

# **POLITICS OF THE BIHAR SOCIALIST PARTY 1936—1942**

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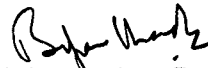
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## DECLARATION

This is to certify that this dissertation entitled "Politics of the Bihar Socialist Party, 1936-42", submitted by Mr. Sandeep Bhushan in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy, has not been previously submitted for any degree of this or any other University. This is his own work.

We recommend this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

  
SUPERVISOR


  
CHAIRPERSON

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A number of persons have helped me in writing this dissertation in its various stages. It is not possible to mention all of them here. Tanu helped me incalculably in completing this dissertation and no amount of acknowledgement is enough to convey this. Bertie gave me some of his precious time and more importantly provided me with glimmer moments, extremely important in this prolonged project. Rohan and Bronob shared some of the burden of typing despite the acute compulsions of 'activism', while Birendra and Vishvakarma Babu gave final shape to a completely messy draft. Needless to say, all the shortcomings in the dissertation are entirely mine.

I am extremely grateful to Dr. Aditya Mukherjee as without him this dissertation would not have been written in the first place. To my supervisor, Prof. Bipan Chandra, I am indebted for re-introducing me to some of the more well worn areas in Modern Indian History, which are steadily going out of fashion, but whose historical importance continues to remain undiminished. Finally I would like to thank the sheer stoicism of my family and the support they have given me at various levels, and it is to my Mother that I dedicate this dissertation.

23<sup>rd</sup> July '90

  
(Sandeep Bhushan)

## PREFACE

The Bihar Socialist Party was one of the earliest expressions of organised Socialism in Contemporary India. Historically, Socialist politics embodied the two most influential ideas of its time-- nationalism and Socialism. In terms of the politics in the province, this combination situated them uneasily between the Provincial Congress, which represented the swelling tide of Indian Nationalism and a volatile peasant movement, which in the opinion of the socialists would show the way to a socialist utopia. Uncomfortably, straddling both, while the socialists created a marked impact on the provincial politics on an immediate basis, in the longer run their politics failed to achieve its objectives. Therefore, at a general level, the politics of the socialists in Bihar, epitomised the ~~history~~ history of the entire left movement in India. What accounts for the specificity of the provincial socialists was their failure to actualise the tremendous possibilities offered by a flourishing peasant movement. It is in this realm that we get to see the whole gamut of socialist understanding and strategy. This is, in essence, the central concern of this dissertation.

One of the major hurdles confronting this dissertation, was the complete absence of any history of not merely the Bihar socialists, but also of socialist politics of any other province, which would have provided a useful reference point. Historians have tended to either <sup>concentrate</sup> on the Congress, which spearheaded the movement for Swaraj or on the more visible peasant ferment in this period which has overwhelmingly concerned the Marxist historian. In the process, the socialists have been the worst casualty. This dissertation is a modest attempt to rescue them from this enormous obscurity.

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## CHAPTER-I

Any study of the Congress Socialist Party has to precede with an analysis of the nature and character of the Indian National Congress (INC). This is mainly because not only were the Socialists products of the Congress-led movement, but also their organisation and strategy bore an indelible imprint of the mother organisation.

Here we do not propose to go into the historiography of the Congress, which is a topic important enough to merit a separate treatment. What is going to follow is a brief sketch of the major formulations on the Congress, in order to put the issue in perspective.

The Most significant though flawed response came initially from the left. Its most representative spokesman R.P. Dutt argued in a linear fashion that the Indian National Movement (INM) passed through three phases, each phase representing the interest and predominance of a particular class. The moderate phase represented, according to him, the class interests of the bourgeois and the landed interests whereas the period preceding 1914 was the petty bourgeois phase. But the Gandhian phase is rightly seen by him as representing the mass phase of the INM,<sup>1</sup> his politics is seen as not only betraying a "familiar bourgeois essence ... through

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1. R.P. Dutt, India Today, Manisha, Calcutta 1986, pp. 319-68.

added to the confusion. While on the one hand it sought to coopt elements in the Indian society by backing organisations like the Bihar United Party, it was forced to give concessions to the Congress especially after each major movement.<sup>52</sup> After the Civil Disobedience Movement, the establishment of the Franchise Committee and the grant of communal award exemplified this position. While the former envisaged an increase in the total number of voters from 370,000 to 3.5 million (an increase of almost 10%),<sup>53</sup> the communal award reserved only 5 seats for the landholders.<sup>54</sup> This in turn totally upset the big Zamindars in Bihar. The Tirhut Landholders, Association, for instance, reflected this anxiety when they wrote to the Governor of Bihar asking for increased representation in the Legislative Council.<sup>55</sup>

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52. Prof. Chandra Characterises this tendency of the colonial State as 'semi-hegemonic.' See his, Long Term Dynamics, P. 21.

53. G. MacDonald, op.cit., P.337.

54. Under this award, in a legislature of 175 seats, 99 elected by Hindus in the general constituencies. Of the remainder 42 were for Muslims, 8 for backward areas, 5 for landholders and 14 special interests. ibid., P. 338.

55. In fact, as early as 1927, the Maharaja of Darbhanga had feared a revision in the constitution. He said that 'it is, therefore, time that we landlords... agitate for adequate representation in the legislature, which will, four years from hence supplant those now functioning and are dominated by the professional element in the middle classes ibid., pp. 340-41.

The Nationalists on their part seem to suffer chronically from the lack of any vision or ideals. their nationalism arises from their frustrated job aspirations and their politics is born of ceaseless jostling for power. Logically the study of Socialists also suffers from this approach. This is best evidenced from Tomlinson's work on the Congress.<sup>7</sup> According to him, Sahajanand Saraswati took to agitational politics simply because his faction happened to be weaker than that of Mahamaya Prasad in the Saran district Congress committee.<sup>8</sup>

The Subalterns emerging a little over a decade later and tracing their lineage to the Marxism of Gramsci, E.P. Thompson, and George Rude, started off by rejecting most of the historiography as either "colonial elitist" or "bourgeois elitist".<sup>9</sup> The project was simple-- to write about "history from below" that is to resurrect peasants from being mere "objects" of history into conscious, "subjects".<sup>10</sup> Since for them all hither to historiography has been "elitist" Congress hardly enters into a discourse and even when it does, it is an unwelcome intruder hell bent curbing the "radical"

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7. B.R. Tomlinson, The Indian National Congress and the Raj, 1919-42, Macmillan, 1976.

8. ibid., P. 99.

9. Ranajit Guha, "On Some Aspects of Historiography of Colonial India" in Ranajit Guha (ed.) Subaltern Studies, Volume I, Oxford, Delhi, 1986, pp.

10. Ranajit Guha, Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India, Oxford, Delhi, 1986, pp. 1-17.



and autonomous initiatives of the "Subalterns"<sup>11</sup>. While there is some substance to their critique of Congress,<sup>12</sup> from the standpoint of autonomous movements they seem to suffer from two major flaws. Firstly, the movements discussed are so episodic in character that the possibility of any generalisation about the INM is precluded. Secondly, and more importantly they fail to present any alternative conception of nationalism in the context of colonialism. In other words, had the Congress only concerned itself with resolving the contradiction between the classes in Indian society, would it have been in a position to fight imperialism? Moreover, in our opinion this sort of a situation would have meant a change in the multi-class character of the Congress into a class organisation; and it could have well ended up meeting the fate of the Communist Party. A resolution of some of the fundamental problems relating to the Congress-led national movement is proposed by Professor Bipan Chandra.<sup>13</sup> More importantly, from our standpoint it provides us with a framework to study the CSP.

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11. See for example, Gyanendra Pandey's, "Peasant Revolt and Indian Nationalism: The Peasant Movement in Awadh, 1919-22" in Ranajit Guha (ed.), Subaltern Studies, Volume I, Oxford, 1986.
  12. Historians like Majid. H. Siddiqui who have talked about both "patronage from above" and the "movement from below" as crucial for the understanding of peasant movement, argue that the Congress failed to integrate short run demands in a broad programme geared to a larger political perspective. See his book, Agrarian Unrest in North India - The United Provinces, 1918-22, Vikas, Delhi, 1985, P. xi and P. xii.
  13. Bipan Chandra, Long Term Dynamics of the INC, Presidential Address, Indian History Congress, 46th session, Amritsar, December 1985.

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For starters, it should be categorically pointed out, that the national movement was not a class movement reflecting the needs of say the bourgeoisie, neither was it a movement led exclusively by a leader like Gandhi, nor was it an expression of sporadic and disjuncted "Subaltern" activities (although all the aforementioned elements were a part of the national movement). Led by the INC, it was a mass movement of far reaching proportions comprising of various levels (that is social, economic and cultural) and involving heterogenous classes and sections-- the bourgeoisie, petty bourgeois, merchants, peasants, workers, etc. The forum provided by the Congress was at any given time, fluid enough to allow a free play of ideas where each could contend with the other in order to "hegemonise" the national movement.

The point of unity in this diversity and the sheet anchor of all the contending ideologies was the fact that all of them had a sharp anti-imperialist thrust. Each was grounded on the material premise that there was a "central or primary contradiction between colonialism and the interests of Indian people."<sup>14</sup> This objective premise was first given ideological expression by the moderates who worked out a coherent understanding of the various modes of surplus extraction by the imperialists. This understanding was enriched further after 1918 under the impact of anti-imperialist mass movements. Along with this were some other constituents of

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13. Bipan Chandra, Long Term Dynamics of the INC, Presidential Address, Indian History Congress, 46th session, Amritsar, December 1985.

14. ibid. P. 3.

Congress anti-imperialist ideology. These were--bourgeois independent economic development and a secular republican, democratic and a civil libertarian political order.<sup>15</sup> More importantly, the Congress had a " pro-poor orientation and accepted and propagated a programme that was quite radical by contemporary standards and was basically oriented towards the people".<sup>16</sup> However, this claim of the Congress was seriously put to test by the Socialists and the Sabhaites in Bihar in the 1930s.<sup>17</sup>

While realising its "primary task" Congress was fully aware of the "secondary contradictions" that is the division and conflicts between the classes within the Indian society itself.<sup>18</sup> What it constantly sought to do was to subordinate these contradictions to the primary task of overthrowing the British. This subordination in turn was not exactly an easy task and it called for complex "class adjustments" among the mutually antagonistic classes.

Apart from an understanding of this "primary contradiction" the nationalists had a correct idea of the colonial state;<sup>19</sup> which was "semi-hegemonic (and semi-authoritarian) in character".<sup>20</sup> Colonial

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15. ibid., P. 5.

16. ibid. P. 6.

17. See chapter IV of this dissertation.

18. Bipan Chandra, op.cit.; pp. 39-41.

19. Gandhi, for instance, wrote in 'Harijan'(4th Sept'37) that "British domination of India...has been sustained by British arms, as it has been through the legislature, distribution of titles, the law courts, the educational institutions, the financial policy and the like". ibid.; P. 10.

20. ibid., P. 9.

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state was not merely based on brute force. It combined force with the creation of certain civil institutions, liberties, rule of law, etc. Moreover, it wore an air of benevolence and projected itself as a just arbiter between different classes.

From this understanding of the nature of colonial state as well as from the comprehension of the specificity of Indian history, the nationalists had evolved a highly flexible strategy though they did not theorise it at any point.<sup>21</sup> The strategy was what Gramsci called the "war of position"<sup>22</sup> a strategy of long term resistance where the opponent despite being weaker than the state accumulates "thousands of small victories" and converts it into "a great success" against the latter by capturing it. In the Indian context this connotated two things.<sup>23</sup> First, the struggle for Independence under the INC was hegemonic. This involved converting more and more people to the cause of nationalism and infusing confidence among them to stand up against imperialism. This would in the long run have the effect of completely eroding the legitimacy of the colonial state. The second meaning of the war of positions for the Congress was "long drawn out hegemonic struggle based on alteration between two different types of phases".<sup>24</sup> This aspect which was given full expression by Gandhi had roots in the earlier moderate phase and

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21. ibid., P. 8

22. ibid., pp. 19-20.

23. ibid., pp. 12-34 for a discussion of both the aspects.

24. ibid., P. 15.

has been conceptualised by Prof. Bipan Chandra as "struggle-truce-struggle"<sup>25</sup>. In his own words it means:

"....phases of vigorous extra-legal mass movement and open confrontation with colonial authority alternate with phases during which direct confrontation was withdrawn, political concessions or reforms, if any wrested from the colonial regime were villy nilly worked and shown to be inadequate and intense political and ideological work carried on among the masses within the existing legal and constitutional framework which in turn provided for such work; forces were gathered for another mass movement at a higher level till finally a call for 'Quit India' was given and the ultimate concession of Independence was extracted".

What needs to be emphasised is that since the national movement is a battle of hegemony, the central focus of both the aforementioned elements was to involve as many people within the fold- to make the movement as popular as could be. This was the rationale behind the Gandhian constructive programme and the acceptance by the Congress of the constitutional reforms offered by the British after every mass movement.<sup>26</sup>

It was precisely for this reason that the Congress continuously propagated the idea of non-violence. In fact non-violence was not some exalted Hindu philosophy although it had elements

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25. ibid.,  
26. ibid., pp. 17-24.

of it. It was most importantly a strategy designed to ensure the creation of more and more "reserves of hegemony".<sup>27</sup>

While a number of characteristics of the Congress-led national movement were conducive to ideological transformation (for instance the change oriented philosophy of Gandhi, pro-poor tendencies within the Congress, etc.) the one which was the most important was its "ideological and organisational open-endedness".<sup>28</sup> As it was not a party in the accepted sense of the term, different ideological strands could co-exist in it and contend for the hegemony of the national movement. This actually happened in the 1930s when the Communists, Royists and Socialists worked in the Congress in the hope of effecting a transformation. And in fact they were greatly responsible for pushing the Congress leftwards. Organisations like the Communist Party gained the most both ideologically as well as in terms of sheer numbers as long as the United Front strategy was pursued. The emergence of a Socialist Party reflected this key characteristic of the Congress.

## SECTION II

In this section we will examine the ideology programme and strategy of the Congress Socialist Party.

The Congress Socialist Party was formed in 1934. Actually it was the culmination of the efforts of some of the Provincial Congressmen who were striving to establish a socialist forum. The

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27. ibid., pp. 25-28.

28. ibid., P. 41.

earliest one was formed in Bihar in 1931. In 1933, a socialist group was formed in Benaras, UP<sup>29</sup> and in September of the same year a Punjab Socialist Party was organised as an offshoot of the Naijawan Bharat Sabha.<sup>30</sup>

All these left expressions were a product of the historical ferment ~~which~~ which characterised that epoch-- a ferment which has both International and National wellsprings. Internationally the Russian revolution and the construction of Soviet socialism had created an incredible era of optimism. This new hope was shared not only by the Communists but also by the Socialists.<sup>31</sup> This faith in the future of socialism was further reinforced by the Great Depression which was seen by the majority on the left as the final days of capitalism.<sup>32</sup> In the early 1930s this mood received a further impetus with the continuing success of the Chinese Communist Party as well as the Spanish Civil War.<sup>33</sup>

If one cares to flip through the issues of the "Congress Socialist" from 1936 onwards, almost every issue is considered sympathetically

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29. Girija Shanker, Socialist Trends in the Indian National Movement, A Study of the CSP, Twenty First Century Publishers, Meerut, 1987, P. 45.
30. ibid., P. 46.
31. Most of the speeches and literature available of the period about Socialists suggests an overwhelming influence of the Bolshevik revolution and the subsequent industrialisation of the Soviet State.
32. Commenting upon the apparent recovery of capitalism after the Depression, an editorial in the Congress Socialist remarked, "in the past, depressions have helped to consolidate, and ensure the progress of capitalism but now they will reflect and intensify its decline and decay. Capitalism's innings is over, its span of usefulness is worked out." Congress Socialist, 10-7-37.
33. The Andhra Pradesh CSP and its youth league organised a Spain week from 16th-22th March. Money was collected for the purpose and the significance of the movement was described at many places, Congress Socialist, 3-4-1936.



which enthused the contemporary left. There are issues commemorating the Spanish Civil War, Bolshevik Revolution, plus reports by Edgar Snow on the situation in China, etc. Moreover, all the debates are openly carried out in the columns, for example the furious debate over the CPI's United Front tactics. Within the country there was a resurgence of the working class and the communist activities in the late 1920s and the early 1930s. The period 1927-28 experienced a spate of strikes all over India,<sup>34</sup> most notably in Bombay where the textile workers fought out a battle of attrition with the State and the capitalists. In most of these strikes the Communists participated overwhelmingly; under the cover of workers and peasant Party. Along with this there was an important Left-inspired "revolutionary terrorist" trend, whose best example was the Hindustan Socialist Republican Army led by Bhagat Singh. While the Civil Disobdience Movement registered an overall assent, there were elements specially among the educated and the middle class youth who were thoroughly disenchanted with the way Gandhi had led the show and not carried the movement to a higher pitch. While, some like the Communists decided to completely eschew the Congress, others like the Socialists decided to harness the existing historical forces in order the affect a decisive shift of the Congress towards the Left. (the result was the Congress resolutions of 1931

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34. In this period, there were a spate of strikes in Bengal, especially in Kharagpur, Lilloah Rail Workshop and Calcutta Corporation. In December, 1928, the working class led by the Workers and Peasant Party marched in thousands into the Congress session at Calcutta, occupied the Pandal and passed a resolution demanding 'Purna Swaraj'. See Sumit Sarkar Modern India, MacMillan, Delhi 1985, pp.269-70.

and '36). This general drift in the mood of the Congress was most visibly epitomised in the person of Jawaharlal Nehru, who between 1933-36 reached his "most Marxist phase, the Indian summer of his leftism".<sup>35</sup> He for a long time remained as the main source of inspiration for the Socialists-- a tie which only snapped after Independence.

The programme and ideology of the Congress Socialist Party was best indicative of the existing mood. The basic aim of the Party was the "achievement of complete Independence" and the "establishment of a socialist society".<sup>36</sup> The common link between the two was a Marxist understanding of the historical situation and the notion of change according to these principles. Even though "achievement of complete Independence" was to be effected through the Congress, the Socialists always saw this arrangement as temporary as fundamentally they envisaged an ideological transformation in it, in the direction of Marxist socialism. However, the CSP variant of Marxism was not hidebound, but had a strong liberatarian streak. In effect all this meant that the CSP in the mid and late 1930s could boast of at least three major trends-- Marxism whose chief ideologue was Jayaprakash Narayan, Fabians of the Nehruvian variety (though more to the left of Nehru) whose chief representative was Minoo Masani and Gandhian socialism whose main

35. Bipan Chandra-"Jawaharlal Nehru and the Indian Capitalist class 1936", in Nationalism and Colonialism in Modern India, Orient Longman, 1979, P. 171.

36. "All India Congress Socialist Party Constitution" Quoted in Giriya Shanker, op.cit., Appendix III, P. 311.

spokesman was Sampurnanand. In the main this liberatarian trend emerged from the fact that the CSP bore an indelible imprint of the mother organisation that is, the Congress. Most of the Socialists had emerged from the Congress and it was but natural that some of it rubbed off in the new organisation. This was most eloquently evidenced in at least two major clauses of the Socialist constitution. In the first place anyone could become a member of the CSP who was a member of the INC (but who was not a member of any communal organisation).<sup>37</sup> This itself was a very flexible clause as the INC contained members of diverse ideological lines. Secondly, while the Provincial Parties were to accept the broad programme of the CSP, they were allowed "to make such additions and alterations in the immediate demands of the party as are necessary in view of the local conditions".<sup>38</sup> This clause was crucial in determining the different strategies of the Socialists, for instance in Bihar and Kerala. Notwithstanding the inherent liberal grounding of the CSP, its ideology and programme were broadly Marxist (which we shall shortly see). Historians like T. Rusch<sup>39</sup> and Girija Shanker have argued that it was JP's overall influence which accounted for the CSP's ideological slant towards Marxism. This at best can be said to be only partly true. For one the "Poona draft" which

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37. Girija Shanker, op.cit., P. 311.

38. ibid.,

39. In his interview to Rusch, Masani said that how the overwhelmingly Marxist programme was framed to please J.P. See Thomas A. Rusch, Role of the Congress Socialist Party in the Indian National Congress 1931-42, Dissertation, submitted to the University of Chicago, 1955-56, P. 164.

was frankly Marxist<sup>40</sup> and which formed the basis of the CSP programme, was framed in JP's absence. After endorsing scientific socialism, materialist interpretation of history, class struggle, theory of surplus value, and dictatorship of the proletariat the Poona draft proceeded to declare that the committee "accepted Marxism in its entirety".<sup>41</sup> Secondly, CSP owed its Marxism to the fact that following the United Front alliance with the CSP between 1936-40, the Communists had steadily taken over the organisation (nobody could guess the number of Communists in the CSP as JP himself admitted, but he scribed it as being "large").<sup>42</sup> In fact in 1938 at Lahore both the Socialists and the Communists presented separate lists of candidates for the National Executive. The Socialists won by a narrow margin.<sup>43</sup>

Let us now briefly consider the first of the two objectives of the CSP -- "achievement of complete Independence". This objective of the Socialists was based on a Marxist understanding -- that the ruling capitalist and imperialist class cannot part with power voluntarily since both depended on the continued exploitation of colonies. In applying this to India, JP in a tract in 1936 argued that the Indian capitalists, Princes and Zamindars were all in a

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40. "Poona Draft for the formation of a Socialist Party" Girija Shanker, op.cit., Appendix II, P. 310. This draft was formulated by a committee consisting of P. Tricumdas, Yusuf Meherally and Kamla Devi Chattopadhyay.

41. ibid.

42/ Gene. D. Overstreet and Marshall windmiller op.cit., P.162.

43. ibid., P. 166.

league with British imperialism because of class interests.<sup>44</sup> Therefore all constitutional and other concessions offered by the Britishers were mere devices to perpetuate imperialist rule in India.

Unlike the Communists, however, this understanding did not lead them to eschew the Congress. As the Meerut thesis pointed out, "the word 'Congress' prefixed to 'Socialists' only signified the organic relationship-- past, present and future of the organisation with the National Movement".<sup>45</sup> JP explaining the relationship more graphically at a meeting in Madras in 1934, said:-

"I will tell you about the relation between our party and the Congress Party. That means of course that this Party is within the Congress and as such accepts the creed of the Congress, the need being attainment of complete Independence through legitimate and peaceful means. We accept that creed but we define complete Independence as socialist state. Being part of the Congress, we are subject to its discipline except when its discipline, on the basic principle

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44. Jayaprakash Narayan, "Why Socialism?". All India Congress Socialist Party, Benaras 1936. This simplistic understanding especially about the ideological predilection of the Indian bourgeoisie was quite similar to the analysis of the Communists. The whole framework for this understanding was established first by M.N. Roy's "decolonisation" thesis of 1928 the crux of which was a collaborationist and anti-people bourgeoisie. It was this underlying theme which the Communist Party preferred in different variations, throughout the course of the national movement. For a historically accurate description of the ideology of Indian bourgeoisie see Aditya Mukherjee's article "The Indian Capitalist Class: Aspects of its economic, political and ideological development in the colonial period 1927-47" in Situating Indian History, Romilla Thapar and Sabyasachi Bhattacharya (ed) Oxford, Delhi 1986.

45. Meerut Thesis, Girija Shanker, op.cit., Appendix V, P.315. This was reiterated by the Fazpur Thesis which proclaimed that "... the main organised expression of the anti-imperialist movement has been the Indian National Congress". See Appendix VI of the same book.

of our programme differs. Then, of course, a different question will arise for us. But in all other matters we are subject to Congress discipline".<sup>46</sup>

Simultaneously they also had a critique of the Congress from a left standpoint. The core of the criticism was that the Congress was a "bourgeois Party".<sup>47</sup> For instance, the Meerut programme while it did not explicitly speak of the Congress as a bourgeois Party it dwelled on the necessity to "wean the anti-imperialist elements in the congress away from its present bourgeois leadership".<sup>48</sup> The Faizpur thesis, on the other hand, saw the Congress leadership as "predominantly bourgeois".<sup>49</sup> This had two major consequences. In the first place, while the Congress enjoyed support among the peasantry and middle class the Party as such was organised on the "basis of individual membership".<sup>50</sup> Therefore, most of the members do not "take any active part in the anti-imperialist movement and simply meet once a year to elect the delegates and representatives. Moreover they do not have any day to day programme of work. They have usually no contact with the organisation of peasants and workers and do not take any appreciable part in their day to day struggle".<sup>51</sup> Moreover, "the constructive programme

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46. ibid., P. 60.  
47. Here also there was a remarkable similarity to the CPI position. Even the United Front strategy of the CPI while lauding the role of the Congress in "realising the Anti-Imperialist People's Front" nevertheless viewed the Congress right with suspicion, although it was never spelt out as such. Their whole emphasis was to first penetrate and then hegemonise the left elements within the Congress.  
48. Girija Shanker, op.cit., Appendix V, P.318.  
49. Girija Shanker, op.cit., Appendix VII, P. 318.  
50. ibid.  
51. ibid.

is not in the hands of the Congress Committees but autonomous associations. Their form of open struggle-- civil disobedience -- does not give the masses wide scope for participation".<sup>52</sup> Secondly, owing to all this the leadership "is unable .... to develop this struggle of the masses to a higher level".<sup>53</sup>

Despite being a "predominantly bourgeois" organisation, both the Meerut and the Faizpur theses accepted that there were socialists or left elements within the Congress (who were anti-imperialists) who were to be weaned away from the leadership. These elements were, "completely out of touch with the Congress and had no influence on the national movement".<sup>54</sup> This has strengthened the position of the "Right". "Right" for them, unlike the Communists, was not entirely the tool of the bourgeois, although, "a part of

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52. ibid.

53. ibid.

54. Girija Shanker, op.cit., Appendix V, P. 315.

it is undoubtedly so".<sup>55</sup> "On the whole, Right is the petty-bourgeois but it is under the dominance of bourgeois interests and bound by the limitations of the Indian bourgeois".<sup>56</sup>

It was behind the backdrop of this understanding that they formulated their "main task". This was defined by the Meerut thesis as, firstly, "develop the national movement into real anti-imperialist movement"<sup>57</sup> and secondly, "wean the anti-imperialist elements in the Congress away from its present bourgeois leadership and to bring them under the leadership of revolutionary socialism".<sup>58</sup> The

55. This position again was quite similar to the Dimitroff line of the Comintern which emphasised the need for a "unity from below" tactic i.e. the need to work within the Congress in order to mobilise a left wing that would influence and eventually oust the Right wing Congress leadership. Implicit in this was conception of a right wing which was openly collaborating with the bourgeoisie. Overstreet and Windmiller, op.cit., 1958-59. Actually it is true that the bourgeoisie was scared by the gradual radicalisation of the Congress especially of Nehru. They appeared to follow a three pronged strategy. First, they never openly floated any organisation explicitly representing their interests. Secondly, instead of openly crossing swords with the left, in the Congress, they whole-heartedly backed the right. Whether there was a financial nexus between the two is not very clear. Some historians (like Aditya Mukherjee) have argued against it. In my sphere of research A.N. Sinha mentions that in the course of the 1935 elections in Bihar for the upper chamber the Provincial Congress Committee did receive money from Dalmia, but only after Congress managed to give a severe drubbing to the landed elements. See A.N. Sinha, Mere Sansmaran, Kusum Prakashan, (Year not given) P. 213. Finally, they backed the right wing ideologically by trying to root out the *raison d'être* of socialism i.e. poverty through instrumentalities like the Bombay Plan.

See Aditya Mukherjee, op.cit., pp. 261-62.

56. Girija Shanker, op.cit., Appendix VI, P. 318.

57. ibid., Appendix V, P. 315.

58. ibid.



Faizpur thesis amplified the first proposition by aiming to build up a "mighty front" against imperialism embracing the "broadest possible sector of the masses".<sup>59</sup> About the second proposition it realised that the "problem is not only one of change in leadership but of effecting "a complete reorganisation of the Congress from bottom upwards".<sup>60</sup>

The basic strategy of the CSP was " ideological" work inside and outside the Congress and secondly, to democratise the organisation of the Congress.

Ideological work within the Congress involved evolving an "anti-imperialist programme....suiing the needs of workers and peasants and lower middle class".<sup>61</sup> Among these three classes, it admitted that the "working class in India though organisationally weak and politically not sufficiently conscious of its role is none the less potentially the most revolutionary class"<sup>62</sup> However, it was very cautious on this issue. The Meerut thesis argued that one should not "make the mistake" of placing a full socialist programme before the Congress. Neither should the constructive programme be obstructed or interfered with. These should be "scientifically criticised and exposed".<sup>63</sup> Implicit in the Faizpur thesis is the call for a left unity within the Congress against the petty bourgeois leadership of the Right which in turn is "bound by the limitations of the Indian bourgeoisie".<sup>64</sup>

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59. ibid., Appendix VI, P. 317

60. ibid., P. 318.

61. ibid., P. 319.

62. ibid.

63. ibid., Appendix V, P. 316.

64. ibid., Appendix VI, P. 318.

As for ideological work outside the Congress, the terrain had to be the middle classes, the peasants and the workers, specially the latter which was potentially the most revolutionary. (Curiously the Meerut thesis does not talk about working outside the Congress). They also sought to shape the Congress programme in such a manner that the "immediate demands" of the workers and peasants are taken up. Towards this end, the Socialists would try and provide the Congress committee with a programme of "day to day work" among the masses and try and involve the rank and file Congress workers around it.<sup>65</sup> Apart from influencing the Congress programme they defined their "foremost task" outside the congress, as developing independent organisations of the peasants, workers, youth and other exploited sections of the people.<sup>66</sup> All these should be harnessed into an anti-imperialist front. Further as the Faizpur thesis pointed out:-

These organisations while functioning independently and carrying on their own programme should be linked up with the Congress committees and there should be joint action as often as possible. This should ultimately lead us, as already pointed out to the masses mobilised in those organisations, entering the Congress through collective representation... "This transformation is bound to change the entire structure and leadership of the Congress which will be composed of the strongly welded alliance of the various anti-imperialist classes, organised and unorganised consolidation of socialist forces".<sup>67</sup>

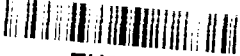
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65. . ibid., pp. 319-320.  
 66. ibid.,  
 67. ibid.

But prior to this the CSP strategy envisaged organisational changes within the Congress. Curiously the Meerut thesis is silent on this point. It merely states that in Congress elections the Socialists "should not show keenness to 'capture' committees and offices" nor should they form alliance with "politically undesirable groups for the purpose".<sup>68</sup> In the Faizpur thesis they unambiguously stated their strategy as the "democratisation" of the Congress constitution so as to give "more initiative" to primary members and committees. Also it should be made more broad based by extending the organisation of the Congress and further making them more alive.

Uptill now we have been discussing the first objective of the CSP, namely the achievement of complete Independence. Now we will briefly point out the main features of the second objective "establishment of socialist society". It was on the basis of these features that the Constitution of free India was to be framed. These features were:-

1. Transfer of all power to the producing masses.
2. Development of the economic life of the country to be planned and controlled by the state.
3. Socialisation of key and principal industries such as steel, cotton, jute, railways, shipping, mines, banks and other public utilities.
4. Organisation and encouragement of cooperatives for the production distribution and credit in the unsocialised sector of economic life of the country.

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68. ibid., Appendix V P.316.

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5. State monopoly of foreign trade.
6. Elimination of Princes, landlords and all other classes of exploiters without compensation.
7. Redistribution of land to the peasant.
8. Encouragement and promotion of co-operative farming for ultimate collectivisation of all agriculture in the country.
9. Liquidation of debts owned by peasants and workers.
10. Recognition of right to work or maintenance by the State.
11. Adult Franchise on a functional basis.
12. To "everyone according to his need" as the basis of distribution of national income.
13. Neither support to nor discrimination against any religion by the state.
14. No discrimination between sexes nor recognition of any distinction based on caste or community.
15. Repudiation of the so-called public debt of India.<sup>69</sup>

It was broadly with this historical and ideological framework that the CSP in Bihar sought to achieve its objectives.

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69. ibid., P. 72.

CHAPTER-2

SECTION I

What we have seen in the first chapter is the nature of Congress organisation (movement) and the CSP's bid to affect an organisational and ideological change in the premier national organisation in the direction of socialism. In Bihar this transformation was sought to be effected by the Bihar Socialist Party (BSP). In the process it had to come to grips with the Bihar Provincial Congress Committee (BPCC), an organisation which had by 1930s struck deep roots in Bihar society and which was basically Gandhian<sup>1</sup> in character. This organisational and ideological dominance had an important bearing on the subsequent socialist strategy, as we shall see in the following section.



1. When one uses the term Gandhian|right wing for the provincial Congressmen who were not left, certain points need to be borne in mind. Firstly, right wing was an adjective which historically emerged with the emergence of the left. It was not a right wing self-image but a left wing characterisation of a particular brand of politics which emerged with the Congress in 1885 (with the moderates) and continued throughout the course of the national movement. They basically visualised a bourgeois democratic order. However, as we shall see in the next chapter not all of them believed in non-violence in the same way as Gandhi, Prasad and Patel did. Infact, in the charged political atmosphere of the 1930's in Bihar, they did frequently resort to violence in order to preserve the status-quo. Secondly, while the consensus was ideological as well as strategic in order to combat the left, the right-wing was not strictly a monolith. As the Bihar experience shows, they were riven by dissensions on caste lines. Finally, right and left is a convenient shorthand to encapsulate the mood of contemporary politics, which had become markedly polarised in the mid 1930's. It tends to miss out on a number of elements who were "in between" (moderates) so to speak, between the 2 wings.

The Bihar Pradesh Congress Committee was formed in 1908 at Sonapur under the presidentship of Nawab Sarfaraz Hussain Khan Bahadur.<sup>2</sup> From its inception down to 1916, the BPCC represented the politics of what Macdonald calls "sub-ordinate patriotism" in that what a combination of Kayasthas and Muslims did was to petition the British Government regularly and expressed faith in the spirit of liberal constitutionalism.<sup>3</sup> Organisationally, the Congress hardly made its presence felt beyond the towns. Moreover, its composition was overwhelmingly upper caste specially those who comprised the professional and landed elite. This is obvious from the composition at the Madras session of the Congress.<sup>4</sup> Out of the six delegates, two were Muslims, three Kayasthas and one Marwari. Similarly, at the Allahabad Congress in 1910, the composition of the Bihari delegates indicated its tame character.<sup>5</sup>

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2. K.K. Datta, History of Freedom Movement in Bihar, Government of Bihar, 1958, Vol-1, P-150.
  3. G. MacDonald, Bihar Polity, 1908-1937: The Bihar Congress and the Political Development of the Region, Phd. Thesis, University of Western Australia, 1978, PP-40-59. Heningham makes the same point. According to him, upto 1917 Congress comprised of "half a dozen wire pullers and audience consists chiefly of the junior bar". Stephan Heningham. Peasant Movements in Colonial India, North Bihar, 1917-1942, A.N.U., Monograph No.9, P.-92.
  4. Heningham, OP.Cit., P. 97.
  5. K.K. Datta, op.cit., Appendix VII.

OCCUPATION (S)	NUMBER OF DELEGATES
Zamindar	12
Land holder	3
Zamindar & Lawyer	6
Banker & Zamindar	2
Lawyer	14
Member, servant of Indian society	1
Not known	1
	39

Organisationally, Congress was shrunken. At least that is what the available evidence suggests. According to Rajendra Prasad Congress hardly had any organisation.<sup>6</sup> Till 1917, "there was not one single known man in the Province to whom the people could point as wholly and solely for them". Kriplani, similarly, brought the state of contemporary anti-imperialist politics in Bihar.<sup>7</sup>

Advent of the Home Rule League movement in 1917 marked the emergence of some sort of activity, although there was nothing very radical from the stand point of either the social basis or the modes of mobilisation employed. Here also the movement was

6. Rajendra Prasad, Mahatma Gandhi and Bihar, Hind Kitab Ltd., Bombay, 1949, P.3.

7. "In those days such was our nationalism that we did not know what was really happening in the villages. We, the educated lived, more or less, isolated lives. Our world was confined to the cities and our fraternity of the educated. Our contact with the masses was confined to our servants and yet we talked of the masses and were anxious to free the country from foreign yoke." Quoted in Jacques Pouchepadass, "Local leaders and the intelligentsia in the Champaran Satyagraha (1917) 'A' study in peasant mobilisation", Contributions to India Sociology, No.8, 1974., P.-70.

rather staid uptill mid-June and it was only with the arrest of Beasant that the movement got a fillip. Some meetings were organised specially at Gaya where Parmeswar Lal an affluent landed Kayastha tried to rouse people.<sup>8</sup> However, the meetings were not particularly well attended and the largest one had an attendance of only 16 people. Some activity was also visible in Saran, Muzaffarpur and Darbhanga.<sup>9</sup> In Saran, the League could claim over two thousand five hundred members. However, the overall character of the movement was evident from the meeting organised in Bankipur to protest against incarceration of Annie Beasant.<sup>10</sup> Most of the people who attended were either students or lawyers, like Sachidanand Sinha, Mazharul Haque, Rai Bahadur Krishna Sahay, Sarfaraz Hussain Khan.<sup>11</sup>

It is the Champaran movement against the indigo planters which marked the first major attempt by the Congress and Gandhi to find a foothold not only in the Provincial politics but also at the all-India level. The Champaran movement was significant from two stand points. In the first place, Gandhi by preaching through

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- 8. There were only three meetings between December 1916 and January 1917, two at Bankipur, Patna and one at Gaya. G. MacDonald, op.cit., pp.102-3.
- 9. ibid., pp.12-13.
- 10. ibid., pp.118-23.
- 11. ibid., P. 113.



practice as well as by presenting new modes of political mobilisation and protest had an impact both on the local peasants as well as the intelligentsia in a manner which was nothing short of revolutionary.<sup>12</sup> His actions won him committed life long supporters in the form of Kripalani, Rajendra Prasad, A.N. Sinha, Mazhar-ul-Haque, people who also represented the class of small landlords. He also won considerable support among the rich and middle peasants.<sup>13</sup> The support established by Gandhi was to remain with the Congress throughout the nationalist movement. Moreover it represented the first major efforts of the Congress to forge a broad United Front against imperialism. Secondly, the success of the Champaran Satyagraha and the sheer novelty of the Gandhian technique enabled Gandhi's image to acquire "distinctly Messianic overtones."<sup>14</sup> It should however, be pointed out that this despite the fact that Gandhi was not as yet an all-India figure. Curiously, he was known in that area not only among the substantial peasants like R.K. Shukla

but also among the raiyats, one of whom saw him as "Ram-chandra out to destroy the rakshsas (planters)"<sup>15</sup> In the two months that he attended to the grievances of the peasantry in order to provide relief, nearly 8000 raiyats of Champaran came to present their grievances before him and his assistants.<sup>16</sup> And his overall

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12. See Prasad, op.cit., and A.N. Sinha, Mere Sansmaran, Kusum Prakashan, n.d.

13. Most of the local notables, like R.K.Shukla, Khendar Rai, Sant Raut owned substantial land, cattle and were even money-lenders. J. Pouchepadass, op.cit., pp.71-72.

14. ibid., P.83.

15. Quoted from Government Confidential Report, April 1917, ibid., P.83.

16. ibid.

stay of 8 months "created a profound impression on the Province as a whole and the Tirhut division in particular.<sup>17</sup> Ryots from the districts of Saran, Muzzafarpur and Darbhanga came to Bettiah and Motihari to see him and invite him over to their district. Thus he was laying the foundations of Congress organisation in North Bihar-the nucleus of national movement in Bihar. Besides, he also laid the foundation of constructive work in Champaran by initiating schools and charkha work among women<sup>18</sup> an important plank of Gandhian strategy-which however failed to endure.

The foundations laid by Gandhi in Champaran began to fructify from around 1919. Heningham has explained this consolidation in terms of the cooperation of merchant and bania community as well as the movement of rich and small landlords towards the Congress.<sup>19</sup> One can add to this the growing appeal of Congress as an anti-imperialist organisation, especially the appeal generated by Gandhi's Satyagraha in Kheda and against the Rowlatt Bill. About the Rowlatt Satyagraha, Prasad writes that the "whole city" of Patna fasted for 24 hours and there was complete hartal with not even a vehicle plying in the countryside.<sup>20</sup>

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17. Prasad, op.cit., P.34.  
 18. ibid., pp.29-32.  
 19. Heningham, op.cit.; pp.92-93.  
 20. Prasad, op.cit.; P. 37.

In 1920 Gandhi consolidated his gains by effecting a reorganisation of the Congress. Evidence for Gujarat and UP has been put forth by Hardiman and Pandey who have shown how this reorganisation went a long way in transforming Congress into a mass organisation.<sup>21</sup> For Bihar there is not much evidence. However, Rajendra Prasad writes that by the end of June 1920 for the first time Bihar had a network of Congress Committees in all districts. For the first time Congress became a representative body elected by members who had signed the Congress Pledge.<sup>22</sup>

The establishment of the Congress social base, Gandhi's charisma and the reorganisation of Congress paid dividends during the non-cooperation movement. The non-cooperation movement which picked up tempo around December 1920 soon engulfed the "broad spectrum of society in the countryside."<sup>23</sup> Congress organised national panchayats as a matter of fact were effective in sorting out local disputes.<sup>24</sup> Sometimes these panchayats were constituted of men of lowest castes such as Doms and Chamars. The movement was strongest in the Tirhut division of North Bihar.<sup>25</sup> In Heningham's study of non-cooperation, there is no evidence of violence against landlords and zamindars but there are instances of violence against the police as in Kateya in Saran district.<sup>26</sup> Curiously a number

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21. David Hardiman, Peasant Nationalists of Gujarat, Kheda District 1917-1934, OUP, 1981; and Gyanendra Pandey, Ascendancy of Congress in U.P., 1926-1934, A study in Imperfect Mobilisation, OUP, 1978, pp.30-31.

22. Prasad, op.cit., P.46.

23. Heningham, op.cit., P.105.

24. ibid., P.97.

25. ibid., P.102.

26. ibid., P. 100.

of these reprisals as well as other instances of looting occurred in the name of Gandhi.<sup>27</sup> This suggests a few things. In the first place Gandhi's charisma had acquired mass proportions or as Heningham says a "semi-divine" status.<sup>28</sup> Secondly, the Congress was creating impact as an anti-imperialist organisation. Most of the acts of violence were committed against the functionaries of the colonial state and not against the local land holders. Finally it also suggests that while Provincial Congress had become Gandhian it could not control the entire Bihar society. There were elements, who, given the circumstances, could betray a semblance of independence. This independent streak was manifested earlier in Vidyanand's movement against the Darbhanga Raj which was essentially a movement of the middle and poor peasants.<sup>29</sup> The movement failed because of its advocacy of violence which alienated the Congress and allowed the Darbhanga administration to defuse it.

Notwithstanding the broad ideological hold which Gandhi commanded in the BPC, during and after the non-cooperation movement the situation had become complex. While the prohibition campaign had become a success in the non-cooperation movement in that the government's excise income decreased by 1,000,000,<sup>30</sup> the constructive programme of charkha failed to make much of a headway.<sup>31</sup>

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27. Most of these incidents reflected local grievances and Gandhi's name was invoked to provide justification for the acts committed. ibid., pp.98-104.
28. ibid., P. 99.
29. ibid., pp. 70-89.
30. ibid., P. 98.
31. Gandhi had to personally tour Bihar on two occasions between 1925-27, in order to mobilise funds. Prasad, op.cit., P.68.

This was partly because of the inability of the BPCCC to mobilise adequate finances through the Tilak-Swaraj fund.<sup>32</sup> In Bihar a mere 8½ lakh rupees were mobilised for the Tilak-Swaraj fund,<sup>33</sup> while in UP nearly 6 lakhs were collected between January to June, 1921.<sup>34</sup> In As a matter of fact finances continued to remain a problem for the BPCCC. Its bid to mobilise funds for the organisation of the Gaya Congress ran into problems despite Prasad's repeated reminders to the district committees. Eventually they were forced to borrow from the banks and invite donations from Gujarat.<sup>35</sup>

On the other hand membership of the Provincial Congress increased. Exact figures are not available but Hardiman in his study of Gujarat says that by November, 1921 Gujarat was fifth in terms of membership after Bihar, UP, Andhra Pradesh and Bengal.<sup>36</sup> Moreover Gandhi's support had fully crystallised. At the Bhagalpur session (August, 1920) his programme of boycott and non-cooperation was passed by an "overwhelming majority."<sup>37</sup> This was an important victory as, "it was the first time that the delegates to the conference were largely drawn from outside the professional classes."<sup>38</sup> Similarly in the Gaya session, "each and every delegate" voted for the Mahatma against the proposal of Council entry.<sup>39</sup> Finally it was

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32. ibid., P. 47.

33. ibid., pp.57-58.

34. Gyanendra Pandey, op.cit., P. 31.

35. Prasad, op.cit., P. 39.

36. Hardiman, op.cit., P. 44.

37. Prasad, op.cit., P. 40.

38. ibid., pp. 39-40.

39. ibid., pp. 56-59.

out of the non-cooperation movement that the solid core of Gandhian leadership was born, people like K.B. Sahay, Abdul Bari, etc. While the older leadership comprising of Rajendra Prasad, Braj Kishore Prasad, A.N. Sinha, etc. reaffirmed their allegiance to Gandhi and Congress.

A veritable and similar pattern was visible in the course of the CIVIL Disobedience movement (\*1930-34) excepting that, now, the Congress was much "better organised and more "deeply entrenched" than before.<sup>40</sup> This accounted for its success in mobilising immense support for the first phase of CDM,<sup>41</sup> between early 1930-31. In this phase there is evidence of widespread participation, this specially true of the anti-chowkidari tax and the anti-liquor campaign. In the anti-liquor campaign by December 1930 the total government loss of excise revenue amounted to Rs. 4,300,000 out of an annual excise income which totalled about 20,000,000.<sup>42</sup> However, these campaigns led to some amount of violence. For instance, the anti-chowkidari tax campaign in Bihpur, led to violent clashes between the local Congressmen and the police till local leaders like Rajendra Prasad, Abdul Bari and Baldev Sahay intervened.<sup>43</sup> Even Macdonald's study indicates evidence of violence. While Heningham argues that the BPGC permitted " limited violence"<sup>44</sup> which emerged

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40. Heningham, op.cit., P. 110.  
41. ibid., pp. 115-33.  
42. ibid., P. 116.  
43. ibid., pp. 120-124.  
44. ibid., pp 112-113.

from the nature of the Provincial Congresses social support as well as its inability to mediate between these forces, Macdonald argues that the Provincial leaders exercised a "fragile control" over their followers at the district level.<sup>45</sup> Both the explanations are partly true. The tendency to give too much specificity to the Congress in Bihar, what Macdonald considers "fragile control" of the leaders, was in fact the general nature of the INC at the all India level. By its very nature Congress was an open and democratic organisation, in that it allowed local initiatives to emerge.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, while the top leadership of the INC and the BPCCC remained committed Gandhians, throughout the course of the National Movement, the same cannot be said about the lower level activists, as we shall see in the next section,<sup>47</sup> specially once the Kisan Sabha movement began. Gyanendra Pandey makes an interesting point in the context of UP. According to him, in the course of both the non cooperation and Civil Disobedience Movement, the Congress membership became phenomenal but declined considerably once the movement was called off. For example, in March, 1923, Congress claimed a

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45. G. MacDonald, op.cit., P. 297. He substantiates it by quoting an instance from Barhi (Monghyr) where the Bhumi-har landlords demanded a continuation of the Civil Disobedience Movement. See P. 294 of the same book.
46. Bipan Chandra, Long Term Dynamics, pp. 35-36.
47. See Chapter IV of this dissertation.

membership of 106,046 in 16 of the 20 provinces. Less than 2 years earlier the UP Congress alone had claimed over three times that number.<sup>48</sup> It is possible that the the mass which periodically joined the Congress led movements were not or could not be converted to Gandhism, in the same way as the leadership was.

Despite all this by 1930 the BPCCC could legitimately claim for itself the role of the primary anti-imperialist organisation, representing different classes- merchants, moneylenders, urban professionals and the bulk of the peasantry.

Its claim to represent different classes however came under serious threat in the 1930s. This threat came from two class based organisations, both of whom resented the ideological drift of the Congress. The major threat of course was from the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha (BPKS), and its allies in the BPCCC-the Congress Socialists. This will be discussed in the next section. Here it would be sufficient to point out that they wrongly perceived the Congress as a pro-zamindar organisation which stunted its potentially radical tendencies.

The other threat, though much minor in comparison, came from the Zamindars and big landlords (though few in number), organised in organisations like Bihar Landholders Association and the Bihar United Party. From another angle, to them the Congress appeared to be getting more and more radical and a threat to their

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48. Gyanendra Pandey, op.cit., P. 31.



position. This underlay the reason for the formation of the Bihar United Party, in 1932- a move which had been underway since 1929 through the efforts of the Maharaja of Darbhanga<sup>49</sup>, who was spearheading the move by the zamindars to introduce a Tenancy bill in the council, which would further strengthen their own position.

Not only this, they were veering away perceptibly towards the colonial state. Macdonald has very graphically shown how the United Party had solid backing from the Provincial administration including the Governor.<sup>50</sup> In fact this appeared to be a very general trend. For instance Nehru observed in his 'Autobiography' that the Round table conference was an obvious collection of these (Zamindars) vested interests ... This general thing up in London was hastened by a realisation that the Congress was going increasingly to the Left and the masses were influencing it more and more.<sup>51</sup> The colonial state beleaguered by two major mass movements

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49. G. MacDonald, op.cit., pp. 340-45.

50. After the September 1932 meeting of the representatives of the Bihar United Party at Ranchi attended by about 300 members, Sir Sultan Ahmed and Radhika Raman Sinha met with the Chief Secretary, who assured them that, "while the Government Officials should take no public part in the activities of the new (Bihar United) Party and should not attend its public meetings, there was no objection to their personal influence being exercised in favour of the Party, because it is the only Party whose policy is to work the new constitution." See also the letter of the Chief Secretary of Bihar and Orissa to Meyrick, (a European Planter), and Stephenson, the Governor's letter, to the Tirhut Landholders Association. See ibid., pp. 344-46.

51. Quoted in Walter Hauser, The Bihar Pradesh Kisan Sabha, 1929-1942; a study of an Indian Peasant Movement, D.Phil. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1961 (unpublished), P. 47.

added to the confusion. While on the one hand it sought to coopt elements in the Indian society by backing organisations like the Bihar United Party, it was forced to give concessions to the Congress especially after each major movement.<sup>52</sup> After the Civil Disobedience Movement, the establishment of the Franchise Committee and the grant of communal award exemplified this position. While the former envisaged an increase in the total number of voters from 370,000 to 3.5 million (an increase of almost 10%),<sup>53</sup> the communal award reserved only 5 seats for the landholders.<sup>54</sup> This in turn totally upset the big Zamindars in Bihar. The Tirhut Landholders, Association, for instance, reflected this anxiety when they wrote to the Governor of Bihar asking for increased representation in the Legislative Council.<sup>55</sup>

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52. Prof. Chandra Characterises this tendency of the colonial State as 'semi-hegemonic.' See his, Long Term Dynamics, P. 21.

53. G. MacDonald, op.cit., P.337.

54. Under this award, in a legislature of 175 seats, 99 elected by Hindus in the general constituencies. Of the remainder 42 were for Muslims, 8 for backward areas, 5 for landholders and 14 special interests. ibid., P. 338.

55. In fact, as early as 1927, the Maharaja of Darbhanga had feared a revision in the constitution. He said that 'it is, therefore, time that we landlords... agitate for adequate representation in the legislature, which will, four years from hence supplant those now functioning and are dominated by the professional element in the middle classes ibid., pp. 340-41.

In early 1930s, therefore, the BPCC was in an unenviable position, sandwiched as it was between an emerging peasant movement led by the socialists and a declining, but still powerful, aristocracy. A study of the Congress in this period is therefore, inevitably a study of the efforts of the Gandhians to negotiate between the two warring classes and attempt to coopt both of them.

### CHAPTER-III

As this dissertation is on the Socialists, I do not propose to examine the activities of the Kisan Sabha in great detail. Since Bihar in the 1930's was predominantly an agrarian society<sup>1</sup>, and also in a state of agitated ferment, the socialists were in a sense objectively compelled to seek allies in the peasantry in order to achieve their twin goals of Socialism and Swaraj. It is this reason which accounts for the disproportionate emphasis on the complex dialectic between the BSP and the BPKS. This, however, should not be taken to mean that the peasantry was the only political concern of the socialists. There is evidence of their activities among the working class and the youth, but owing to the paucity of data as well as their marginal numerical presence in the Bihar society, it is difficult to reconstruct the extent of political activity of the Provincial socialists.

Socialist politics in Bihar, broadly underwent three stages in the period of our study. In passing through them, its strategy assumed a full circle, if the INC is taken as the starting point of that circle. In the FIRST STAGE, the Socialist Party (from its

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1. According to Heningham's estimates, for North Bihar, less than three percent of the region's inhabitants lived in towns and four out of every five of them depended directly on agriculture for their livelihood. Heningham, op.cit; P.4.

inception in 1931) started off on a fairly moderate note (although elements which would determine their strategy in the ministry period were ~~were~~ very much present in the programme, viz. their understanding of the INC), with constant refrains of allegiance to the Congress and a simultaneous acknowledgement of its position as the primary anti-imperialist organisation. This period extended uptill the accession of the Congress ministry period in 1937. Their most volatile but self-defeating phase began with the enthronement of the Congress ministry and extended right uptill its resignation in 1939. This period was basically a phase of "ultra-leftism", where in effect they made a wholesale denunciation of the Congress. In the FINAL PHASE, which tentatively began from the crisis in the Tripuri Congress, the socialists 'returned' to the Congress fold and reaffirmed their allegiance, while still retaining some crucial aspects of their programme and strategy.

At least two major points need to be borne in mind before we examine each phase. Firstly, the forces shaping the socialist strategy included not merely the Kisan Sabha (which was, ofcourse, the most important) but also the strategy of the left groups (CPI, Royists, Forward Bloc ) and importantly of the right wing of the Provincial Congress. Secondly, the three phases that I have outlined above should not be seen as rigidly compartmentalised nor was the transition from one to another smooth and linear. This periodisation should be taken as a convenient working hypothesis where broadly each phase reflected a particular mood, and a broad shift

in the strategy of the socialists. However, it should be borne in mind that each phase had its own complexity which stemmed largely from an intrinsic ambiguity of the Socialists towards the Congress as well<sup>as</sup> towards the larger question of Socialism v|s Nationalism. This ambiguity was further compounded by the presence of a fragmented left which always tended to confuse rather than clear the picture.

Each phase is going to be examined in separate chapters. In this chapter we will examine the first phase.

The BSP was formed in 1931 in the wake of the First round of the non-cooperation movement. There are no proceedings available which would indicate the programme and strategy of the socialists. What is, however, obvious is that there is no evidence of their participation in the Kisan Sabha movement, upto 1934<sup>2</sup> when the Second Civil disobedience movement was called off. In fact, if anything, they appeared skeptical of a kisan organisation. When the BPKS was formed it was opposed not only by the right wingers like Babu Brij Kishore Prasad, but even by the younger lot like J.P. and Rambrikhsa Benipuri--the architect of the YUVAK, a socialist magazine founded during the non-cooperation movement. They felt that since the majority of the Congress comprised of peasants, therefore, the Congress itself was the real Kisan Sabha<sup>3</sup>.

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2. All the secondary sources indicate this. See for example, W. Hauser, G. MacDonal'd, Arvind N. Das, Agrarian Unrest and Socio-Economic change in Bihar, New Delhi, 1980.

3. Arvind N. Das, op.cit.: P. 93.

Similarly around early 1930's when Ranga appealed for the formation of an All-India organisation of kisans, the Bihar socialists disapproved the proposition arguing that the "workers all over the country" should "patiently organise the peasantry in their respective Provinces on a sound basis and to postpone the formation of an All-India federation for five years to come<sup>4</sup>."

The Kisan Sabha movement, on the other hand, developed almost autonomously uptill 1934. It predated the formation of the Socialist Party<sup>5</sup> and was led by a mendicant, who was a product of a caste reform movement among the Bhumihars<sup>6</sup>, and whose social origins radically differed from that of his potential allies-- the western educated socialists. Moreover, right from its very inception, the Kisan Sabha betrayed its class origins and basis. It was formed to combat the Zamindar propelled Tenancy legislation, which while allowing certain concessions to the peasants, nevertheless sought to strengthen the position of the landholders by increasing private holdings<sup>7</sup>. Despite the class nature of the Sabha, as yet they had not showed signs of disenchantment with the Congress. This was mainly because the peasant movement had not picked up sufficiently to generate confidence in the leadership..

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4. K.K. Datta, op.cit: Vol.II, pp. 267-68.  
5. The Kisan Sabha was formed in 1929 by Sahajanand. Prior to this he had established a West Patna District Kisan Sabha in 1928. See W. Hauser, op.cit; pp. 37-38.  
6. ibid. pp. 82-84.  
7. ibid. pp. 37-73.

The period from 1934 onwards, marked a watershed in the course of socialist politics, in that their hegemonic struggle was launched decisively. This was abetted by a number of historical factors.

In the first place, this was a period in which the Congress made a decisive leftward shift. This was epitomised in the Karachi resolution (which had called for a reform of the land tenure, revenue and rent, relief from agricultural indebtedness, etc.) and also in the person of Nehru, who was in the process of veering towards Marxism, but most importantly in the growing peasantisation of the Congress. This was complemented by a burgeoning network of Congress local committees which partly accounted for the entrenchment of Gandhians and the right wingers within the BPC. The Congress leadership reacted to this new situation by effecting a reorganisation of the Congress in 1934, which in essence sought to democratise the organisation by ensuring more peasant participation, with greater central control, through the Working Committee.

After the Civil Disobedience Movement, the ideological and organisational position of the BPC can be gleaned from the following Table:-



TABLE II

1.	Percentage of peasants	Percentage of workers.	No. of Committees (Primary) covering area of Thana   Municipality.	Average 4 annas membership.
1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
Champanan	99%	-	17	336
Gaya	75%	-	-	-
Bhagalpur	86%	-	14	300
Purnea	90%	8%	7	825
Muzaffarpur	75%	2%	25	724
Arrah	99%	-	4	200
Chapra	85%	10%	29	260
Darbhanga	95%	-	23	459
Hazaribagh	95%	-	9	200
Patna	90%	-	22	-
Monghyr	60%	20%	22	-
Manbhum	-	-	4	100- 150

(Source: J.P. Papers, File No. 116, NMML)

This overall peasantisation of the Congress was, however met with the contradictory force of decreasing grass-root contact with the masses. This was evident from the report of the various provincial committees on the mass contact programme of the Congress which had been initiated on the recommendations of the Lucknow session.<sup>8</sup> The BPCC report on the mass contact issue acknowledged that there was no participation of the primary, tehsil and district committees in the shaping of the Congress policies. The report also admitted that these local committees do not associate with

8. J.P. Papers, File No. 116, NMML.

the daily lives of the people.<sup>9</sup> This hiatus between the masses and the local committees as well as the increased hegemonic reserves of the Congress created potentially fertile conditions for the socialists to effect their declared goal of transforming the character of the Congress. And, in fact, they did make some rapid strides in creating a desired ideological climate but in the long run failed to channelise it properly.

There were also minor factors like the resurgence of the council entry supporters and the constitutionalists in 1934. This created resentment among the more volatile sections of the Congress. As one of the Socialists later recounted, the majority of the socialist delegates to the Bombay session of the AICSP were against the newly revived Swaraj Party.<sup>10</sup> As we shall see, similar sentiments were expressed in Bihar also.

The second major factor was the formation of the AICSP in Bombay. One of its major consequences was that it presented an understanding of the contemporary situation and suggested a strategy which unambiguously called for the "organisation of peasantry" and "organisation of workers and arousing class consciousness among them".<sup>11</sup> In fact it was now that the most potent seeds of potential conflict were sown, in that the Party expressed faith in Marxism<sup>12</sup> any by implication class based politics.

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9. ibid.  
10. P.L.Lakhanpal, History of the Congress Socialist Party, Lahore, n.d., P. 13  
11. Girija Shanker, op.cit., Poona Draft for the Formation of a Socialist Party, Appendix II, pp. 310.  
12. ibid.

But even prior to the Bombay session, the socialists had proposed a resolution to the AICC saying that Freedom should mean a reorganisation of the economic foundations of society. This should include:

- (a) Transfer of all power to the producing masses.
- (b) Elimination of princes and Landlords and other classes of exploiters.
- (c) A State which would encourage and promote collectivisation.
- (d) Liquidation of all debts owed by the peasants.

The resolution also urged the peasants to be drawn into the national movement through the organisation of functional union.<sup>13</sup>

The socialist perception of the situation was based on a detailed critique of the Congress. Even prior to the Meerut thesis, the socialists were arguing that the Congress had scrupulously avoided economic issues and had concentrated on purely political ones. Hailing the Lucknow resolution it said that, while the aim of the Congress to attain Swaraj is laudable its content should be defined in terms of "people's needs and desires", that is, it should mean "freedom from political and economic exploitation".<sup>14</sup> In their own words, "The craving for national unity without analysing

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13. W. Hauser, op.cit., pp. 102-103.

14. Congress Socialist, 21-3-1936.

the forces working in a society is a dangerous adventure, for it ultimately amounts to the betrayal of popular interests. Moreover the United Front policy was committing the blunder of carrying 2% of vested interests at the cost of the popular interest of the 98%.<sup>15</sup> As the key aspect of their economic concerns, it instead proposed that, "th Kisan Movement will develop on the right lines only if it is securely anchored to the solid feet of class war in our society".<sup>16</sup> It also suggested that the Congress programme should be aimed not merely at the rich peasants "but the vast majority of the poor and middle peasants".<sup>17</sup> Apart from this, a full fledged constitution was also adopted at Bombay which included conditions of organisation, membership, annual sessions, etc. Also, rules and regulations were framed for the broad functioning of the CSP.<sup>18</sup>

Finally, simultaneous with all these developments, two other things were happening in Bihar which had a direct bearing on socialist politics. In the first place, there was a spate of peasant disturbances throughout Bihar. Between April 1933 to November 1933, there were more than 500 Kisan Sabha meetings, conferences, held, in about 10 districts.<sup>19</sup> Secondly, Sahajanand, who

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15. ibid., 4.4.1936.

16. ibid., 11.1.1936.

17. ibid.

18. Girija Shankar, op.cit., Appendix III, pp. 313-14.

19. The districtwise break-up of these meetings was - Patna 88; Gaya 38; Monghyr 57; Shahabad 39; Bhagalpur 22; Darbhanga 38; Muzaffarpur 43; Saran 17; Purnea 13; Champaran 2. See the Report of the BPKS, November 1929 to November 1935, Published by Awadheshwar Prasad Singh, NMML.

had uptill then staunchly stood by the Congress showed signs of disillusionment. Writing in his recollections later, he recalled Gandhi's advice to him not to take up the grievances of the peasantry, but persuade the manager of the Darbhanga Raj (who had Congress sympathies) to do so, undermined his "respect for Gandhiji" and ".....from that day I departed from him for ever".<sup>20</sup>

All these historical forces precipitated formation of the historic alliance between the BSP and the BPKS, on April 21st 1934.<sup>21</sup> While Sahajanand was elected as the President, at the joint session, Baldeo Sahay (who was then a socialist) was elected as the Vice-President. Even J.P. and Abdul Bari were made office-bearers. In the executive committee out of 13 members, 6 were socialists.<sup>22</sup> From now on started a phase where the socialists tried to push the Sabha into an extreme political position, which finally not only made it extremely difficult for the socialists to control the unleashed ferment but also made irreconcilable, the ideological position of the Congress, and the Sabha.

In an open letter to the AICC in April 1934, the BSP severely criticised the Congress strategy of Constructive Programme and Council entry. The former was denounced as an "old method" which was "too inadequate to suit present requirements and to make such

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20. W. Hauser, op.cit., P. 99  
21. G. MacDonald, op.cit., P. 397.  
22. ibid., P. 397.

appeals to the masses".<sup>23</sup> While the latter was criticised as being not just of "secondary" importance but also as hampering the strength of the nation.<sup>24</sup> Elsewhere, the socialists came down heavily on Gandhi. For example, B.P.Sinha, attributed the popularity of Congress, "not so much (to) Gandhi the nationalist, as Gandhi the saint ...."<sup>25</sup> Along with all this they also declared a Programme of Action in 1934. The basic purpose of this was to transform the basic character of the INC. Towards this end it proposed "organisation of Kisan Sabha and trade unions where they exist for the purpose of participating in the day to day economic struggles of peasants and workers and of creating a powerful mass movement for the achievement of Independence and Socialism".<sup>26</sup>

The Socialists had to, in fact, contend with two contradictory forces. First was Sahajanand's charismatic domination of the kisan movement, who was clearly reluctant to take a stand against the Zamindars, given his faith in the Congress strategy of anti-imperialism. Thus in July 1936, the BPKS declared that

23. ibid., P. 386.

24. ibid., P. 387.

25. ibid., In April 1934 at the Bihar Youth Conference, the convener exhorted the youth of India, "to capture the Congress (and liberate it from the influence of capitalists and landlords ... if Mahatmaji himself joins hands with the capitalists and landlords as he has done in the A.I.C.C. meeting at Patna, the youth of India should not mind even if they have to lose the guidance of the great Gandhi.

26. ibid., P. 391.

the "Congress is the only political organisation that can speak in the name of the Indian masses".<sup>27</sup> And again, "the Congress affords the most suitable platform for the United Front movement".<sup>28</sup>

To the Socialists, this implied that the mere presence of Sahajanand in any of the joint meetings, precluded the possibility of getting an anti-zamindari resolution passed. The first attempt was made at Gaya in 1934 at the second session of the BPKS, where Swami Sahajanand was present. He, however, managed to stall its passage.<sup>29</sup> Another attempt was made in 1935, where in fact, the Socialists managed to push through an anti-zamindari resolution.<sup>30</sup> Sahajanand, however, resigned in protest and the resolution had to be withdrawn. The basic idea behind Sahajanand's resistance to idea of abolition of Zamindari was his ideological proximity to the Congress as well as his fear that such a policy "might alienate kisan sabha supporters who were small holders".<sup>31</sup> i.e. small Zamindars and tenants.

The second factor that tended to contradict Sahajanand's dominance was the very nature of the Provincial Kisan Sabha movement. As Hauser points out, the movement was characterised not by organisation and structure, but by "agitation" where "action was the watchword".<sup>32</sup> This imparted a certain flexibility to the

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27. Congress Socialist, 25-7-1936.

28. ibid., 26-12-1936.

29. G. MacDonald, op.cit., P. 397.

30. ibid.

31. W. Hauser, op.cit., P. 100.

32. ibid.

movement which atleast momentarily worked to the advantage of the socialists. This flexibility was reinforced by the intrinsically class nature of the Sabha concerned as it was, mainly with the economic grievances of the peasantry.

As Sahajanand uptill this point was not anti-Congress but was attempting to combine the economic with the political end of attaining Swaraj, the socialists were only able to push through anti-zamindari resolutions in joint forums where Sahajanand was not present. Thus A.N. Sinha recalls that, as early as 1934, at a meeting not attended by Sahajanand, one Bishweshwar Prasad (probably at Gaya, where A.N. Sinha was present) called for an end to the Zamindari System which had accounted for the loss of nearly 10 crores (which according to him, was the earnings of the Zamindars) to the peasantry.<sup>33</sup> In January 1935 in a Kisan Sabha Meeting in Dukhan Saraga, a village in Muzaffarpur district, a resolution was passed calling for the abolition of the Zamindari System without compensation. The resolution was introduced by K.P. Singh a socialist, and seconded by A.P. Sinha, another socialist. It was passed only by 10 dissenting votes in a gathering of 1600 peasants.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, prior to the November 1935 session, a resolution proposing the abolition of Zamindari moved by Rambriksh Benipuri at the Patna district kisan Congress, was adopted.<sup>35</sup> Along with the

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33. A.N. Sinha, op.cit., P. 201.

34. W. Hauser, op.cit., Foot Note No. 2, P. 100.

35. G. MacDonald, op.cit., P. 403.



fact that these resolutions were passed in Sahajanand's absence, it is also obvious that the socialists were beginning to make head-ways in the direction of capturing the Kisan movement in atleast three districts -- Patna, Gaya and Muzaffarpur. However, there appears to be no evidence for Darbhanga and Monghyr -- the other two districts of intense socialist activity.

The socialist strategic endeavour finally paid off in November 1935, when the Third BPKS meeting at Hajipur adopted the demand for Zamindari abolition without compensation.<sup>36</sup> In effect the passage of the anti-zamindari resolution reflected a conjuncture of three events. First, was the increased socialist activity among the Kisans, both in ideological and organisational terms. In a sense, it was the apogee of peasant-socialist equation, which led to Sahajanand's confession that, ".....of all the material philosophies, socialism was the most sound".<sup>37</sup> Secondly, the astute peasant leader that Sahajanand, was, he accurately perceived the gathering sentiment against the zamindars. Commenting on the passage of the socialist backed anti-zamindari resolution at Dukhan Saroga in January 1935, he is reported to have said that, "this was a matter which the BPKS had not taken into their own hands, but if similar resolutions were passed at other places, then it would have to be taken up".<sup>38</sup> Moreover, by this time Sahajanand was, "genuinely concerned about and appalled by the distress of the

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36. W. Hauser, *op.cit.*, P. 100.

37. *ibid.*, P. 101.

38. *ibid.*, P. 100.

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Bihar peasantry".

Strategically, however, the Sabha had not yet changed its attitude towards the Congress, but its branch which would press for the acceptance of its own programme. The Kisan Sabha, according to him, would not fight elections on its own, but would back the Congress candidates.<sup>40</sup> But he made it clear that Zamindars were only the biggest of landholders, and not the small Zamindars who were peasants.<sup>41</sup> Notwithstanding such a duality, the acceptance of the Zamindari resolution by the BPKS laid the concrete foundations of the class position which was to determine the relation between the Congress, on the one hand, and the kisan sabha and the socialists, on the other.

The position taken by the Sabha was amplified further and for the first time in its "manifesto" which was adopted on July 4, 1936. In the manifesto the kisan sabha counterposed its own economic programme with the essentially "political" character of the Congress. It categorically stated that "The one single outstanding fact of political and economic significance in our country is the utter poverty and misery of our peasant masses". Therefore, "if the mass character of the Congress has any meaning, the problem of the peasantry must form the core of its programme". In a veiled criticism of the Provincial Congress, it attributed the backwardness of the Bihar peasantry to the twin causes of lack of "ameliorative

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39. G. MacDonald, op.cit., P. 405.  
40. ibid., P. 404.  
41. Political (special), F.R., 1-4-1935 to 14-1-1937,BSA.

legislation" and the nature of the "political movement" in the Province which had remained "more or less unconcerned with both the immediate and basic problems of the peasantry". According to the Manifesto, the "basic problems" of the peasantry stemmed from the existence of the Zamindari system which must be "abolished". Also, agrarian debt must be wiped off and a system of land tenure be established which makes the peasants, owners of their holdings and tax only those who have income above a minimum necessary to keep them and their families at a reasonable standard of living. Simultaneously it acknowledged that these demands might be difficult to realise under 'the present system of Government'. Yet the peasants, if they have to save themselves from utter ruin, must fight for them and secure them. They also put forth a charter of immediate demands which could be realised within the existing frame-work. It pointed out that it expected the Congress to "lend fullest support" to such a programme and for this should adopt only such candidates for the forthcoming elections to the Provincial Assembly who have "stood for the peasantry and have whole-heartedly espoused its cause .....". These immediate demands which called for immediate redressal were basically the issues on which the Sabha had been agitating since the early 1930's and in fact comprised the very *raison d'etre* of its existence. These issues included conferment of fixity of tenure (which was at the heart of the emerging Bakasht struggles), abolition of the dreaded bhaoli rent system (the main reason for peasant discontent in areas like Gaya, as it worked to the disadvantage of the kisans following the depression), cance-

llation of arrears of rent (on account of the adverse economic situa-  
tion created by the depression) and reduction of canal rates (which  
was leading to considerable discontent in Zamindaris like Bettiah,  
Amawan in Gaya), more generalised demands like cancellation of  
debt and fixity of rate of interest not exceeding 6%.<sup>42</sup>

This manifesto of the BPKS was substantially the posi-  
tion also arrived at by the All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) at Bombay  
in August 1936 at a meeting which was significantly chaired by  
Swami Sahajanand Saraswati.<sup>43</sup>

From the above discussion, it is obvious that the  
Socialists had made tremendous ideological and organisational headway  
in the Kisan Sabha. By 1936, it is clear that they had managed  
to give a fairly coherent direction to the Kisan movement. What  
is, however, not clear is the extent of in-roads the socialists  
had made within the Congress organisation. As there appears to  
be no primary literature on this aspect, we have to go by the  
secondary literature available. Tomlinson<sup>44</sup> argues that by mid-1930's,  
the socialists controlled the DCC's of Patna, Gaya and Champaran  
and Monghyr. But by 1936, they had started losing their foothold  
in the district committees. This, however, is not corroborated  
by Maconald's<sup>45</sup> study who, writing about this period, argues that

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42. Manifesto of the BPKS adopted by the Provincial Council of  
the BPKS on 11-7-1936. Appendix VI, W. Hauser, op.cit.,  
pp. 174-178.

43. ibid., Appendix VII, pp. 179-185.

44. Tomlinson, op.cit., P. 77

45. ibid., P. 101.

excepting the Patna DCC, the socialists did not command strong representation in the district committees.<sup>46</sup> In Muzaffarpur district they controlled the Hajipur Thana Congress Committee. This, however, did not mean control over the district committees.<sup>47</sup> Macdonald could be nearer to the truth, but it should be added that, on the basis of available evidence, the socialists also commanded presence in the Gaya DCC.<sup>48</sup>

This was partly because of the disorganisation in the ranks of the socialists themselves. For instance in June 1935 the CSP had to drop the idea of summer camps as barring two or three provinces, there was no response.<sup>49</sup> As late as 1937 Ashok Mehta was complaining to J.P. that the party members were not purchasing their weekly newspaper, the Congress Socialist, and that "for the past few weeks we have not been receiving reports of Party activities from most of the Provinces".<sup>50</sup> Moreover, all-India membership of the AICSP at this point was only little over 2000.<sup>51</sup> This obviously

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46. G. Macdonald op.cit., P. 389.

47. Hajipur appears to have been quite a major pocket of socialist influence. For instance, in the Hajipur Municipal Board elections Socialists won four out of the ten seats they had contested in a total of twelve. See Political (special) F.R., 1-4-1936 to 14-9-1937, BSA.

48. A note on the difficulties that arise by Kisan Sabha and Congress organisation being one and the same executive. Anonymous note written by a Gaya congressman to Rajendra Prasad, d. 29-12-37, Rajendra Prasad Papers, R.No. 7, NAI.

49. J.P. to K.P. Sinha, dated 9.6.1935, J.P. Papers, F.No.2, NMML.

50. ibid., Letter from Ashok Mehta to J.P., 8-2-1937.

51. ibid.

seriously hampered their organisational activities within the Congress

Therefore, by the end of the first phase, the socialists were in a major predicament. While on the one hand, they had created an impressive ideological reservoir among the kisans, they lacked a corresponding organisational hold over the Congress organisation. This constantly hampered their attempts to translate their hitherto ideological victory into concrete organisational terms. This problem was further compounded by the lack of any significant coordination between the various provincial socialist parties. This hiatus was to remain the achilles heel of the Socialist politics throughout the 1930's.

The major question arising now is, what prevented the socialists from effecting an organisational transformation ? To answer this, two major aspects of Socialists needs to be studied. In the first place, by the beginning of 1936, the CSP had no concrete programme of effecting an organisational transformation of the Congress. All the Meerut thesis said was that, "we should not show keenness to 'capture' committees and offices (in the Congress), nor should we form alliance with politically undesirable groups for the purpose".<sup>52</sup> Between the Meerut and Faizpur session in December, the AICSP came up with the strategy of procuring "direct representation of peasants and workers in the Congress".<sup>53</sup> In June, in the same year,

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52. Girija Shankar, op.cit., Appendix V, P. 316.

53. Congress Socialist, 31-3-1936.

the BPKS also proposed functional representation within the Congress, subject however to the acceptance of the Congress creed. In this scheme, the Sabha proposed that there should be one kisan representation to the TCC for every 100 members to the Thana Kisan Committee. At the district level every district Kisan Sabha having 500 members should be entitled to representation in the DCC. For every 1,000 additional members one representative in the district committee should be elected. It further argued that every representation to the Congress should be directly elected by the Kisan <sup>54:</sup> bodies. Sure enough the right wing of the Congress, while moving in the direction of incorporating peasants, shot down such proposals. The BPCC in its report on mass contact explicitly rejected the proposition and instead proposed "joint action" on agreed questions for close cooperation between the Congress and the peasants and workers. The proposal was rejected as it would "enhance class <sup>55:</sup> antagonisms". The Gujarat PCC also echoed the same sentiments but the Malabar PCC favoured direct representation, and so did the Lucknow city Congress Committee. <sup>56:</sup> Both indicate the predominance of left elements within the Provincial organisation.

Secondly the strategy of the Provincial right wing, which notwithstanding the sweep and thrust of the Sabha led agitation, successfully coopted the left elements within its fold. This

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54. ibid., 27-6-1936.

55. J.P. Papers, F.No. 116, NMML.

56. ibid.

strategy, however, did not immediately bear fruits and the process was a complex one abetted, in the final analysis by a number of historical forces. We propose to examine this strategy in some detail.

The overall frame-work for the right strategy was set by the Karachi resolution (The resolution per se was not a right document though it reflected a particular historical balance of forces where the left was beginning to gain ascendance in the national movement and its impact was historically imprinted in terms of the resolution. The same is true of the Lucknow and the Faizpur resolution) and was amplified further in 1936 by the Lucknow and Faizpur resolutions. All the three resolutions, (which sought to transform the character of the Congress into a mass movement) both, reflected the emerging mass character of the Indian nationalism as well as sought to further the process by coopting more and more classes within the Congress fold. The resolution passed in 1931 and 1936 reflected this historic dialectic. The crux of the right strategy which sought to further the frontiers of Congress, involved alleviating the economic grievances of the peasantry which was attributed directly to the conditions created by the Raj. In other words, they were not portrayed as emerging out of the nature of social relations between the various classes within the Indian society.

In Bihar, the Provincial right wing strategy evolved within the aforementioned framework. In the period following the



Civil Disobedience movement, the Provincial Congress persisted with the earlier strategy, but with a lot more flexibility, owing partly to the various Congress resolutions, mentioned above, partly also because of compulsions of an effective peasant movement within the province. Also, the decision of the Congress to contest the elections under the 1935 Act had an important bearing. The combined result of all this was a Provincial right wing strategy which betrayed at least two stages in its attitude towards the peasantry. In the first stage, which roughly culminated around early 1936, basically an attempt was made to hegemonise the peasant movement, by employing a more conventional appeal to both the peasants and landholders to maintain class harmony. In the second stage, which marked a subtle shift from the previous one and which coincided with the decision of the Congress to go for the elections, the overall parameter of the United Front strategy was retained. But the onus of reforming the land tenure system was heaped increasingly on the Zamindars, culminating finally in their acquiescence in the call for Zamindari abolition, on a number of occasions, towards mid-1937. This was decidedly the most 'left' phase of the Provincial right wing.

The spirit of the first phase, which had its roots in the 'Champaran model' where Gandhi attempted to harmonise the peasants and landholders against Imperialism, was best elucidated by Rajendra Prasad in his report as Chairman of the Kisan Enquiry Committee, established in 1931. Interestingly, the committee

was appointed by the PCC to report on the emerging peasant movement in the Gaya and Patna districts, mainly on account of extreme rent, unfairly high appraisal of crops where rent was paid in kind, non-granting of receipts, illegal ejection etc. In his report, Prasad's observation for the first time clearly laid down the frame-work which could determine the Provincial Congress strategy. He observed that, "the people of Gaya and Aurangabad, particularly should help the congress in carrying out the future programme which Mahatam Gandhi would suggest. The Congress was bound to help the peasants who formed a part and parcel of it ... but as long as no further step was taken in the matter, the kisans should maintain, those relations with their landlords, which were in existence. They should not hear anybody who told them to stop the payment of rent. They should not create any friction with their landlords."<sup>58</sup>

It was this strategy of moderating between the warring classes, which led Srikrishna Sinha to get elected as Secretary of the newly formed BPKS in 1929<sup>59</sup>. Subsequently, throughout this phase, propaganda was carried out on the lines suggested by Prasad. In 1935, at Tekari, Gaya, A.N. Sinha, advised the tenants to first petition the Maharaja of Amawan, before seeking redress through direct methods.<sup>60</sup> From Monghyr also similar reports came, where

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58. ibid., pp. 55-56.

59. ibid., P. 39.

60. Political (Special), July (2) 1935, BSA.

the Congressmen sought to utilise the BPKS platform to propagate the United Front strategy.<sup>61</sup> At the provincial level, this was reiterated at the meeting of the Working Committee of the BPCC, where Prasad called for the strengthening of the "Party line" on the question of agrarian reforms, in the immediate aftermath of the passage of the anti-zamindari resolution,<sup>62</sup> in November. Around the same time, at a joint Kisan Congress district Political Conference held under the presidentship of Srikrishna Sinha, strong support for the zamindari was expressed.<sup>63</sup>

Interestingly, the right wingers were reacting differently to the formation of the kisan sabha and the Socialists. For instance, while leaders like Satyanarain Singh and Binodanand Jha welcomed the formation of the Sabha,<sup>64</sup> as we have seen. The formation of the BSP did not invite a similar reaction. It is also interesting to note, that, while in 1929, Congress right wingers like Srikrishna Sinha was made the Secretary of the BPKS, in 1934, when the sabha and the socialists formed a United Front, there was not a single right winger among the office-bearers of the BPKS. Actions like these, on the part of the right wing leadership, left the sphere of peasantry almost completely open to the socialists and partly explains the rapidity with which they were able to hegemonise this class.

The 'leftward' swing of the provincial right wing on the agrarian question in the beginning of 1936 was actuated by

61. ibid.

62. G. Macdonald, op.cit., P. 401.

63. Political (Special), November (1) 1935, BSA.

64. S.N. Singh, however, considered it "suicidal" that there should be two organisations. He proposed that, "... the welfare of the kisans depends on the victory of the Congress". Hauser, op.cit., pp. 64-65.

a number of factors. Fore-most among them were the indications by the National Congress to contest the coming elections under the 1935 Act. In March 1937, the AICC had accepted a resolution moved by Prasad and Patel for a "conditional acceptance" of office.

Secondly, the passage of the anti-zamindari resolution, backed by the socialist-sabha combine, coupled with a burgeoning peasant movement, objectively compelled the Provincial right wing to inaugurate a not so subtle shift in their strategy. In a statement issued in February 1936, A.N. Sinha, acknowledged that, "with the growth of general consciousness among the kisans, they have in the last few years become assertive, vocal and organised and the tension between them and the party concerned is becoming more and more bitter, which is fraught with dire potentialities"<sup>65</sup>. The statement was not merely ominous for the entrenched right wing but made a point which was vastly different from the one which Prasad had made in his report on the first Kisan Enquiry Committee in 1931.

The first indication of the strategic shift was publicly spelled out in the course of the tour of the Kisan Enquiry Committee (henceforth KEC) established in January 1936.<sup>66</sup> The committee

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65. Searchlight, 2-2-1936.

66. R. Prasad Papers, Reel No. 7, NAI.

comprising almost exclusively of right Congress (excepting Ganga Sharan Singh, all the other members belonged to the dominant section Rajendra Prasad Chairman, A.N. Sinha, Srikrishna Sinha, B.B.Verma, Baldeo Sahay, Binodanand Jha, K.B. Sahay) was established ostensibly to look into the reasons for mass disaffection, -reasons like unemployment, impoverishment due to depression, earthquake, canal water rates, mal-administration of the Irrigation department etc. But the committee had also much larger motives. For one it sought to launch of a hegemonic battle against the left wing by renewing its grass-root contacts (which was getting tenuous as the Mass Contact Programme later acknowledged) which, in the long run would enable it to regain some of the ground it had lost to the socialists among the peasantry. For another, the committee was to serve as an useful forum to mobilise the peasantry in their favour, in the coming election. In fact the election issue greatly accounted for this brief but populist phase of the BPCC.

Be that as it may, the essential thrust of the KEC, in its tours amounted to first identifying the zamindars as being the culprits and then shifting the onus of reforming the land tenure system on them. Thus, during his tour of Champaran, under the aegis of the KEC, A.N. Sinha warned the zamindars, that, if they cease to be sympathetic as they were today, their days were numbered" and further added that "it was the duty of the landlords to see that the raiyats have enough to eat".<sup>67</sup> Similarly Srikrishna

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67. Searchlight, 29-7-1936.

Sinha, the man who was never ambiguous about his support to the zamindars, warned these very elements in Purnea, that while he was not "opposed to their existence, if they continued to oppress tenants who constituted 90% of the population and thwarted Congress by becoming allies of the Government, the Congress would have no alternative, but to fight them".<sup>68</sup> At another meeting at Parora, in the same district, he lambasted them for playing up to the British as at least the latter had loyalties towards their own country which the former lacked.<sup>69</sup>

Outside the KEC forum throughout 1936 the prominent right wingers continued to come down heavily on the Zamindars. In a Kisan Congress joint meeting at Bariarpur, attended by nearly 4000 kisans, Srikrishna Sinha, called for the annulment of enhanced rents between 1930-35. He also requested the Zamindars to provide rent relief in view of the depression and do away with abwabs and cesses.<sup>70</sup> In a public statement issued by A.N.Sinha, he blamed the, "unauthorised actions" of the landlords, among other things for the existing plight of the Kisans.<sup>71</sup> Similarly 'Searchlight' which all along faithfully mouthed the United Front strategy, praised the kisan leaders for having conducted the movement in a "perfectly legitimate manner", but criticised the Zamindars for having neglected the plight of the Kisans". Commenting on the response which the left was eliciting, it cautioned the Government and the Zamindars

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68. ibid.

69. ibid.

70. ibid., 19-1-1936.

71. ibid., 17-2-1936.

against "laughing" at their "own peril".<sup>72</sup> Probably it was developments such as these which led Prasad to publically admit, that "there is no difference among Congressmen, whether they are socialists or not, about the paramount necessity of winning freedom, before any social reconstruction can be attempted".<sup>73</sup>

However, this perceptible shift in favour of the peasantry, should not be taken to mean that the right wingers had lost sight of their strategy. Simultaneously they continued to also advise the tenants "not to pitch your demands too high" ( ... July 22)<sup>74</sup> and in fact in a speech at Champaran, A.N. Sinha cleverly invoked the Champaran episode, to illustrate his point about class adjustment. In his speech A.N. Sinha pointed out that Gandhi in the course of the <sup>a</sup>Styagraha was prepared to negotiate with planters and, "pitched the demands of the tenants very low. If they (kisans) wanted to get rid of the Zamindar's highhandedness they must learn to stand by their rights. But then they must not be unjust even to the landlords. Zamindars and tenants must exist together."<sup>75</sup>

By mid-1937, just prior to the elections, there is widespread evidence of the right wingers succumbing to the demands of Zamindari abolition, an evidence partly of the extent to which the socialist-led movement had threatened the United Front strategy

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72. ibid., 27-3-1936.  
73. ibid., 28-6-1936.  
74. ibid., 22-7-1936.  
75. ibid., 29-5-1936.

and partly also because of populism on the part of the right wingers in view of the coming elections.<sup>76</sup> One of the major reasons for this populism was the extension in Franchise which had made the peasantry an extremely important constituency. In any case it was the furthest that the Provincial Congress went on the agrarian question in the pre-independence period.

Be that as it may, the first instance of this new thrust was exemplified at the Gaya District political Congerence held on the 1st and 2nd May 1937 under Prasad's Presidentship. A resolution was passed demanding the abolition of Zamindari.<sup>77</sup> Only two or three of the several thousand dissented. In June of the same year, at a meeting chaired by Srikrishna Sinha, a resolution was passed calling for the abolition of "Permanent Settlement by compensation"<sup>78</sup>. In another meeting at Hilsa in Patna district, in June 1937, a lengthy resolution was agreed upon which called for zamindari abolition with compensation.<sup>79</sup> As late as mid-July, this particular thrust against the zamindars was continued by the provincial leadership.

Naturally, it was the class of zamindars which felt the most threatened. The zamindars who had been under similar threat earlier, following the Civil Disobedience Movement, had just about managed to retrieve the situation for themselves and

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76. ibid., 22-7-1936.

77. ibid., 29-5-1936.

78. ibid., 2-9-1936.

79. ibid., 3-7-1936.



had reluctantly joined the mainstream. But the sudden leftward swing of the provincial Congress again put them back in the same situation, of course, with the difference that much of the earlier arrogance was gone and they were compelled to grant concessions to the peasantry. The peasant socialist activity had greatly eroded the position of the zamindars in a span of a little over five years.

In may 1936, the Searchlight reported, that the landed elements led by Raja of Darbhanga had been trying to revive the United Party in order to combat the Congress.<sup>80</sup> In July of the same year, a Patna Central Zamindar Association was formed (comprising of Ganesh Dutt Singh, Raja of Amawan, etc.)<sup>81</sup> and in September a Saran District Zamindar Association was formed.<sup>82</sup> The crucial thing is that unlike previously, all of them were not conspiring with the British to stem the popular tide of the Congress. Most of them had probably imbibed the wisdom proffered by men like, A.N. Sinha and Srikrishna Sinha, who had clearly underlined the diminished chances of survival, should they persist with their old ways. Thus, as early as July 1936, the Raja Bahadur Amawan had suggested reforms following the visit of the KEC which included improvement of irrigation facilities, livestock, etc.<sup>83</sup> Similarly, concessions were granted by the Hathwa and Bettiah Raj by remitting rent for a year in the flood affected area of the Saran district.<sup>84</sup> While the

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80. ibid.

81. ibid., 2-9-1936.

82. ibid., 25-9-1936.

83. ibid., 3-7-1936.

84. ibid., 2-9-1936.

Saran District Zamindar Association actually agreed to scale down the interest rates, given certain conditions and abolish illegal exactions.<sup>85</sup>

Here certain qualifications need to be made in order to put the issue in perspective. Firstly, the temporary truce on the Agrarian question, which largely stemmed from a certain consensus on the Zamindari Question had little long-term impact, as the convergence was not ideological, but strategic, established in view of the approaching elections.<sup>86</sup> The right wing would make an about-turn in their attitude on the zamindari question once the Congress formed Ministry. However, it is important to remember this sudden shift of the Provincial Congress on the question of zamindars as well as the somewhat ambiguous position of the zamindars themselves, as it had a direct bearing on the politics in the Ministry period. Secondly, this truce on the economic front was contradicted by considerable differences on the political front. Both were, however, reconciled on the eve of Congress accession to office. As we shall see the consensus was temporary.

On the political front serious conflict emerged on the issue of office acceptance. We have already seen how thoroughly the Bihar socialists were opposed to the occupation of any of the

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85. ibid., 25-9-1936.

86. It could have been influenced partly by the Report of the U.P. Agrarian Committee submitted to the Working Committee in December 1936. The report admitted that sooner or later Zamindari would have to be abolished. But how this would come about was not mentioned. It argued that this would depend on the existing circumstances as it was not proper to lay down

representative institutions devolved by the British. In fact, this was the reason which kept them at perpetual loggerheads with the Swarajists.<sup>87</sup> In a lengthy statement the Council of Action of the BSP denounced the 1935 Act and forewarned the Congress Government:

"In as much as the new constitution is conceived in a spirit of imperialist domination and designed to perpetuate our bondage, this Council is of the opinion that the only course open to the Congress is to wreck that Constitution, making its working impossible. With this end in view, the Congress wherever in majority should refuse to form the government and to allow any of the governments to function with legislative support. In the opinion of the Council, acceptance of offices under this slave constitution will not only amount to the acceptance of the constitution itself but will also destroy the Congress as an organisation based on direct action against imperialism. This Council, therefore, feels that the pro-office propaganda is doing incalculable harm to the Congress movement and should be resisted by all anti-imperialists. It further warns the Congress authorities that such acceptance of offices will put a severe strain on the loyalty of the rank and file".<sup>88</sup>

87. At the Lucknow Congress Sardar Sardul Singh Cavesheer, a Socialist and a member of the Anti-Ministry Committee moved a resolution saying that "our Ministers may become successful in getting the course books, which are taught in the schools, or in hoisting the national flag, or in improving the sanitary conditions of the cities, but they won't be able to provide food and clothing to the hungry and the naked..." The amendment was lost by 250 to 450 votes. T. Rusch, op.cit., pp.194-195. .  
88. W. Macdonald, op.cit. P. 406.

In addition, the Socialists feared that the way the Constitution was designed "barring a political landslide the extremists cannot win any province".<sup>89</sup> Further complications were created by the establishment of the Congress Parliamentary Board (CPB) which was to oversee electoral and other activities. This was denounced by the Socialists as an "anachronism" since it would entail much more centralisation.<sup>90</sup> Other minor conflicts which contributed to vitiate the political equation in the Province also emerged at the all-India level appeared. The Central executive in its Bombay meeting in February, 1937 condemned Patel's fiat against the so-called Andhra pledge drawn up by the Andhra Provincial Kisan Sabha under N.G. Ranga. The Pledge while giving support to the Congress laid down the condition that only those who pledged to the resources of the Kisan Sabha will be entitled to the Kisan votes.<sup>91</sup> The Andhra PCC did not exactly help matters by also banning the Red flag<sup>92</sup>— an issue which was to become a nagging bone of contention in the Ministry period. To cap it all, there appeared to be conflict over the selection of candidates, with the much well entrenched right wing resisting candidature to the left wing candidates. In Bihar there is no evidence regarding this, but the General Secretary of the AICSP complained at Faizpur, "that there was a noticeable tendency to discourage the adoption of Socialists and other radicals as Congress candidates on the part of the Congress Parliamentary

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89. 'Editorial' Congress Socialist, 20-6-1936.

90. ibid., 21-3-1936.

91. ibid., 6-3-1936.

92. ibid., 10-4-1936.

Committee in certain provinces.<sup>93</sup>

In Bihar barring Sheel Bhadrarayjee there was no Left candidate. Although there is no evidence it can still be safely assumed that it must have caused considerable heart burning among the Left. The Left also squarely denounced the decision of the Congress to ally with the Indian Nationalist Party. At its Allahabad meeting in November 1936, the AICSP made a statement saying "that the reigning consideration in the election of candidates is somehow to secure a majority for the Congress Party. This leads to compromises and pacts with the reactionary elements of various complexions as well as to the selection of highly undesirable candidates".<sup>94</sup>

This radicalisation of the Congress in general was, however, coupled with the persistent ambiguity of the Socialists regarding the Congress. This has been amply clear in the context of Bihar. Thus we had the spectacle that after opposing the Congress strategy in the Province in this period, the Socialist Sabha combine could still pass a resolution calling for:

- (a) No non-payment of rent,
- (b) No forcible occupation of bakast land,
- (c) No unlawful acts like threatening the amlas.<sup>95</sup>

At the all-India level whenever the crunch came where it had to be decided between Congress-led nationalism and an alternative

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93. T. Rusch, op.cit., P. 699.

94. Searchlight, 8-11-1936.

95. ibid., 21-8-1936.

movement based on class demands the CSP always ended up supporting the former.

This ambiguity has been commented upon by all historians-- T. Rusch, Girija Shankar, L.P. Sinha and Bipan Chandra. Thus Socialist organs, like the Congress Socialist, which throughout the 1936 talk in terms of class struggle and the primacy of economic demand as well as the need to base Swaraj on the basis of people's "needs and desires" have to abruptly tone down once the CSP executive committee at the Bombay session, expressed "satisfaction" at the Congress election manifesto and extended "fullest cooperation".<sup>96</sup> On accession of the ministry, the CSP explicitly stated that now that the Congress had joined the government it was the duty of every Congressman, "to join together in making the fullest use of the opportunities afforded by the formation of the Congress cabinet for the intensification of the nationalistic struggle and for raising it to a higher level".<sup>97</sup> During the course of the elections this was practised both in letter and in spirit. They saw to it that no one opposed the official Congress candidate. In Bengal for instance, the CSP co-operated with the Provincial trade union Congress, the Bengal Labour Party and other Left parties to form a United Left Front. At the same time they proclaimed that support would be withdrawn to anyone who opposed the official Congress candidate.<sup>98</sup>

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96. Congress Socialist, 30-8-1936.  
97. ibid., 14-8-1937.  
98. T. Rusch, op.cit., P. 699.

This position vis-a-vis the Congress was best reflected in the programme which they presented just prior to the formation of the ministry. The demands were spelled out as "immediate" and any mention of the long term demands like zamindari abolition were avoided. In fact the nature of the demands made it appear closer to the Faizpur resolution of the Congress than its own programme of of 1934.

These demands were:

- (i) Reduction of rent and revenue; fixity of tenure; exemption from rent of uneconomic holdings and cancellation of arrears of rent,
- (ii) Moratorium on debts,
- (iii) 44 hour week and a living wage,
- (iv) Unemployment relief,
- (v) Release of political prisoners and repeal of anti-national and anti-working class laws.<sup>99</sup>

Thus on the eve of the formation of ministry by the Congress an anti-imperialist front had been forged. But the front was necessarily temporary, since the key forces involved had fundamentally contradictory political and ideological interests. Why one characterises this front as 'temporary' will be seen in the next chapter.

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99. Congress Socialist, 6-3-1937.

CHAPTER IV

While previous phase reflected a rather fragile alliance of the social forces, the phase which spanned from the accession of Congress ministry till the beginning of the Tripuri Congress, was marked by an acrimonious conflict between those very forces. The resolution occurred, however, in favour of the dominant Provincial leadership in the wake of myriad national and international developments, but not before the citadel of Gandhism had been considerably battered. The crucial question is -- What accounted for this all time low in the left and right relationships in Pre-independence Bihar.

In Bihar, the main reasons for this state of affairs stemmed primarily from the divergent strategy of the left and the right on the question of the peasantry -- a divergence whose effects were heightened by the fact of the Congress being in Government.

First, we will consider the peasantry -- the chief bone of contention.

Ironically, the increased intensity of peasant movements (both socialist led and otherwise) in the post-1937 period was



because of the formation of the national governments in the provinces which inaugurated an almost unprecedented era of hope for the peasants. To the vast majority of the peasants not acquainted with the subtleties of the inbuilt limitations of the 1935 Act, Congress Ministry represented the of Swaraj. This generalised mood was something which can hardly be empirically substantiated--(something which Nehru reflected somewhere around this time). To the kisans of Bihar, who had been mobilised on the basis of self-interest (this was the main aim of the Bihar socialists), the formation of the Congress ministry right in the midst of a leftward swing of the Provincial Congress as well as the burgeoning peasant movement, created its own specificities. Thus, Sankrityayan, in his memoir's , recalls that in areas around Chapra (Goreakothi) there were instances of 'Panchayati Kheti' which was a basically consolidated landholdings on which different families collectively worked.<sup>1</sup> This phenomenon was recognised by all the various elements in the Provincial Congress. J.P., for instance, writing in 1939, recollected that "The kisans got a new hope with the Congress coming to power. They started dreaming of better times"<sup>2</sup>. Sahajanand, similarly, in a press statement agreed that, "great hopes have been created in the minds of the kisans"<sup>3</sup> in view of the Congress victory in the recent elections. In fact, Sahajanand and the more

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1. Rahul Sankrityayan, Meri Jeevan Yatra, Kitab Mahal, Allahabad 1950, P. 495.
  2. Janata, 3-8-1939.
  3. R. Prasad Papers, Reel No. 7 (Press statement by Sahajanand Saraswati).

conscious elements in the peasantry fully realised that the Congress owed their thumping victory to the peasants. This, the kisans, throughout felt indebted the Congress much more to them than to any other section of the Indian society. The extent of the kisan expectation and involvement in the Congress at this juncture can be best gleaned if one glances through the issues of the JANATA—the socialist weekly edited by Benipuri. Letters published in the columns indicate their involvement in District Board elections, its functioning, comments on various local level leaders and even suggesting action against dissident leaders. The right wing was all along alive to this new historical abstraction. For instance, Harihar Singh, a Congress M.L.A. in a letter to Rajendra Prasad immediately after the formation of the ministry complained that "such expectations are being created that even the Congress will not be able to fulfil them".<sup>4</sup> Providing fillip to the peasant movement was another factor which again occurred from the circumstances created by the formation of the Congress Government in Bihar. All over Bihar, the zamindars who had already been beleaguered by the Congress led peasant movement, felt further terrorised after August 1937. Sankrityayan mentions that as a consequence, somehow or the other, the feeling had gone around among the zamindars, that since the Congress Government had come to power, land which the 'unregistered' tenants had been tilling for so long would be legally handed over to them.<sup>5</sup>

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4. Letter from Harihar Singh to R. Prasad, 18-10-1937, ibid..

5. R. Sankrityayan, op.cit., P. 503.

Therefore, the process of eviction intensified leading to still more conflicts.

The Provincial Congress did not exactly help matters by ratifying the Congress-Zamindar agreement at the beginning of 1938. In fact, it is hardly an exaggeration to suggest that this agreement set the tone for both the left and the right wing politics in this period. For the left it was very clearly a live evidence of the nexus between the dominant Congress leadership and the zamindars--a nexus which the socialists had always suspected, but which could never be demonstrated given the former's oft-repeated strategy of a broad united front of all classes. The provincial leadership further confused matters by not making public the provisions of the agreement. In an article in the Congress Socialist, though written much later, Sahajanand argued that the most "serious objection" was the fact that "actual form of the agreement itself is not known"<sup>6</sup>. Thus the sphere of interpretation of the agreement was left wide open and depending on the situation, accusations were traded in the most base manner. Thus, we have a situation which was extremely combustile, in terms of the aspirations of the peasant, made worse by the ratification of the covert agreement.

The main terms of the Congress-Zamindar agreement were:-

- (a) Tenants land auctioned for the inability to pay rent was not to revert back to the peasants.

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6. Congress Socialist, 6-8-1938.

- (b) Salami on sale of part of the holding to be charged at 4%. But in the case of sale of entire holding, 2% of the sale price will be levied as salami.
  
- (c) Power of certification vested in the Zamindar will be abolished, but it will continue to be in the statute books.
  
- (d) Arrears of rent-- the original promise of scaling down arrears by 50% was dropped. Under the agreement, wherever the Government to apply Section 112 of the Bengal Tenancy Act, arrears will be scaled down in proportion to the reduction made in current rents under this Section and wherever this Section is not applied and reduction of current rent is not effected, the arrears will be treated as debts and referred to the Debt Conciliation Board.
  
- (e) On the crucial issue of bakast land which had become bakast after 1929, kisans will have to pay 50% of the decretal amount. Bakast land in possession of Zamindars who are not liable to agrarian income tax (that is those with an income of less than 1000) will not revert to tenants even on payment of decretal sum.
  
- (f) Zamindars would not oppose the passage of the Tenancy Bill in the Upper House, where Congress is the minority (While emphasizing the acrimony created by the agreement, it should be borne in mind that the whole tenor of the socialist-sabha politics was developing in that direction. The truce effected in 1936 was a temporary one consummated in order to put across a united front in the coming elections).

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7. ibid., 22-1-38.

At a much broader level, as we have already seen, Marxism was being increasingly perceived all over as the order of the day. The socialists were as much partakers in this new mood. They had already decided to be a part of the CPI's new United Front strategy. The understanding was that while the socialists would provide the communists a conduit for entry into the Congress, the communists would allow the socialists entry into the sphere of Labour and Trade Union movement in general where they commanded considerable presence.<sup>8</sup> In fact, in March 1938, the CSP conducted mass campaigns for the legalisation of the CPI to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the arrests in connection with the Meerut conspiracy case.<sup>9</sup> Similar equations existed between the socialists and the Royists -- a bond which was strengthened by a common acceptance of the Congress as the main anti-imperialist organisation. When Roy was released, CSP welcomed him as India's "veteran revolutionary" and expressed hope that he would utilise every opportunity to unite the socialist movement in the country.<sup>10</sup> At their joint meeting in Allahabad, immediately after his release there appeared to be complete harmony of perception between the two.<sup>11</sup> In Bihar, however, there is no evidence of support of either the communists or the Royists. The communists it seems started functioning illegally only in 1939.<sup>12</sup> Here it should be pointed out that

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8. Girija Shankar, op.cit., pp. 138-139.  
 9. Congress Socialist, 19-3-1938.  
 10. Girija Shanker, op.cit., P. 135.  
 11. ibid.  
 12. Bhogendra Jha, "Birth and Growth of Communists in Bihar", in Indian Left Review, Vol. IV, no. 4, February 1976, P. 8.

all this apparent left unity was not entirely free of inner tensions. With the sort of understanding which the communists had of the Congress (under which the socialists were subsumed) coupled with Roy's advocacy of covert political operations the socialists never felt completely secure in the arrangement. Sure enough by the end of 1930's, the alliance broke off. Be that as it may, the mood of the epoch was best epitomised in the personality of Nehru whose commitment to Marxism had peaked in 1936 at Lucknow. Socialists always perceived him as their one authentic National level expression and a constant source of inspiration. From the standpoint of a socialist strategy he was considered indispensable for capturing the Congress organisation. At the first session of the AICSP at Patna, Narendra Dev in his speech made frequent references to Nehru as "our great leader" in whose absence "our task has become extremely difficult" and missed his "valuable advice and guidance". Similarly at Bombay the AICSP passed a resolution which admitted their appreciation of him in no uncertain terms.

The temporary truce effected between the socialists and the Congress leadership for the elections soon caved in almost like a pack of cards. This was largely because the socialist-sabha strategy did not even appear to give a chance to the provincial Congress leadership. The local level Congress leadership also did not exactly help matters by replying almost in the same coin. Thus, just a fortnight before the Congress formed ministry Sahajanand complained to Rajendra Prasad that all kinds of rumours were being

spread in order to create misunderstandings between the two groups<sup>13</sup>. Immediately on the assumption of office by the Congress, reports came from Hazaribagh that socialists were campaigning against the right wingers as being collaborationists and representatives of the zamindars. In fact the letter complained that this had seriously affected their recruitment and that, "wherever we go, we are hooted down by the people as members of the Zamindar Party"<sup>14</sup>. Throughout 1937, there are innumerable letters from grassroot Congress workers complaining about this sort of a propaganda by the Socialists. There were also letters advocating violence against the zamindars. For instance a Thana level Congressman from Muzaffarpur district complained to the DCC, Muzaffarpur, that one sabhaite-socialist and this solution to offer to Zamindar tyranny, in a speech in a village called Kathgulia--if the zamindar's men illegally force you to part with milk, ghee, etc. then take him to the thana, while hitting him. If the thana inspector does not listen catch and take him to the Magistrate in Muzaffarpur and file a case against him<sup>15</sup>. Not only obscure activists like Rajendra Prasad Singh, but even a prominent socialist like Kishori Prasanna Sinha was peddling this strategy. In a speech at Barbara Thana, Muzaffarpur, K.P. Sinha asked for the resignation of the local M.L.A. (who was being addressed by his surname 'Sahiji') who had refused to sign on a certain

13. Sahajanand Saraswati to R. Prasad, 27-1-1937, R.Prasad Papers, Reel No. 7, NAI.

14. ibid., Anonymous letter from Hazaribagh, dt. 17-8-1937, Reel No. 7, NAI.

15. ibid., Anonymous letter from Muzaffarpur to Prasad, 17-9-1937, Reel No. 7, NAI.

memorandum (whose contents are not mentioned) which apparently embodied the kisan demands.<sup>16</sup>

In Darbhanga, Ram Nandan Misra, a foremost socialist compared the Congress to a prostitute at a public meeting in Ryam in Darbhanga.<sup>17</sup> In Darbhanga, the conflict between the two wings was extremely sharp and more often than not in the open. At a meeting in Ryam, which had been organised by the district leadership which was to be addressed by one Babu Badri Singh and Babu Rambadan Singh, it seems R.N. Misra appeared unannounced at the meeting, and one of his supporters suddenly jumped in the midst of the proceedings and proposed his name as the speaker. This was immediately seconded and next moment Misra was on the stage proposing Dhanraj Sharma's name, a prominent sabhaite as the speaker. Sharma's speech was, however, repeatedly interrupted. Notwithstanding this, Sharma was able to put his point across -

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16. Letter from DCC Muzaffarpur to R.Prasad, 17-9-1937, Reel No. 7, Also see a letter 24-8-1937 from another Thana level Congress worker regarding K.P.Sinha's speech in Rohua Mauza in Muzaffarpur district, where he not only advocates non-payment of rent, but elucidates this point further by giving them examples from Russia and Italy where the peasants allegedly burnt the landlords or hurled them into the sea or else throw them from the mountain top. In another speech in Jamui, he told the kisans that if the zamindar slaps you once, slap him three or four times. Letter from a Congress worker, 1-10-1938. This advocacy of violence against the zamindar was widespread among the grassroot socialists. See another letter from Jamui to R. Prasad, 3-10-1937, which said that Giridhar Narain Singh, a socialist incited the peasants to, "usurp zamindar's land" and if any resistance beat him up ... don't sit around like hijras(Eunuch). ibid.
17. Letter to R.Prasad, 25-8-1937 ibid.,



that the Congress was anti-kisan and pro-zamindar.<sup>18</sup> The significant point which the DCC report made was that wherever R.N. Misra and Dhanraj Sharma were going, people were turning anti-Congress and kisan organisations were being established. According to the report, impact was also there because both were considered "respected Congressmen". In Laheriasarai, Darbhanga, Congressmen were compared to those criminals who wore sadhus clothes and commit dacoities.<sup>19</sup> Misra also like his counterpart in Muzaffarpur, not merely accused the Congress of toeing an organisation of Zamindars but also accused individual Congressmen like Satyanarain Singh (leader of the distt. right wing) and Narayan Das (much more moderate and sympathetic to the kisan cause) of being on zamindars payrolls.<sup>20</sup> At a meeting in Dahaura, after abusing Singh as an agent of zamindar he actually admitted that he wanted to abuse him.<sup>21</sup> At a socialist meeting in Bariati Ghat, in Rosera Thana in Darbhanga, Misra, Panna Lal Barrister and Chandrakant Jha, all of them categorically stated that no kisan would vote for the Congress either in the election of the delegates (for the Haripura session) or the District Board unless they gave in writing that zamindari would be abolished and Kisan Raj established.<sup>22</sup>

In a meeting of the Kisan Sabha in Darbhanga, attended by prominent socialists like Ramprakash Sharma, R.N. Misra, B.P. Sinha

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18. Darbhanga DCC, Patna, 2-10-1937, ibid.  
 19. Letter from Laheriasarai, d. 12-10-1937, ibid.  
 20. Letter to R. Prasad, d. 23-11-1937, ibid.  
 21. Letter to R. Prasad, d. 26-11-1937, ibid.  
 22. Letter to R. Prasad, d. 25-11-1937, ibid.

and Yamuna Karjee, the resolution passed vote only for those candidates who were votaries of Purna Swaraj and who believe in the Panchayati Raj; (b) people who are ready for a <sup>a</sup>sṭyagraha against the federation; (c) who agree with the kisan programme of Zamindari abolition -- rents should be halved; cease recovery of debts for the next five years; abolish forced labour; adequate remuneration to agricultural labourers; (d) this commitment should be written; (e) condemned the campaign of the DCC and other prominent Congress men against the Sabha; (f) also criticised the threat of the Champaran DCC of disciplinary action against those Congressmen who support Sahajanand.<sup>23</sup>

This comprised the background for the large scale violence between the Kisan activists and the right wingers for the election of delegates to the Haripura session. In Darbhanga, violence appears to have been unleashed by the local landlords who sought to prevent the election of kisan candidates and socialists.

Reports on similar lines came from Gaya which unlike Muzaffarpur or Darbhanga was a socialist-sabhaite stronghold. In a letter to Prasad, one Kapil Dev Misra, who claimed to be a small farmer from Gaya, and an ordinary member of the Congress lamented (with a bit of arrogance) that "illiterates are roaming around with the Congress flags, inciting Kisans not to pay rents to the zamindar and occupy the bakast land. If there is any resistance, bash up

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23 . Anonymous note (undated), ibid.

the zamindar". Where zamindars relent and want an agreement, the kisans act tough, but where the former are strong, "kisans of nearby villages congregate, with arms, to resist". He identified two types of kisans- peaceful and violent and said that the latter were on the increase. He also accused the District Congress Committee of acting arbitrarily.<sup>24</sup> In another note written to the BPCC by an anonymous Congressman, accusation were made against the left for preaching violence. The note said that, virtually all the Congress Programme (of constructive Programme, communalism, anti-un-touchability, etc.) had come to a standstill and every activity was being carried out under the banner of the kisan sabha. Moreover, since the accession of the Ministry "**class** hatred was being preached". Kisans were attending meetings, armed with 'lathis' (sticks) and 'Ganrasa' (a sharp edged weapon made of iron) to be used against the zamindars. When A.N. Sinha, the Finance Minister came for a tour to Gaya, in December 1937, sabhite socialists members charged him of being a Zamindar's agent and boycotted his meetings.<sup>25</sup>

Similar reports also came from Patna district and Monghyr. In Monghyr, Karyanand Sharma, in a public meeting stated that earlier there were two exploitative classes. Now there were three-British, Zamindars, the Congress.<sup>26</sup>

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24. Letter from Kapil Dev Mishra, P.O. Tungi, Gaya to R. Prasad, d. 11-10-1937, ibid.

25. A Note on the difficulties that arise by Kisan Sabha and Congress organisation being one and the same executive' written (anonymous) by a Gaya Congressman to the BPCC, d. 29-12-1937, ibid.,

26. Letter from Simiriya, Monghyr, d. December 1937, ibid.

Socialist propaganda appeared to be making considerable headway among the kisans. This was reported by most of the local level Congressmen who were sending their impressions to the BPCC. For example, the report from Barbarba thana, Muzaffarpur explicitly said that the "people are beginning to believe that Zamindars who went as Congress representatives in the Assembly are turning their backs on the kisan problems."<sup>27</sup> A report from Mahua thana Congress Committee (Muzaffarpur District) endorsed the impact of the propaganda by K.P. Sinha.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, a letter from Darbhanga explicitly stated that the "kisan psychology is rapidly changing. Kisan Sabha and not the Congress is seen as the organisation for the emancipation of the kisans."<sup>29</sup>

Another letter from Monghyr in December accepted that, "speeches and activities of the kisan sabha is proving detrimental to the policy, programme and prestige of the Congress".<sup>30</sup>

The extent of polarisation in the various district Congress Committees cannot be commented upon although it was beginning to get sharp. However, there were elements who were comple-

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27. Letter from Barbara Thana, Muzaffarpur district, d. 25-8-1937, ibid.

28. Letter from Mahua TCC, Muzaffarpur district, d. 7-10-1937 ibid.

29. Letter from a Congress worker, d. 2-10-1937, from Darbhanga, ibid.

30. Anonymous letter from Monghyr (undated) accepted that, speeches and activities of the Kisan Sabha is proving detrimental to the policy, programme and prestige of the Congress". ibid.

tely confused given the open slanging match between the right and the left. For instance, one Hriday Narayan Chaudhry, a Congress-kisan worker sent his doubts to Rajendra Prasad in a question form--"Is Kisan Sabha openly preaching violence ? Is an agreement possible between the Congress Ministry, the PCC and the Kisan Sabha ? Is not the kisan sabha contributing towards the rise in consciousness ? Are not the Congressmen succumbing to greed and ambition and losing the spirit of sacrifice ? What is the wisdom behind not publishing a Kisan Enquiry Committee Report ? I am a member of the Gandhi Seva Sangh and according to you what attitude should I take towards the Kisan Sabha ? I also heard Sahajanand's speech and found it harmless".<sup>31</sup>

Zamindars were the class most beleaguered by the socialist sabha propaganda. In a letter to the AICC and the Congress President, zamindars of Barhaiya, Teus thana Lakhisarai, and Sheikhpura, Monghyr claimed to be Congress workers, whose life and property had been threatened by the violent exhortations of the Sabha. It seems initially they had petitioned the PCC but were advised to appeal to the AICC.<sup>32</sup> Similarly Jagat Narain Lal reported to Prasad that most of the Zamindars in the Patna district were so terrified of Sahajanand that they had stopped going to the court in order to sort out their problems with the tenantry. Consequently most of their letters kept coming to him.<sup>33</sup>

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31. Letter from Hriday Narain Chaudhary, Darbhanga, d. 7-12-37, ibid.

32. Representation of the Zamindars to the AICC and the Congress President, d. 28-10-1937, ibid.

33. Jagat Narain Lal to Prasad, d. 31-12-1937, ibid.



The Socialist propaganda was matched by an equally sharp Right wing reaction though in comparison it was somewhat cautious. Militant propaganda by the Socialists had put the Provincial Right wing in an unenviable situation. On the one hand, they had to carry the zamindars who were already having enough reasons to feel insecure. And on the other, the left was crying for their blood and their campaign on these lines even appeared to be catching the popular imagination. Prasad very well realised this dilemma. In his reply to Khan Bahdur Ismail's letter, (which had protested against agricultural taxation and tenancy reforms) Prasad complained that the zamindars, "have not been thinking on constructive lines at all and the criticism is a complete negation and nothing else". He further lamented in the same letter the predicament of the Congress --"Congress people are really between two stones, equally relentless". 34

Given this immediate limitation and the broader parameter of uniting all the classes, the right wing politics was multi-pronged. At one level, this involved assuaging the beleaguered zamindars. Zamindars here should not be merely taken to mean the Raja of Darbhanga and Khan Bahadur Ismail, but even small landholders who formed the backbone of the Congress; and felt equally threatened by the Socialist-Sabhaite propaganda. Thus,

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34. Prasad's reply to Khan Bahadur Ismail, d. 12-10-1937, Prasad Papers, R.No. 8, NAI.

we have one Thakur Bimla Prasad Singh from Hajipur thana, Muzaffar pur, thanking Prasad for effecting a compromise between the Zamindars and the tenants through the tenancy legislation.<sup>35</sup> In fact, most of the action initiated against the kisan activists were based on the recommendations of district and thana level Congress activists, most of whom appear to be small zamindars. The culmination of this right wing tactic was the ratification of the Congress-Zamindar agreement in January 1938.

Coupled with this, the right wing led by Rajendra Prasad, initiated action against the Sabhaites. The interesting thing to note is that the leadership did not initiate action against the Socialists like Kishori Prasanna Singh and Ramnandan Misra, whose anti-Congress propaganda was no less hostile than that of the Sabhaites. In fact, in the whole of 1937-38 there is little to distinguish between the rhetoric of the Sabhaites and the Socialists, when it came to criticising the provincial leadership. The move in any case reflected the astute and mature leadership of the province, in as much as it also reflected its limitations. Prasad's move was astute in that it attempted to curtail the sphere of activities of both the socialists and the kisans without antagonising the former who along with Sahajanand was providing most of leadership of the movement. By initiating such actions, Prasad was probably

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35. Thakur Bimla Prasad Singh, Village and P.O. Bhaironpur, Deori, Thana Hajipur, Muzaffarpur District, to Prasad (undated), ibid.:

also driving home the point that the provincial Congress could not move further than this on the agrarian question. Given this, the main targets of the Gandhians naturally became Sahajanand. In November 1937, the Champaran DCC, headed by Prasad's trusted lieutenant, banned the movement of Sahajanand in the district and threatened disciplinary action against any Congressmen who would support Sahajanand.<sup>36</sup> Action on similar lines were initiated by the Monghyr and Muzaffarpur DCC. The resolution of the Monghyr DCC "commanded" Congressmen to "disassociate" themselves from the Kisan Sabha and carry on all work relating to the Sabha in the name of the Congress". It also threatened "disciplinary action ... against all those who may be found working contrary to the above resolution from today".<sup>37</sup> In December-mid 1937, Sahajanand's activities were officially banned by the BPCC. It coincided with the ongoing negotiations between the Congress and the Zamindars which finally resulted in the controversial agreement.

A third important facet of the strategy was graphically stated by Rajendra Prasad in his letter to Ramdayalu Singh, the speaker of Bihar Assembly. In his letter he started off by emphasising the importance of "abandon(ing)" the policy of indifference towards elections" (probably suggesting election of delegates to

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36. Sahajanand to the BPCC, d. 28-11-1937, Prasad Papers, R.No. 7, NAI.

37. Resolution, Monghyr DCC (undated), ibid.



the Haripura Congress) and "organise our forces when others have been working in an organised way and on party lines". Towards this end two things are essential. Firstly, explaining our programme and pointing out the defects of other programme "without in any way involving personalities". Secondly, "organised attempts to participate in the Congress elections, so as to ensure the return of the largest number of area of "our way of thinking" as delegates and as members of the AICC, without of course in any way adopting unfair means. The same letter made a rough analysis of the dissensions within the right wing and Prasad came to the conclusion that it would be possible to unite the different groups and factions belonging to "our way of thinking" as delegates and as members of the AICC without of course in any way adopting unfair means. The same letter made a rough analysis of the dissensions within the right wing and Prasad came to the conclusion that it would be possible to unite the different groups and factions belonging to "our way of thinking".<sup>38</sup> He followed up this letter by another one addressed to Deep Narayan Singh,<sup>39</sup> one of the founding members of the provincial Congress, soliciting his support in order to negate the sabha's projection of him as being pro-zamindar.

Apart from closing the ranks and presenting a united Front to the left, Prasad in a directive, addressed to the legislators asked them to take tours of their respective constituencies

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38. Prasad to Ramdayalu Singh, d. 7-12-37, ibid..

39. The letter rounded off by Prasad's plea that, "your presence is solely needed to remove this misconception". Prasad to Deep Narayan Singh, d. 29-12-1937, ibid..

and explain the proceedings and programmes which the Congress proposed to follow.<sup>40</sup> In another letter addressed to K.B. Sahay, one of the important right wing leaders and the Parliamentary Secretary, informed him that "on behalf of the Government we intend to bring out a pamphlet for countrywide distribution to remove the misapprehensions of the landlords and the Musalmans".<sup>41</sup>

Here it would be interesting to go into the left response to the action taken by the BPCC against Sahajanand. For the first time the left sought to provide arguments to justify its position as well as the propaganda against the right wing. Immediately, after being hemmed by the PCC directive, Saraswati wrote a letter to Prasad, resigning from the Working Committee of the BPCC and defending his politics. In the letter, he claimed that the action against him was sudden. He also claimed that prior to this he had asked Prasad explicitly in various public meetings whether he had any specific charges against him regarding his activities, to which the former had not mentioned any. He also complained that neither he nor his other three expelled colleagues were provided any opportunity to defend their case. The second point which he made was of a much more serious order as it remained the dominant image of the Congress among the left wing peasant nationalists. He lamented that zamindars who were uptill

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40.. Prasad's Memorandum to Legislators, d. 5-10-1937, ibid.

41. Prasad to K.B. Sahay, d. 14-10-1937, ibid.

now anti-Congress (this is especially true of the big time zamindars as we have seen) have suddenly become pro-Congress and criticised the agreement by saying that it ... will take the Congress backwards". All this had severed the links between the Congress and the Sabha. Defending his advocacy of violence, he quoted Gandhi, that violence is better than cowardice, Also, given the nature of everyday zamindar oppression, violence is the only alternative.<sup>42</sup>

Sahajanand's stand was vindicated by the AICSP conference in Bombay on January 6th.<sup>43</sup> The resolution criticised the BPCC for taking action against Sahajanand without enquiry. According to them, the activities of the BPKS was a model example of how United Front could be maintained along with activities among the peasants. It also took note of the fact that "in some places, autonomous people's movements, revolts and even parliamentary activities is being destroyed by the Congress Ministry". J.P. followed it up by criticising Prasad's press release. (in response to Sahajanand's accusations which had denounced the Sabhas for fomenting class struggle). He accused Prasad of first punishing the Swami and his comrades and then declaring the charges, accusations which was largely untrue. According to him, Swami should have atleast got an opportunity to defend himself. Moreover, Prasad had magnified the accusations which were trivial and which might or might not have a basis. To drive home his point further, appealing to the leadership's

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42. Sangharsh, 10-1-1938.

43. ibid.,

sense of justice, he pointed out that during the elections to the Haripura Congress, even Satyanarain Singh was "abusing me and my colleagues in the Samastipur polling booth".<sup>44</sup> Similar accusations were also made against local Congressmen of Darbhanga. When Ram Prakash Sharma, a prominent socialist of Darbhanga was asked to explain his anti-Congress rhetoric he argued that even the right wingers had gone public in their attitude towards the Sabha. He cited the instance of Deokinandan Jha, a district committee Working Committee member who had accused the sabhaites of being "frauds, swindlers, gamblers and anti-nationals". Another DCC member Satyanarain Tiwari had publicly stated that, "when I hear of the organisation of the kisans my blood boils". The same explanation also argued that the demands of the kisan sabha were very much within the framework of the Faizpur Karachi and Lucknow resolutions of the Congress and was not contrary to the ethos which Gandhi stood for.<sup>45</sup>

The Sangharsh (quoting Searchlight) cited that on the 24th of December, a prominent Congress worker declared to a gathering of Congressmen that it was Prasad's wish that no socialist be elected unopposed. In Patna the Congress volunteers were heard shouting "vote for the white box and throttle the red one".<sup>46</sup>

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44. ibid., 31-3-1938.

45. Letter from Ram Prakash Sharma to Rajendra Prasad, (undated), Prasad Papers, R.No. 7, NAI.

46. Sangharsh, 10-1-1938.

In Darbhanga, rumours were spread that the kisans had been thrown out of the Congress and Nehru (who had toured two districts of Bihar in 1937) had asked that the people should not vote for the Sabha. It even alleged that so and so was an atheist or foreign returned (obviously directed at the socialist) and hence, a traitor.<sup>47</sup>

In a letter to Srikrishna Sinha Prasad actually sought to reconsider the decision regarding the ban on Sahajanand, probably shaken by the left accusation. He urged him to collect all literature disseminated by the Kisan Sabha, regarding the Congress; "one shall see if action needs to be taken against Swami and the sabhaites".<sup>48</sup> He also proposed to talk to Gandhi about it. In an earlier letter to Rajendra Prasad, Sahajanand claimed the right of the sabha by calling for a speedy implementation of the Faizpur agrarian programme and urging the militant organisations to strengthen themselves organisationally, obviously to meet the right wing challenge which had brought about a "capitulatory trend in the Congress policy".<sup>49</sup>

In a major way the socialist politics in Bihar was both drawing inspiration and inspiring the movements outside the Province. Throughout the approximately five months of Congress

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47. ibid.

48. Prasad to Srikrishna Sinha, d. 9-1-1938, Prasad Papers, R.No. 7, NAI.

49. Sahajanand to the BPC, d. 28-11-1937, Prasad Papers, R.No. 7, NAI.

rule in 1937, there was a spate of socialist and kisan activity which threatened the dominant leadership of the provinces in different degrees. In Maharashtra, there was a movement by the provincial kisan sabha to pressurise the leadership to implement the Congress pledge on moratorium. In fact a moratorium Day was observed in seven districts of Maharashtra<sup>50</sup> (in the following month, on the 20th of November 1938, a movement for the abolition of the khoti system, a claim which was also supported by the MRCC in 1936). A Moratorium week was also proposed in Andhra between the 1-7 November.<sup>51</sup> In Mahakoshal, peasants were demanding the abolition of the malguzari system and a 50% reduction in rent.<sup>52</sup> In Utkal, the Cuttack Kisan Sangh, criticised the Congress for passing a tenancy Bill wholly inadequate for the non-occupancy tenants.<sup>53</sup> The activities of the BPKS which were widely reported all over was in a sense re-enforcing movements outside the province. The Gujrat Congress Socialist Party condemned the ban imposed on the BPKS.<sup>54</sup> In February 1938 Bombay and Poona CSP celebrated the Bihar Kisan Day.<sup>55</sup>

Simultaneous with this process, difference between the left and the provincial leadership also appeared to be emerging. In Andhra, the Provincial PCC was criticised for not having given representation to the kisans in the Government Enquiry Committee.<sup>56</sup>

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50. Congress Socialist, 30-10-1938.

51. ibid.

52. ibid., 13-11-1937.

53. ibid., 27-11-1937.

54. ibid., 18-12-1937.

55. ibid., 5-2-1938.

56. ibid., 30-10-1937.

In Ahmedabad, socialists were put behind bars for distributing CPI literature.<sup>57</sup> The Congress Socialist was especially sore that action had been initiated by the provincial leadership under the criminal law Amendment Act, which was used against the nationalists in the Civil Disobedience Movement. In the Bombay meeting of the AICSP, the U.P. Ministry was severely criticised for quelling the Kanpur textile mill strike.<sup>58</sup> About a month prior to this, at a meeting addressed by Sri Prakash, a UPCC left winger, talked about the myriad problems faced by the Congress with the accession of the Congress Ministry. Chief among them was the degeneration which had set in on account of personal fights, power struggle, and numerical growth but inner decay. He rounded off by criticising the ministry for its inability to take criticisms and its tendency to self-perpetuate-- 'It is amazing how everything within the Congress is beginning to be viewed from the standpoint as to whether it strengthens the existing Congress Ministry.'<sup>59</sup>

The aftermath of the Haripura session gradually marked the beginnings of the right wing consolidation both at an All-India as well as provincial level. The socialists, who since 1934 had been much more clear cut on their attitude towards the Congress, now lapsed into their familiar ambiguity.

For the moment, however, (especially the first half of 1938) the socialists kept their ideological battle alive. The

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57. ibid., 20-11-1937.

58. Sangharsh, 10-1-1938.

59. Notes for the meeting of Provincial Congress workers called by Nehru, d. 7-12-1937, Speech by Sri Prakash, J.P. Papers, File No. 118, NMML.

Haripura resolution reiterated the right of the peasants to form their organisations, but again left the issue of their mode of participation in the Congress unstated. But this was not an issue to invite reaction on the part of the socialists. In fact in many ways it was a hard won reassertion of Congress' basic assertion—a victory which owed to the left pressure exerted throughout India. What irked the socialists was the silence of the Congress (despite having a left-winger as the President) on the issue of State's people struggle. The AICSP working committee meeting at Sonapur (attended by Narendra Dev, Kamala Devi Chattopadhyay, and J.P.) criticised the Congress for "compelling" the people of the states to "surrender" and arguing that the rulers of the states were not foreigners, but Indians.<sup>60</sup> Just prior to this, a major crisis developed following the Haripura session, when the AICSP proposed Masani's name as a replacement for some other socialist member in the Congress Working Committee. Patel strongly resisted this, following which the socialists decided to withdraw its other members from the Congress Working Committee, on the grounds that their party was not prepared to allow other people to dictate their nomination.<sup>61</sup> The Congress socialist lamented that, "a radical President is no guarantee against compromising policies."<sup>62</sup> More importantly, this minor crisis marked in effect the end of socialist strategy of "composite leadership".<sup>63</sup>

60. Sangharsh, 6-6-1938.  
 61. At the Haripura Session, Patel is reported to have told the socialists that, "Let me make it clear that we have tolerated you for two years but the time has come when we shall no longer tolerate you. We will now give it back to you in your coin" Girija Shankar, op.cit., P. 112.  
 62. Article entitled, 'Faizpur to Haripura, Congress Socialist, 19-2-1938.  
 63. Girija Shankar, op.cit., P. 112.



In Bihar, on the peasant front, the socialists kept up their alliance with them for sometime, before a hiatus began to emerge though not openly, as yet. For the initial months following the Haripura, the whole tone of socialist politics was set by J.P's open defence of Sahajanand. The annual meeting of the Jahanabad kisan Sammelan was held at Ghosiyana, under J.P's chairmanship, with Benipuri also in attendance. What followed in the meeting was a wholesale criticism of the Congress. It was accused of going back<sup>on</sup> its election promises. Scathing criticism was made of its complicated and cosmetic tenancy legislations which, moreover, had not benefitted the agricultural labour. Also, it castigated the severe police repression.<sup>64</sup> All this was further emphasised by another meeting of the working committee of the BSP.<sup>65</sup> The resolution expressed sorrow for the failure of the Congress ministry to alleviate the misery of the peasants. It warned the Congress against the erosion of its credibility owing to its persistent use of law and order machinery as well as the general discontent against it. The position of the socialist was basically similar to that of the BPKS which continued to call for an infusion of economic content in the more political goal of attaining Swaraj. This was coupled with a certain stridency against the Congress-Zamindar agreement which led to a mass protest of the Kisans under the aegis of the Kisan Sabha.<sup>66</sup>

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64. Sangharsh, 30-5-1938.

65. *ibid.*, 18-7-1938.

66. BPKS annual meeting at Bachwara, January 22-23, 1938, made both these points. Widespread protest against the agreement was reported from Patna, Gaya, Saran, Shahabad, Bhagalpur, Monghyr. On 8th August, a 5000 strong kisan demonstration was reported from Monghyr despite law and order restrictions. Between 25th and 31st July, an anti-agreement week was launched against the Pact where Congress was criticised for not fulfilling the promises of the Faizpur resolution. See Sangharsh of 31-1-1938, 25-7-1938, 1-8-1938, 15-15-8-1938.

While at least uptill July 1938 there appeared to be continuity in the BSP anti-Congress rhetoric; the AICSP had begun to shift its stand on the Congress. This was largely because of the deteriorating prospects of left Unity. It would hardly be an exaggeration to say that the left elements within the Congress had begun to get at each others throats; the changed stance also reflected partly the gradual reflection of the socialist ambiguity regarding the Congress. The AICSP shift was first registered at the Lahore Congress of the AICSP in April 1938. Masani, speaking at the Congress presented the problem, thus "on the one hand, we want to make a success of the Congress ministry and on the other, we have to criticise these actions of theirs which are against the Congress programme".<sup>67</sup> Masani's solution envisaged caution and discipline within the party with only constructive criticism of the ministry.<sup>68</sup> For the first time something as moderate as this was suggested if compared to the Meerut thesis. In the same speech Masani also argued that among all the tenets of Marxism, "I would pick out the abolition of private property and the evolution of a classless society as the essence of socialism."<sup>69</sup> On the crucial question of the relationship with the Congress the socialist appreciated the work of the ministry's "in fulfilment of the election and its firmness" in tackling the issue of political prisoners by resigning in U.P. and Bihar. It concluded with the assertion that the Congress had "justified the confidence reposed in it by the

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67. Congress Socialist, 23-4-1938.  
 68. Rusch, op.cit., P. 261.  
 69. Congress Socialist, 23-4-1938.

Indian people". Almost apologetically it justified its actions by arguing that while the party was opposed to office acceptance and believed in vigilance and criticism, it did not intend to "embarrass or create difficulties for the Congress ministries but only desire to strengthen them ... in carrying out the Congress election manifesto.<sup>70</sup>

It was around August that the provincial socialist party began to change its stand in the direction of the Lahore Congress. In his tour of Gaya, J.P. made a speech reflecting the new equation "... if some Congressmen have joined the ministry, it does not mean that the struggle has ended. Congress is an organisation of struggle. It (the Congress) has mobilised people from Assam to the frontier end from Punjab to Madras. It is on this basis that our men have become ministers. Congress should be strengthened. Workers and peasants and people from different occupations should join it but they should not work against each other.<sup>71</sup> Addressing another huge kisan demonstration along with Sahajanand Saraswati) he reiterated that Congress was the only genuine anti-imperialist organisation. With a seriously twisted logic, he argued that basically the kisans were not against the Congress, but if the latter aligns with exploitative classes, it was their duty to oppose it. By doing this Congress would become stronger.<sup>72</sup>

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70. T. Rusch, op.cit., P. 245.

71. Sangharsh, 15-8-1938.

72. ibid., 22-8-1938.

The basic duality in the socialist position that is acceptance of the congress as the major anti-imperialist organisation on the one hand and a consistent programmatic faith in marxism, a position reiterated at the Lahore Congress; however, persisted. Despite the diminishing prospects of left unity the socialist refused to sever their links with the most influential politics of its time. The study camp organised by the AICSP in Sonapur in May 1938 clearly brought home this point. Prior to this, a socialist summer camp had been organised in Almora. But no details are available. A detailed account of the socialist summer school has been provided in the government accounts.<sup>73</sup> The activists selected for the camp were carefully chosen-about 200 odd- "who were really interested in the movement and (would) not divulge secrets." Majority of the people were Kisan Sabha workers and school teachers and most of them belonged to the province. The government account noted that the "lectures were communistic in tone and advocated violence." The curriculum included Sociology, history politics and economics with emphasis on socialist movement, workers and peasant movements history of the Congress with the study of the books like R.P.Dutt, 'World Politics', Lenin's State and Revolution, and Marx's 'Communist Manifesto.'

Significantly, some of the tactics charted out at the summer camp, in a way presaged the nature of socialist activity during the Quit India Movement. For instance, the party executive

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73. Copy of the report of the DIG., CID, Bihar on Socialist Summer School in Sonapur, May 1938, History of Freedom Movement, Third Phase (1920-47), V.III, Region no. VII, F.No. 14|3, NAI.

emphasised upon the necessity to organise the party and recruit volunteers who would be prepared to undergo suffering and even face the gallows. These recruits were to prepare themselves to blow up roads, bridges and culverts in the event of a war. In fact, the meeting appears to have given specific directions; to blow up the railway bridge at Dehri-On-Sone in order to halt the movement of troops. They also suggested the same fate for the bridge over Gandak at Hajipur, which would impede the troop movement in North Bihar. It was also decided that in the event of a war, the volunteers would tour Saran and Shahabad districts which supplied bulk of the constables to Bengal, Bihar and U.P. and persuade every family how happy they would be under a Socialist regime. On an immediate basis, J.P. asked the volunteers to organise peasants and workers and precipitate strikes. No Congress related resolution was, however, passed. The CID report merely stated, that most of the inmates looked down upon all Congress leaders in comparison to Sahajanand, excepting Gandhi.

For the dominant Congress leadership, both at the national as well as the provincial (Bihar) level, the accession of the Congress ministry as well as the action of the BPC against the Sabha did not seriously affect their position, notwithstanding the Congress-Zamindar agreement. Politically, the provincial leadership had pulled off a major strategic victory though the same cannot be said on the economic front. In February 1939, the membership of the Congress swelled from 6 lakhs to 3,10,000.<sup>74</sup> In Bihar it

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74. Congress Socialist, 19-2-1938.

had reached an astronomical 4,09,000 and was way ahead of other provinces. For instance, Andhra Congress membership was around 48,000, Tamil Nadu 20,000, Bengal 48,377 and Malabar 10,000.<sup>75</sup> In other words the BPCC had more members than the four PCC's put together.

In addition, the BPCC enjoyed the overwhelming support of the Congress leadership. In the Congress Working Committee meeting in January 1938, a resolution was passed backing the BPCC in allowing it full freedom to discipline elements on grounds it deemed fit. The resolution also dissociated the Congress and kisan sabha activities although it recognised the rights of the peasants to organise themselves.<sup>76</sup> The position of the provincial right was further strengthened by the Congress Working Committee resolution of May 1938, and the Delhi session of the AICC in September of the same year. At the Congress Working Committee meeting, a resolution was passed saying that it was "undesirable for parties and groups inside and outside the Congress to use the name of the Congress without permission."<sup>77</sup> a resolution obviously aimed at the BSP. In Delhi, about 60 members of the AICC along with Narendra Dev staged a walk out against a right wing sponsored resolution on "civil liberties", which charged the leftists of being advocates of "murder, arson, looting and class war by violent means."<sup>78</sup>

Despite the total support the BPCC was battling against severe odds. The banning of the Kisan Sabha did not seem

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75. ibid., 2-4-1939.

76. Rusch, op.cit., P. 230.

77./ Girija Shankar, op.cit., P. 113.

78. ibid.

to have any major repercussions for the right wing. In fact as the membership figures in 1939 suggests, the Provincial Congress had gained considerably from the Kisan movement. The socialist rhetoric had obviously driven away the small landholders into the lap of the Provincial right wing. While politically, a patch up was effected, on the economic front, differences persisted with the dominant provincial leadership.

The peasant movement under the BPKS, which had temporarily lulled in the first half of the 1938, again reared its head in the shape of, the now famous Bakast struggles principally in the districts of Gaya, Darbhanga and Monghyr, but also in other districts in a rather sporadic way. The 'bakast' movement was actually triggered off because of the depression, mainly on account of the collapse of primary produce prices, coupled with the continuing stability in the prices of consumer items like cotton, salt and Kerosene. In Bihar, the impact was compounded by the havoc created by the earthquake and the recurrent floods. All this effected a large section of the rural society. To add fuel to this situation, Zamindars like Darbhanga Raj, continued to exact their pound of flesh despite the depressed conditions. Additionally the powerful landholders never failed to use the administrative-judicial machinery to their advantage in effecting rent settlements and even eviction of tenants. At the subjective level, the kisan sabha, through its politics, had managed to generate considerable consciousness among

the peasants - a process which catalysed with the formation of the Congress Ministry.<sup>79</sup>

The 'bakast' struggles broke out behind this historical background. 'Bakast' lands were basically holdings over which the Zamindars exercised direct control over cultivation, but over which occupancy rights could be acquired by the short-term tenants or share-croppers after paying rents to the landlords. Owing to the condition mentioned above, most of the non-occupancy tenants and share-croppers were ejected on a large scale from their land. The tenants in order to retain their holdings were forced to produce rent receipts, which were never given to them in the first place. This created an insuperable legal hurdle for them, in making use of the Bengal Tenancy Act which provided occupancy rights to those share-croppers and tenants who had been cultivating bakast holdings continuously for 12 years.

The Bakast struggles which continued uptill Mid-1930's, suddenly emerged on a huge scale after 1937. In most of these bakast struggles, there is evidence of at best marginal participation on the part of the socialists. This could partly be because most of them were led by the sabha while some were, autonomous and some led by the right wingers of the province.

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79. Hem<sup>ing</sup>ham, op.cit., pp. 139-53.



The most famous and successful of them, the Reora Satyagraha in Gaya district was aimed against the local anti-Congress Zamindar, Babu Rameshwar Prasad. Sometime before October 1938, he had auctioned off about 1000 bighas of land for arrears of rent and attached it as Bakast land. But the entire land was left in the possession of the original tenants without a written document. Things started moving once the bakasht legislation was enacted. The zamindars panicked after started evicting tenants. The movement started sometime after November and subsided sometime around February 1939. Curiously while the Government, in the course of the Satyagraha responded to it by force (Section 144 Cr. P.C. was clamped and 16 sabhaites including Jadunandan Sharma were arrested) the BPCC passed a resolution accepting the justness of the claims of the kisans.<sup>80</sup> In a rather moderated criticism, the Council of Action of the BSP passed a resolution lending "its full support to the (Reora) Satyagraha and declares that the whole responsibility of forcing the Kisans to this course lies on the zamindars and government authorities."<sup>81</sup> In the settlement which was reached in February with J.P. negotiating on behalf of the kisans, the kisans received 500 acres which was divided among 133 families while the zamindars received 118 acres.<sup>82</sup> Reora satyagraha though successful, was certainly not the most representative. The socialists, the BPCC and the Sabha combined for once against some anti-Congress Zamindar elements in a basically non-violent way.

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80. Congress Socialist, 17-1-1939.

81. Searchlight, 17-1-1939.

82. Congress Socialist, 29-1-1939.

Darbhanga, continued to remain a hotbed of Sabha-Socialist activity. The bakasht movement in Darbhanga which spanned July 1938 to September 1939 was a product of the accumulated grievances of the peasantry mainly on account of the zamindar's unabated rent exactions coupled with myriads forms of everyday oppression, misuse of administrative and judicial machinery, extra-legal exactions, despite floods and earthquake. Coupled with this was the Government's bakasht legislation which was frequently invoked by the peasants to wrest concessions from the zamindars and the State. This was clearly exemplified in the Reora and Kasraur Satyagraha where the movement began almost immediately after the passage of the bakasht legislation. Equally important was the fact that the district 'Gandhians' were not averse to the use of any means to maintain their domination. This was clearly evidenced during the election of delegates to the Haripura session. Confronted with a situation like this, the Socialist-sabhaite resolved to go in for direct peasant action, first at Waini and then at Sakri -- both at Darbhanga.<sup>83</sup> In 1938-39, a spate of bakasht struggles were reported from Parri, Pandaul, Kasraur, Dekuli and Raghopore. Here the extent of socialist activity is not clear excepting the fact that barring Kasraur, in most of the other Satyagraha's Ramnandan Misra was very active. What is, however, clear is that by 1938, the socialist-sabhaites were giving a tough time to the district leadership under Satyanarain Singh. In July 1938, two parallel DCC's were formed one under Satyanarain Singh and the other under Ramanand

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83. Hemingham, op.cit., P. 151.

Misra. It was largely a desperate attempt by the socialists who had "practically no hand in shaping their policy".<sup>84</sup> The squabble between the left and the right came to a head in the course of election of delegates to the Tripuri session. Heningham writes that the "conservatives" (rightists) posted lathials at polling booths to support kisan supporters from voting and dissuaded other potential kisan voters from attending the poll by threatening them with ejection from holdings.<sup>85</sup> (The Tripuri right in the midst of bakast struggles). A committee was appointed by the BPCC to go into the violence unleashed during the election of delegates to the Tripuri session. The composition of the committee is not clear at all, but obviously it would have had people acceptable to the leadership. The findings of the committee are revealing and frankly reflected the partisanship exercised in favour of the right wingers. According to the findings of the report, the main reason for the violence was the Congress acceptance of office which had led to the negation of the spirit of "sacrifice" and "freedom" (which had characterised the organisation in the pre-1937 phase). Acceptance of office had led to the infusion of opportunists, perpetually hankering for office and position. It criticised the blatant partisanship on the part of the election officers; and quoted two instances to substantiate their allegation. In Gaya, in the contest between Jadunandan Sharma and one Laxminarain Rai, the latter was declared elected despite

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84. Letter from K.C. Mukherjee, General Secretary, BCSP, Darbhanga Branch, to J.P., J.P. Papers, F.No. VIII, NMML.

85. Heningham, op.cit., P. 150.

the fact that ballot papers were torn. Rai was declared elected merely on the assumption that he could have got more votes. Similarly in Darbhanga Thakur Rampratap was declared elected against Jamuna Karjee simply on the basis of the former's word that he would have got more votes.<sup>86</sup> On the issue of violence it explicitly said that, "... Mostly violence was there, where there was a contest between a Congressman and a Kisan Sabha man". Finally the committee recommended that the kisan demand be sympathetically considered and that discontent be dealt with but not by police action as it was contrary to non-violence.<sup>87</sup>

Meanwhile, bakasht struggles continued to rage throughout North and South Bihar. By August 1939, Sangharsh, the socialist weekly reported at least 100 bakasht struggles.<sup>88</sup> Satyagraha was reported from Khagaria, Amwari, Ranipukri (Champaran), Chitauli and Barhaiya Tal to name a few important ones. Some like the one in Khagaria<sup>89</sup> was led by the women and there is evidence of their large scale participation in most of the other Satyagrahas- especially as a shield against police violence. At Barhaiya Tal, Narendra Dev, reacted rather moderately to the events there-by blaming solely the Zamindars and "elements representing them in the Congress". He also urged the small zamindars to remain with the sabha, rather than get misled by the big zamindars.<sup>90</sup> This modera-

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86. Sangharsh, 19-5-1939.

87. ibid.

88. ibid., 6-8-1939.

89. ibid., 5-3-1939.

90. ibid., 12-2-1939.

tion was further reiterated by J.P. who rather ruefully lamented that the sacrifice of the kisans had not sufficiently motivated the Congress ministry to do anything for them.<sup>91</sup> The point was brought homemore clearly in Narendra Dev's Presidential Address at the 4th All India Kisan Sabha meeting at Gaya. In his speech he came down heavily on the zamindars who were using violence to maintain the status-quo in the face of sustained, disciplined and non-violent onslaught by the kisans. He criticised the Congress for at best effecting cosmetic changes in the sphere of land relations and accepted the complete loss of faith between the Congress and the kisans. He also defended the concept of independent class organisation, like the sabha, who would otherwise not find a voice in such multi-class organisations, like the Congress. While saying this, he also asserted that kisan sabha should desist from competing with the Congress as "we must remember that the two organisations are complementary to each other".<sup>92</sup> The position of the sabha, also till April 1939, happened to be similar to that of the socialist, excepting the crucial issue of violence which was justified by the stalwrts like Jadunandan Sharma as "right to self defence against an inherently violent zamindari and capitalist system".<sup>93</sup>

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91. ibid., 6-8-1939.

92. ibid., 16-4-1939.

93. Jadunandan Sharma while denying that Kisans were violent, argued that, "the very foundation of zamindari and the capitalist system is an organised violence. And it is ... , how such people, who stand for these do not feel ashamed to teach the lessons of non-violence". See the Address of Jadunandan Sharma, Chairman, Reception Committee, AIKS, IV Session, Gaya, 9th - 10th April, 1939, P. 11, NMML.

Sustained peasant struggle in alliance with the socialists against the zamindars and the Congress had a tremendous impact on right wing politics, of the province. For one, the zamindars notwithstanding their agreement with the Congress, were compelled to allow concessions to the tenants, atleast within the framework of Congress agrarian legislation.<sup>94</sup> In a letter to Maharaja of Darbhanga, Rajendra Prasad Asked him to release a statement signed by leading zamindars and distributed widely making the following points:-

- (1) All rents should be legally exacted without payment of abwab.
- (2) Tenants should not be compelled to sell any articles without price or below the market price.
- (3) No payments should be accepted without grant of receipts.
- (4) Any complaint against the amlas should be looked into and action taken if justified.<sup>95</sup>

The Maharaja in his reply, agreed to Prasad's requests, but asked him to request the ministry to issue a statement that the tenants should now (that is after the passage of tenancy bill) discharge their duties towards the landlords.<sup>96</sup> In the subsequent

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94. For a critical discussion on the nature of Congress Agrarian legislation in Bihar, See G.P. Sharma, The Congress peasant movement and Agrarian legislation in Bihar: 1937-39, M.phil dissertation, J.N.U. 1979.

95. Prasad to Maharaja of Darbhanga, d. 20-4-1938, Prasad Papers Reel No. 8, NAI.

96. Maharaja of Darbhanga to Prasad, d. 21-4-1938, ibid.

in his Zamindari.<sup>97</sup>

The different sections also reacted differently to the changed mood of the Congress. While the more pragmatic ones, like Darbhanga, sensed the mood better and accordingly kept the channels of communication open, with the Congress, the more conservative section among them remained as recalcitrant as ever. For instance, certain section of the Bihar landholders Association rejected the provision of the highly moderate bakasht bill on the plea that the compromise was effected by certain persons in Patna and therefore it did not bind the Association as a whole.<sup>98</sup> Similarly, Narayanji, the Congress leader from Darbhanga, who had been appointed by Prasad to look into the grievances of the kisans, complained to latter that most of the zamindars in Gaya are refusing to change excepting Tekari.<sup>99</sup>

One of the major points which emerges from this is that the Congress right was not a mere instrument in the hands of the big zamindars. Despite the agreement, leaders like Prasad were astute enough to maintain some amount of distance from the zamindars in order to carry the different classes against imperialism. Secondly, the recalcitrance of the zamindars, used to ages

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97. Prasad to Maharaja of Darbhanga, d. 7-5-1939, ibid.

98. Hari Kishore Prasad to Prasad, d. 30-6-1938. ibid.

99. Narayanji to Prasad, d. 11-7-1938, ibid.

of oppression and power made the task of the Congress very difficult since a number of the major bakasht struggles in Gaya and Darbhanga stemmed from the tardy implementation of the agrarian legislation by the zamindars.

Additionally, the Gandhians were also compelled to keep the pressure on the Government. In a 'confidential' letter to Srikrishna Sinha in March 1938, Prasad complained about the "working of the ministry as a whole" which had not much to fulfil all that was promised in the election manifesto and was expected of a National Government". He continued that, "one does not know when a constitutional crisis will next arise (Prasad's letter was written after the constitutional crisis arising from the political prisoners issue over which both the U.P. and Bihar Government resigned in 1937). I am, therefore, anxious that the ministry should get through as many legislative and administrative measures as possible within the shortest possible time so that when the next crisis comes the country may have before it a record of good work done by the Congress. "He warned that should a speedy implementation of land reforms not happen, the Congress would stand discredited at the time of conflict when it will need all the support of the people at large". He, therefore, suggested prompt enforcement of the Bihar Tenancy Act, latest by autumn (Bhado) next.<sup>100</sup>

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100. Prasad to Sri Krishna Sinha, d. 4-3-1938, Prasad Papers, R.No. 10, NAI.



While on the one hand, the right wingers were compelling the zamindars to implement the agrarian legislation, they were also, on the other hand, appealing directly to the peasantry. This was being done principally:-

- (a) by maintaining constant vigil and pressure on the Government to implement the legislation as swiftly as possible, and
- (b) by appealing directly to the peasantry.

There is scant evidence of the Congress's right attempt to mobilise the peasantry. Most of the works as well as available evidence concentrates almost exclusively on the attempts of the left to hegemonise the peasantry. However, as the subsequent developments show the right had sufficient reserves of hegemony among the peasantry mainly because of its nearly thirty years of live presence in a predominantly agrarian Bihar. In our period, therefore, extremely scanty evidence can be cited from Kasraur, where they negotiated between the Raj Management and the tenants, after the tenants had been evicted on a large scale on the plea that 200 out of 500 acres of land was Zirat (i.e. personal cultivation). The outcome of the Satyagraha is not clear, but the district committee members throughout tried to stave off violence (unlike the socialists) and tried non-violent means to redress the grievances.<sup>101</sup> At the height

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101. Letter from Kasraur (name unclear), to Prasad, d. 7-5-1937, ibid.

of bakasht atruggle, a Congress Kisan Department was also establi-  
shed in most of the districts of Bihar, excepting Gaya and  
Muzaffarpur.<sup>102</sup>

Finally, as in the previous phase, there are indica-  
tions that the socialist-sabha propaganda had a perceptible effect  
on the more moderate elements in the BPC. This was in fact finally  
acknowledged by Prasad who in a letter accepted (in the context  
of Tenancy Amendment Act) that, "there is great resentment in the  
party and there is a strong feeling against all that we have tried  
to accomplish and this resentment is felt not only by the so-called  
left wingers but evenby the moderate elements,<sup>103</sup> Prominent "moderate  
elements" like Narayanji and Jamuna Prasad opposed the "distrainment"  
clause of the bakasht legislation which stipulated that if a tenant  
failed to pay his rent on time, the zamindar was allowed to take  
possession of his crop. Narayanji in a letter accepted that even  
"our people"have started talking against the agreement and were  
especially agitated over the "distrainment clause".<sup>104</sup> Murali, the editor  
of Searchlight, which had unambiguously supported the ministry  
lamented that, "criticisms of the ministry have become general  
and widespread". The "universal goodwill" with which the ministry

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102. Letter ~~from~~ Narayanji to Prasad, d. 11-7-1938, Prasad Papers  
R.No. 8, NAI.

103. Prasad to C.P.N. Singh, d. 25-4-1938, ibid.

104. Narayanji to Prasad, d. 23-7-1938, ibid.

began is being gradually replaced by a "growing revulsion". He also criticised the manner in which the tenancy legislation had dragged on because of the disagreement between the Congress and the zamindars over who should be characterised as a "habitual defaulter". Because of this the Congress had also lost the "psychological impact".<sup>105</sup>

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105. Here it should be pointed out that the resentment against the tenancy legislation was one of the causes, though an important one, for the disenchantment of the moderates. By the end of 1938, the right wing both in the Government and outside was riven with internal dissensions. There was open conflict between A.N. Sinha and Srikrishna Sinha over manager ship of the Bettiah Raj, which got entangled with caste consideration of such unsavoury proportions that even Prasad was accused of favouring his own caste-man, B.B. Verma. Anyway the crux of the conflict over the Bettiah Raj manager-ship, stemmed from Anugrah Narain's support to Prasad's candidate and Srikrishna Sinha's support to another aspirant who was his caste-man and who was also being backed by the Bhumihar -Brahman Sabha. The Bihar Premier also created a major scandal by awarding a coveted contractorship to his son leading Dalmia to write to Prasad that the "scandal" in Muzaffarpur, "had travelled to the highest level" (Dalmia to Prasad, d. 27-11-1938). There also appears to have been considerable scramble over jobs and positions. In Chapra, again, the Premier and A.N. Sinha clashed over the candida- ture of the Public Prosecutor's office. Srikrishna Sinha was also allegedly involved in a land scandal in Patna. In a letter to Prasad, Syed Mahmud, the education minister complained that, "those friends who call themselves Congress- man bother me more than others and bring all sorts of impos- sible requests" (Syed Mahmud to Prasad, 18-7-1938). Around the same time, the Hazaribagh DCC, President complainingly wrote to Prasad that K.B. Sahay had become an oppurtunist and a casteist (Ramnarayan Singh to Prasad, 1-9-1938). All in Prasad Papers, R.No.11, NAI. All this mudslinging, led Ramnarayan a Bihari Congressman to telegram Gandhi that, "your promise enquiring Bihar corruption unfulfilled, situation continuously worsening; Minister's chiefly Premier behaving improperly, neither caring friends nor fearing foes, Rajendra Bobu too weak to control and ranks too demoralised to rebel ... further delay dangerous ..." Prasad papers, R.No. 14,NAI.

Despite the sustained onslaught of the socialist sabhites on the right wingers for nearly a decade, the former were unable to seriously undermine the position of the leadership in the provincial organisation. The duality of having considerable ideological support among the peasants but having a marginal presence in the organisation which characterised the position of the left in the pre-ministry period, continued right up till the end of 1939 and even subsequently. As in the previous phase, the socialist continued to hold on to Patna and Gaya in organisational terms although, as we have seen, they had also made considerable headway in Muzaffarpur, Monghyr, Darbhanga and Shahabad district, outside the Congress. Despite all this, the right wing still appeared to be entrenched, though obviously not, as comfortably as before.

Thus, at the height of the socialist sabha rhetoric against the Congress and the zamindars, we have Prasad writing to the Bihar premier that, "... the district of Muzaffarpur can be managed and so also Darbhanga. "In Munger the whole thing can be "managed easily". Only Saran is slightly difficult as the differences are personal. Two districts where the Congress Programme may encounter "greater opposition" are Gaya and Patna and to some extent Shahabad he rounded of the letter by making a statement which clearly reflected the position of the right wingers "I do not want any kind of unfair dealing or unfair dealing or unfair advantage to be taken by those in office of the Congress Committee against their opponents, Where ever the former happens to hold views of the orthodox "Congress programme".<sup>106</sup>

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106. Prasad to Srikrishna Sinha, d. 2-12-1937, Prasad Papers, Reel No. 8, NAI.

How astute was Prasad's observation has been amply borne out by some scattered facts; and the general trend of contemporary politics. Around the time when Prasad was writing, the Muzaffarpur DCC expelled Shahjanand for violating the basic Principles of the Congress. The only opposition came from K.P. Sinha and Awadeshwar Prasad Singh with one member remaining neutral.<sup>107</sup>

Similarly in Darbhanga despite susuained propaganda by the left which led to a vertical split within the DCC it was the right wing committee which was accorded recognition .Significantly division came after Narayanji who had been nominated as the supervisor by the BPCC intervened in the increasingly acrimonious deliberations between the two factions and said that only members could vote while non members should clear off.<sup>108</sup> Of course it is true that among all the district committee that the right wing predominated, it was here that the left wing posed the maximum threat, which is borne out by the widespread violence unlcashed mainly by the right wingers in the course of elections to Haripura and Tripuri. in Patna and Gaya on the other hand the left enjoyed considerable Predominance. In Patna for instance, even at the peak of the left's anti-Congressism, the Patna DCC was able to pass a resolution supporting the immediate demands of the Kisan Sabha.<sup>109</sup> In Gaya, the domination of the left continued throughout the 1930's. As late as

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107. Anonymous letter, (undated), to Prasad, Prasad Papers., Reel No. 7, NAI.  
108. Narayanji to Prasad, d. 11-7-1938, Prasad Papers, Reel No. 8, NAI.  
109. Resolution was passed on 7th September 1937, Congress Socialist, 22-1-1938.

the latter half of 1938, when the Provincial Congress decided to establish Congress Kisan departments in all the districts the Gaya DCC strongly opposed this Proposal and were positively uncooperative in their attitude.<sup>110</sup> The position of the left and its frustration in not finding a voice in the Congress committee's was graphically brought out by Awadheswar Prasad Sinha, the Kisan Secretary of the AICSP and a prominent socialist of the Province.

"As we are a minority in the Congress, some of us have got despaired of our attempts and frequent defeats in the Congress Committee meetings. Sometimes the dominant group has taken to questionable methods to ensure their victories. This has further alienated our workers from the Congress. The result of this is that some of us want to concentrate wholly on mass activity outside the Congress. They do not want to fight their battles as hitherto within the Congress. Even when they find themselves fighting for Congress avowals to the masses, they do not think it worthwhile to put their point of view in the committees. They do not see the usefulness of linking the mass activity with their fights in Congress ... We would, thus, have the right wingers of the Congress free to do whatever they liked to the Congress".<sup>111</sup>

The abject despair of the socialists, coupled with toning down in their scale of activities within the Congress as well as

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110. Narayanji to Prasad, d. 10-7-1938, Prasad Papers, Reel No. 8, NAI.

111. Congress Socialist, d. 25-9-1938.

the use of grossly unfair means by the right wingers resulted in extremely low polling of votes at Tripuri. In fact this table can be taken to be a pretty fair indication of the marginal presence of the socialist within the Provincial organisation:-

TABLE - III

	BOSE	SITARAM AYYA
UTKAL	44	99
TAMILNADU	110	102
PUNJAB	182	186
BENGAL	404	79
U.P.	269	185
BIHAR	70	197

(Source: Searchlight, 31-1-1939).

If one were to summarise this phase of socialist politics one can unhesitatingly say that it was a phase of missed opportunities on the part of the left. In historical terms, they had probably the most fertile of conditions chiefly in the shape of a widespread peasant movement. But instead of channelising it in the direction of ant-imperialism, it diverted the fire against the Congress which ultimately resulted in the left having at least three opponents to counter-the landlords (big as well as small), the Provincial Congress (whose social base extended into the former) as well as the colonial state. In the main this emerged from<sup>a</sup> gross misreading of the situation, the crux of which was Congress as an instrument of the Zamindars. It was clearly impos<sup>s</sup>ible for the provincial left to take on all the <sup>h</sup>tree at the same time, notwithstanding the scale of the peasant movement. This was the most

obvious reason for their performance at Tripuri, although it was supplemented by other factors also, as mentioned above. This state of affairs, definitely appears unbelievably stark in comparison to the voting pattern of the left in other provinces which did not enjoy the same historical potential. In the next phase, the socialist tried to come to terms with this, but the most glorious of opportunities had already been lost.



CHAPTER V

The crisis at Tripuri marked the first beginnings of the return of the socialists to the Congress fold. Although the intergration as usual was not complete, neither was the support un-conditional. Differences in strategy persisted which was to finish only when the Quit India Movement began. Although, as we have seen, it was the Lahore session of the AICSP which had made a call to renew its political **relation** with the Congress, in order to overthrow Imperialism. While the left had voted overwhelmingly in favour of Bose in nearly all the Provinces, his victory for a second time was seen by the Gandhians as a major defeat- a feeling reinforced by Gandhi's claim that Sitaramayya's defeat was his personal defeat. This led to the resignation of 12 out of 15 working committee members. J.P. at this point intervened and presented a compromise resolution called "National Demand" which was seconded by Narendra Dev and had the support of Nehru. The resolution called upon the British for granting immediate independence, underlined the necessity of calling for a constituent Assembly and urged the Congress to call for a mass civil disobedience movement. The socialists were roundly criticised by the left, but they defended themselves by arguing that the 'National Demand' was aimed to (a) preserve national unity and (b) introduce a forward programme of action. B.P. Sinha, the foremost U.P. socialist quipped that

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1. AICSP (1936-47), Stand taken in the Tripuri Session, J.P. Papers, P. No. 218, NMML.

"if we cannot do without the leadership of Mahatama Gandhi, we must be prepared to pay its price"<sup>2</sup>. The right wing headed by G.B.Pant introduced another resolution which called for adherence to the fundamental Congress policies of the past as laid down by Gandhi. This substantially toned down the 'National Demand' of the socialists. Still it was passed by an "overwhelming majority" and with the active support of the socialists.

The left compromise at Tripuri and the subsequent toeing of the "Congress line" by the socialists in the period 1939-41 (no doubt with important differences with the dominant leadership on strategy) was precipitated by a number of factors.

Most importantly it stemmed from the famous duality of the Congress Socialists which can be described thus: as long as the going for Congress was smooth, the socialists would, as the Bihar experience shows, back almost vehemently its economic programme. But the moment there was a perceived crisis, the socialists unlike the communists, would come around to supporting the Congress in its anti-imperialist struggle. Despite all the bickerings between the right and the left throughout the thirties, the socialists were the most trusted allies of the Congress not only at Tripuri but also during the elections of 1937 and even after 1939 when most of the left opinion chose to desert the Congress and chart out indi-

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2. Congress Socialist, 26-3-1939.

individual paths.

The outbreak of World War II was a major factor in cementing the ties between the right and the left. The socialists had all along taken the stand "against participation in any war in which the British Government may be involved and to prepare the country for resisting it actively".<sup>3</sup> This will be examined in the next chapter.

The outbreak of War and the resultant insecurity coincided with the near impossible prospects of left unity. As it is the alliance was never secure. With a lot of mutual suspicion the crunch came with the stand of the socialists and the communists at Tripuri. The relations between the CSP and the CPI was marked by an uneasiness right from 1936 when the latter launched their United Front strategy. In that year J.P. accused the communists of "doing faction work within the party and trying to capture the organisation".<sup>4</sup> As early as 1938, the communists had tried to bulldoze their way in the Lahore Congress, by presenting a separate list of candidates for the executive as well as moving an alternative resolution. The socialists retaliated by tightening the rules of admission to the party in a bid to check the increasing communist

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3. Girija Shankar, op.cit., Appendix V, P. 316. This position was substantially reiterated in the Faizpur Thesis. See Appendix VI of the same book.

4. ibid., P. 144.

influence.<sup>5</sup> By the end of 1938, the mood among the socialists was epitomised by this letter from a Bengal socialist who lamented that, "the platform of the CSP has become one of propaganda for the CPI members who under the garb of Congress Socialist are trying to create disruption in the CSP. These should be purged forthwith in the best existence of the CSP ....<sup>6</sup> In 1939, J.P. gave a call to form a United Front of all anti-imperialist organisation -- Congress AITUC, the Kisan Sabha -- excepting the CPI.<sup>7</sup>

By 1940, equations between the two had irrevocably degenerated, with lot of bitterness around the United Front policy heightened by CPI's wholesale capture of the CSP's organisation in Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Andhra Pradesh. To the credit of the Bihar socialists it must go, that the CPI was unable to hijack their organisation in Bihar. By 1941, the CPI had completely changed its line from United Front to People's War which in effect had made it veer towards the British.

In a letter to Sahajanand, (who had begun to gravitate towards CPI), J.P. blamed the communists solely for the failure

5. AICSP Executive laid down that (a) those who are not active will not have the right to vote; (b) a detailed procedure was laid down to admit new members and (c) it was stipulated that no person who is a member of another Party and whose objectives and programme conflict with that of AICSP would be eligible for membership. Congress Socialist, 11-7-38.
6. A letter from Prithvi Chandra Ghose, (Secretary, Barisal unit of Bengal Socialist Party) to the Congress Socialist, Congress Socialist, 13-11-1938.
7. ibid., 8-4-1939.

of the "United Programme" which had been a unity move arrived at between the two.<sup>8</sup> He carried on further, that, "People who talk about left unity are the one's who have created the maximum divisions". Reflecting Sahajanand's swing leftwards, J.P. gloomily prophesied, "Now that the unity slogan has come to Bihar, whatever work we have jointly done is going to get ruined".<sup>9</sup>

The relations between the CSP and Roy was also heading towards the same fate. This also had the same mutually suspicious past as Roy had initially joined the CSP with the avowed intention of subverting it.<sup>10</sup> In 1940, J.P. refused to support Roy's candidature for presidentship to the INC on the grounds that he was " ... destructive to the unity of the Congress". Similar spirit characterised the relations between the Forward Bloc and the socialists. In fact in real terms, one can hardly talk about a relation or any alliance between the two as the establishment of the Bloc

8. J.P. to Sahajanand, (undated), J.P. Papers, F.No. 10, NMML.

9. ibid.

10. For M.N. Roy's earlier stand on CSP, See J.P. Haithcox, Communism and Nationalism in India. Princeton University Press, Bombay, 1971, pp. 230-232. Just before the Meerut Congress a Royist circular was discovered which planned to liquidate the party. In 1937 after the elections, Roy gathered his followers at Delhi and issued instructions to them to break the CSP. The main plank of this strategy was that every Royist within the Congress, was to resign in a spectacular and public manner at regular intervals, in order to convey the impression that the Party was breaking up. The Socialists also accused him of discouraging peasant movement, opposing collective representation, and approving office acceptance by the Congress. See Congress Socialist, 28-8-38.

itself was opposed by the socialists themselves. J.P. categorically overruled the prospects of any alliance with the Forward Bloc as its main grudge was against the High Command and secondly worked against the crystallization of any organisation within the Congress which would disrupt national unity.<sup>11</sup>

An anonymous undated note probably written around this time acknowledged that the split among the left on the issue of War was potentially present right from the beginning and since then the left groups "have drifted further and further apart in politics". It confessed that one of the major problems appears to be that the definition of left is merely limited to 'anti-rightism' and 'anti-High Command' and to the "degree of opposition .... to Gandhi and Patel" (obviously aimed at the Forward Bloc). This negative politics had precluded the development of any "positive slogans and programme" on the part of the left. The only concession which the socialists now was willing to allow was a "joint committee" with the kisan sabha in Bihar. Socialist politics in Bihar appeared to have taken a full circle. Starting from a declared policy of full-scale alliance with the sabha, the socialists were now proposing a "joint committee with them -- a proposal similar to the one mooted by the Congress mass contact programme in 1936. The note finally rounded off by calling upon the party "to follow its own initiative and its own course, set its house in order, endeavour to stem the tide of disruption in the Congress....."<sup>12</sup>

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11. ibid., 21-5-1939.

12. Anonymous note, (undated), J.P. Papers, F.No. 7, NMML.

From the standpoint of left unity in Bihar, the most significant occurrence was the growing estrangement between the BSP and Sahajanand's kisan sabha. As already noted in the previous section, throughout 1939, especially after the crisis in Tripuri, the socialists had been soft-peddling their criticism of the Congress, while participating in the numerous bakasht struggles. With the threat of War looming large, the politics of the Provincial socialists was being increasingly characterised by a movement towards the political (in the sense of asserting faith in anti-imperialism involving all classes) rather than economic. In June 1939, the left elements formed the Left Co-ordination Committee. In October at a joint meeting held at Lucknow a seven point programme was agreed upon, the first stage of which was carrying on anti-war propaganda. The socialists accused the communists of sabotaging it by talking about armed struggle. In June 1939, they had joined the Left Co-ordination Committee founded by Bose along with other left parties; including Sahajanand. In October, however, they walked out of it accusing the CPI of sabotaging it by mounting ultra-left rhetoric. This last minute disavowal of committee led Sahajanand to complain that, "the socialists did not participate though I had already asked Jayaprakash Babu ... They agreed to put up a united front, but relapsed into silence."<sup>13</sup>

The relation between the leaders of the two parties steadily degenerated. In a letter to the Swami, J.P. ostensibly

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13. Quoted in Arvind. N.Das, op.cit, pp. 163-4.

replying to the former's charges of insulting him on a number of occasions, categorically denied it, and admitted that, "despite our political differences which is so obvious today, I will continue to respect you". In the same letter he rejected Sahajanand's thesis that Congress will not fight; and that it has ceased to be a fighting organisation. J.P. agreed that the Congress has elements favouring compromise, "but it does not follow that the Congress will not fight". He also for the first time rejected the suggestion of severing links with the Congress and backing any class organisation.<sup>14</sup>

While Sahajanand, continued his march towards the left, the socialists continued to move in the opposite direction—towards the Congress. This divergence was most graphically brought out during the Ramgarh Congress in March 1940. The left including Sahajanand, had already felt that the Congress had been very compromising with the British on the War question. What they constantly argued for was speeding up the anti-imperialist struggle given the very favourable war conditions existing which had made the British very vulnerable. The anti-Compromise Conference as the name suggests, was basically grounded on this understanding. At Ramgarh, where they held their first conference (along with the Congress session), Sahajanand lambasted the British Government for not moving beyond the promise of 'dominion status' and also the Congress especially Gandhi about whom he said, "... the nation is tired of mysticism of Mahatma and saints".<sup>15</sup> In the same speech,

14. J.P. to Sahajanand.(undated), J.P.Papers, F.No.7,NMML.  
 15. Speech of Sahajanand Saraswati—Chairman of the Reception Committee, The All India Anti-Compromise Conference, First Session, Ramgarh, 19-20 March 1940,NMML.



he rejected the Gandhian constructive programme, but accepted non-violence on practical grounds, and not as a dogma. The socialists, on the other hand, not only denounced the anti-compromise conference, but supported Azad's candidature on the grounds that the votes against him would amount to a repudiation of Gandhi's leadership.<sup>16</sup> Prior to this, on the eve of the Congress session, J.P., the party General Secretary made an appeal albeit with "deep regret" that "in this hour of crisis when national and Congress unity is so essential, there are so many disruptive tendencies at work. The task of maintaining unity in the Congress rests on the shoulders of the leftists much more than those of others".<sup>17</sup> He warned them that should any compromise be affected on the question of War by the Congress, the socialist party itself would with the help and cooperation of other leftists take the lead and declare national struggle. "The Party had with this object in view made full preparations". The new equations between the Congress and the socialists best reflected in the socialist participation in the individual satyagraha movement launched by the Congress in March 1940. At least, from one district the Government reported overwhelming participation of socialists. In Muzaffarpur district by May 1940, out of the 86 satyagrahis, 30 were reported to be left-wingers. By mid-June, this figure had climbed upto 189 i.e. 103 more socialists had joined the movement within a month.<sup>18</sup> This was

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16. Girija Shankar, op.cit., P. 155.

17. ibid., P. 156.

18. History of Congress, Muzaffarpur in History of the Freedom Movement, Third phase (1920-47), V.III, Region No. 7, Bihar and Nepal, F. No. 11|3, NAI.

particularly significant because ~~at~~ the provincial level, the movement was not reported as being much of a success, owing partly because of the growing restiveness among the people and partly also because Congressmen in position were not willing to forego it, which was an essential pre-condition for being a satyagrahi.<sup>19</sup> In fact around this time, the possibility cannot be overruled that the socialists were experiencing some sort of split within their own ranks. While the evidence from Muzaffarpur (cited above) indicated an increased proximity between the left and the right, the leadership was talking in a different language (Though, the language was perceptibly moderated). J.P., for instance reacted in a critical fashion to the Congress Pledge which had called for an intensification of the Congress programme. In a statement, he clearly stated that, ".... while we have never obstructed the constructive programme we (have) always stressed its inadequacy and its unscientific social philosophy", though (for the first time) he agreed to its "usefulness" as an instrument of social amelioration.<sup>20</sup> Even prior to this, the Socialists had voted against the individual satyagraha resolution in the BPCC.<sup>21</sup> In keeping with the new shift, in January 1940, J.P. resigned from the Presidentship of the DCC Gaya.<sup>22</sup>

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19. From Shahabad, for instance, the Collector reported a lukewarm response to the call for individual Satyagraha. For July, the Collector reported that "It seems that the Congress is now failing to stir the imagination of the people and that without the sacred name of Gandhi, there would be a tremendous alteration in the position "Towards the end of the Year the movement appears to have picked up somewhat. See F.R. on Political Events from District Magistrates, No.20, July (1) 1940, BSA.

20. Searchlight, 9-1-1941.

21. Janata, 7-9-1939.

22. Ganga Sharan Singh to J.P , D. 21-2-1940, J.P. Papers, F.No. 40, NMML.

Anyway, the situation by the end of 1940-41 was that both the Socialists and Sahajanand had almost irrevocably drifted apart from each other. This drift materialised formally into a split in March 1941 at Dumraon where the socialists expelled Sahajanand after describing him as a mere "faction leader".<sup>23</sup> The split significantly concided with the formation of the CPI in 1939, and the Swami's irresistible movement towards it which fructified in his assent to the "people's War "line. By the time, the Dumraon split occurred prominent left wingers like Kishori Prasanna Sinha Karyanand and Jadunandan Sharma, Sheel Bhadra Yajee had defected over to the ranks of the CPI, emphasising further the irreconcilability of position between Sahajanand and the Socialists.

The Dumraon split, also vertically split the already subdued kisan movement. From now on there were two groups within the peasantry - the kisan socialists and the kisan-communists-each exchanging open hostilities. At the meeting of the National Executive of the AICSP, at Patna (30th April, 1941) a resolution was adopted , which urged the socialists to "maintain a militant spirit among workers (in order ) to fight the communist menace".<sup>24</sup> This was subsequently reiterated by the BSP. In July 1941, at the Central Kisan Council meeting the A.I.K.S, at Calcutta, the BPKS under Karjee was declared to be the genuine, kisan sabha. In retaliation, Awadheshwar Prasad Singh, summoned another meeting of the socia-

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23. Cited in A.N. Das, op.cit., pp. 163-4.

24. FR(1), May 1941, HPF, 18-5-1941. NAI.

sta at Lucknow (where the socialists predominated) and reversed the Calcutta decision.<sup>25</sup> By the time, the PAKALA session of the AIKSwas held (October 1941), the socialists had been completely driven out of the Sabha. At Pakala, not a single, socialist figured among the office-bearers.<sup>26</sup>

Despite the split and the apparent strengtn of the socialists, the sparse evidence available for the early part of 1941, suggests that the socialists commanded a larger following among the peasants in comparison to the Sabha. The Government Report for April 1941, notes that the socialists had "completely monopolised" the Sourth Bihar Conference, held at Kumarsar in Monghyr district under Benipuri's Presidentship.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, at the Sherghati Conference in Gaya, in April the BPKS attracted merely 5000 kisans, whereas the rival socialist one estimated an attendance of 70,000.<sup>28</sup>

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25. FR(1), June 1941, HPF, 18-6-1941.NAI.

26. At the session, Sahajanand (Communist) was elected as the President and Sheel Bhadra (Forward Bloc) as the Joint Secretary. Among the members of the Council there was Jamuna Karjee (Communist) and Mathura Prasad. (FR(2), October 1941, HPF, 18-10-1941.

27. FR(1), April 1941, HPF, 18-4-1941.NAI.

28. Chandan Mitra, 'Images of the Congress, UP and Bihar in the late thirties and early forties', in the Indian National Congress, D.A.Low(ed), Delhi, 1988, P. 164.

Therefore, by the end of this phase the politics of the Provincial socialist had taken a full circle. They were back to the point from where they had begun, though this come back and the factors responsible for it were much different from the earlier phase. As a price, however, they had to surrender their hopes of forming a left front-something for which they can hardly be blamed. Their position within the Congress organisation also appears to have been the same. Strategically, however by returning to mainstream nationalism they had gained considerably on the peasant front over the Sabha, which was to remain an important reserve of hegemony during the Quit India movement.

CHAPTER VISECTION I

Thus, by the beginnings of 1940, the socialists had moved closer to the Congress as never before. This was best reflected in its diluted stand on the zamindari question as well as its acceptance of the anti-imperialist strategy of the Congress. The shift from acute differences on the economic question right throughout the 1930's, to that of a broad agreement on the political question by the end of the decade, was however not complete. The incompleteness of the agreement basically stemmed from the difference over strategy which Congress should now follow, given their common understanding that the war was fundamentally imperialist in nature and that India had been both unwittingly and unwillingly dragged into it. While, broadly the dominant leadership were arguing for a conditional support to the British in this hour of crisis, the socialists were urging precisely the opposite- ie, using the crisis situation to launch a militant mass movement in order to attain independence. This difference which existed right from the time the socialists proposed the Meerut Thesis, persisted uptill 1942, when the Congress gave call for Quit India leading the socialists to dismantle their own organisation and function, though temporarily, under the aegis of the Congress.

The socialist strategy on the war was essentially two pronged. On the one hand, it involved propagating a middle

path within the Congress which attempted to strike a balance between the pro-British strategy of the communists as well as what they say as the potentially compromising nature of the Congress leadership, which they always felt would end up supporting the British on the war question, and thereby miss the opportunity offered. The essential thrust of the centrist strategy, especially after 1941, was to get the Congress to accept a more militant line against the British, since the communists, by then, had decided upon their 'People's War' line. And on the other, it entailed sustained ideological work outside the Congress. In Bihar, on the basis of available evidence, the essence of this ideological work involved, subordination of the internal differences within the Congress and whipping up of anti-British sentiments by blaming them squarely for the war. Simultaneously, people were exhorted to get ready for any eventuality which had to be countered under the aegis of the INC.

We will first examine their differences with the dominant leadership within the Congress.

The differences between the socialists and the Congress leadership on the issue of war has been examined in detail in a number of studies.<sup>1</sup> Here we will briefly sketch out these differences and then move on to examine these at the Provincial level in Bihar. Although there is paucity of sources at this level, still a fairly accurate picture can be gathered from the available evidence.

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1. See for instance, Girija Shankar, Thomas Rusch, and L.P. Sinha. For a brief sketch of the differences within the right wingers on the war question, see Johannes. H. Voigt, "Cooperation or Confrontation ? War and Congress politics, 1939-42", in D.A. Low (ed), Congress and the Raj, Arnold Heinemann, 1977, p.349.

Among all the political parties, socialists perhaps had the earliest and the most unequivocal position on the war question. As early as 1934, when the party was formed, a resolution was moved expressing opposition to Indian participation in any way in which the British might be involved.<sup>2</sup> The resolution urged the Congress to undertake, on an immediate basis, preparation to resist actively the use by the British of Indian money and resources and utilise the opportunity for attaining Swaraj. The right wing, on the other hand, not only opposed this formulation as in Jabalpur in 1935,<sup>3</sup> but failed to take up the issue seriously. Even when it did as in Haripura, it merely condemned the precautionary measures initiated by the British and criticised them for having "consistently supported Fascist powers".<sup>4</sup> They had almost nothing to say as to how they would impose their terms on the British and the strategy they would follow in this eventuality. As Johannes Voigt has argued, the Congress never had any clear policy on war and in fact never took any interest in the military and strategic policy relating to India.<sup>5</sup> This was further complicated by the divisions within the dominant Congress leadership with Gandhi, Nehru and Bose<sup>6</sup> advocating divergent attitude towards the war. Despite the differences in perception and strategy, war never was a major

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2. Girija Shankar, op.cit., pp. 158-9.

3. At the Jabalpur session of the AICC, in April 1935, the socialist resolution for war resistance was ruled out of order by the President on the grounds that it was contrary to the Congress policy. ibid., P.159.

4. ibid., P.162.

5. J.H. Voigt, op.cit., P.349.

6. ibid., pp. 350-4.



issue of contention between the two in the mid and late- 1930's since the whole political agenda was dominated by the agrarian question. This was more so in Bihar, as we have already seen in the previous chapters.

With the outbreak of war, the socialists stepped up the pressure on the leadership to accept a more militant line which the crisis situation offered, in order to drive out the British. This argument was proffered in Patna, immediately after the war broke out and subsequently in Lucknow at the meeting of the National executive.<sup>7</sup> At the Working Committee meeting at Wardha, the socialist formulation was not really considered but a lengthy declaration was issued where it was stated that since the war purported to "defend the status-quo, imperialist possessions, colonies, vested interests and privileges", India had "nothing to do with it".<sup>8</sup> In brief, this difference on strategy continued uptill 1942 when the Congress decided to call for Quit India. In between while the socialists stuck to their stand on war, the right wing strategy oscillated between keeping negotiations open in order to extract as much concessions as possible and threatening resistance to war efforts once the negotiations broke down. With the left, differences were far from being acrimonious and was almost friendly in comparison to the agrarian issue.

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7. Girija Shankar, op.cit., P.166.

8. ibid., P.167.

In Bihar, like elsewhere, the war question emerged only after the issue assumed serious proportions. It was the agrarian issues around which the politics of the province revolved from the Civil Disobedience Movement down to the resignation of the Congress ministry. The conflict in the Provincial politics basically involved the BPC, the socialists and the newly formed illegal unit of the CPI, which was beginning to gather momentum. While the CPI was calling for an ultra-left line, the socialists were proposing a middle path. This was clearly brought out in a note entitled, "The Ramgarh Resolution and Our Duty"<sup>9</sup>, written by Kishori Prasanna Singh immediately after the Ramgarh session. The note was based on the proposition that the war was precipitated between two gangs of imperialist capitalists" into which India was being dragged without her consent. In the main it sought to assess the implications of the Ramgarh resolution on the war question and exhorted the Indians to "sink petty differences and accept all that is substantial" (in the Ramgarh resolution)<sup>10</sup>.

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9. Freedom Movement papers, 28.3.1940, F.No. 121, BSA.  
 10. The Ramgarh resolution accused Britain of precipitating war, "fundamentally for imperialist ends and for the preservation and strengthening her empire which is based on the exploitation of the people of India as well as of other Asiatic people". Given this reality, the Government had made a mistake in declaring India as a belligerent country without reference to her people and asserted that, "Indian freedom cannot exist within the orbit of 'imperialism'. The resolution, therefore, resolved that, "nothing short of complete independence can be accepted". It also for the first time gave hints of a civil disobedience movement, the prelude for which had been already consummated with the resignation of the Congress Ministries. This, however, would only happen, "as soon as the Congress organisation is considered fit enough for the purpose or in case circumstances so shape themselves, as to precipitate a crisis". See Girija Shankar, opp.cit., pp.171-72.

Simultaneously, it also warned the "compromisists" and the "ultra radicals" (aimed at the constituents of the Anti-compromise Conference). Among the former, the note identified "industrial magnates" and the "big capitalists" as well as the "middle classes" serving in the various legislative and administrative bodies, all of whom have their interests tied up with the British rule. It warned them that should any compromise be effected on the question of war by the Congress the socialist party itself would with the help and co-operation of other leftists take the lead and declare "national struggle". "The party had with this object in view made full preparation. Importantly, the note also cautioned Gandhi who, "shall have to fight inspite of his unwillingness to do so. If he declines, the country would not wait for him". Regarding the left, the note frankly said that, "we have simultaneously to defend its (Congress) unity from the onslaughts of those men who knowingly or unknowingly are determined to work its disintegration", and warned them that, "the talk of national struggle without any co-operation of the Congress or against its direction amounts to self-contradiction"<sup>11</sup>. In another document released by K.P. Sinha (on behalf of the CSP) entitled European War, why, for what and our duty"<sup>12</sup>, the aforementioned stand was reiterated. Predictibly, Britain was not merely blamed for the war, but was, criticised for the poverty, and misery of the Indian

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11. The note also quoted J.P. who had warned Gandhi after the talk between him and the Vicroy failed that, "Indian Youths would not acknowledge Mr Gandhi's leadership if he concluded a compromise with Englishmen in regard to the question of national freedom". Freedom Movement papers 28.3.1940, F. 70,--B.S.A.

12. "European War, why, for what and our duties " Kishori Prasanna Singh, on behalf of the Bihar Socialist Patna, (Translated), undated, Freedom Movement Papers, F.No. 114.. BSA

people. Subtle criticism was also launched about the "compromising" role of the Congress which was still negotiating with the Government, despite the latter's continuing "ordinance rule" since 1935 and its stubbornness in not granting anything more than the dominion status.

The specificity of the stand of the BSP lay in its stifled criticism of the BPCC, despite their acceptance of Congress as the premier anti-imperialist force. Evidence from other provinces is not forth-coming but clearly the socialists in Bihar had inherited the bitterness of the past decade or so acrimony over the agrarian question. In a explicit criticism of the BPCC, K.P. Sinha stated, "The partiality shown at the time of election of delegates to Haripura, the Bakasht troubles, the ill-treatment of the kisan prisoners or the expulsion of men like Swami Sahajanand from the Congress have embittered the feeling of local Congressmen in a way that cannot be witnessed in any other province. This is the reason why it has become difficult to ponder over any question in an unprejudiced way. Therefore, their support to the Congress on the war question appears to be much more grudging than that of say the AICSP whose main difference with the leadership was the strategy to be followed in such a situation.

Socialist propaganda outside the Congress evolved a strategy of anti-imperialism which had at least two major components. Firstly, the war issue was interpreted in such a way, that the whole blame for it was heaped on the Britain and not Germany as has been commonly done by the Historians. The attempt was obviously to create a sort of "vicarious nationalism"

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13. ibid.

where Britain was held solely responsible for the war. Despite the shortcomings in interpretation, the dissemination of this perception went a long way in strengthening anti-imperialist sentiments and accounted considerably for the ferment during the 1942 movement. Secondly, starting from this understanding of the war question, an attempt was made to combine both nationalism and socialism in a manner in which the latter for the first time was subordinated to the former in a decisive way.

First, let us consider the socialist interpretation of the war issue in Bihar. K.P. Sinha's document on behalf of the BSP entitled "European war why, for what and our duty" (which has been quoted above) is the best evidence of this attempt to whip up vicarious nationalism. The document which was essentially based on a Marxist understanding of the situation argued that since 1914, the world order had come to reflect the conflict between the two gigantic forces of capitalism and Imperialism (whose "center" was Britain) on the one hand and socialism on the other. Seen in this light, the World War was characterised as the 'second imperialist war'<sup>14</sup>. It traced the roots of the war to the early 1930's when Japan, Italy and Germany attacked Manchuria, Abbyssinia and Czechoslovakia respectively with covert support from Britain. Actually the war was a mere pretence. What was happening was that, all the four had combined to crush the revolutionary movements which had emerged in a major way in these countries (apart from Spain, Austria and China), in the wake of the great depression. Once Czechoslovakia was conquered

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14. ibid.

Germany, Chamberlain was confronted with a dilemma- he had to now, wage war against Germany (since the latter could not advance without overrunning France and Britain) whom Britain had all along been supporting. As this was objectively not feasible since both belonged to the same Imperialist camp, Chamberlain devised the ingenious scheme of pledging support to the security of Poland, knowing fully well that this was impossible without Soviet concurrence. In effect the ploy was designed to precipitate a war between Germany and Soviet Union so that in one master stroke both the enemies would destroy one another, leaving the field open to Britain once, Britain declared war on Germany in September. Chamberlain declared that Britain's involvement was purely to safeguard democracy and those small nations who had been dragged into the war. The document seriously contested this claim this on the grounds that since 1932, all powerful nations had been annexing territories (Japan in Manchuria, Spain, Italy and Germany in Spain Britain and France in Abyssinia) and subduing popular movements, but Britain had all along kept quiet.<sup>15</sup> J.P. reiterated this position in 1940, in his defence after the Government had prosecuted him for his speech in Jamshedpur where he had exhorted workers to halt the production of munitions and other war supplies.<sup>16</sup> In his defence he acknowledged that "My country is not a party to this war in any manner for it regards both German Nazism and British Imperialism as enemies". He

15. Regarding Britain's role in Spain, the document asserted that, "Chamberlain's clothes are red with the blood of the Spanish heroes". It also accused him of sacrificing Czechs in order to appease Hitler. See ibid.

16. Copy of Mr. Jayaprakash Narain's statement, 15.3.1940 Freedom Movement Papers, F.No. 70., BSA.

further stated that "Great Britain is fighting not to destroy Nazism which it has nurtured but to curb a rival whose might can no longer be allowed to grow unchallenged. It is fighting to maintain its dominant position in the world, and to preserve its imperial glory and power. As far as India is concerned, Great Britain is fighting to perpetuate the Indian Empire". He finally concluded by stating that "If India's opposition to Britain's Imperialist War ensures a Nazi victory, it is for the British people to decide whether they would have Nazi hegemony or victory with real democracy at home and in India".

Prior to both these declarations the socialist party in Bihar had launched a full scale propaganda on these lines. Obviously, resolution to this effect must have been passed by the Provincial socialist party, sometime towards the second half of 1939, evidence of which has not survived. In September, 1939, Manzah Rizvi, one of the important socialist leader on the labour front addressed a 2000 strong public meetings in Dehri decrying the war as a move to strengthen the European nation<sup>17</sup>. He explained this further, by arguing that Chamberlain was actually strengthening Hitler so that the latter attack Russia. The main enemy, therefore, was Britain, since Germany was separated by nearly thousands of miles from India and Japan was weakened after fighting too many wars. In early October, addressing another meeting, Basawan Singh accused Britain of betraying Gandhi's faith in them during the last war<sup>18</sup>. Despite the fact that

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17. Report from DSP Sasaram Regarding Political Activities and Kisan agitation, F.No.17, Freedom Movement Papers, BSA.

18. Workers meeting in Dehri, 8.10.1939, ibid.

Gandhi had undertaken conscription on their behalf the British had retaliated with the Jallianwalla Bagh violence. In another gathering the meeting opened with slogans like "Destroy British rule", "Destroy capitalists" and "Resist recruitment in the army", followed by Manzar Risvi's speech which categorically declared that the "Great Hitler of India is the Viceroy"<sup>19</sup>.

In fact evidence from Shahabad district suggests that with the socialists as well as the local Congressmen were conducting anti-imperialist propaganda jointly and along the same lines. From Sasaram, the DSP in a confidential note on the activities of the Sasaram Congress Committee reported that in a meeting attended by "about 1000 townies of all castes and creed...." the speeches delivered were "highly objectionable and seditious to a great extent"<sup>20</sup>. The meeting which was addressed by both Congressmen and the socialists basically sought to disseminate propaganda along the lines indicated subsequently by the document authored by K.P. Sinha, Habib, a grass root socialist worker commented that "the Viceroy of India is not less in 'Zulum' (oppression) and badmashi (mischief) than Hitler."<sup>21</sup> Gulab Chand Prasad Gupta, a Congressman stated that, "there is no doubt that the Government has joined war simply to protect her interests; Chamberlain cheated Europe, the Germans destroyed Poland in 8 days, and no British soldier reached Poland." At least one speaker in the same meeting also stated that, on the issue of war both the Hindus and the Muslims were united.<sup>22</sup> The speaker Hafiz Moulvi Anwar

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19. Meeting of socialists, Dehri, 17.10.1939, ibid.  
 20. Confidential report of the DSP Sasaram, Meeting on 29.10.1939, ibid.  
 21. ibid.  
 22. ibid.



dwelled on the treachery committed by the British with muslim countries like Turkey, Abyssinia, Arab and Palestine and concluded by extending the call to all the "Hindus and Musalmans to wage tidy war against the British Government even if they are hangd". It is obvious that the war was offering an opportunity to the Congressmen not merely to explain the world history but also India's recent past in terms of a diabolical villainy on the part of the British. Bishwanath Mathur, a socialist, in the same meeting argued how Britain had constantly humiliated India right since 1857, the sacrifice of Nanaji, the destruction of indigenous industries best symbolised by the Britishers cutting the thumb of Indian artisans, the slaying of Bhagat Singh Chandra Shekhar Azad and Lajpat Rai. From here the speech went on to elaborate the role of Britain in suppressing North America, Ireland and now Chamberlain had precipitated the war for his own ends.

Starting from this understanding, socialist also attempted to formulate a strategy to meet the situation. At the outset however, it should be pointed out that the strategy was at best a curious admixture of acknowledging anti-imperialism under the Congress banner coupled with advocating terrorism and other forms of anarchy as well as appealing to the workers and peasants to refashion the whole concept of Swaraj.

We have already seen in the previous chapter how the socialists were veering towards the Congress by 1939. By the end of the same year, the socialist position was getting more and more unambiguous vis-a-vis the Congress on the war question, although as K.P. Sinha's document shows, within the organisation the

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socialists were attaching certain conditions for the support. Outside the organisation, however, the socialists sought to present a united front strategy under Gandhi's leadership. Most of the speeches quoted above, from Sasaram after heaping all the blame on the British for almost everything invariably came around to exhorting the people to fight under the Congress banner. As Gulab Chand Prasad Gupta remarked, "If we want to save our respect and honour, we should obey the mandate of the Congress". Most of the other socialist leaders like Babu Harihar Prasad, Bishwanath Mathur reposed faith in Gandhi who was expected to provide 'the lead'. At a meeting in Nokha, in Sasaram, one Sheo Pujan Prasad stated that, "we have to maintain its (Congress) honour. It is because of the Congress that we are able to speak freely. Police, Daroga, Jamadar, Inspector cannot do anything to us".<sup>23</sup>

By mid 1942, the Provincial socialists were decisively moving towards the Congress. At the Bedaul conference of the socialists in Muzaffarpur which was termed as "remarkably successful" attended by approximately 20,000 people, a resolution was passed welcoming the strong line advocated by Gandhi towards imperialism. This was followed by Mehrally's appeal to everyone to respond to Gandhi's call for a mass movement;<sup>24</sup> which the socialists felt would be announced shortly. This socialist response was based on Gandhi's proposal on war which had been passed with some modifications by the AICC meeting in Allahabad in April-May 1942. In essence the proposal called for British withdrawal

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23. Ibid.

24. F.R.. June (1), 1942, BSA.

from India since the interests of both the country was contradictory and moreover her presence was much more disastrous for India since Japan was at war with her and not India.

By the beginning of 1942, the socialist has begun to openly criticise the CPI for its stand on the war question. At a speech in Patna in January, Lobia openly condemned the attitude of the Farooqui group of the AICSP which had passed a resolution in December, 1941 extending unconditional support to the Britain.<sup>25</sup> He urged the people not to help the British, but to keep national interest as paramount. At another socialist conference in Muza-  
ffarpur, Benipuri on behalf of the BSP, for the first time openly  
<sup>26</sup>condemned Sahajanand. The Fortnightly Report also noted around the same time, "widening of rift between the two sections of the  
<sup>27</sup>kisan sabha.

Although war became undoubtedly the overwhelming pre-occupation with the socialists, they did not loose sight of their economic programme and mobilisation along the same lines. The difference, however, was that while earlier on Congress was criticised for representing class interests (especially of the zamindars), now this rhetoric was missing though their conception of swaraj continued to talk in similar terms. Thus K.P. Sinha's  
<sup>28</sup>document, quoted above, defined swaraj as the absence of the zamindari system, provide employment of workers and education of students, would be provided by the state, and there would be no

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25. FR, February (1), 1942, BSA.  
26. FR, March (2), 1942, BSA.  
27. FR, May(2) 1942, **BSA**  
28. Freedom Movement Papers, F.No.114, BSA.

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usery and exploitation. In a lengthy appeal issued by Benipur, after the Ramgarh Congress the workers, peasants and middle classes were exhorted to "awaken" in this solemn hour of achieving freedom".<sup>29</sup> The appeal was formulated in rather poetic style where the labourers historic mission was defined as the "Pioneers of revolution" while the Peasants hold the "key" to it. The word revolution here is being used more for the effect as throughout the appeal there is no mention of how this will come about. Rising in revolt is being portrayed more as a sense of duty. Significantly in the paragraph on appeal to the middle class men, the whole text was directed at the "small scale industrialists, educated 'Babus', petty zamindars, well-off peasants and artisans". By not mentioning Zamindars, the socialists were carrying over the history of their decade long conflict with them.

This clear headedness at the level of theory and declaration was however not matched by actual political activity. In fact the picture tends to get remarkably confused towards 1942. In 1939, there is evidence of attempts by the socialists to mobilise peasants and workers. In Dehri, from where evidence is forthcoming, most of the socialist activity continuously emphasised on the need for workers to unite and overthrow capitalism. This was clearly the basic theme of Pramath Mukherjee the socialist labour leaders addressed to the workers of Boulia and Chunhatta,<sup>30</sup> as also of Manzar Rizvi's

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29. Rambriksha Benipuri, 18.4.1940, *ibid.*, Freedom Movement Papers, BSA.

30. DSP's Report, August 1939; F.No. 17, Freedom Movement Papers, BSA.

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speech at Dehri, which was attended by J.P. and Jamuna Prasad.<sup>31</sup> In February, 1942, the Council of Action of the BSP decided to enrol Kisan and Mazdoor volunteers who would maintain constant touch with the masses and keep them informed about the progress of the war.<sup>32</sup>

By June, this unambiguity was steadily getting replaced by a pronounced confusion. On June 17th, serious epidemic of 'hat' (market) looting "broke out in Champaran district". Among the accused was one socialist-kisan and some local communists.<sup>33</sup> The fortnightly report of July also mentioned the involvement of kisans and socialists in market looting.<sup>34</sup> In the same report, the Government also noted the emergence of secret organisations, organised by the socialists on terrorist lines.<sup>35</sup> In a separate note appended to the fortnightly report, the Government also reported the organisation of a Revolutionary socialist Party in North Bihar by members of the BSP for committing crimes in order to raise funds for the purchase of firearms.<sup>36</sup>

The complete chaos which included as diverse action as using the Congress platform to propagate anti-imperialism to the formation of secret organisation and even market looting in a sense presaged the mood of post-September 1942.

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31. Ibid.  
 32. F.R. February (2), 1942, BSA  
 33. F.R. June (2) 1942, BSA  
 34. F.R. July (2) 1942, BSA  
 35. ibid.  
 36. ibid.

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This continuity in action also reflected a continuity in the historical situation. Chiefly important here was the acute scarcity of foodgrains mainly on account of choked supply line and large scale hoarding by shopkeepers. This was heightened by the war situation which led to all sorts of rumours, some of which spelled the possibility of the "collapse of Government."<sup>37</sup>

SECTION II

The Congress called for Quit India on August 8th 1942. This Congress decision was actuated by a number of factors. Chiefly these were the peculiar conditions created by the war (which has been discussed in the previous section) which had heightened insecurities both material, as well as psychological, the recalcitrant attitude of the colonial state which was not willing to yield an inch beyond dominion status which had created further problems for itself by instituting repressive laws (like the Revolutionary movement Ordinance) and finally sustained pressure by the socialists on the leadership to capitalise on the opportunity and strike out for independence.

The movement which began on the August 8th was predictably met with brute force by the colonial authorities who invoked the various legislation at its command to arrest the leadership and disband the organisational structure of the Congress (including that of the socialists) from top to bottom.

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37. F.R., July (1), 1942, BSA

But clearly by 1942, the Congress had become too sweeping a movement, to be repressed by a thoroughly delegitimised colonial state.

Historians have generally concurred in arguing that the Quit India movement in Bihar underwent, broadly three stages.<sup>38</sup> According to Heningham's periodisation,<sup>39</sup> the movement's first stage spanned from the day of the Bombay resolution to the ensuing ten days of turbulence. Those ten days of protest was constituted eventually of the upper castes and its nature was fundamentally 'political'. This was followed by a "rebellion of desperation" comprising mainly of the lower castes and the agricultural labourers and its motivation was essentially economic. The final phase which began towards the end of 1942 (coinciding roughly with the escape of J.P., Yogendra Shukul and Ramanand Misra from the Hazaribagh Jail on the 9th November) continued for little less than a year and was characterised by "guerilla warfare" against the state.

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38. See for instance. Stephen Heningham, Article by Max Harcourt, "Kisan Populism and Revolution in Rural India; the 1942 disturbances in Bihar and Eastern U.P.in D.A. Low(ed). Congress and the Raj. This trend is also implicit in Gyanendra Pandey's "The revolt of August 1942 in Eastern U.P. and Bihar", in The Indian Nation in 1942, Gyanendra Pandey (ed), K.P. Bagchi & Co., Calcutta, 1988.

39. Heningham. op.cit., pp. 181-5.

From the stand point of the evolution of the activities of the Provincial socialists during the Quit India Movement, this three phase periodisation has to be slightly amended. According to the available evidence socialist politics evolved in two phases. The first phase coincided with the urban and rural upsurge which tapered off towards October 1942. The second stage began, somewhere around when Heningham's third stage begins, and this coincided with J.P. and his comrades escape from the Hazaribagh jail. The reason for collapsing Heningham's first two stages into one essentially stems from the following reasons. Firstly, since the socialists were not functioning autonomously, but as Congressmen, and that also on a common platform of anti-imperialism, it is almost impossible to distinguish the activities of one from the other. This confusion was further compounded by the arrest of most of the leadership, the disbanding of both the organisations and the near absence of any written records, since Press and other institutions were banned. It is only with the emergence of Guerilla activists towards the end of 1942, that socialist activities received an identity of its own. Still some deduction will be made on the nature of socialist politics in this period. Secondly violence following the August 8th declaration, had become so indiscriminate against the state and its symbols that one can hardly say with confidence which particular event was the work of Congressmen and which the socialists. To put the whole matter, succinctly anti-imperia-



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lism had become such an all consuming and pervasive material force that all boundries between nationalism and socialism (which the socialists had constantly propagated in the past decade in Bihar) were momentarily erased.

Let us now examine, on the basis of the available evidence, the whole course of socialist politics.

The first phase which began with the call for Quit India and ended around October, represented the culmination of socialist pre-eminence to nationalism (as opposed to socialism) under the Congress banner, which had been ambiguously initiated at Tripuri. At the national level this was reflected in the establishment of a central Directorate in order to coordinate and activise an underground movement, which would direct violence at the State and its symbols and not human beings. No direct evidence of socialist nationalism is forthcoming but on the basis of their sphere and area of activity some deduc;tions can be made. In Patna even as the State was cracking down with vengeance on the Congress and socialist leaders, there was a major upsurge of students on the 10th of August leading to police firing and death of seven of them on the 11th.<sup>40</sup> A curricular of the socialist dominated Patna town Congress Committee at this juncture appealed to the kisans and workers to non-cooperate and promised" the largest measure of freedom.....to workers.<sup>41</sup>". It also

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40. K.K. Dutta, opp.cit., P.51.

41. ibid., P.51.

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exhorted them to "...go and raise the standard of rebellion in villages and organise your own village Panchayats....All the provinces, districts and thanas are passing under the control of labourers.<sup>42</sup> Another circular entitled "What we should Do" released anonymously but written probably by the socialists actually called for the non-payment of land rent, but not against those Zamindars "who are willing to cooperate with us".<sup>43</sup> In the same circular under a different heading "What we should not do" requested the people to "Not ask the sweepers to go on strike".<sup>44</sup> The latter part of the appeal is striking in its political maturity whereas in the 1937-39 phase they had indiscriminately clubbed all the zamindars together as oppressors and collaborators for the first time they appeared to be making distinctions.

As the movement spilled over from the towns into the countryside, there were instances of large scale looting and arson against the state. It was not mere coincidence, that most of the affected areas had previously been the stronghold of socialist activity. Thus, around mid August, violence was reported from Darbhanga, where the villagers, disrupted roads and railways and destroyed telephone and telegraph activities.<sup>45</sup>

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42. ibid.  
 43. ibid., PP 52-3.  
 44. The circular was distributed in the wake of the sweeper's strike in Patna Medical College Hospital. ibid.  
 45. Heningham. op.cit., P 177

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Apparently this violence continued till the end of August. In Muzaffarpur district, violence was reported from Minapur and Sitamarhi where the rebels lynched a number of Policemen, while attempting to capture the thana.<sup>46</sup> From Parihar circle of the Darbhanga Raj, in the Sitamarhi Sub-division of the Muzaffarpur district, the manager later reported that "In the month of August last, there was an unprecedented Congress movement in the sub-division. The Sub-divisional Officer and several Sub Inspectors of Police were murdered..There was no agitation whatsoever against the Raj and inspite of the above movement Raj workers were never suspended.<sup>47</sup> In the northern part of Monghyr by 29th August, all Police stations had been either overrun or abandoned. Here the small landholders, mostly Bhumihar by caste who had all along been staunch Congress and Sabha supporters spear-headed the rebellion.<sup>48</sup> Reports regarding rebellion on these lines came from nearly all storm centres of Sabha- socialist activity- Shahabad, Saran and Gaya,<sup>49</sup> apart from the incidents of violence in the districts mentioned above.

In the sphere of labour rebellion, strike was observed in the Gaya Cotton and Jute Mills, the Japla Cement Factory and the Musabani Copper in Jamshedpur. All these had been

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46. ibid.

47. ibid. , P.184.

48. ibid., P.177 & 182.

49. For a graphic description of the course of the movement in these districts, See Govind Sahay, 42 Rebellion, Delhi, 1947.

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spheres of intense socialist activity in the past five years or so. Strikes were also observed in a number of other industrial concerns like at the Tata Steel, Bengal Nagpur Indian Railway Union but they do not directly concern us here. The best instance of socialist politics bearing fruit was the response of the Rohtas Industries Mazdoor Sangh led by the noted socialist labour leader Reasat Karim in Dalmianagar. Immediately, following the arrest of the Congress leaders, the union went on a partial strike on the 9th of August<sup>50</sup>. Earlier between 1938-40, the socialists chiefly Basawan, Reasat Karim, Narayan Murti, had been responsible for a number of strike in and around Dalmianagar. Anyway on the 11th the strike became total and on the 12th morning the Collector reported that "even the power house stopped working, a thing which had never happened before, in previous strikes"<sup>51</sup>. Importantly this was one instance of the workers, not taking on the management, but remaining throughout disciplined in a manner in which the Congress expected of them. This was also abetted by a management, whose role the Collector doubted in the course of the strike. As he reported "though they (management) may not have taken an active part in the affair, there was nothing in their attitude to show that they discouraged the strike. This was evidenced in the absence of any.....damage to the factory and the reported, "peaceful

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50. Weekly Report from the District Magistrate to the Chief Secretary regarding the Quit India Movement. Freedom Movement in Bihar Papers, F.No.20, BSA.

51. ibid.

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behaviour" of the strikers, all of which points to the "passive connivance of the management in the matter"<sup>52</sup>. The strike ebbed around the 25th August when most workers reported back in the Paper and Chemical Factory but the workers in the Cement Factory, the actual socialist constituency continued to held back which coincided roughly with Heningham periodisation when the movement abated in the towns and spilled over to the countryside. It was only around September end, that the workers of the Cement Factory reported for work and then also three to four hundred of them out of a total of three thousand, continued to be on strike.<sup>53</sup>

By early September officials reported that the situation was returning to normal, although in places like Tirhut Division, in North Bihar, a sort of people's swaraj continued to function, on the pattern laid out by the Congress.<sup>54</sup> The normalisation of the situation owed to the twin factors of continued Government repression and the very impossibility of sustaining a mass movement of such dimensions in the absence of a proper leadership.

The onset of the second "Guerilla" phase of socialist activity was anticipated by the emergence of at least one major Guerilla outfit which went by the name of 'Siaram dal' after its leader Siaram Singh. The dal appears to have been

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52. ibid.

53. ibid.

54. K.K. Datta, Freedom Movement, Vol-III, P-247.

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established around the end of August since the chronology of events in Siaram Singh's diary begins on the 31st of that month. <sup>55</sup> It defined its objectives as collection of money, both voluntarily and through looting, collection of arms; training people in the use of arms; and organising the people for opposing the Government. The 'dal' which gave a torrid time to the Provincial Government operated with considerable local support <sup>56</sup> for nearly two years in the district of Bhagalpur, Purnea, Monghyr and Santhal Parganas before Siaram Singh was finally arrested. The ideological nature of this group is not entirely clear, apart from the fact that it was fervently anti-British. There is, however, stray evidence to suggest that some sort of hezus emerged between the dal and 'J.P. and Azad dastas', especially in Purnea and Muzaffarpur and at least on two occasions Siaram Singh met J.P. <sup>57</sup>

Clear evidence of Guerilla activities by the Provincial socialists emerges only after J.P.'s escape from the Hazaribagh jail, on November 9th. Quite apart from the fact that the mass phase of the Quit India Movement had abated which in a way compelled the socialists to resort to individual and group heroism. Guerilla activities was intrinsic to

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55. This diary was handed over to K.K. Dutta by Sia ram Singh himself and the mormer's account forms the basis of my observation. ibid, PP 274-87.

56. In June'44, the Collector Monghyr complained that the "Public gives practically no assistance to the authorities in effecting their arrest. I Think about 75 percent of the people are more or less sympathetic to the absconders." ibid., P.288.

57. ibid., P.287.

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the strategy of the socialists. As early as the Sonepur summer camp in 1938 the socialists had visualised in very specific terms disruption of communication in the eventuality of a civil disobedience movement. Aggressive propaganda on these lines was carried out by the socialists, throughout the intervening period, especially after the ministry resigned, and there were reports of the emergence of secret organisation led by socialists in parts of the province. On August 7, 1942, the socialist in their CSP Camp at Poona made a "comprehensive plan of revolt" under the leadership of Yusuf Meherally but the Government got a wind of it and the plan was foiled.<sup>58</sup> Moreover Gandhi's call to "do or die" and his exhortation to the Indians to "feel free" had created such an ambiguous situation that all the activities whether of disruption, loot or killings was being justified 'as being within the terms of the Bombay resolution'.

In December 1942, J.P. and his comrades formed the first 'Azad dastas' on the pattern of Bose's Azad Hind Fauj. Not much information is available about the ideology and programme of these dastas, although it appears that Guerilla warfare was centered to the strategy. Very scanty evidence survives about their activities. Driven by severe Government repression the dastas had their headquarters in Nepal where a parallel Government existed which had its own wireless station

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58. Girija Shankar, op.cit., P 205.

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and radio, and which operated military training camps.<sup>59</sup>  
 These dastas were definitely in existence till July 1943. In his confidential report ending July the Collector of Ballia cited evidence of political activity by individuals related to the dastes from Saran district.<sup>60</sup> He also reported the arrest of one "revolutionary" by the name of Rabindra Lal who had been entrusted the job of organising Azad dastas among the students.<sup>61</sup> He, however, confessed that he had no idea as to how many of these dastas existed.

In December, there is evidence of the existence of another group organised on the same lines, by the socialists. While there is no evidence whatsoever about their activities, some points can be made about its programme. The "Freedom struggle Front" as it called itself basically aimed at a "joint enterprise" where "every group every family, every class" can find a place without losing their identities, in order to form "disruptive force" which would join the onward march towards revolution.<sup>62</sup> It recognised the fact that the movement as it existed had been hobbled of organisation and leadership which had made it "decentralised, individualistic and anarchical."<sup>63</sup> Yet this was justified within the terms of Gandhi's

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59. K.K. Dutta, Freedom Movement. Vol-III, P 274.  
 60. Weekly confidential report from the Collector of Ballia July(2), 1943, Freedom Movement Papers, F.No.28 ,BSA  
 61. ibid.  
 62. K.K. Dutta, Freedom Movement. Vol-III, P.271.  
 63. ibid.



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appeal of feeling "free", which, according to their leaflet, expected direct response from each individual without the mediation of any party.<sup>64</sup> Given this chaos the leaflet proposed planning, which would aim to serve a three-fold purpose. Firstly it will provide an ideological perspective, secondly, it will indicate the broad principles which will guide action and finally, it will coordinate the efforts of groups and individuals. On the crucial question of class-war versus anti-imperialism, it, explicitly recognised that "the class war may have to come, but that is not yet, till the riddance of foreign exploitation."<sup>65</sup> In fact, the pamphlet argued that it is in the course of this struggle against the British, that the forces are going to shift in favour of the proletariat. It also identified how this shift is going to occur. According to their "Programme of Action"<sup>66</sup> the peasantry, which was seen as the major vehicle of change, and its sympathisers (ie. socialists and other left elements) would represent the rebellion as actuated by economic factors. Since the authorities are not going to concede economic concessions, the "militant elements will take over and prepare for direct action by (a) siezing stocks of essential goods, (b) restraining payment of rents and debts (c) refusing to part with crops (d) ignoring court processes (e) taking possession of local administration such as boards, chowkies and thanas.

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64. ibid., P 429.

65. ibid., P 432.

66. ibid. , P.435

Clearly, whether it was the 'Azad dastas' or the 'Freedom struggle front' or the Siaram dal while the goals were noble, they erred completely in characterising the nature of the colonial state as well the Congress- the two institutions which would have inevitably determined the course of any revolution whether of the bourgeois-democratic or of the proletariat kind. Their strategy was too simplistic which was best reflected in their above "programme of action" which traced all conflicts as emanating from the "economic" contradiction and in the light of that suggested a take-over of the state not in a step-by-step fashion but instantly. The CPI had done this till 1936 and had paid the price when its strength came close to getting depleted. Even after 1936, when their period of illegality persisted, they had cleverly formed united front with the Congress. In this they were still strongly rooted in the instant socialism of the ministry period. Moreover they appeared to have been completely oblivious of the fact that any change of huge proportions would come about by not merely challenging the Provincial Government, but by forging links with all the awakened social forces throughout the length and breadth of the Indian society in the wake of the Quit India Movement. To be fair to them, it is not that they did not try to forge links as is evidenced from J.P.'s clandestine visit to Punjab shortly before his arrest. In this they were also hampered by the pre-imperialist stand taken by the left parties, although they did try to combine with the more militant Forward Block. But when all

is said and done, it would almost be self-evident argument that to overthrow the more sophisticated colonial state and to mobilise the culturally and economically diverse Indian society, clandestine activity was a sure shot recipe for failure. More importantly by emphasising on Guerilla activity, the socialists were confessing their lack of strategy in periods of truce, which inevitably followed every major turbulence. Similar directionlessness had overtaken them in the 1940-41 period after the Sabha led turbulence subsided but the outbreak of the war almost came as a blessing in disguise and saved them the trouble of deciding upon a course of action in the new situation. Confronted with a similar situation in the last months of 1942, the socialists could think of nothing better than sporadic guerilla warfare- a strategy could never hope to challenge the might of the State as well as the 'collaborationist' indigenous social classes. The most obvious fact that the masses cannot be in a permanent state of revolt was completely lost out on the socialists. In the specific instance of the Quit India Movement, problems were compounded for them, because the turbulence occurred in those very areas which had already witnessed the blazing heat of the Sabha led agitations- areas like Darbhanga, Muzaffarpur, Gaya, Monghyr and Patna- for nearly a decade.

At the most fundamental level the socialist had failed to comprehend the myth of the Congress, like all the other left parties. They had failed to come to terms with the magic

which Gandhi's name commanded (something which even the subalterns admit though in a round about fashion) and the tremendous historical task which Constructive programme was performing in periods of truce. They also failed to see why despite their long propaganda in the province, Congress was continuing to mobilise diverse sections against the state and conversely why the left, despite being no less in terms of commitment to the cause, kept on constantly floundering which was eloquently expressed in Sahajanand's dwindling reserves of support in Bihar. In fact the greatest historical irony was that the socialists themselves sought to justify their actions in terms of Gandhi's programme. In a pamphlet entitled "To all Fighters of Freedom Revolutionary Greetings", written by J.P., he defended the stand of the socialists by arguing that "since we have declared ourselves as independent and also named Britain as the aggressive power we are, therefore, justified within the terms of the Bombay resolution itself to fight Britain with arms"<sup>68</sup>.

To be fair to the socialists, in the specific case of the Quit India Movement, Gyan Pandey rightly argues that "there were many contradictory stances and many conflicting tones in the statements and messages put out by different Congress leaders at different towns and in different parts of the country and indeed in the speeches and writings of

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68. R.K. Dutta, Freedom Movement. Vol-III, P 442.

individual leaders too". For instance, just after the Congress Working Committee had approved in May a draft resolution on Mass Civil Disobedience Movement Gandhi declared that courting arrest was "too soft a thing" and further added, "we had no doubt, made it a business to court imprisonment upto now, but there will be no such thing this time. My inten-

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tion is to make the thing as short and swift as possible". In the confidential draft instruction for civil registers circulated to members of the Working Committee on the 4th of August, Gandhi had suggested non-payment of land tax, as, "we have mentally ceased to recognise the existing Government" as our

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own. Gandhi it seems was also a party to a 12 point programme prepared around this time, which while calling for a non-violent non-cooperation movement had a note attached to it which declared that the final stage of the movement would lead to the breaking of salt laws on a large scale, picketing of foreign cloth and loom shops, promoting industrial strikes, holding up of railways and telegraphs, calling army to come out, non-payment of taxes, setting up of a parallel Govern-

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ment....". Several versions of this programme were circu-

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59. Gyanendra Pandey, "The Revolt of August 1942 in

Eastern U.P. and Bihar" in Gyan Pandey, Ed. The Indian Nation in 1942, P.128. A similar argument has been put forth in the article 'Quit India Movement in Midnapur district' by Hitesranjan Sanyal in the same book. PP 20-21.

70. ibid.

71. ibid., P 130.

72. Sanyal, op.cit., PP 20-21.

lated around the most famous of which was Andhra circular issued on the 27th July endorsing modes of protest like falling of trees, marching on Government offices and appealing to police not to do their duty.

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Notwithstanding the fact that the socialists, not only in Bihar, but all over India had emerged as Heroes by virtue of their active participation in the Quit India Movement, in the overall objective sense and also in terms of their aims, the same cannot be said. By the time the movement was called off, the socialists were ideologically and organisationally bettered.

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73. 'Andhra circular and Pattabhi Siteranmayya' in 'Quit India Movement'. British Secret Documents, Dr.P.N. Chopra (ed) Delhi, 1986, P-5.

## CONCLUSION

In the conclusion, we will round off this discussion by attempting to answer as to why the Provincial Left (Sabha socialist combine) in Bihar, despite having the most fertile of conditions in the shape of a raging kisan movement failed to effect an organisational and ideological transformation of the Bihar Congress. Attempts will be made to conclude on the basis of some tentative comparisons with the Kerala Socialists whose success in transforming the Provincial Congress has been frequently offered as a model of astute politics from a left standpoint.<sup>1</sup> This comparison however, does not pretend to be an in-depth study of the Kerala socialists, in the background of their specific history (i.e. in terms of land and social relations), but is more of a reference point to elucidate the politics of the BSP.

The one major reason which accounted for the failure of the BSP in achieving their declared objective was also the central reason for the failure of the entire left movement. This was their perception of the Congress as a "predominantly bourgeois (class)" organisation. Though here it must be added that unlike the other left parties like the CPI, the socialists accepted the Congress as the primary anti-imperialist organisation. However, as the Bihar

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1. Bhagwan Josh, 'Understanding Indian Communists: A survey of approaches to the Study of the Indian Communist Movement in India 1920-47' in Situating Indian History, Romilla Thapar and Sabyasachi Bhattacharya (ed.) Oxford, delhi, 1986, pp. 312-325.

experience shows, they invariably managed to subordinate the latter in favour of a sharp (and at times ultra-left) class rhetoric.

This emphasis on the Congress as a class organisation (almost to the exclusion of its role as an anti-imperialist organisation), manifested itself, in Bihar, in the frequent socialist accusation that the Congress was a pro-zamindar (since Bihar hardly had any bourgeois worth the name) organisation. This misplaced strategy had a number of unforeseen consequences for the socialists.

For one, it completely polarised the political configuration. This was because, (even if for a moment we assume that the socialist strategy was correct), the onslaught on the right was not made in political-ideological terms (not that this would have made a drastic difference, though politics elevated to this level have more of a chance of being productive) but in extremely personalised terms. The whole pattern was familiar. Individual Congressman, in public meetings were hauled up by name, accused of being agents of zamindars following which the audience, comprising mainly of kisans, were incited to inflict violence upon them. This sort of politics proved counter-productive in the long-run. And its success in the short-term run was also dubious. In my study of the entire period, there is not one evidence of kisan's attacking the Congressmen in the way in which the socialists were emphasising. Most of the kisan violence was limited to forcible harvesting of crops in the event, of zamindars themselves resorting to 'lathials'



and armed suppression. More importantly the socialist rhetoric ended up, even antagonising the more moderate elements within the BPCC (like Nayayanji, Jamuna Prasad) whose legitimate confusions (See Chapter IV) in the wake of the right and left confrontations was not channelised into clear streams of socialism.

How does one explain this alienation ?

The drift towards the right wing did not merely reflect a bad strategy, though this was largely true. In the main the drift mirrored, the enormous legitimacy which the Congress commanded, mainly on account of its image as a live, anti-imperialist force. The catch, therefore, also lay in the contemporary popular perception of the Congress. As one of the socialists (who was a witness to this phase) later wrote, "It (Congress) was synonymous with political independence and Ram Rajya," and, "members of another organisation could not command the same influence and reverence.<sup>2</sup> Chandan Mitra's recent study of the "images of the Congress" in U.P. and Bihar, in this period, also makes the same point. Mitra argues, that the tremendous power of the congress name accrued from two main reasons - Firstly it identified with 'Swatantra Bharat' and, secondly, it was seen as a party of the peasants. More importantly, he argues, "the magic of the Congress name was to a significant extent connected to the Gandhi myth."<sup>3</sup>

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2. P.L. Lakhanpal, op.cit., P. 23.

3. Chandan Mitra, 'Images of the Congress'... op.cit., P. 157.

In Bihar, charisma and mythology around Gandhi almost existed as a "material force", mainly because was it from Champaran that he had launched his political sojourn. The right wingers were not merely seen as the as inheritors of the Champaran tradition (where most of the BPCCL leadership had assisted Gandhi), but some like Prasad were almost seen as the incarnation of the great man, re-enforced undoubtedly by his actual closeness to Gandhi. The right wing, of course, was fully aware of their position in history and as we have seen the Champaran satyagraha was freely invoked by the provincial leadership, in the course of their tour under the aegis of the KEC, which just preceded the elections.

Here it is essential to point out, that it was not that the socialists and the sabhaites were unaware of the standing of the Congress and Gandhi. In fact upto 1936, the importance of Congress was accepted and even at their vit<sup>r</sup>ol<sup>k</sup>ic worst during the ministry period, the left never dared to confront Gandhi publicly. The, one occasion that Sahajanand was accused of criticising Gandhi, he disowned it in a letter to Prasad, saying that, "I might have my differences with Gandhi, but there is no reason why I should make it public"<sup>4</sup>.

The reverse side of this coin was that by not answering the phenomenon of Gandhi the Provincial left was committing

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4. Sahajanand Saraswati to Rajendra Prasad, d. 21-7-1937, Prasad Papers, R. No. 7, NAI.

the same blunder in Bihar which the CPI was making at that time (although the CPI denunciation was more open and strident). Like elsewhere, in Bihar they failed to understand the logic of constructive programme, council entry and office acceptance, all of which were constantly expanding the social frontiers of the Congress - especially in periods of truce.

This indifference and even hostility to the Gandhian strategy in turn led them to constantly criticise the Congress as being an organisation of 'compromisers' and induced them to push for more radical and immediate solution. Their criticism of the ministry blinded them so much, that they could not even see the most obvious - that a good number of the 'bakast' struggles ironically under left leadership, was aimed at using the provisions of the right-wing sponsored bakast legislation and that the spate of peasant movements after 1937 coincided with the Congress accession to Government. The complete absence of any programme of the left, (which would approximate to the Congress constructive programme), which would fill up the political vacuum resulting from withdrawals or truce was really the achilles heel of the left politics.

In the ultimate analysis, the Provincial left politics was based on a grand myth that masses are or could be induced to be in a perpetual state of revolt. Revolutions of any sort, whether Marxist or bourgeois democratic is a long drawn out process and there are no short-cuts. The left grievously erred in imagining a perpetual state of conflict on a particular pitch which would ultimately lead to a dramatic change. In Bihar this myth, always

landed them up in a cut-de-sac, once periods of lull began. Thus, in the period spanning from the end of 1939 to the end of 1941, the socialists had virtually nothing to offer, once the peasant movement had petered out. The situation for them was saved by the outbreak of the war which saw them return to the ranks of the Congress.

In Bihar, the absence of a long-term programme on the part of the left had more serious consequences, since the right winger was so well entrenched. This absence meant that whatever the "reserves of hegemony" the socialists created for themselves was lost in the long run to the Congress leadership which, obviously had a more historically appropriate strategy and was more organised.

The clubbing together of the various elements who supported the provincial Congress as zamindars, had another important consequence. Bihar at the beginning of the 20th century, excepting Maharaja of Darbhanga and few other large and middle **land-owners** "most zamindars held only small properties"<sup>5</sup>. As we have seen through protracted work, the Congress had over the years hegemonised most of these classes (excepting a section of the big Zamindars

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5. According to Heningham, in Darbhanga, around this time, each Zamindar on an average held 15 acres and had an annual rental income of Rs. 85. Stephen Heningham "Bureaucracy and control in India's great landed estates, the Raj Darbhanga of Bihar 1879-1950, Modern Asian Studies, Vol. 17, 1978, P. 37.

who definitely <sup>dithered</sup> in the early 1930's being conservative owing to their propertied interests) especially the smaller propertied ones, against imperialism. This was most clearly evidenced during the Civil Disobedience Movement, when despite the sweep of the movement it remained vigorously anti-imperialist. When the kisan sabha and subsequently the socialist movement began, it was these smaller propertied interests who provided leadership and formed the backbone of the left movement in Bihar. Therefore, the struggle between the right and left was also a struggle to hegemonise the most political sections of small peasantry and landlords.

Given this background, the left in Bihar (including Sahajanand) though he had realised very early that the kisan sabha movement rested almost wholly on the more affluent sections of the peasantry. Most of the 'class' demands on which the sabha agitated like lowering of canal water rates, better remuneration for sugar-cane cultivators, better irrigation facilities, grant of occupancy status to non-occupancy tenants etc., reflected the demands of this section) made a monumental blunder in not distinguishing between various sections of the peasantry and the aggressive use of the anti-zamindar rhetoric completely scared off the small landholders who were also subsumed under the omnibus, Zamindar category. Importantly, this pugnacity of the provincial left coincided with a particularly comfortable period for the small landholders who had gained considerably following the depression on account of

"personally supervised cultivation" (which increased their margin of profit as compared to the bigger estates where the management tended to soak some part of the profit), "financial reserves" and "local influence".<sup>6</sup> It is only after the Tripuri session and before the Gaya session of the AIKS that there is some stray evidence of socialists making distinction within the peasantry. But this was more of an exception, than rule for the whole period.

As for the provincial zamindars, being collaborationists, this was at best an ideological prejudice rather than a historical reality. Though strictly this issue is beyond the concerns of this dissertation, it can be argued that the position of the Zamindars was fairly ambiguous and certainly not as clear-cut as the Socialists imagined. Prominent Zamindaries like Darbhanga in the mid-1930's, while spearheading the move to revive the United Party, at the same time, kept channels of communication open with the Congress and responded though reluctantly to the various agrarian legislations.<sup>7</sup> This clearly marked them off from the Taluqdars of neighbouring U.P. where they had become "clearly identified as a bulwark of the British rule", which was partly the reason why

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6. Stephen Heningham, Peasant Movement in Colonial India, P.151.
  7. About Maharaja of Darbhanga, even Heningham makes the same point. According to him, he, "kept on good terms with the British, but also presented himself as a moderate nationalist, maintained a friendship with Rajendra Prasad, and donated covertly to Congress funds". ibid., P. 197.

the Provincial Congress could pass a more radical anti-zamindari resolution.<sup>8</sup>

In any case, the crucial thing for us is that if the left had to compete with the more advantageously placed right wing for a common social base, they had to have a more carefully worked out strategy, the crux of which would have to be a more moderate position on the agrarian question and which would strike a better balance between Swaraj and Socialism than what was being offered by the right wing.

Apart from the sheer short-sightedness of the socialist strategy they were also confronted with a relatively conservative but entrenched provincial right wing. A history of their hegemonic control over the Bihar peasantry has been sketchily described in the second chapter. Most of the Provincial Congress Committees like U.P. also had a broadly similar hegemony over various classes. But what accounted for their conservatism has not been studied. Probably the answer lies in the nature of the agrarian social relations where modes of oppression were diverse, the relatively late entry of Congress in provincial politics which kept the province insulated from the ferment outside, say in Bengal, as well as the absence of a leader like Nehru,<sup>9</sup> and crucially the absence of any

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8. ibid.

9. According to Hanser, "In the United Provinces, it was in fact under the strong influence of Jawaharlal Nehru that the congress called for non-payment of revenue and rent". Hanser, op.cit., P. 43.

history of social reform movement. In arguing against their political conservatism, however, it should be specified that one is not arguing from the standpoint of a revolution, but from the standpoint of carrying the various classes together against imperialism. The Provincial Congress in its attempt to perform this ~~un~~deniable task was effecting complex class adjustments. The general frame-work for effecting these class adjustments was provided by the Karachi, Lucknow and Faizpur resolutions. However, provinces had a certain autonomy in defining the terms of this adjustment so that every class may participate against imperialism.

In Bihar, without any exaggeration, it could be argued that the PCC was effecting class adjustments very much in favour of the substantial landholders, especially the petty Zamindars and the emerging rich peasantry. At the time when the neighbouring United province PCC passed a resolution, calling for Zamindari abolition, BPCCC was reluctant to implement the provisions of Faizpur programme either in letter or spirit. This was one of the frequent accusation of the provincial left and it, no doubt, carried some substance.

While the Provincial Congress had introduced a number of agrarian reforms through its the various legislations, like the lowering of salami, abolition of illegal exaction, reductions in rent and the interest charged and regulation of money-lending activities, restoration of (bakasht) lands which had been attached by the



Zamindars after 1929, clearly the legislations did not go very far, even if we concede that the demands of the left were exaggerated. For instance, salami or transfer fee was merely halved. Money-lending activities was not restricted and the rate of interest charged was merely reduced to 6 to 7 percent, a concession which did not meet the Faizpur promise of removing "the crushing burden of rural debt" and a "moratorium" on it. The Faizpur programme had also envisaged exemption of uneconomic holdings from rent and "fixing of tenure with heritable rights". But while in the case of former no legislation was passed whatsoever in the case of the latter the Bakasht restoration Act, did not amount to much as it defined "petty" landlords so widely that nearly 99% of the small landlords who had stood to gain the maximum in the aftermath of depression remain unaffected by the scope of its provisions.<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, a good part of what was given by the left hand was taken away by the right because of atleast two major clauses of the Congress-zamindar agreement. Firstly, there was the "distrainment" clause under which the landlord could appropriate his tenants crop in lieu of non-payment of rent, which seriously undermined the rent concessions granted under the Tenancy Amendment Act. Secondly, the certificate power continued to be exercised by the landlord. Under this the landlord could move the court for

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10. For a brief discussion of this see G.P. Sharma, op.cit., pp. 223-40.

the issue of a certificate for the collection of his rent and could hold his tenants land as long as the rent was not paid back.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, Prof. Bipan Chandra's generalised contention that class adjustments were effected at the "peasants **unilateral** cost".<sup>12</sup> was singularly true for Bihar. A politically conservative position like this, in the face of a fairly prolonged and incinerous peasant movement, backed by the socialists was bound to produce an explosive situation

The politically conservative reaction of the dominant leadership was further complicated by an extremely conservative and oppressive social order. Although a comparison like this cannot be quafified it would not be an exaggeration to argue that the landholders in the province were much more given to oppression of diverse kinds, in comparison totheir counterparts elsewhere. A.N. Sinha recollects that in Gaya district when the kisans refused forced labour and resisted atrocities, petScorpions of the zamindars were released in order to terrorise them into submission.<sup>13</sup> In Darbhanga, in the course of the kisan Enquiry Committee's study this is what a women reported to the members, "I was brought to the Kutcherry (lower court) where I was ordered to be made naked and my legs were tied with those of my father-in-law".<sup>14</sup>

Primarily this violence stemmed from a 'limited Raj'which the colonial state excercised over the Bihar society

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11. See chapter III of this dissertation.  
 12. Bipan Chandra, 'Peasantry and National Integration'in Colonialism and Nationalism in Modern India, Orient Longman, 1979, P. 348.  
 13. A.N.Sinha, op.cit., P. 203.  
 14. Searchlight, 31-7-1936.

which left traditional structures intact thereby giving considerable autonomy to the property-holders and which relied considerably on the acquiescence of the village elite.<sup>15</sup> In the ministry period even when the Congress Government sought to sincerely push through agrarian legislation it was met with an entrenched and change-resistant bureaucracy. As A.N.Sinha the then Finance Minister later recollected, the bureaucracy met the agrarian legislation with non-compliance and even distortion in implementation and frequently insisted upon arresting prominent sabha leaders which led to considerable acrimony within the Congress.<sup>16</sup>

Secondly, quite apart from this, the position of the propertied, was reinforced by the exclusively political objective of the Congress concerned as it was primarily with the goal of attaining Swaraj. This, notwithstanding the intentions of the leadership, served to abdicate this structure of social oppression. Finally, to cap it all, it can hardly be argued that the entire leadership of the provincial Congress was Gandhian, in the sense that Rajendra Prasad was or even the top leadership of the BPCC. In fact, as the evidence relating to the election of delegates to the Haripura and Tripura session and the report of the committee on violence

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15. Heningham has borrowed this phrase from Anand. A Yang's study of Bihar to explain the frequent bursts of autonomy and violence on the part of the landed sections. See, Heningham, Peasant Movement in Colonial India, P. 199.

16. A.N. Sinha, op.cit., pp. 272-3.

shows, the local level congressmen frequently reflecting the attributes of a 'limited Raj' were conservative and given to violence and would go to considerable length to preserve their property and predominance in the Congress organisation.

The combined effect of an unfounded strategy and the predominance of conservative elements within the BPCC led to their second major failure. This was its inability to effect our organisational transformation within the Provincial Congress. The schism between considerable ideological reserves outside the Congress and at best a feeble presence within the organisation constantly hampered their prospects of realising the potentialities of the situation. Given the fact that the Congress was an open and a democratic organisation, the only way to influence its policies was to have a say at the various rungs of the body. The socialists negligible presence in Bihar at the various levels of the Congress seriously impeded this endeavour to affect an organisational transformation which in turn marred their prospects of infusing a leftward shift in the Congress. Even the DCC's which the socialists captured like the one in Gaya, the only kind of activity it appeared to do within the BPCC was complete non-co-operation and denunciation of the provincial leadership. For the socialists, their endeavour was further complicated by bitterness within the various left groups which led them to clamp down on the intake of membership

after 1938, following the large scale appropriation of their organisation and cadres by the CPI.

On the other hand, the success of the socialists in Kerala reflected a conjuncture of a number of events. Firstly, as compared to Bihar, in Kerala the left wingers did not meet an entrenched (to use an often used phrase) Gandhian leadership.<sup>17</sup> In fact Congress organisation seemed to exist almost symbolically till well after the second civil disobedience movement. Gopalan Kutty's study of the Civil Disobedience Movement in Malabar clearly states that prior to the movement Congress was not at all a well-knit organisation and it was the civil disobedience movement which activated the process towards the formation of a better organisation".<sup>18</sup> This organisational disarray combined with a fragile ideological hold of the Gandhians which partly stemmed from the fact that the Provincial Congress was not as deeply identified as an organ of struggle as say in Bihar. Gopalankutty notes, "a total absence of no tax and no rent campaign", in the course of the movement, which circumscribed it "largely to urban areas".<sup>19</sup> The Malabar DCC, un-

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17. A.K. Gopalan, somewhere also makes the point that the absence of the Congress as well as the CPI in the Province "made it possible (for the Communists) to start anew". Quoted in Bhagwan Josh, op.cit., P.313.  
18. The Congress had meagre financial reserves. In 1930, the KPCC had only Rs. 400 in hand. K. Gopalan Kutty, 'Mobilisation against the State and not against the Landlords: The Civil Disobedience Movement in Malabar', IESHR, Vol. XXVI, No. 4, Oct.-Dec., 1989, pp. 470-2.  
19. Gopalan Kutty makes this point for the Malabar region. ibid., P. 476.

doubtedly the storm centre of Congress politics, till mid-1930's still had "too little or no contact with the masses in the district".<sup>20</sup> A.K. Gopalan makes the same point for the Wayanad DCC by asserting that "Congress work was an uphill task at this time (i.e. around the time of the civil Disobedience Movement). There were no Congress Committees nor funds."<sup>21</sup> Namboodiripad's report to the AICC on the mass contact issue, in Walluvanud Taluka, the lowest unit in the Congress organisation, perhaps gives the best picture of its lower level organisational activities. In his report, he lamented the absence of mass contact because of the non-existence of constructive programme as well as the PCC's hesitation in not taking up the economic grievances of the masses. At the organisational level, the report pointed out that the primary members, numbering less than 500, 'do not meet at all' and the composition of the Taluka Congress Committee comprised mainly of the "upper layers of society", with practically no representation of the actual tillers and the industrial labourers.<sup>22</sup> While for Cochin evidence is not forthcoming, in the Princely state of Travancore, Congress was formed around mid-1938. Though it must be added that Gandhi and the Congress were well known there because of the glorification by the media.<sup>23</sup> At any rate, the crucial point for us is that because the Provincial Congress had a relatively shorter existence and

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20. 'Report on the mass contact programme, Malabar DCC' J.P. Papers, F.No.116, NMML.
21. A.K. Gopalan, In the cause of the People Remniscences, Orient Longmans, 1973, P. 19.
22. J.P. Paper F.No. 116 NMML.
23. Robin Jeffrey 'A Sanctified Rebel - Congress in Travancore Politics, 1938-48' in D.A.Low(ed), Congress and the Raj, p 445

also since it was not as yet identified in the popular perception as an organ of struggle (since constructive programme and economic grievances of the peasantry was not taken up in right earnest), it had not entrenched itself as comfortably as in Bihar. Also since it also was in considerable organisation disarray, both these factors combined to make the job of the left wingers much easier.

Secondly Kerala had a very strong and live history of social reform movement. Most of the prominent communists had at some stage or the other been involved with these movements in fact it would not be terribly off the mark to argue that only those provinces had a strong left movement which had experienced somewhere along the line a strong social reform movement. This was true of not only Kerala, but also Bengal, Punjab and Maharashtra. The exact link between the two is hard to establish here, since that itself forms a separate subject for enquiry and is beyond the scope of our concern. However, as a generalisation it can be argued that social reform movement accounted for widespread politicisation at the most basic of levels (marriage etc.), loosened up the caste structure doing away with various forms of domination, secularised the society and created a certain conception of egalitarianism. Moreover, questioning one logic of domination led to another culminating finally in questioning the very basis of contemporary poverty and exploitation whose solution was provided by the

Congress, in terms of overthrowing the colonial state. In Kerala this was best evidenced in the evolution of A.K. Gopalan's politics, who traced his earlier politicisation to the participation in the Vaikom and Guruvyoor satyagraha. At an earlier stage, he was also a leading member of the North Malabar Nair Society.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, Namboodripad started off as an activist for reformation among the Namboodri Brahmin and from here proceeded to socialism and finally became a communist.

Apart from the favourable historical condition which accrued to the Kerala socialists, they also followed a strategy, quite different from that of their counterparts in Bihar. In essence the socialist strategy in Kerala envisaged a "mutually complementary approach between the growth of workers and peasants movements and the growth of Congress into a mass organisation."<sup>25</sup> "This proposition was, for instance, best exemplified in Namboodripad's thesis "How to work jointly with the progressive forces of the province" which was passed at the Fourth Conference of the Kerala CSP in 1937, at the height of the grassroot ferment all over India. The salient features of EMS's thesis were (a) cooperation with the Congress right wing in popularising the agrarian programme instead of spending time in criticising it, (b) joint front with the propo-

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24. Gopalan recounts that after the Vaikom Satyagraha (1927) he for the first time ate publically at a ezhva's (a caste of untouchables) house and in the following year joined the Congress constructive programme. He was also active in the Guruvayoor Satyagraha, which according to him had "created an impetus for social change throughout the country". For more details, see A.K. Gopalan, op.cit., pp. 2-32.
25. Bhagwan Josh, op.cit., P. 318.



nents of constructive programme, and, (c) as regards Travancore, joint front with those elements of communist organisation who stood for workers and peasants demands.<sup>26</sup> It was this fusion of nationalism under the Congress with solid ideological work among the peasantry and the working class, which put the Kerala socialists in a position radically different from that of the left in Bihar. In more real terms this meant that, those provincial right wingers (like Kelappan for example) who sought to discredit the socialists for one reason or the other,<sup>27</sup> failed in their endeavour, because, "people knew them as dedicated Congressmen"<sup>28</sup>.

The crux of the matter for the Bihar socialists was their plapable inability to reconcile the twin goals of socialism and swaraj. While their periodic proclamations ritually invested faith in the congress, in real terms they always gave precedence to the goal of socialism. What the socialists practised in Bihar (though <sup>the</sup> critically never made it explicit owing to their allegiance to the Congress.) the communists had made a theory out of it (i.e. Congress as representing class interests, nationalism as bourgeois in nature etc.), Therefore, at a basic level, the politics of both

26. Congress Socialist, 3-7-1937.

27. Gopalan recalls that there was considerable tension between the left and the right during the ministry period where, the latter had formed a 'Congress Gandhi Samagham' under Kelappan's Presidentship. Throughout the ministry period there was considerable conflict between the left and the right wing, in Kerala, and, "to oppose anything done by the socialists and not to co-operate with them <sup>become</sup> their obsession A.K.Gopalan op.cit., pp. 88-9.

28. Bhagwan Josh, op.cit., P. 319.

hinged on a gross fallacy, best articulated by Prof. Bipan Chandra, which needs to be quoted at length. According to him, the central problem of communists-

"lay in their inability to see the principal or central contradiction of colonial society that is the contradiction between colonialism and the entire Indian society ... Nationalism and anti-imperialism was not seen as representing the interests of all classes ... but as something which was bourgeois. Here was an incorrect transfer of the theory of nationalism to a colonial situation. The question here was: would one be a nationalist from a bourgeois point of view or from a proletarian socialist point of view ... The task in India was not that of the working class or the communist party supporting bourgeois because of the historically progressive character but to wage the nationalist struggle because it was the struggle of the Indian people including that of the working class:<sup>29</sup>

When all is said and done about the socialists it must be admitted that beyond all the debates, they were as fiercely committed anti-imperialists as anyone else at that time. Although the peasant movement led by them failed to achieve its long term goals, on an immediate basis it created a palpable impact on the economic programme of the provincial congress compelling it to implement its various pledges. Moreover, the onslaught wreaked

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29. ibid., P. 308.

on the Zamindars laid the basis of the Zamindari abolition legislation initiated by the Congress immediately after independence. The socialists in Bihar as elsewhere, formed the critical element within the Congress which provide movement to the Congress led anti-imperialist movement. In the long run, though some of their cadres were absorbed by the Congress, the remaining lot remained the pioneers of the left movement within the Province. Some continued the old socialist tradition and this trend still survives though as a minor force, as is evidenced in the recent emergence of a socialist party on the eve of 1989 General Election. The remaining cadres splintered off by joining the CPI (in fact provided the bulk of their initial leadership in Bihar). Moreover it is not just a mere coincidence that the storm-centre of contemporary peasant ferment was also the hub of Sabha-Socialist activity-areas like Patna, Gaya, Monghyr and Muzaffarpur districts. In that sense the socialists contributed substantially to the establishment of traditions of protest within the Province, as well as outside. Socialist movement also threw up leaders like Jayaprakash Narayan, who was intricately linked up with the political developments of the Post-1977 emergency phase, and even in the newly formed Janata Dal Government, there are sizeable number of people (including ex-Congressmen) who continue to swear by his name. Despite all the short-comings the socialists were pioneers in the sphere of left and 'alternate' politics in the Province.

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