trotsky, whereas SUCI formulates that on the basis of Lenin’s formulation of socialist revolution as stated in *April Theses*. Evolution of the RSP goes through the phases of national revolutionism, then an association with non-communist socialist group like CSP and ultimately conversion to a Marxist–Leninist party through a declaration. The evolution of the SUCI, on the other hand, followed a different pattern. It was started with the constitution of the POA. However, the concept of forming a POA prior to the first official convention was not a unique practice conceptualised by SUC alone; other parties such as the CSP, RSP and DV also followed the same process of party formation during that period.

Further, the ideological exercise was not sufficient to keep the revolutionaries turned Marxists to the fold of a single structural unit. The history of these two parties is laden with series of expulsions and resignations. It may be argued that individual loyalty to a particular leader or to a particular group seems to be a major factor behind this frequent disintegration of the leftist parties in India. This is particularly true about the Anushilan Samiti where the bond between the Kolkata and the Dhaka groups hinged on a very thin balance. Further, the relationship of the party rank and file to their local organisational leader (often called ‘*dada*’) had an intense personal, almost religious, bond of loyalty. It has been alleged about the SUCI founders that they basically belonged to the Charu Roy group of Dhaka. In Kolkata, they assembled in a South Kolkata Club, Culture Club, formed by another Charu Roy follower, Chitta Guha.⁴⁶ Members of Santi Sangha, a club of Jaynagar, 24 Parganas, were also associated with the formation of the SUCI.

The RSP encountered expulsions and resignations for a number of times: First, in 1946, almost 30 members were expelled from the party, with charges of being ‘Stalinist; second, in 1946, 148 leading and well-known personalities left the party to join the CSP; and lastly, the first general secretary of the party, Jogesh Chandra Chatterjee left the party to join the INC in 1955.

The SUCI had to face similar internal strife at the ‘POA phase’ when the different groups who assembled together to form this platform had fallen apart after a year. Actually, as second party general secretary, Nihar Mukherjee confided that there would have been three SUC’s in India when all the three main groups were trying to use the name of the POA (i.e., SUC). It is because of the efforts of Sudhindra Pramanik, the group which came out from RSP could use the name, the SUCI. The group of Nepal Bhattacharjee took the name of Workers and Peasants’ League, Biren Bhattacharjee and his followers joined the CPI and Sudhindra Pramanik retained his independent existence. Because of this experience of formative years, the SUCI leadership, in order

⁴⁶ Personal communication with Chitta Guha, 21 June 1996, Anushilan Organiser & Founder of Culture Club, Kolkata.

to check the possibility of recurrence of such disintegrating trends in the party, stressed upon the concepts of uniformity in thinking, oneness in approach and ideological centralism and so on prior to giving the party a 'conventional structure'. But these exercises also proved a failure as observed previously.

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