OFFICE ACCEPTANCE AND THE CONGRESS 1937-1939: PREMISES AND PERCEPTIONS

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Certified that the dissertation entitled OFFICE ACCEPTANCE AND THE CONGRESS 1937-1939: PREMISES AND PERCEPTIONS submitted by Mr. Gyanesh Kudaisya is in fulfillment of eight credits out of the twenty six credits for the degree of Master of Philosophy of this University. This dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree of this University and is his own work.

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

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Problematique

This study, a prelude to a more comprehensive and ambitious research project on the Indian National Movement during the 1930s and "40s, was undertaken largely as an exercise in self-clarification. The objectives of this study were:

a) to critically analyse the existing historiographic understanding of the period and to evaluate the adequcy and validity of some of the analytical categories/concepts used to "explain" the politics of the period; and

b) to identify and prioritise issues and themes for further research.

Keeping in view this exploratory nature of our task, it was decided to initially undertake the study in the form of a broad, synoptic survey of all - India politics rather than rush in for a study of a specialised nature, specific to a theme and region.

This was felt advantageous, not only because of my own very limited theoretical apparatus, but also because it was felt that research on a particular theme, specific to a region and time-frame, would be fruitfull only when:

// one is well-grounded in the literature, both historiographic as well as primary, relating to the period and is able to analyse the validity of the concepts used;

one is familiar with the broad patterns of politics at an all-India level so as to understand the process of how rural grievances and local concerns were incorporated in larger nationalist politics; and

one is able to construct a tentative scheme of typification of the various types of politics, undertaken by different groups/classes, which are designated under the broad spectrum label of "nationalist politics".

The period 1937-39 was selected for the study as it represents one of the most complex and interesting conjunctures in nationalist politics. It was during this period:

* that the Congress was a protest movement as well as the local administration in six provinces;

* that the battle for ideological as well as organisational hegemony over the National Movement was waged most intensely;

* that the Congress' claims to hegemony were seriously challenged by various political groups/sections such as:

  # the Kisan Sabhas which, in conjunction with some trade union activists, emerged as a left-wing oppossition to the Congress ministries in some provinces and challenged the notion that the Congress championed the cause of the peasantry,

  # the Communalists, mainly the Muslim League, which challenged the claim that the Congress represented the minorities and could speak on behalf of all sections of Indian society. The League sought to propagate the notion that the Congress was trying to

establish a "Hindu Raj" and was increasingly attracted to seperatist politics, leading eventually to the adoption of the Pakistan Resolution, and

// the leaders of the depressed classes, mainly B.R. Ambedkar as well as the anti-Hindi agitationists led by E.V.Ramaswami Naicker; and

* that the Congress had to cope with the dialemmas and contradictons which were generated as a result of office-acceptance.

The need for synergy in the historiography of the Indian National Movement cannot be over-emphasized. However, new perspectives and methodologies will have to be evolved and fragmentary and sectarian perspectives abondoned for synthesizing research relating to different themes, regions and periods.

Study of perceptions, an integral part of intellectual history, can provide us the necessary integrative tools for achieving a high degree of synthesis. The new emphasis on perceptions has opened up a fascinating area of research as historians are beginning to relise that processes of continuity and change can be accounted for more fruitfully, not just by quantitative empirical data, but by studying "collective mentalities".

Hence the focus of this study has been exclusively on the perceptions of leaders. An attempt has been made here to reconstruct the scenario of 1937-39 through the study of perceptions. As a result, the focus has been more on the study of perceptions of the historical process rather than the process itself.

An attempt has been made to chart the perceptual field of reality of nationalist leaders by analysing their perceptions of:

-- strength ;

-- weaknesses;

-- opportunities; and

-- threats.

A major part of this study is devoted to the debate which took place among Congressmen over the issue of office-acceptance. The different and often conflicting notions of strategy of leaders vis-a-vis the Government of India Act (1935) as well as the assumptions underlying these notions have been analysed in detail. The debate on office-acceptance provides very interesting insights, not only about strategy-related issues but also about more fundamental questions relating to the nature and content of Indian Nationalism.

An attempt has been made to understand why offices were eventually accepted by the Congress by analysing the actual alternatives that were available to the Congress and by studying how the relative merits of these alternatives were perceived by contemporary leaders and participants.

At the outset, the undeveloped and tentative nature of this study must be explicitly stated. A major limitation of the study relates to the sources it is based on. We have relied almost exclusively on archival sources, mainly private papers of important nationalist leaders and British policy-makers, government records, contemporary newspapers and journals and memoirs and writings of some of the participants available in Delhi. No use of oral testimony has been made which is essential for the study of perceptions.

As clarified earlier, this study has been undertaken largely as an exercise in scenario building. Hence it need not be evaluated as a comprehensive history of the period under study ; nor any of the evidence or arguments presented here should be taken as conclusive. In reconstructing a scenario, effort has been made to assess the relative importance of various situational variables and to make a tentative attempt to explain why certain variables and ideas become social levers at a point in time.

At the time of commencing the study, it was decided the efforts would be

made to recreate a "prosopography" (collective biography) of leaders at various levels and extrapolate from their perceptions insights about nationalist politics. Unfortunately, the tradition of biography in our country is still undeveloped and very few good autobiographies and biographies of nationalist leaders are available. As a result, attempts to draw out meaningfull information from the very few biographies available proved to be of little use. Hence material could be collected only about important individual leaders ; the lesser known individuals at the middle and lower tiers of nationalist activity could not be covered to the extent desirable. Hence it is necessary to add the qualification that by "nationalist leadership" is meant a representative mix of individual leaders. However, care was taken to include individuals representing various ideological groups as well as points of views commanding wider political support.

Another major "limitation" of this study is the lack of a reginal focus. This, to an extent, was delibrate, although one is aware that such studies are increasingly becoming unfashionable. This is because the nationalist leadership, in its perceptions of strengths and weaknesses, looked upon the all-India situation in its totality.

1.2 Structure of this Study

This dissertation is divided into two parts, excluding this Introduction.

Part one, comprising Chapters 2, 3 and 4, deals with th prelude and premises which led to acceptance of offices by the Congress. In Chapter 2, the Gandhi-Irwin Settlement has been taken as a milestone to trace the main features of the period 1932-35. Similarly, Chapter 3 provides an overview of British policy during this period, especially with reference to the underlying

assumptions of the Government of India Act, 1935.

Chapter 4 discusses the great debate which took place among Congressmen on the crucial issue of formulation of strategies to combat the GOI Act (1935), especially over the issue of office-acceptance. The positions of various groups, their arguments for and against office-acceptance, and the undelying assumptions behind their notions of politics are discussed in elaborate detail in this Chapter. An effort has been made to understand how long-term (epochal) objectives are translated into short-term (conjunctural) goals and then worked out in day-to-day politics.

Part two of the dissertation consists of Chapters 5, 6 and 7 and focusses primarily on the changing perceptions of the nationalist leadership about Congress ministeries. The early perceptions of the leadership about mass mobilization and their assessments of Congress' position about ministry formation are briefly discussed in Chapter 5.

The formation of Congress ministries unleashed forces wich substantially affected the ideological and organisational reserves of hegemony of the Congress. This backlash to the Congress ministries is described in detail in Chapter 6.

In the light of the backlash, shifts and divergence of perceptions of leaders about strengths and weaknesses of the Congress, which eventually led to the clash at Tripuri, are analysed in Chapter 7.

Chapter 8 recapitulates the major points, which may have a wider concern going beyond the specific theme and time-frame, of our enquiry.

PART ONE

OFFICE ACCEPTANCE : PRELUDE AND PREMISES

CHAPTER 2

BACKGROUND/SCENARIO

2.1 Overview

Issues and themes involved in the debate over the question of office-acceptance can be logically understood and analysed only when they are studied in their historical context. For this purpose, it is necessary to delineate the broad features of the conjuncture in which the debate took place.

This Chapter attempts to reconstruct the major features of the conjuncture of 1931-34. Essentially speaking, this Chapter is an exercise in scenario-building. An attempt has been made here to provide a historical setting as well as to contextually link the issues, themes and perceptions relating to the debate on office-acceptance.

The Gandhi-Irwin Settlement of 1931 has been taken as a milestone. This is because some of the complexities, pressures and counter-pressures, dilemmas and the inherent contradictions of the National Movement, which were not only conjuctural but were long term in a spatial and temporal sense, were brilliantly highlighted in early-1931.

Beginning from the Gandhi-Irwin Settlement, an attempt has been made to reconstruct the essential features of the conjucture of 1931-34 as much of the ensuing debate between the Constitutionalists and the Non-Constitutionalists had its contextual origins in this period. Also the debate was conducted for chalking out a plan of action and was rooted objectively in the political situation of early-1930s. The debate was, therefore, more a groping in the

dark, an attempt to arrive at a plan of action and an effort at operationlizing politics in an immdiate political context. Hence the positions of the Consttutionalists and Non-Constitutionalists were decisively influenced by their concrete political experiences of the immediate past.

While trying to reconstruct the basic characteristics of the conjucture of 1931-34, the focus has been more of a contextual reconstruction rather than on analysis of perceptions or notions of politics.

2.2 The Eleven Points

The Eleven Points, formulated by Gandhi in January 1930 as his terms for not launching the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) (1), have been the target of much controversy. Nehru and other radicals within the Congress bitterly complained that in the wake of the famous Purna Swaraj Resolution, adopted only a few weeks earlier at Lahore, they came "more like surrender than anything else" (2).

Combined with this is the famous letter of the capitalist leader, Lalji Naranji, which Sumit Sarkar has quoted with such advantage :

> Gandhiji's Eleven Points or demands are more of economic nature than of political nature. It is, therefore, that the commercial community has put more explicit faith in Gandhiji or his organisation.... Government indifference has driven, we capitalists to work with socialistic organisations like the Congress.... I am sure no member of commercial community will think of Congress, if we get what we want, the Congress will be foremost in withdrawing the CDM. (3).

What was so attractive to the bourgeoisie in the Eleven Points ? (4). Of course, the demands relating to rupee-pound ratio, indigenous shipping, and protection for textile industry were essentially bourgeois in nature. But the rest of the demands had a far wider focus. The demands relating to abolition of salt tax and reduction of land revenue to 50% were aimed at mobilizing the peasantry. And the rest such as release of political prisoners and disbanding of CID were directly related to a wider movement for civil liberties and related

issues.

It would be naive to suggest that the Eleven Points were formulated by Gandhi at the instance of the bourgeoisie. It was repeatedly emphasized by Gandhi that "there is nothing new about them. Most of them have been handed down from Dadabhai Naoroji's time" (5) that is at a time when the bourgeoisie was yet to constiute itself as a class (6). However, these demands were definitely bourgeois in the sense that they represented a bourgeois societal perspective.

One serious criticism that has been made about the Eleven Points was that they did not incorporate the constitutional issue on which the Lahore Congress had expressed itself so resolutely. But even a preliminary study of Gandhi's personality and politics would reveal that constitutional questions were incidental to him. In his negotiations with British officials, constitutional issues never figured importantly and he always chose to verbalise them as "organic ability to severe the British connection at will", "equality", "partnership between equals", etc. This was because he was more interestd in transforming the relationship between the Colonial State and the National Movement in a hegemonic sense than in capturing state power in a piecemeal fashion. As he wrote years later:

> A non-violent revolution is not a programme of seizure of power. It is a programme of transformation of relationship ending in a peaceful transfer of power (7).

How were the Eleven Points perceived by the p articipants and leaders ? The demands relating to abolition of salt tax and reduction of land revenue to 50 percent were eminently successful in galvanising social support in the country-side. "Salt linked up in a flash the ideal of Swaraj with the most

concrete and universal rural grievance" (8). "It elevated Gandhi's "case to a higher moral plane and sharpened Indians' awareness of the conflict between their own material interests and those of Great Britain" (9). As soon it dawned upon the Colonial State that "what Mr. Gandhi is trying to manufacture is not salt but civil disobedience" (10).

The Eleven Points need to be seen not as the class programme of the Indian National Congress but as a means to reaching out to different social groups for harrassing them for Civil Disobedience. They were a set of concrete points around which a consensual type of politics was sought to be generated for challenging the Colonial State and for extending the hegemony of the National Movement. They were essentially an attempt by Gandhi to capture mass consciousness. To look upon them as the class programme of the National Movement or even as a bargaining counter against the Colonial State would be unjustified.

2.3 Bourgeois Pressures

Sumit Sarkar has done considerable research on the participation of the capitalist class in CDM. He has marshalled rich evidence to argue that capitalist pressures upon Gandhi played a decisive role during the course of the Movement.

Sarkar, in his study, choses to divide the Movement into two broad phases, "September-October 1930 may be taken as a dividing line between two broad phases of Civil Disobedience" (11). The first phase, according to Sarkar, "saw the high point of bourgeois participation in towns and controlled peasant mobilization on issues selected by the Gadhian leadership" (12). It was during this phase that bourgeois groups participated enthusiastically in CDM.

However, beginning from the autumn of 1930, writes Sarkar, there started

a spate of "alarm signals from business groups calling for compromise" (13). Throughout the later-half of 1930 and especially during early 1931, business lobbies continued to mount pressure on Gandhi for withdrawing CDM and entering into a dialogue with the Colonial State on the constitutional issue. Sarkar has drawn heavily on private correspondences of leading capitalists, especially Purushottamdas Thakurdas.

While bourgeois participation in CDM and mounting pressures on Gandhi were significant aspects of the National Movement, it would be wrong to see the centrality of the historical process in them, as Sumit Sarkar would like us to do. Pressures and counter-pressures of business groups were a constant and endemic feature of nationalist politics and need to be understood more objectively in the context of a wider constellation of social forces.

The fact that such business pressures did not in any fundamental sense undermine the autonomy of the Congress as a popular, anti-imperialist bloc is borne out by an interesting instance of Congress-bourgeoisie relationship" (14). Purushottamdas Thakurdas, the leading Bombay capitalist, tried to prevent Gandhi from launching CDM and urged him to attend the First Round Table Congress in London. He wrote to Gandhi in January 1930:

> I do not believe that India will benefit either now or within a few decades by revolution as much as by a process of evolution.... If the constitution is not sufficiently changed after the conference in London as to make us masters in our own house, I can understand your impatience, but to resort to Civil Disobedience does strike me as being a hasty step. (15).

Thakurdas's opinion typically represented a businessman's fears of extra-constitutional, mass politics. It can be demonstrated by studying the positions of various capitalists as well as their organisations that these fears

were shared by a large number of business leaders and what Thakurdas was voicing was not the opinion of an individual but that of the industry as a whole. Gandhi's reaction to such pressures was typical:

> I must not enter into argument with you for argument is useless when conviction on either side is deep-seated. I can only give you my assurance that I shall take no hasty step. A risky step may not necessarily be a hasty step. (16).

It would be interesting to know how the opinion of the same Thakurdas was transformed into the "groundswell of a class" (17), which Gandhi found so irresistable that he was forced to strike a deal with the Colonial State to turn `a bang into a whimper ?'

2.4 "Pressures From Below"

In his account of CDM and the Gandhi-Irwin Truce, Sarkar writes that there were emerging "sporadic but militant movements from below, a kind of less inhibited `second wave' which gathered strength in the countryside particularly in the context of the deepening slump in agricultural prices from the autumn of 1930 onwards" (18). The "early `official' type of Gandhian Civil Disobedience", based on, "relatively pro-propertied groups were losing some of their earlier potency" (19). "At the same time, there were signs of a `second wave', taking less-managable and socially dangerous forms, like no-rent or tribal rebellion" (20).

Sarkar concludes that "available regional data seem to indicate a broadly similar pattern from the autumn of 1930 onwards of simultaneous decline and radicalization: a weakening in forms associated with bourgeois groups or peasant upper strata (e.g. urban boycott and no revenue), accompanied by

sporadic but fairly widespread tendencies towards less-managable forms (no-rent, tribal outbursts, popular violence)". In such a situation, "moves towards some kind of compromise settlement were only natural, both for Gandhian leadership with its faith in controlled mass participation, as well as, for business leaders with their counting-house mentality and fear of peasant radicalism" (21).

While there is rich evidence, both from the Congress as well as from government sources, to suggest that in the fall of 1930 the Movement was losing its mass support rapidly, the evidence about the "second wave" of popular activity seems to be extremely sketchy. Barring tribal revolts in which the Congress had little experience and standing of any political activity, there seems to be no basis to suggest that there were "sporadic but fairly widespread tendencies towards less managable forms". Except for the UP, where there definitely was developing a situation in which potentialities of introducing a no-rent campaign were explored by the provincial level Congress leadership, evidence about possibilities of no-rent campaigns in other parts of the country is rather fragmentary. The evidence cited by Sarkar about "pressures from below" relates solely to tribal revolts.

2.5 Perceptions of the Gandhi-Irwin Truce

No exhaustive study has been undertaken to understand how the Gandhi-Irwin Truce was popularly perceived, although Hardiman and Gyanendra Pandey have made references in their respective studies of Kheda and the U.P. (22). However, available evidence strongly suggest that colonial policy-makers and administrators felt that the Truce had placed the Congress in a greatly advantageous position. Willingdon, writing to Samuel Hoare, the new Secretary of State, complained bitterly that the Truce "certainly has established a position in the minds of the people that Gandhi had acted as a plenipotentiary in

negotiating terms of peace with the Viceroy himself and that, therefore, there seemed to be two kings of Brentford in India" (23).

Similarly, Harry Haig, Member of the Viceroy's Council, wrote in June 1931 that "they (the Congress) will always try to twist round any agreement to convince people that they have been the victors. This was demonstrated by the Pact. ...what we require is a Constitution as early as possible that will give free scope to Congress activities and into which the Congress will come gradually but not by formal compact. We cannot afford to do anything that will increase the prestige of the Congress" (24).

Reminisencing about the Settlement, Willingdon was to write that the Truce "was a great handicap to the Government in its administration and an enormous advantage to the Congress in promoting their activities" (25).

The Congress was successful in projecting the Delhi Settlement as a victory, as is clearly borne out by different sources. "In the U.P. and Gujarat, the Pact was represented to the peasants as a mere `truce' or temporary suspension of hostilities during which Congress, the victors of the Civil Disobedience Movement, would present the peasants demands for redress" (26). For instance, Sitara Sahai, a Congress worker in Rae Bareli in U.P., proclaimed in a letter dated 8th March 1931 that "if the government agrees to our terms it will be a very good thing, but if we do not get a satisfactory answer, the struggle will begin again" (27). He asked the tenants to submit their applications in the Congress Office, and "the Gongress workers ... will see the Zamindars, Taluqdars and Deputy Commissioners, and try to get the rent suspended, remitted or reduced". The letter was prefaced by a message from Nehru which boldly proclaimed:

> Our peace is still far away. The more our strength increases the sooner we will have real peace and this is possible only when we obtain complete Swaraj ... We will take rest only when the troubles of the peasants are over (28).

It was noted by colonial policy-makers that the activities of the Congress were calculated to establish "its position in rural areas ... as an intermediary between the government and the landlord or the landlord and the peasant" (29).

Sumit Sarkar talks of the "profoundly ambiguous" consequences of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact (30), but at the same time writes that "the average Congress worker released from jail seems to have gone back to his village or town as a victor, a mood vastly different from the near total disenchantment and frustration of 1922" (31). This aspect is especially important in view of the fact that large numbers of political prisoners were released en masse as a result of the Truce. This in itself was important for an organization, whose total membership at the time of the Karachi Session was only 1,45,204" (32), and which had to undergo severe repression during which 92,124 political convictions took place (33).

In U.P. alone 4599 convicted prisoners were released as a result of the Truce (34). This immensely heightened the morale of the average political activist and contributed a great deal to the extension of nationalist support in the countryside. Gyanendra Pandey has shown that in the single district of Rae Bareli in U.P., after the Truce, the Congress had 32 offices, 8040 members, 13,081 volunteers, and the Congress flag flew over 1,019 villages (35).

Notwithstanding these important aspects, the real significance of the

Gandhi-Irwin Truce can be understood only at an altogether different theoretical plane. The endeavour of Gandhi to gradually transform the relationship between the Colonial State and the National Movement in a hegemonic sense reflected itself brilliantly in early-1931 when Gandhi forced the Colonial State to treat the National Movement on par and, therefore, was successful in demonstrating that a point of relative equilibrium had been reached between the Colonial State and the National Movement. He was able to concretely demonstrate the tremendous reserves of hegemony which the National Movement had accumulated over the years, and at the same time, by his unique understanding of the struggle, he was able to force the Colonial State to duly recognise this position.

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2. JLN Papers, cited in Moore, Crisis of Indian Unity 1917-40, p. 167.

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4. These Eleven Points were: (i) Total Prohibition; (ii) Reduction of the ratio to 1s 4d.; (iii) Reduction of land revenue to 50%; (iv) Reduction of military expenditure to atleast 50%; (v) Reduction of salaries of higher grade services to one-half; (vi) Protective tariff on foreign cloth; (vii) Passing of Coastal Reservation Traffic Bill; (viii) Discharge of all political prisoners;

   (ix) Withdrawal of all political persecution, abrogation of Section 1-24A, Regulation of 1918, and the like; (x) Abolition of CID; and (xi) Issue of firearms, subject to popular control. Young India, 30-1-1930, MGCW XLII, p. 434.

5. 'Young India,' 20-3-1930, MGCW XLII, p. 45.

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CHAPTER 3

ASPECTS OF BRITISH POLICY

3.1 Retreat Towards Simonism

The bureaucratic and political backlash to the Gandhi-Irwin Settlement was so strong both in India and England that soon demand for a shift in policy became irresistable. A strong conservative protest was led by elder statesman, Winston Churchill, who bitterly attacked the Viceroy for negotiating on terms of equality with the "seditious fakir". By May 1931, the Home Member was already convinced that the Delhi Truce must be "accompanied by the determination to strike at once and strike hard, if and when the settlement breaks down" (1).

This backlash was considerably strengthened by the success of the Right-wing at elections in England and the appointment of a Tory, Samuel Hoare, as the Secretary of State. The new policy aimed at showing "unmistakably that it (the Government) was able and willing to govern" (2).

By August 1931, the Government of India had started sounding local governments about "the vital necessity of a hard and immediate blow, if civil disobedience was revived" (3). And by the time the Second Round Table Conference (RTC) met in London, there were definite signs of a "retreat towards Simonism" (4).

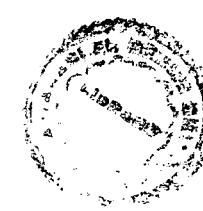
At RTC, the new policy of the Colonial State became unmistakably clear to all concerned. The Congress, it was argued with relentless fervour, did not represent all Indian interests. There were the numerous minorities, the princely houses and finally a whole class of zamindars and taluqdars. The Congress did not represent all these "interests". To prove this, there were "representatives" from these communities, class organisations, chambers of

princes and commerce. The Congress was treated on par with other Indian representatives; it merely represented another sectional interest. Its claims of representing all Indian iterests were fiercely contradicted.

The shift in policy reflected at RTC was significant. The whole set of assumptions on the basis of which Gandhi had opted for the Delhi Settlement were sought to be undermined. Every effort was made to demonstrate that the Gongress merely represented `sectional' interests; that there were many who challenged its claims to represent all Indian interests; that the Government was "able and willing" to govern India and it did not require the Congress's consent for it; and that a scheme for constitutional advance (the proposed Government of India Act of 1935) could be introduced without securing a mandate from the nationalist leadership. In summary, the whole attempt was to undermine, deny, contradict, de-recognise, and challenge the hegemony of the Congress.

Gandhi looked upon this negation of his claim to speak for all Indian interests as a fundamental challenge to the hegamony of the Congress. Registering his protest rather vehemently he declared:

> All other parties at this meeting represent sectional interests. Congress alone claims to represent the whole of India, all interests. It is no communal organization, it is a determined enemy of communalism in any shape or form ... Its platform is universal. The most bitter critics of the Congress will have to recognize as it has been recognized that the National Congress of India is a daily growing organization, that its message penetrates the remotest village of India; that on given occasions the Congress has been able to demonstrate its influence over and among the masses who inhabit seven lakh villages. And yet here I see that the Congress is treated as one



> of the parties. I do not regard it as a calamity for the Congress; but I do regard it as a calamity for the purpose for which we have gathered together here .... The Congress is the only all-India wide national organization, bereft of any communal bias, that it does represent all the minorities which have lodged their claims here .... The Congress, I say, claims to represent all these minorities (5).

By the time Gandhi returned to India, the Truce had already become a dead letter. In UP and NWFP, the situation was explosive and the local leadership was already exploring the possibility of a no-rent campaign. The situation deteriorated in other provinces also. And by the end of 1931, another phase of Civil Disobedience was looming large on the horizon. Congressmen were bitter with the experience of the Second RTC and the Colonial State was determined to demonstrate that it was "able and willing to govern" (6).

Within a few days of his arrival, Gandhi was arrested (7). In the single month of January, 14, 803 persons were imprisioned and during Feburary another 17,818 (8). By April 1932, as many as 74, 671 convictions had taken place (9). The Congress was banned, alongwith its other fraternal organisations. Most of its offices were seized and the properties of its important leaders and activists confiscated. The extent of repression can be gauged by the fact that no less than 272 organisations of various types were banned on the very first day in Bengal alone (10).

Even while the second RTC was in progress in London, the Government of India was making elaborate preparations to equip itself with a range of special and emergency ordinances to cope with the contingency of another phase of extra-constitutional struggle. These ordinances gave the Government and its local authorities almost unlimited powers (11).

D.A. Low has shown how the Second Civil Disobedience Movement was, in effect, smashed even before it could be formally launched and how it was decided soon after the Delhi Settlement that suppression of the Congress had become a contingent necesseity for the Colonial States (12).

However, this imperative need to supress the Movement could only be a short-term tactic. Colonial policy-makers realized that terms had to be made with the National Movement; that denial of Congress's hegemony at the RTC could be deceptively dangerous; that large-scale suppression could not be a lasting solution; and finally that a long-term strategy for coopting the Movement had to be formulated and implemented on an immediate basis (13).

3.2 Towards a Strategy of Cooption: The GOI Act of 1935

For evolving and successfully implementing such a cooptive strategy, it was necessary to prepare a climate conducive to the introduction of another phase of constitutionalism.

It had not taken much effort and time to repress the second wave of Civil Disobedience. Within four months (April 1932), Willingdon was already reporting conditions as "well under control", and Civil Disobedience to be "almost in a moribund condition" (14). By January 1933, he could write about India "enjoying a sense of confidence, security, and general restfulness from all worries of agitation" (15).

And by late 1932, the Colonial State had already started releasing prisoners. By January 1933, the number of political prisoners had come down from a peak of 74,671 to 14,000 (16).

All these measures were an attempt by colonial policy-makers to prepare a favourable climate for the revival of another phase of constitutionalism. Even at the height of repression in 1932, colonial policy-makers were convinced that a lasting framework for constitutional politics (in the form of the proposed constitution) was required to effectively cope with the National Movement and, more importantly, to prevent the outbreak of another phase of extra-constitutional struggle.

However, the manner in which such a long-term strategy for constitutional politics was to be implemented had to be carefully chalked out. Almost everyone agreed that the Congress was not to be consulted while formulating the new legislation. Haig, for instance, was convinced that "it is no way necessary to secure the cooperation of the Congress in order that the new constitution may be properly launched (17).

Haig's view was shared by the Secretary of State who thought that Indians must be "more and more forced back upon provincial autonomy as the first step to be taken" (18).

In fact, immediately after the Gandhi-Irwin Settlement, many policy-makers felt that the psychological victory gained by the Congress as a result of the Settlement must be offset not only by demonstrating that the Government was "able and willing to govern", but also by initiating a long-term strategy of cooption. Such a strategy necessarily involved introduction of another phase of "reforms". For instance, as early as May 1931, James Cerar, Home Member of Irwin's Council, believed that "the prudent, sound, and logical course to take" was to begin "the process of reform by establishing autonomous provinces, leaving federation to a later stage" (19).

Following this line of thinking, it was decided to rush through the proposed Government of India Act inspite of stiff conservative opposition at home and the boycott of the Third RTC by the Congress. It was felt that yet another constitutional garb was necessary to come to terms with the National Movement.

The Government of India Act of 1935 was intended as a concrete mechanism of this cooptive strategy. In a long-term sense, the objectives of this strategy were:

(a) to drive a wedge and secure a split between the Constitutionalists and the Non-Constitutionalists over the issue of entering legislatures and accepting offices in the provinces;

(b) to give "concessions" to the Constitutionalists with a view to ensure their apparent dominance in various political processes and to eventually coopt them;

(c) to smash the Non-Constitutionalists opposition in the name of " extremism"; and

(d) to encourage and foster resurgence of fissiparous tendencies through electoral processes to emphasise societal divisions along class, caste, communal and linguistic lines to weaken the hegemony of the National Movement.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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2. Moore, op.cit., p.205.

3. Home Pol. 14/12/1931. Note to Secretary of State, 4.8.1931.

4. R.J. Moore's phrase, op.cit., p.232.

5. MGCW, Vol XL VII, I, December 1931, p. 356, 357

6. Samual Hoare's phrase.

7. On 4 January, 1932.

8. Sarkar, op.cit., p.321,

9. Chandra, Bipan, Modern India.

10. Sarkar, op.cit.

11. Some of the major ordinances were the Emergency Power Ordinance conferring special powers against the press, the Unlawful Instigation Ordinance for dealing with no-tax campaign, the Prevention Molestation and Boycott Ordinance against picketting and intimidation of government servants and the Unlawful Association Ordinance, enabling the Congress to be suppressed. The Emergency Power Ordinance gave widespread authority to local governments for sanctioning arrest of suspects, seizure of buildings and prohibition of access to places, search of persons in premises and control over commodities and utilities of public use. Moore, op.cit. p.250.

12. Low, op.cit.

13. Tracing the origins of the Government of India Act of 1935, Percival Spear writes: "The strength and discipline of the Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930-31, and the skill of its direction had convinced the mass of conservative opinion that the national movement was not only a reality but a paramount reality. Terms must be made with it and, that being the case, a conservative government should seek to guide the movement along its own lines rather that put up futile barriers to be swept away one by one by an ever-rising nationalist flood". Spear Percival, A History of India, p.206.

14. Templewood Collection, cited in Sarkar, op.cit. p.321.

15. Willingdon to Hoare, 29 January 1933, Templewood Collection, cited in Moore, op.cit., p.292.

16. Ibid p.292.

17. 28 December 1932, cited by Moore, op.cit., p.250.

18. Samuel Hoare to Willingdon, 2 October, 1932, Templewood Collection, cited in Ibid., p.222.

19. Cerar's Minute dated 13 May 1931, cited in Ibid., p.192.

CHAPTER 4

THE GREAT DEBATE

4.1 Overview

The passing of the GOI Act of 1935 confronted the nationalist leadership with a totally new political reality. While there was absolute unanimity in the condemnation of the new constitution, there were fears, apprehensions and a wide divergence of perceptions about the strategy to be pursued for combatting the Act and promoting nationalist interest.

The ideological flux which characterised the National Movement during this period provided a fertile setting to the debate. In a way, issues relating to the Act and the subsequent dialemma over office-acceptance acted as catalysts in this process of ideological flux.

This Chapter discusses in elaborate detail the origins as well as the course and outcome of the great debate.

4.2 Origins of the Debate

The origins of the debate on office-acceptance can be traced back to 1933. In its Calcutta Session (April 1933), the Congress had reiterated that after "a careful survey of all that has happened during the past 15 months, ... the Congress is of opinion that in the situation the country is placed, the CD movement should be strengthened and extended" (1).

However, Gandhi was increasingly becoming skeptical about the desirability of continuing Civil Disobedience only in name and not in action. In May 1933, he publicly pronounced his views, perhaps in an unsuccessful effort

to work out an arrangement with the Colonial State to put an end to the "ordinance rule". However, his efforts at negotiations and peace failed as the Colonial State made withdrawal of Civil Disobedience a pre-condition for negotiations. As a result, the temporary suspension of the Movement was revoked by Gandhi.

Alongside, a section of Congressmen organised a conference in March 1933 under the leadership of Dr. M.A. Ansari to revive the programme of council-entry and the constitutional method of struggle. This Conference, held at Delhi was soon followed by another larger assembly at Ranchi in May 1933, where the All-India Swaraj Party was formally revived. Important leaders of the Conference were Ansari, Bhulabhai Desai, and Bidhan Chandra Roy (2).

All these moves at mobilising opinion in favour of revival of constitutional struggle paid rich dividends. Gandhi announced the withdrawal of Civil Disobedience on 7 April, 1934 and the decision was formally ratified by the Working Committee (WC) and the All-India Congress Committee (AICC) in May (3). A Congress Parliamentary Board was constituted and Ansari was elected its President (4).

As opposed to the moves of the Constitutionalists, radicals within the Congress organised an All-India Conference at Patna in May 1934 to undertake preparatory activities for the formation of the All India Congress Socialist Party (AICSP or CSP). The `Plan of Action', adopted at the Patna Conference, clearly laid down as part of the core programme: "Refusal to enter at any stage into negotiations on the constitutional issue with the British Government" (5).

At the Bombay Session (October 1935), theorising about the nature of the nationalist struggle, K.F. Nariman, the famous radical Congressman from Bombay,

declared:

> Those who have read history know that there have always been two wings fighting for the country's freedom -- one inside the legislatures and the other outside. I fully believe that nothing can be achieved within the Council chambers, if nothing is being done outside it (6).

This basic perception about the National Movement having two wings, each playing its role and dialectically supplementing the other, was shared by most of the Non-Constitutionalists. For instance Kamladevi Chattopadhayaya, seconding the CSP resolution moved by Narendra Deva, said: "Friends, I don't pretend to be an `orthodox' or a `no-changer'. All I contend is that a parliamentary programme will have no effect unless linked up with dynamic mass action" (7). She called for continuation of Civil Disobedience, as she felt that merely entering the councils without any mass activity outside would by futile. Her basic critique of the council-entry programme was that "they (councils) have been played with for too long" (8).

Most Non-Constitutionalist, barring a few like Nehru, did not have any fundamental critique of the parliamentary method of struggle. Most did not regard the parliamentary method as ideologically incompatible with their own notions of struggle. Their criticism of the constitutional method, strictly speaking, was situational. Many joined the bandwagon of the Non-Constitutionalists, not because of any clear political perspective but because of a variety of reasons which included attraction to unorthodox, adventurist symbols and a vague, undefined fascination for socialism (9).

The withdrawal of CDM in May 1934 evoked a mixed response from Congressmen. A section of Congressmen protested bitterly against the withdrawal. Subhash Bose and Vithalbhai Patel jointly denounced it in a

statement from Vienna as "a confession of failure" (10). They asserted that "we are clearly of the opinion that Mr. Gandhi as a political leader has failed. The time has come for a radical organisation of the Congress on a new principle with a new method, for whih a new leader is essential" (11).

This clearly was a denunciation of the Gandhian leadership. However, the denunciation came as a surprise to many as Vithalbhai was always regarded as an avowed Constitutionalist (12), and his overnight conversion to any new principle was seen as unlikely, although Bose's vauge, undefined radicalism was well-known. Perhaps Vithalbhai Patel's emotional reaction was rooted in the politically depressing context of the rout of Civil Disobedience -- a situation in which symbols of struggle often gain precedence over substance.

4.3 Nehru and the Radicals

4.3.1 During 1934

It was Nehru who most vehemently denounced the withdrawal of CDM and the revival of the constitutional phase. When moves were afloat during 1933 about the possible withdrawal of the Movement, Nehru felt that "withdrawal of Civil Disobedience would be a blunder of the first magnitude" (13). He felt that the fight was "essentially based on mass morale ... the whole basis of our struggle has been open defiance in order to inculcate character and backbone in our people -- and in this we have succeeded to a remarkable extent" (14). He justified the existing programme of continuation of Civil Disobedience on the ground that it was "potentially dynamic" (15), although he could not spell out the basis for his optimism. Nehru felt that symbolically it was necssary to continue the Movement, especially in the context of the "great deal of political depression in the country at present" (16).

Not only in his private positions but also in his public utterances, Nehru vigorously attacked all moves towards withdrawal of CDM, as he felt that they would inevitably lead to "liquidating our present strength", and "some form of compromise with British imperialism" and a "betrayal to the cause" (17). He believed "it seems to me to be folly to expect that a withdrawal of CDM will give us this opportunity, unless this consolidation means parlour talk and no action" (18).

This defence of the policy of continuation of Civil Disobedience was combined with a virulent attack on constitutionalism as well as on those who were sponsoring various conferences to press for the revival of the parliamentary programme. Nehru denounced such moves as "harmful to the country and in the interest of British Imperialism", and refused to argue with "those who can think and act only in terms of an impotent constitutionalism. Constitutionalism is dead and worms have already been at it and there is going to be no resurrection. Not even the National Congress can revive it ... To suggest that the impasse should be resolved by an attempt to revive the corpse of constitutionalism is to ignoe both historical precedent and existing facts" (19). For Nehru, the only desirable course of action was: "Carry on the struggle for freedom without compromise or going back or faltering!" (20).

By this period, Nehru had begun to sincerely believe that constitutionalism had become historically irrelevant and the era of non-constitutional politics had come about as a `historical inevitability'. "We have arrived at a stage when fundamentally our strength remains on the edge of illegality and unconstitutionality, and there can be no going back from it and having arrived at this stage the only choice that is left to us is either to go ahead or withdraw. There is no third way. People delude themselves into

suggesting various ways" (21).

Perhaps moves to revive the constitutional phase may have appeared to Nehru as attempts to put the clock back -- something as unimaginable as going back to the politics of the pre-Gandhian era. Therefore, when Gandhi finally withdrew CDM in May 1934, Nehru's violently emotional reaction was understandable. As he wrote to Gandhi:

> I had a sudden and intense feeling that something broke inside me, a bond that I valued very greatly had snapped. I felt terribly lonely in this wide world. I have always felt a little lonely almost from childhood up. But a few bonds stregtened me... a few strong supports held me up. But now I felt absolutely alone, left high and dry on a desert island (22).

In his violent and perhaps unjustified attack on the Constitutionalists, he continued:

> The leading figures of the Congress suddenly became those people who had obstructed us, held us back, kept aloof from the struggle and even cooperated with the opposite party in the time of our direst need...
>
> And so the flag of Indian freedom was entrusted with all pomp and circumstance to those who had actually hauled it down at the height of our national struggle...to those who had proclaimed from the house-tops that they had given up politics (for politics were unsafe then), but who emerged with a jump to the front ranks when politics became safe (23).

Talking of the new programme, Nehru wrote: "And what of the ideals they set forth before them speaking as they did on behalf of the Congress and the nation? A pitiful hotch-potch, avoiding real issues, toning down as far as they dared, even the political objective of the Congres, expressing a tender solicitude for every vested interest, bowing down to many a declared enemy of freedom. ...Is not the Congress being rapidly reduced to a magnified edition of that shameful spectacle, the Calcutta Corporation" (24).

4.3.2 Positions in 1935

However, by 1935, Nehru came round to a more reasonable and moderate position in his attitude towards Gandhi and the general Congress policy. His disillusionment with Gandhi proved to be transitory and by early 1935, he was publicly convassing support and projecting the image of Gandhi during his European sojourn (25). The initial disappointment had given way and Nehru was once again looking forward to Gandhi to come back and provide an active leadership to the Congress. In fact, by mid-1935, Nehru was anxious to ensure that Gandhi lifts his self-imposed exile from politics and return to the Congress to guide its affairs (26).

Not only this, a new kind of understanding was developing between Nehru and Gandhi and by late-1935 Gandhi was writing that Nehru's presidency at the forthcoming Lucknow Session of the Congress "is the rightest thing that could have happened for the country" (27) and "is enough for my purpose if you will shoulder the burden" (28).

In view of Nehru's strong views on the constitutional issue and his staunch opposition to the newly adopted parliamentary programme, a section of Congressmen, led by C. Rajagopalachari, strongly protested against the proposal to nominate Nehru to the Presidentship of the forthcoming Lucknow Session. His incompatibility with the existing parliamentary programme, his strong views on negotiations and office-acceptance scared many Congressmen who pressurised Gandhi to keep Nehru in the background (29). However, these arguements had little effect on Gandhi who insisted on Nehru's nomination to the Congress Presidentship.

Inspite of his consent to become the Congress President, Nehru still had serious reservations about Congress policy, especially in view of the impending

challenge of the GOI Act of 1935. As he wrote to the Congress President Rajendra Prasad:

> I feel that the Congress today is in a state of ideological flux and does not quite know its mind. Take the recent AICC meeting in Madras. All the major decisions were no decisions at all -- they were merely a putting off of the decision or a deliberate balancing on the fence. Our policy, all along the time, even mentality, is becoming more and more of non-action and not-thought ... The dynamic quality seems to have disappeared now and we have a lifeless body which neither thinks nor acts and over which old incantations are repeated to give it a semblance of life (30).

The `ideological flux´ and `deliberate balancing on fence´ and policy of `non-action and non-thought´ referred to inability of the Congress leadership to evolve a plan of action to combat the GOI Act. 1935.

4.4 Positions of the Constitutionalists

Nehru's attacks on the official Congress policy during 1934-35 did not go unchallenged. Gandhi, as was typical of him, took responsibility by saying that "the present policy of the Congress is in the main of my shaping. It is not one of drift. It is founded up on the central idea of consolidating the power of the people with a view to peaceful action" (31).

Nehru's attacks on constitutionalism and his impatience for "action" were considerably sobered down on his return to India and as a result of his parleys with his colleagues. On the issue of the GOI Act and the revival of constitutional struggle, Nehru was politically told that "the difficulties are

inherent in the situation...it is not possible to force pace or cause wholesale change.... In all big struggles we have to come across such situations and however much we may chafe and fume, we have to lie low and work and wait for better times" (32).

The positions of the Constitutionalists during 1935 towards the GOI Act and the future course of action were surprisingly principled and disarmingly realistic. Unfortunately, the only person whose positions are clearly available from historical sources is Rajendra Prasad. But he may be taken as representing a whole trend of thinking within the Congress. As Rajendra Prasad wrote in clear, definite, and unambiguous terms to Dr. M.A. Ansari in December 1936:

> I am one of those who believe that a party engaged in a mass revolutionary movement should not accept positions of honour, responsibility and profit until it has succeeded in capturing power. The reasons are that such acceptance creates personal jealousies among the workers, raises hopes among the masses which the party is not able to fulfill and thus a reaction against it sets in. This has been the experience of workers in other countries which has been confirmed by the very limited experiences we have gained in this country in the course of our struggle when we captured municipal and district boards and also partly when we have entered legislatures (33).

The notion of acceptance of offices was part of a larger perspective of building and extending hegemony of the National Movement over newer social classes and over new regions. The issue of acceptance of offices was perceived not in isolation but was seen as involving other issues. This is brought out to some extent by Rajendra Prasad's defence against Nehru's allegations that the majority of the leadership was obsessed with the prospect of office-acceptance.

Rajendra Prasad wrote to Nehru:

> It has been wrongly and unfairly assumed that the Working Committee has been thinking of nothing except offices under the New Constitution. We have not as a matter of fact given to the matter any importance. On the other hand, it is others who have been trying to force our hands to come to a decision.
>
> As it strikes me, it is not right to put it as if it were a question of acceptance or non-acceptance of offices. So far as I can judge, no one wants to accept offices for their own sake. No one wants to work the Constitution as the Government would like it to be worked. The questions for us are altogether different. What are we to do with this Constitution? Are we to ignore it altogether and go our way? Is it possible to do so? Are we to capture it and use it as we would like to use it and to the extent it lends itself to be used in that way? Are we to fight it from within or from without and in what way? It is really a question of laying down a positive programme for dealing with the situation created by the introduction of this Constitution in the light of the circumstances as they exist. It is not a question be answered a priori on the basis of pre-conceived notions of so-called pro-changer or no-changer, co-operator or obstructionist. ...We have to consider and decide the question irrespective of everything except the good of the country and the effect of our decision on the great objective we have in view (34).

Thus the question of office-acceptance was debated not on an apriori basis. The question was not perceived to be significant in itself. It was considered as part of a larger perspective of finding ways and means of extending Congress's hegemony over Indian civil society.

It becomes evident from the writings of Rajendra Prasad that Nehru was wrong in assuming that a section of Congressmen had become back-numbers and were no longer interested in non-constitutional methods and that their faith in constitutionalism had become so deep-seated and structured that they were no longer interested in mass, radical, popular politics but were merely interested in parliamentary methods.

This is brought out clearly by Rajendra Prasad, who in in his letter to Nehru, assured him that "I do not believe that any one has gone back to pre-non-cooperation mentality. I do not think that we have gone back to 1923-28. We are in 1928-29 mentality and I have no doubt that better days will soon come. We have been carrying on to the best of our lights and ability and no one can do more" (35).

Thus in their own self-perception, the Constitutionlists did not look upon the impending period as one leading to cooperation and compromise. This is significant, especially in view of the historiographic impression that by the mid-1930s, a large section of Congressmen were hankering for ministerial authority and were no longer interested in extra-constitutional, mass struggles. In fact, the Constitutionalists were as anxious as any one else to go in for a radical course of action to combat the GOI Act 1935. However, their perceptions and understanding were influenced by a number of considerations. These considerations (36), to a great extent, decisively influenced the decision in favour of office-acceptance.

4.5 Early Organistional Positions

The debate over the issue of office-acceptance was carried on at various organisational and informal levels and manifested itself in diverse forms. One major form was the intense propaganda campaign launched by various groups and individuals. The Non-Constitutionalists, especially Nehru and the CSP, utilised a number of forums like conferences, study circles, election campaigns, speeches, press statements and phamplets to convass support for their ideas. At this level, the Constitutionalists were not very active. Only a few like S. Satyamurthi and K.M. Munshi utilized methods comparable to the ones used by the

Non-Constitutionalists. Barring these and some others, the Constitutionalists did not employ matching propaganda methods. Most of their work remained confined to organisational forums. This was partly due to the superior polemical skills employed by the Non-Constitutionalists and partly due to the orthodox style of functioning of the Constitutionalists.

However, within the organisaional framework, the Constitutionalists showed remarkable skills at mobilising opinion and convincingly putting across their ideas to the average, small-town and village level political activist. They effectively succeeded in dominating various organisational forums available to them.

In fact, the issues (and non-issues), tone, scope, and broad parameters of the ensuing debate were set out in official communications issued by the top leadership. A number of circulars were issued by the Working Committee and the Central Parliamentary Board to subordinate Congress committees to obtain their opinion and verdict on the issue of office-acceptance.

In an AICC Newsletter, signed by J.B. Kriplani, the "fundamental objections" to the proposed Constitution were spelled out. Among the major objections were the following:

a) The Constitution that is being attempted to be thrust on India was not drawn up by representatives of India.

b) It gives no control over Army, Navy, Finance and Foreign Affairs, which constitute the substance of Swaraj to which the Congress is pledged.

c) The Constitution, as proposed, tends more to emhasize and perpetuate sectional interests to the deteriment of the national interest as a whole.

d) The scheme is designed to facilitate, perpetuate, and consolidate the domination and exploitation of India by Britain (37).

These fundamental objections were repeatedly used by local level activists in their propaganda against the GOI Act of 1935 during the election campaingns of 1936-37. Much of the arguements against the Act and the Congress' position towards it were derived from this document.

However, the "position paper" which really aimed at discussing the various considerations involved in the debate was a note prepared by Congress President Rajendra Prasad. Appropriately titled as "Pros and Cons of Office-Acceptance", the Note aimed at summarising the various considerations involved in simple, clear-cut terms. It was widely circulated among local level committees to delienate the issues involved and to concretise the debate.

About the possible disadvantages of office-acceptance and its resultant consequences, the note speculated as follows:

> Is not acceptance likely to have an undesirable effect on the mentality and outlook of the country at large and of Congress members in particular? Is it not likely to destroy or weaken the mentality of resistance and replace it by one of acquienscence?
>
> Is not acceptance of office likely to create expectations in the country which the Constitution makes it impossible to fulfill?
>
> To what extent are we likely to carry out the programme which the Congress has from time-to-time laid down?
>
> What effect is acceptance of office likely to have on the moral of our workers? If there is risk, should we face it? Is it possible to avoid facing it? (38).

Speculating further about the eventuality in which offices would not be accepted, the Note further discussed:

> Is it possible and desirable to avoid acceptance of offices when there are other individuals and parties in the country willing to work the Constitution in a way which may be detrimental to the best interests of the country;
>
> Do not people generally expect us to do them such good as is possible through the Constitution?;
>
> Is not the effect of exercise of power by their representatives likely to hearten and encourage them?;
>
> Is it not possible to strengthen and support the movement for freedom and particularly our organisational movement if we accept offices or at any rate shall we not be in a better position to prevent mischief and demoralisation? (39).

In any case, the significant point to be noted was the one which related to the time span of the ministeries, if offices were to be accepted as well as the programme of action to be adopted during the period of acceptance:

> Should it be a programme aiming at securing the maximum benefit till a crisis arises in ordinary and due course or should it be a programme intended to create a crisis at the earliest possible opportunity? (40).

The significant points which emerge from the above discussion may be sumarised as follows:

(a) The issues involved in the debate were perceived with a briliant degree of clarity. The questions were faced with an open-ended approach and were evaluated on their own merit, keeping in view the larger interests of the Movement. No abstract notions or theoretical principles were unnecessarily invoked.

(b) Non-acceptance of offices was not perceived as "struggle" nor was acceptance seen as "compromise" or "betrayal". Both the options were seen as

acceptable methods, nor was any sanctity attached to either of them. Neither of them were looked upon as sacrosanct.

(c) Most importantly, implicit in the notion of office-acceptance was the conviction shared even by the staunched Constitutionalists that the phase of office-acceptance and constitutionalism was to be merely a transitory phenomenon. It was generally accepted by everyone that the resignation of ministeries was sooner or later inevitable and was to be followed by another phase of non-constitutional struggle.

4.6 The Lucknow Congress and the Non-Constitutionalists

By the time the Lucknow Congress met (41), the issues, tone and parameters involved in the debate had crystallised. A major part in this crystallisation process was played by the 'official' circulars and communications issued by the top leadership from time-to-time.

To thses were added the intense propaganda campaigns carried out by the Non-Constitutionalists. Two distinct phases appear in the nature and tone of these propaganda campaigns. The first phase was characterised by general attacks on the arbitrary nature of the GOI Act. The focus during this phase was on attacking the British Government for forcibly imposing an unwanted constitution on the Indian nation which was intended to perpetuate colonial and vested interests and which did not recognise the right of self-determination of the Indian people and sought to challenge the hegemony of the National Movement. On the positive side, the propaganda campaign sought to popularise the demand for a Constituent Assembly.

However, during the second phase, beginning from the Lucknow Session, the emphasis shifted and narrowed down to the issue of office-acceptance. The condemnation of the Act continued with as much vehemance, but now the struggle against the Constitutionalists became a more immediate issue. Offices must be rejected at all costs became the war-cry of the Non-Constitutionalists.

This shift in the propaganda edge of the Non-Constitutionalists manifested itself at the Lucknow Session of the Congress. At Lucknow, Nehru presented the most articulate, consistent, and logically argued case for the rejection of offices. Barring the characteristic verboise, Nehru's and the Non-Constitutionists positions can be summarised as follows:

> I think that under the circumstances, we have no choice but to contest the elections to the new provincial legislatures .... We should seek elections on the basis of a detailed political and economic programme, with our demand for a Constituent Assembley in the forefront (42).
>
> One of the principal reasons for our seeking elections will be to carry the message of the Congress to the millions of voters and to the scores of millions of the dis-franchised, to acquaint them with our future programme and policy, to make the masses realize that we not only stand for them but that we are of them and seek to cooperate with them in removing their social and economic burdens. Our appeal and message must not be limited to the voters for we must remember that hundreds and thousands are dis-franchised (43).
>
> During the election campaign, the real danger will come from toning down our programme and policy in order to win the hesitating and compromising groups and individuals. If we compromise on principles, we shall fall between two stools and deserve our fall (44).
>
> The only solution of our political and communal problems will come through ... an Assembly, provided it is elected on an adult franchise and a mass basis. That Assembly will not come into existence till at least a semi-revolutionary situation has been created in this country and actual relationships of power ... are such that people of India are able to make their will felt. When that will happen, I cannot say. ... The actual details, as to how the Assembly is to be convened, must depend on the circumstances then existing and need not trouble us now (45).
>
> When we have survived the elections, what then are we to do? Office or no office?
>
> A secondary matter, perhaps, and yet behind that issue lie deep questions of principles and a vital difference of outlook, and a

decision on that either way, has far-reaching consequences (46).

> To accept office and ministry is to negate our rejection and stand self-condemned. National honour and self-respect cannot accept this position, for it would mean our cooperation in some measure with the repressive apparatus of imperialism. Of course, we would try to champion the rights of the people and would protest against repression but as ministers under the Act, we could do very little to give relief, and we would have to share responsibility for administration with the apparatus of imperialism, for the deficit budgets, for the suppression of labour and the peasantry (47).

> The big things for which we stand will fade into the background and petty issues will absorb our attention, and we shall loose ourselves in compromisees and communal tangles and disillusion with us will spread over the land. Offices will not add to our real strength, it will only weaken us by making us responsible for many things that we utterly dislike (48).

Discounting all talk about the possibility of an immediate revival of Civil Disobedience, Nehru admitted realistically:

> There has been some talk of a militant programme and militant action. I do not know what exactly is meant, but if direct action on a national scale and civil disobedience is meant, then I would say that I see no near prospect of them. Let us not indulge in tall talk before we are ready for action. Our business today is to put our house in order, to sweep away the defeatist mentality of the people, and to build up our organisation with its mass affiliations, as welll as to work amongst the masses .... Civil disobedience and the like can not be switched on and off when we feel like doing so (49).

Nehru provided the most coherent, logically worked out and articulately stated position on behalf of the Non-Constitutionalists on the issue. His speech at Lucknow can be taken as representing the essence of the arguements put forward by the Non-Constitutionalists.

Among others who spoke against office-acceptance, no one had anything also to say, except reiterate that, "by accepting the ministry, you accept the

constitution" (50).

M.R. Masani of CSP argued that the notion of "utilising" the Constitution was wrong. The Act, he said, has been devised by the British to "suit its own end any you may not work it for any other purpose" (51). He thus challenged the very notion of utilising and instrumentalising the Act and the opportunities provided by it to strengthen and galvanize the social support of the Congress. However, Masani, like other CSPites, was opposed only to the ministries and did not extend his opposition to the idea of the Congress participating in the elections.

One persistent criticism made by all the Non-Constitutionalists was that the policy of the Congress of postponing a decision on the issue reflected a sign of weakness, depression and lack of strong leadership and an intrinsic desire to take advantage of opportunities and situations. This expediency-based policy of the leadership was criticised, especially by Masani:

> My imagination fails to comprehend what uncertainities there are which can possibly justify us in accepting offices. ...The Working Committee seems to be like a set of political Micawbers who like Dickens' characters are always 'wanting something to turn up'. They resemble Micawber who was always bankrupt and yet always full of opportunism (52).

Not only this, the Constitutionalists were bitterly attacked for their "defeatist mentality" and "political pessimism". "The defeat in the last Congress fight and the depession in the political atmosphere ... encourage them to plunge down the slippery road of constitutionalism" (53).

4.7 Contextual Considerations

The Constitutionalists marshalled a number of arguments in support of office-acceptance. In the first place, the most important argument was based on their understanding of the current situation of political apathy and depression. The Second Civil Disobedience Movement of 1932-34 had totally demoralized the average nationalist activist. The onslaught of repression was so great that even as early as May 1933 Gandhi wanted to withdraw Civil Disobedience, although his attempts at negotiation failed and he had to continue the Movement against his wishes and eventualy withdraw it unconditionally in May 1934 without any workable formula for any kind of constitutional settlement. The moves of a section of Congressmen who wanted to revive the parliamentary programme began right from 1933 and were guided by these considerations.

Therefore, the Bombay Congress (1934) revived the parliamentary programme more because of nationalist weakness and severe state repression than due to any long-term faith in constitutional politics. Throughout 1934-35, Congress efforts at mass mobilization remained at a low ebb, although the whole focus of the Constructive Programme was "consolidation of people's power" and not a detour from the "fight for freedom" (54).

It is not possible to definitely assess the impact of the Constructive Programme in mobilizing mass support for the Congress and strengthening it as an organization in the absence of local level studies. But by and large it was clear that the possibility of reviving Civil Disobedience was bleak. This fact was apparent by the hectic efforts made during late-1935 and early-1936 to reorganize local Congress bodies and the emphasis put on mass contact and agrarian programmes at the Lucknow Session. Even Nehru in his Presidential

Address at Lucknow conceded that he saw no prospect for revival of Civil Disobedience in the near future. "Our business", he said, "is to put our house in order to sweep away the defeatist mentality of the people, and to build up our organization with its mass affiliation. ...Civil disobedience and the like cannot be switched on and off when we feel like doing so" (55).

Although the members of the CSP and Kisan Sabha activists talked a great deal about the need to launch another phase of non-constitutional struggle, their view was not shared by the majority of Congressmen who were uncertain whether the mass radicalization which had taken place as a result of intense leftist activity during mid-1930s could be transformed and sustained into forms of non-constitutional struggle. The need for organization-building, enlistment of new members, corporate affiliation of peasant and workers' organisations and mass contact clearly reflected the fact that the Congress was still trying to extend and consolidate its social support over various social classes as well as new regions.

This inability to transform the "latent support of the Congress" (56) into forms of non-constitutional struggle during 1936-37 is brought out clearly by intelligence reports for the period. The debate on the issue of office-acceptance and future course of action must be viewed in the light of these circumstances. The alternatives which were possible for the Congress at that point in time need to be examined concretely, so also the choices that were finally made.

Unfortunately, the objective limitations of the Congress as an organization and the weakness and limitations of its social support has not been realized or even discussed by any historian. Either the Congress is seen as an all-powerful organization which could mobilize popular support at any point, in

any form, for any programme or it is seen merely as a body of elites which instrumentalized the masses. The actual problems faced by the Congress in mobilizing various social classes, enlisting support and other organizatioal problems need to be understood and examined more carefully. The debate on office-acceptance and future course of action vis-a-vis the GOI Act, 1935 should be examined in the context of the actual choices/options available to the Congress in the specific political context.

4.8 The Constitutionalists Restate Their Case

This context of political inactivity was emphasised greatly by all those who argued for the acceptance of offices. The contingent necessity of promoting politics in the context of mass inactivity provided the basic justification to those who favoured office-acceptance. For instance, J.B. Kripalani, speaking in favour of office-acceptance at the Lucknow Session, argued very convincingly:

> We cannot lose sight of the fact that we are in the grip of depression. This should not mean we should not do little things because at present the sprit of doing great things is not in us. We are just like an army in barracks. What does such an army do? All its activity appears peaceful, tame, sometime even useless. The soldiers dig trenches that they fill up the next day, they go on big marches that go nowhere, they shoot at targets without killing.
>
> All this to the untrained eye has no value and leads nowhere but to the trained military eye, all this drilling, digging, marching and shooting, however, apparently useless, is a necessary part of preparation of war. If this was neglected, no army would be fit to fight. Even in a revolutionary movement, there may be time of comparative depression and inactvity. At such times, whatever programmes are devised have necessarily an appearance of reformatory activity but they are all a necessary part of all revolutionary strategy. When actual direct action starts, not only will there be no talk about ministry but even the councils, as in the past, may be emptied by Congress members (57).

Here was a briliant theorisation about the strategy of office-acceptance which provides fruitful insights about the struggle for hegemony between the Colonial State and the National Movement.

The idea of advocating office-acceptance was basically grounded in the politics of the period characterized by mass inactivity (58), during which the Congress was faced with the challenge of the strategy of cooption of the Colonial State, i.e., the GOI Act, 1935.

The Constitutionalists looked upon the question of office-acceptance essentially as an issue of strategy and not involving any fundamental principles. They sharply discounted and attacked the Non-Constitutionalists for confusing the issue and involving in it a whole range of other questions and sought to delink the issues of office-acceptance and socialism. Thus, Tenneti Vishwanathan, AICC delegate from Andhra, said: "To my socialist comrades, I would say, capture or rejection of office is not a matter of socialism, I would ask them to realize that it is a matter of strategy" (59). This view and priority about the issue was unanimously shared by all those who advocated office-acceptance. For instance, Hari Krishan Mohanti, a Congress worker, in a letter to the Congress President argued: "Entry into councils or an attempt to work them is not an end in itself. If there is a better and more useful programme before the nation, and if people's enthusiasm can be worked on such programmes, the councils would then naturally fall into the background" (60).

Similarly, the question was formulated and posed essentially as a matter of strategy by the leadership when local Congress bodies were asked to give

their opinion on the issue (61). The Constitutionalists in their reply to the polemics of the Non-Constitutionalists consistently argued that the matter should be decided essentially on grounds of strategy and not on the basis of abstract notions. As Rajendra Prasad put it mildly to Nehru: "It is not a question to be answered a priori on the basis of pre-conceived notions of so-called pro-changers or no changers, co-operators or obstructionists" (62).

Unfortunately, this clarity was not shared by the Non-Constitutionalists who looked upon the issue from a totally different point of view. Nehru, for instance, stroungly felt that "Behind this issue lie deep questions of principle and vital differences about outlook and a decision on that either way has far-reaching consequences. Behind it lies, somewhat hidden, a question of independence and whether we seek revolutionary changes in India or are we working for petty reforms under the aegis of British Imperialism. We go back again in thought about the clash of ideas which preceeded the changes in the Congress in 1920. We made a choice then and discarded the old, sterile creed of reformism. Are we to go back again to that blind and suffocating lane after all these years of brave endeavour ... that is the issue and let none of us forget it that we have to give our decision" (63).

The Non-Constitutionalists sincerely believed that constitutionalism as a historical force was dead and any kind of advance which had to be made in the struggle had to be through extra-constitutional, coercive methods, involving direct action by the masses. The AICSP was organised, among other principles, on the article of faith that any form of negotiation and all constitutional

methods had to be avoided at all times (64). Therefore, the question of office-acceptance was seen by all Non-Constitutionalists as an attempt to put the clock back by relying too heavily on constitutional methods. The Non-Constitutionalists sincerely blieved that a stage had been reached when only non-constitutionalist methods would succeed or should be employed against the Colonial State. Not only this, constant apprehensions were expressed by the Non-Constitutionalists about the possibility of co-option, de-radicalization of social support, organizational corruption and the inability of the Congress to fulfil its election manifesto and ultimately the resultant loss of hegemony (65).

As far as the apprehension of co-option was concerned, the Constitutionalists confidently rebutted the charge. As Vishwanathan reiterated:

> There is no office and there is no accepatnce. What lies behind this so-called idea of office-acceptance by the Congress is altogether different from acceptance by the non-Congressmen. There is nothing for the Government to give and the Congress to accept. Just as you fight every inch of your battle in the legislatures, so also you capture the ministries .... if you are not yielding to constitutionalism by driving your opponents from the legislatures, you are no more yielding to constitutionalism, or lowering the flag of the Congress by driving your enemies from the strategic positions of the ministers. Do not look upon ministries as offces but as centres and fortresses from where British imperialism is radiated.
>
> I am not one of those who believe that the idea of reformism or constitutionalism has come to take hold in the Congress .... The idea of revolution came into the Congress full fifteen years ago. Day after day it is increasing. The councils cannot lead us to constitutionalism, for we are not babies, we will lead the councils and lead them for revolutions (66).

This not only reflects the self-confidence of individual Congressmen but also the belief in the hegemony of the Congress over Indian civil society as well as the strength of this hegemony. The fact that the National Movement had come to acquire a hegemonic position by the 1930s, so much so that it could take calculated risks about co-option by temporarily accepting constitutional processes is significant. In fact, this confidence was shared by all Constitutionalists as well as by Gandhi. However, the Non-Constitutionalists were ill-at-ease and were apprehensive of the political opinions of people like Satyamurthi who, they believed, were keen to work out constitutional compromises.

Once the process of electioneering started with its resultant mass activity in which the Non-Constituionalists played a crucial role, these apprehensions soon gave way and no charges about co-option were made any longer.

Lastly, the argument which was used most convincingly by the Constitutionalists in support of office-acceptance related to the need to exclude and prevent reactionaries from coming to power. "We do not want our enemies to occupy those places and use rifles against our men" (67). An overwhelming majority of Congressmen felt that pro-imperialist and communal elements will use the ministries to undermine the Congress and the demoralization among nationalists will be further intensified (68). This view was shared by an overwhelming majorty of PCC's and other local Congress committees which gave their verdict in favour of office-acceptance (69).

Lastly, all those who advocated office-acceptance had the final

trump-card when they challenged the Non-Constitutionalists to come up with an alternate programme of action. The Non-Constitutionalists were consistently accused of vague talk about creating a Constituent Assembly. As Satyamurthi proclaimed at Lucknow: "There is no immediate alternative programme before the country and I challenge the socialists to place a programme before the country" (70). In fact, throughout the period, one of the main plank of Satyamurthi's campaign was that there was no alternative to office-acceptance. He consitently argued that there was no alternative to office-acceptance. He consistently argued that "it is for those who say that we must not accept ministership to show the way thereby the struggle for swaraj will be intensified" (71). This plight of the Non-Constitutionalists was consistently exposed by leading Congressmen throughout the period. As H.K.Mohani, a Congress worker, wrote:

> The socialists have not put before the nation a cut and dried scheme of action. At present what they say has a negative colour which will prehaps have a positive action in future. Their ideology and philosophy smacks of nebulousness and though impatient, selfless and reckless minds are attracted by their augmentation, they have not yet anything convincing to offer.
>
> As long as, therefore, a more heroic and more attractive programme from the point of view of inciting the masses is not before us, the councils which form a normal activity of the state will have to be dealt with for what they are worth, with a view to find a better substitute is its place (72).

4.9 The Issue Is Clinched

Having taken into account all thses arguments for and against office-acceptance as well as the assumptions which lie behind them, it is necessary to briefly recapitulate the exact process which finally lead to office-acceptance in July 1937.

Inspite of the efforts of Non-Constitutionalists to clinch the issue at the Lucknow session itself, the Constitutionalists were successful in deferring a decision on the issue. The official Congress statement which was passed by 487 to 225 votes in the AICC postponed a decision on the issue (73). This was resented by the Non-Constitutionalists strongly (74). However, the Constitutionalists were able to succeed in their tactics and many delegates seemed convinced by Satyamurthi's plea: "You are asked to suspend your judgement until you are in a better position to judge ... correct judgement is far more better than premature judgement" (sic) (75).

Once it was decided not to clinch the issue until the results of the election came, the Constitutionalists were in a definite position of advantage. This was because the focus soon shifted to the elections which restricted, to a great extent, the propaganda against office-acceptance and directed the energies of the Non-Constitutionalists more to electioneering.

The election campaign initiated hectic activity and Nehru personally travelled about 50,000 miles in the course of one month and, according to his own estimate, his meetings were attended by roughly more than 10 million people (76).

The election campaigns generated a great deal of mass enthusiasm and gave an opportunity to the Non-Constitutionalists to propagate their ideas. The Non-Constitutionalists were not only active participants but also tried to get as many nominations as they could to the assemblies (77). Sahajanand Saraswati organized efforts to gain as many nominations as possible for the Kisan Sabhaites and called upon all Kisan Sabha activists to participate more vigorously in the election to Congress committees (78).

Official reports about leftist activity during the elections reported that the Leftists were more interested in preaching propaganda against the Constitution. In fact, the whole election campaign was conducted by Nehru on larger politicl issues (79). Herbert Emerson, Governor of Punjab, wrote to Linlithgow that Nehru "is less concerned with the success of the Congress candidates at the polls then with the opportunity which the elections afford of propagating seditious ideas and preaching the programme of independence" (80).

The popularity of Gandhi was brought out clearly at the elections so much so that many people regarded "the ballot boxes as a letter-box for Gandhi and smuggled in petitions addressed to him with their voting papers" (81). This was inspite of the fact that Gandhi did not attend a single election meeting and his total contribution to the campaign was merely an appeal to the electorate asking for their support to reject the Constitution (82).

While the election campaign gave a substantial boost to the Non-Constitutionalists' popularity and provided them considerable opportunity to propagate their oppostion to the Act and to office-acceptance, the Consitutionalists were more successful in galvanizing support within the organization. The efforts of the Non-Constitutionalists continued at various levels. A number of political conferences were organized to mobilize opinion against office-acceptance (83). An Anti-Constitution Conference of Congressmen was held in March at Bombay which declared that "acceptance of offices for whatever purposes amounted to working the reforms and co-operation with the government" (84). This was followed by the celebration of Anti-Ministry Day at Karachi where at large public meetings it was declared that office-acceptance would prove disastrous for Congress and for freedom. The support of the All-India Kisan Sabha was also enlisted which prepared a manifesto elaborating the agrarian demands. The AIKS Manifesto considerably influencd the Agrarian

Programme which was adopted by the Congress at Faizpur and was substantially incorporated in the Election Manifesto of the Congress (85).

These activities continued throughout 1936 and mainly the CSP-ites continued to organize conference and meetings against office-acceptance. In November 1936, AICSP gave a call for a nation-wide hartal on April 1, 1937, when the new Constitution was to be introduced and made considerable preparations for it. Similarly, the AIKS in its annual session, which was held in the Subjects Committee of the Congress just before the Faizpur Session, passed a resolution urging "upon the INC, the imperative need of an unequivocal declaration at the Faizpur Session to the effect that the Congress representatives in the legislature will not become powers of imperialism by accepting office under the New Constitution" (86). The session was attended among others by Nehru, M.N. Roy, Narendra Dev, Jayaprakash Narayan, S.A. Dange, Sahajanand Saraswati, M.R. Masani, Yusuf Meher Ali and Shanker Dev.

Once the election results were declared, it became imperative that a decision be taken on the issue of offices. By this time, the opinions of subordinate committees, including a majority of PCCs, had become available. The verdict was overwhelmingly in favour of office-acceptance. By mid-April 1937, out of 18 PCCs whose opinions had been ascertained, only five had voted against acceptance of offices (87).

The Constitutionalists were immensely successful through their superior organisational skills as well as their convincing arguements in mustering opionion in favour of ministry-formation. The Non-Constitutionalists had no choice but to acquise under the massive popular pressure on the Congress to form ministries once the election results were declared.

However, once a decision was taken to accept offices, it was decided to hasten slowly by engaging in a long and uncertain dialouge with the Governors over the question of special powers. This tactic, it has been suggested (83), was a sop to the Non-Constitutionalists and, at the same time, was an attempt to off-set the impression that the Congress was "capitulating" from its earlier position of rejection of the GOI Act.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. AM and SG Zaidi (ed.), The Encyclopaedia of the Indian National Congress, vol.1.10, p.278.

2. N.N. Mitra (ed.), Indian Annual Register, 1933, Pt.1.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. CSP, Plan of Action, Jayaprakash Narayan Papers, File No. 21.

6. Defending the revival of the parliamentary method of struggle, Nariman continued: "The Congress Parliamentary Board is preparing the mentality of the people to fight, so that when the fight commences ... people can fight with greater strength and grit". Zaidi, op.cit., p.312.

7. Ibid, p.316.

8. Ibid.

9. This was often reflected in polemical outbursts which betrayed a very mechanical political understanding such as the one provided by Ali Bahadur Khan at the Bombay Session: "If the programme of the socialist is adopted, the rule by the peasants and workers will become an established fact. For their fight for independence with economic freedom for the masses, the nation requires men who do not retrace their steps in the fight that might follow. The socialist programme is dynamic and the programme of the Congress Parliamentary Board is of little use for them.... Now as regards the Communal Award for which so much noise is made, I say all this is all bosh. There is no communal problem among the masses who starve for food.... The ultimate remedy for the present social and economic malidies, the final solution by which the starving masses will get help, is by summoning the Constituent Assembly as mentioned by Pandit Jawaharlal where all important questions will be considered satisfactorily in the interests of all sections of the people". Ibid., p. 323.

10. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, History of the Indian National Congress, Part I, p. 561.

11. Ibid.

12. One of the best parliamentarians of his time, Patel was also the speaker of the Central Legislative Assembly till he resigned in response to Gandhi's call at the time of the Dandi March.

13. Nehru to Asaf Ali, October 12, 1933, SW, vol. 6, p. 43.

14. Letter to Nabakrushna Choudhary, October 15, 1933, SW, vol. 6, p.45.

15. Letter to Lala Dunichand, 2-11-1933, SW, vol.6, p.80.

16. Ibid.

17. Press Statement, published in "Indian Press", 27.11.193, SW, vol.6, pp.27-28.

18. Ibid, p.28.

19. A particularly emotional press statement to 'The Tribune' 11.1.1934, SW, vol.6, pp.87-88.

20. Ibid.

21. Speech at Albert Hall, Calcutta, 18.1.1934, ibid, vol.6, pp. 102-103. Nehru was later persecuted for sedition for making this speech.

22. Nehru to Gandhi, 13.9.1934, ibid, vol.6, p. 278.

23. Ibid, pp. 279 to 280.

24. Ibid, p. 280.

25. As he wrote to Agatha Harrison on 25 September 1935: "The only person who represents India more than anyone else has done or can do is Gandhi...So far as I am concerned, he is India in a peculiar measure and he is the undoubted leader of my country. If anybody wants to know what India wants, let him go to Gandhi". ibid, vol.7, p.29. Similarly, in an article written for a European newspaper, Nehru wrote in early 1936 that "Gandhi continues to be and will continue to be ...the most dominant and influential figure in India, capable of moving millions, and he might return to the political field at any crucial moment. To imagine that he is a back number in Indian politics is the most futile of errors". ibid, vol.7, p.58.

26. An inteligence report about Nehru's views in December 1935 states: "Nehru is apparently anxious to avoid disruption in the Congress and to this end will not oppose council-entry but under no circumstance will he agree to acceptance of offices. He is anxious to bring Gandhi back and considers that the present weakness in Congress is due to Gandhi's departure. He feels that unless Gandhi is brought back at once, the forces of reaction will become so strong that the good work the Congress has done will be ruined". Secret Report dated 4.12.1935, Home Political Records, File No. 4/13/1935.

27. Gandhi to Nehru 30 October, 1935, MGCW, vol. 62, p.6.

28. Gandhi to Nehru, 10 October 1935, Ibid., p. 16.

29. As C. Rajagopalachari wrote to Gandhi: "I am very doubtful about Jawaharlal's fitting in the parliamentary programme and policy. While I readily agreed that on personal and general grounds, we could not pitch on a better choice for the Congress President's place this year ... I could not but feel very doubtful about his dealing with the parliamentary policy in the right way". Rajmohan Gandhi, A Warrior From the South, p.280.

30. Nehru to Rajendra Prasad, 20 November 1935, intercepted letter in Home Political Records, File No. 1/2/1936.

31. Gandhi to Nehru, 22 September 1935, intercepted letter ibid, File No.4/7/1935. What Gandhi is partly referring to is the Constructive Programme.

32. Rajendra Prasad, the then Congress President's sobering reply to Nehru, dated December 19, 1935, Jawaharlal Nehru, Bunch of Old Letter, p. 154.

33. Rajendra Prasad to M.A. Ansari, 26 December 1934, in B.N. Pandey, (ed) Select Documents, p.76.

34. Rajendra Prasad to Nehru 19 December 1935, Jawaharlal Nehru Papers, Vol.85.

35. Ibid.

36. These are discussed subsequently.

37. AICC Newsletter, No. 1, 1935, signed by J.B. Kriplani, General Secretary, Rajendra Prasad Papers.

38. "Pros and Cons of Office Acceptance", Rajendra Prasad's Note to Bhalabhai Desai, 10 December 1935, Rajendra Prasad Papers. File No. III/1935.

39. Ibid.

40. Ibid.

41. April 12 to 14, 1936.

42. Presidential Speech at Lucknow, 12 April 1936, SW vol. 7, p. 184.

43. Ibid.

44. Ibid

45. Ibid.

46. Ibid.

47. Ibid, p.186.

48. Ibid.

49. Ibid.

50. Speech of Gopika Bilas, Also see speeches of Annapurniah and M.R. Masani, ibid., pp.56-57.

51. Ibid., p.44.

52. Ibid., p.44.

53. Ibid., p.44.

54. Gandhi in 'Harijan,' 11 October 1936. MGCW vol.62, p.28. "The present policy of the Congress ... is founded upon the central idea of consolidating the people's power with a view to peaceful action". Gandhi to Nehru, September 1935, intercepted letter in Home Political Records, 4/7/35.

55. Zaidi, op.cit., p.110.

56. A phrase used by Gwynne, Chief Secretary, U.P. in his report to the Home Department. Home Political Records, 4/15/36. Also Harry Haig's appreciation of the situation to Linlithgow: "Generally speaking, the conditions are not favourable for widespread agitation in the villages for, on the whole, the harvest that is being reaped is a good one and the prices of other rabi crops have risen lately in the most satisfactory manner". Haig to Linlithgou, April 7, 1937, Haig Papers. Roll Numner 3. Similarly, the Secretary to the Home Department, R.N. Maxwell, wrote in April 1937: "The most importnt feature which must be borne in mind is that whatever its intentions, the Congress probably has not and know that it has not the organization ready to attempt a mass movement in the near future". Situation in April, Assessment by Home Secretary, Home Political Records, File 7/120/1937.

57. J.B. Kripalani, Lucknow Session, Zaidi, op.cit., p.48.

58. Making a case for office-acceptance, K.M. Munshi wrote in a phamphlet: "The important feature of the general situation is the demoralisation which has overtaken the country at the moment. It expresses itself in squabbles between public men, disintegration of political parties; in loss of faith in the methods so far adopted by the Congress; in attempts to discover quick, speedy, quack remedies". "The Question of Office-Acceptance: A General Survey"

K.M. Munshi, Rajendra Prasad Papers, F.No. 1/36.

59 Zaidi, op.cit., p.42.

60. AICC Papers, G-39/1937.

61. AICC Papers, G-39(1)/1937.

62. Rajendra Prasad to Nehru, 19 Dec. 1935, A Bunch of Old Letters.

63. Presidential Address at Lucknow Session, Zaidi, op.cit., pp.110-11.

64. One of the fundamentals of CSP Programme adopted by the Patna Conferece on May 17, 1934 was: "Refusal to enter at any stage into negotiations on the constitutional issue with the British Govt". CSP Plan of Action, J.P. Papers, File 21.

65. "The big things for which we stand will fade into the background and petty issues will absorb out attention and we shall loose ourselves in compromises and communal tangles and disillusionment with us will spread all over the land. Offices will not add to our

real strength. It will only weaken us by making us responsible for many things that we utterly dislike". Nehru in Presidential Address, Lucknow Session, Zaidi, op.cit., p.102. Similarly, H.K. Mohani accused the socialists of "labouring under the apprehension that the acceptance of ministry could mitigate the idealistic favour of the nation and the practical bent of mind of leaders would ultimately be transferred into personal selfishness", ibid, p. 7.

66. Ibid., pp.141-42.

67. T. Prakasham, Lucknow Session, Zaidi, op.cit., p.35.

68. "If the ministries guided by reactionary elements and without any political gospel assume the reign of office, the demoralization will be internlized", K.M. Munshi, op.cit.

69. AICC Papers, G-39/1/1937.

70. Proceedings of the Lucknow Session, Zaidi, op.cit., p.53.

71. Satyamurti to Patel, 21 May 1935, intercepted letter, Home Political Records, 32/3/1935.

72. AICC Papers, G-39/1937.

73. The resolution on the Act was as follows:

Whereas the GOI Act of 1935, in no way represents the country is designed to facilitate and perpetuate the domination and exploitation of the people of India and is imposed on the country to the accompaniment of widespread repression of civil liberties, Congress reiterates its rejection of the new constitution in its entirity.

The Congress, as representing the will of the people for national freedom and a democratic state, declares that no constitution imposed by outside authority and no constitution which curtails the

sovereignty of the people of India can be accepted .... The Congress thereby reiterates and stresses the demand for a Constituent Assembly in the name of the Indian people and calls upon its representatives and members in and outside legislatures to work for the fulfilment of this demand. The question of office acceptance or non-acceptance by Congress Members elected to the legislatures under the new legilatures having agitated the country, the Congress, IN VIEW OF THE UNCERTAINITIES OF THE SITUATION AS IT MAY DEVELOP, considers it in advisable to commit itself at this state', N.N. Mitra, op.cit., emphasis original.

74. See M.R. Masani's speech at Lucknow cited in the previous references.

75. Satyamurti's speech at Lucknow, Zaidi, op.cit. p.53.

76. Jawarharlal Nehru An Autobiography, p.602.

77. D. Pilditch, Chief Intelligence Officer, UP, wrote in October 1936 that "at the Provincial Parliamentary Board meeting to select candidates for election to Board Meeting to select candidates for election to provincial legislatures, only 15 persons were chosen without disagreement. Of these, 12 are socialists". Haig Papers, Mss.88/Eur/115/116.

78. "The Faizpur Agrarian Programme of the Congress and its decision to abolish zamindari are living evidences that the Congress is the very organization of the Kisans. Now it is the fault of the Kisans if they do not take part in the Congress elections. .... In future, they should be careful and fight the elections and capture the Congress committees". Kisan Sabha Ka Sansmaran, Saraswati Papers, Roll No.2, Translated from Hindi.

79. The typical tone of Nehru's compaign: "I have not asked you to cast a single vote in favour of the Congress, if you do not wish to vote for independence". Nehru's speech at Nagpur. 29 April, 1936. N.N. Mitra, op.cit.

80. Herbert Emerson to Linlithgow, 27 January 1937, Linlithgow Papers. Vol.112.

81. James Sifton, Governor of Bihar to Linlithgow, 9 February 1937, Linlithgow Papers, Vol.112.

82. MGCW. Vol.64.

83. CSP Conference at Meerut on 20 January 1936 was the first in the series, N.N. Mitra, op.cit.

84. Ibid.

85. M.A. Rasool, A History of the All India Kisan Sabha, p. 7.

86. ibid., p. 11.

87. These were U.P., Bengal, Punjab, Delhi and Maharashtra. It may be noted that in Bengal and Punjab the Congress was in a minority. In many cases, important all-India leaders forced their own decisions on the PCCs against the majority opinions of district and local level committees. A case in point is the U.P.

88. By Vishalakshi Menon, op.cit.

PART TWO

PERCEPTIONS

CHAPTER 5

EARLY PERCEPTIONS

(I)

Implicit in the notion of office-acceptance was the basic assumption that offices would be utilized fo promoting mass contact, organisational strengthening and setting up of committees at the village level. One of the most fundamental assumptions which went into the strategy of office-acceptance was that the two forms of struggle would be co-ordinated at all levels. Mass activity, popular mobilization and organisational work were seen as essential and desirable features of the ensuing phase of ministry-making. Even the most orthodox Constitutionalist within the Congress conceded that legislatures and ministries were not end in themselves; that they had to be "utilized" for translating the popular nationalist sentiment into organisational terms; that entering legislatures and forming ministries did not imply suspension of other forms of struggle.

However, the forms which political activity outside the legislatures should take, the nature and depth of mass mobilization which should be attempted and the issues and priorities which should be taken up were issues over which there was lack of clarity and considerable divergence of views.

Immediately after the declaration of election results, the Congress Working Committee called upon all subordinate bodies to greatly emphasise extra-padiamentary struggle:

In view of the great awakening of the masses during the election

> campaigns, the WC wishes to impress upon all provincial and local bodies the necessity of increasing association with the masses .... The committees and organisations that were built up must be kept functioning and converted into local branches of the Congress so that committees exist in as large a number of villages as possible (1).

This policy of emphasizing "extra-parliamentary activity" was endorsed formally by the AICC in its 17 March 1937 meeting (2). While permitting office-acceptance, the AICC declared that the Congress policy "must inevitably lead to deadlock with the British Government and bring out still further the inherent antogonism between British Imperialism and Indian Nationalism, and expose the autocratic and undemocratic nature of the new Constitution" (3).

Local Congress bodies were directed that "all effective work in the legislatures must have the sanction of the people behind it and, therefore, must be co-ordinated with Congress activities outside. Every Congress member must, therefore, keep in constant touch with the people and shall consult them and report to them from time-to-time" (4).

Not only in resolutions and public pronouncements but also in circulars and directives to local bodies, it was underscored that extra-parliamentary activities and mass mobilization should be given the utmost attention. Writing to PCCs, Nehru observed that "the elections have taught us afresh the old lesson that our strength comes from the masses and mass-organizations and the facing of problems affecting the mases" (5).

Throughout 1937, it was emphasised by the top leadership that "work outside the legislatures" was the "major occupation of the Congress" and "the two forms of activity must be co-ordinated together and the masses should be

kept in touch with whatever we do and consulted about it. The initiative must come from the masses" (6).

The Congress Socialists looked upon the ministries as "a detachment of our army fighting on the constitutional front. They must maintain and strengthen their organic contact with the Congress organisations and workers and the latter must, in their turn, strengthen their roots in the masses .... the movement of masses alone can provide such intimate contacts" (7).

The CSP, although opposed to office-acceptance, lent its critical support to the ministries once it was decided to accept office. The objective of the Congress, the CSP believed, should be "to use them (ministries) for revolutionary ends, that activities in them should only be a reflection of the struggle of the masses outside" (8).

The need to create a "psychology of struggle among the people "was repeatedly emphasized by the Congress Socialists (9). The task of the Congress ministries, Jayaprakash Narayan, General Secretary of AICSP believed, "is to create a parallel machinary to the administrative machinery set up by Imperialism .... The creation of a parallel authority ... is essential if the declaration of the convening of the Constituent Assembly ... is to be brought into practice" (10). The top leadership of the Congress was called upon to ensure that "the ministerial activities directly and unerringly further these objectives .... The Congress Governments should be utilized as a lever to strengthen our organisation and develop the parallel authority of the Congress" (11).

Similarly, P.Y. Deshpande, a socialist from Maharashtra, believed that the Congress must work "with the sole intention of transforming its political

force into political power" (12).

The CSP believed that there was a need to "radicalize" through pressure "the parliamentary programme". The parliamentary programme, the Congress Socialists laid down, should be governed by the following objectives:

a) To utilise the legislatures to voice uncompromisingly the peoples' aspirations and demands, as outlined in the election programme, irrespective of the question of voting success or defeat and thus delibrately widen the breach between the genuine peoples' representatives and others with a view to expose the latter's reactionary character; and further

b) to clarify the conflict between the people and the government by compelling the latter to resort to ordinance rule, especially in matters closely connected with the economic and political demands of the people (13).

The Congress Socialists believed that "greatest vigil is now necessary" to ensure that "the combative part of the Congress programme is not allowed to become a dead letter" (14). "The urgent work before all soldiers of freedom is to arouse mass struggle and mass energy. With redoubled zest, we must throw ourselves in the work of organisation of masses and constantly strive to bring mass pressure on the Congress governments" (15).

Writing about the policy of the Congress immediately after the formation of ministries, Pattabhi Sitarammaya writes that the objective was that "the Congress should be able to plant a committee in every village and any village which is without a committee must be regarded as a village without a temple" (16).

The Congress strategy during this period, as can be seen, was not based on choosing one form of struggle to the exclusion of the other but on the basic question of deciding "whether they are properly co-ordinated to each other and proportionately co-related to the total and final object that the Congress has in view" (17).

In pursuance of this policy, the Congress' efforts at mass mobilization and combination of legislative and extra-parliamentary forms of struggle were eminently successful. The formation of ministries during July-August 1937 led to a wave of mass enthusiasm which reflected itself in various forms. One major form of mass activity which was reported to be widespread was the setting up of parallel organs of authority under the leadership of local Congress committes (18). This form of activity was widespread all over the U.P. during the latter-half of 1937, as is brought out by Intelligence Reports for the period (19).

The widespread nature and extent of mass mobilization which took place in the wake of assumption of offices by the Congress and the co-ordination of two forms of struggle has been brought out by Vishalakshi Menon in her study of mass mobilization in the U.P. (20).

The fact that these forms of non-constitutional activities were fairly widespread is brought out by the Intelligence Reports themselves. However, what was more significant about such activity was the involvement of important Congress functionaries and legislatures. The organizational imetus to such activity was provided by local Congress committees.

This co-ordination of non-constitutional forms of struggle with activity in the legislature was viewed with great alarm by colonial policy-makers. Harry Haig, Governor of U.P., formally lodged a complaint to G.B. Pant, the Congress Premier (21). However, Pant's attitude was reported to the Viceroy by Haig as "most unsatisfactory" (22). By late-1937, the situation had become most alarming for colonial policy-makers, specially Linlithgow who viewed it with "considerable uneasiness of mind" (23). However, Haig, advising caution to Linlithgow, pleaded for a more cautious policy of wait and watch. As he

telegraphed to Linlithgow:

> It would be a calamity if instead of a struggle between Right and Left, arising inevitably from their own policy and likely to have far-reaching effects, we substitute a struggle between the Government and the Congress ... at a time when we should certainly be landed in an no-rent campaign. We have got to realize that with a situation of this kind, at some point, conditions of disorder would arise that could not be tolerated .... We should wait as long as it is possible without running the risk of complete collapse ... We must allow a left-wing administration to discredit itself as much as possible and prove unmistakably its dangers and disadvantages (24).

(II)

The immense increase in the prestige of the Congress immediately after the formation of ministries (25) depended a great deal on its ability to successfully co-ordinate the two forms of struggle. With the formation of the ministries, the Congress had an exellent opportunity of demonstrating in no uncertain terms its hegemony not only on civil society but also on institutions of state power.

At this point, it would be interesting to study the early perceptions of nationalist leadership about the initial impact of office-acceptance.

It is well-known that throughout 1936, Gandhi had delibrately adopted an ambivalent position on the question of offices. Even upto March 1937, Nehru one of the closest associates of Gandhi, was optimistic that the Congress under the guidance of Gandhi would reject offices (26). In fact, throughout late-1936 and early-1937, Nehru was looking forward to Gandhi for support against office-acceptance. But Gandhi's policy was to 'wait and watch'.

Even during early-1937, Gandhi refused to adopt any clear-cut position

but eventually found the Constitutionalists arguments and line of action more convincing. But his support to office-acceptance was never whole-hearted. However, once it was decided to form ministries, Gandhi began to play a more direct, public role in conducting the long and uncertain negotiations about assurances relating to special powers.

Once the ministries were formed and after watching the immense increase in Congress' prestige as result of the co-ordination of the two forms of struggle, Gandhi's doubts about office-acceptance began to subdue. By August 1937, Gandhi began to view his self-appointed role in the Congress as "confined to tendering advice on the issues involved in office-acceptance and on the policies to be pursued in the persecution of our march to the goal of Complete Independence" (27).

Gandhi's ambivalence about the strategy of office-acceptance began to diminish steadly. In fact, it seems that Gandhi was immensely pleased by the strength offices generated and his general attitude towards the strategy became very optimistic. By November 1937, Gandhi was describing himself "as a or the prime mover in the direction of office-acceptance" (28).

This transformation from scepticism to resignation to rejoice can be traced in Nehru's perceptions also. Throughout 1935 and 1936, Nehru's one-point programme had been to get the Congress to reject offices. Even during early-1937, Nehru was committed to "prevent the Congress from committing itself

to the retrogate and dangerous step of acceptance of office" (29).

However, this scepticism soon gave way to rejoice and by October 1937 Nehru could feel that "the country is pulsating with a new life and a new vision" (30). In his public and private pronouncements, he repeatedly referred to the "remarkable change" that has been brought about in peoples' minds by the acceptance of offices by the Congress (31).

Thus the autumn months of 1937 provided a new hope for Gandhi. This hope was based on the new situation that had come about as a result of the co-ordination of two forms of activities. In fact, Gandhi continued to encourage Nehru and even made conscious efforts to convey to the Viceroy that office-acceptance did not mean that his honeymoon with the Non-Constitutionalists was over and that he had finally thrown in his lot with the Constitutionalists (32). In fact, he continued to promote Nehru and consistently denied that differences between the two were widening.

In fact, by Haripura Gandhi's optimism had reached its high-water-mark. As he himself wrote:

> The conclusion I have arrived at ofter Haripura is that, if matters are as we see them, despite all our failings, we may be able to see Purna Swaraj within my life-time. If we can accomplish our task intelligently, the British will have to admit defeat at our hands. There will be only one power in India with whom they can discuss matters, and that power will be the Congress. There will be nothing left for them .... I felt that we could accomplish whatever we wanted in a year and that we had developed the strength for it (33).

However, as we shall see subsequently what followed for Gandhi after Haripura was an anti-climax ...

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. AICC, G-30(A)/1937.
2. Pioneer, 18 March 1937.
3. Ibid.
4. Working Committee Directive, 27 February 1937, AICC, G(A) 1937.
5. "The Importance of Mass Contact", Nehru's Circular to PCCs February 1937, SW, vol. 8, p. 49.
6. Nehru's Circular, 10 July 1937, AICC, G-13/1937.
7. "In Office But Not in Power Yet", editorial comment in Congress Socialist, 17 July 1937, emphasis original.
8. Ibid, editorial, August 1937.
9. "Uniform And Militant Policy", ibid, editorial, 14 August 1937.
10. Ibid, 27 November 1937.
11. "Uniform And Militant Policy" ibid, editorial, 14 August 1937.
12. "Office Acceptance And After", ibid, November 1937.
13. "The Parliamentary Tactics", ibid.
14. "A New Lease of Life", editorial in ibid, 10 July 1937.
15. Ibid.
16. Pattabhi Sitarammaya, History of Indian National Congress, Part II,
17. Mitra (ed.) op. cit., 1937, vol. II.
18. "Signs of a parallel administration have recently been noticed. In Aligarh, it is intended to organise Congress police stations and outposts and in Gorakhpur and Mirzapur, there are Congress courts; it is understood that fines realised from persons have been credited to Congress funds. Congress workers in Gorakhpur have visited villages to set-up panchayats informing the public that there is no need to report cases to the police or courts .... In Azamgarh, it has been emphasized that reports should no longer be made to police and if any policeman, not accompanied by a Congress worker, visited a village on patrol, he should be arrested and brought to the Congress office. In Badaun, Kumar Hukum Singh,

MLA, is repeatedly emphasizing ... that the people should refuse to go to police stations, but should ask police officers to come to their houses. In Fatehpur, the President of the DCC advised people not to appear as witnesses in cases sent by the police. In Hardoi, the police has met with a great deal of resistance in their duties and their prestige is being destroyed". U.P. Police Abstract Number 35 for week ending 11 September 1937, cited in Haig Papers, F. 115/12, Roll No. 2. Please note how widespread this kind of activity was.

19. A typical Intelligence Report for the period: "Advice was given by the Congress units in Etawah and Hardoi not to take their cases to the police while interference by Congress workers is reported in Rai Bareli. A number of Congress panchayats have been set-up in Gorakhpur and have levied taxes which apparently were credited to Congress funds. In the same district, Congress workers have announced that kisans have been exempted from paying rent". U.P. Police Abstract of Intelligence No. 44 for week ending 18 November 1937, ibid.

20. "The Indian National Congress and Mass Mobilization: A study of the U.P. - 1937-39", Studies in History, vol. 2, No. 2, 1980.

21. In a letter of protest and alarm, Haig wrote to Pant: "It has become plain to me, since I have been on tour, that in most districts the activities of Congressmen is interfering with police work and in establishing a regular system of complaints against whatever the police do is producing a deterioration in the morale of the police and are beginning to affect their authority .... There also seems to be growing tendency of attempts by Congress workers to establish parallel institutions of their own in rivalry to government istitutions in the nature of courts and machinery. Haig to Pant, 3-11-1937, Haig Papers, Roll No. 2.

22. Ibid.

23. Linlithgow, in his reply to Haig, wrote that he viewed the situation "with a considerable uneasiness of mind which represents a condition which I fear has been growing for some time in intensity .... I think I have made it clear in the past that in my judgement the U.P. situation is the key point, the handling of which is of critical importance in relation to the all-India situation, and I feel that the state of things, as it stands now, is such as to warrant me into taking a grave view". Linlithgow to Haig, 19-11-1937, ibid

24. Haig's telegram to Linlithgow, 23 December 1937, Linlithgow Papers.

25. "We cannot ignore the immense prestige that the Congress have won since the general election and particularly since they took office, the authority they possess and fully exploit by virtue of being the Government and the nationalist sentiment which extends probably to a much larger proportion of the population then one might suppose".

Haig to Linlithgow, 6 December 1937, Haig Papers Roll No. 1. For similar perceptions of other governors and policy-makers, see Linlithgow Papers.

26. Nehru's Press Statement 28 March 1937, cited in Linlithgow Papers, File F/115/14, Roll No. 2.

27. 'Harijan', 17 August 1937, MGCW, vol. 66, p. 16.

28. 'Harijan', 21 November 1937, ibid, p. 302, emphasis original.

29. Home Political, 4/7/1936.

30. Nehru's speech at Calcutta AICC, 29 October, 1937, SW, vol. 8, pp. 388-9.

31. Speech at Allahabad, 5 November 1937, ibid., p. 351.

32. A most interesting account of this is provided by Linlithgow himself who reported about his interview with Gandhi on 4 August 1937: "He then himself raised the matter of Nehru and sang his praises at great length. He said he was reserved and spartan, his name Jawaharlal meant jewel and that exactly described what Nehru was. There was no chasm as was sometimes suggested between himself and Nehru (I formed the impression that Mr. Gandhi was particularly anxious to dispose off this suggestion and that it was for that reason that he had raised the matter of Nehru). He suspected that Nehru was in evil odour with me .... Mr. Gandhi replied that I had misread Nehru about Russia and that what he had in mind was not the Russian type of revolution". Notes of Conversation with Mr. Gandhi on 4 August, 1937, Linlithgow Papers, MSS/EUR, F. 115/13.

33. Speech at Sarva Seva Sangh, March 1938, MGCW, vol. 66, pp. 420-424. In the same speech, Gandhi added that the conclusions he had arrived at upto Haripura were erroneous.

CHAPTER 6

THE BACKLASH

6.1 Overview

The formation of ministries by the Congress substantially altered the social configuration of the National Movement. On the one hand, it led to massive mass mobilization which immensely heightened the prestige of the Congress and created a popular imagery that a real shift had taken place in the power relationship between British Imperialim and Indian Nationalism and that the Congress represented a new political order in which rural grievances relating to land, credit and market would soon be resolved in favour of the peasant.

On the other hand, office-acceptance unleashed social forces which the Congress as a movement found difficult to cope with. The backlash to the Congress ministries threatened to seriously undermine nationalist hegemony and decisively influenced the perceptions of the leadership on the desirability of offices and future course of politics.

In this Chapter, an attempt has been made to firstly document and analyse the apprehensions of all those who were opposed to offices about what the backlash to the Congress might lead to. This is followed by a survey of certain new political trends which emerged during this period and challenged Congress' hegemony and successfully exposed the limitations and weaknesses of the National Movement. Later it will be argued that these forces, which were mainly represented by the Muslim League, the Kisan Sabha activitists of Bihar, and industrial unrest, decisively influenced the perceptions of the nationalist

leadership about the strength/weaknesses of the Congress.

6.2 Early Apprehensions

Although the Non-Constitutionalists had to concede defeat over the issue of offices, they nevertheless voiced their apprehensions about the dangers involved in the strategy of ministry-formation. It was Nehru who had first warned at the Lucknow Session itself that "the big things for which we stand will fade into background and petty issues will absorb our attention and we shall loose ourselves in compromises and communal tangles, and disillusion with us will spread all over the land. Offices will not add to our real strength, it will only weaken us by making us responsible for many things that we utterly dislike" (1).

The Congress Socialists also declared that "the most disturbing effect of office-acceptance will be to dampen the Congress powder" (2). It was feared that "in the ethos that must inevitably arise with the acceptance of offices, the emphasis is likely to fall increasingly on the `constructive´ rather than the `combatative´ part of the Congress programme" (3).

It was lamented that, "with the acceptance of offices, Congress activities are bound to be for a certain time refracted through the prism of parliamentarianism" (4). Congressmen were warned that "the greatest peril lies in the pull the parliamentary wing exercises on it" (5). The programme of council-entry and ministry-making, it was declared, "is not a tonic to mass action but is anesthetic to ... an upheaval" (6).

It was declared that "we are fast heading towards political bankruptcy and liquidation of our past achievements" (7) and alleged that "the Congress

sail is being filled with reformist wind" (8). The Congress ministers were criticised as they "are keen to prove that they can govern the country `well'" (9) and were denounced for adopting an approach which "is fast becoming that of co-operation with the government" (10).

These early apprehensions about the ministries and the result office-acceptance was likely to have were significant pointers to the leadership. However, they were not based on a comprehensive understanding of the fast-changing political situation. For instance, those who harboured apprehensions about what office-aceptance might lead to never fully realized how the formation of Congress ministries could radically transform the communal reality until they were suddenly faced with the Pakistan Resolution. Nor did they, for that matter, realize how the emergence of a left-wing opposition to the Congress ministries in the form of Kisan Sabha and working class upsurge, could expose the limits and weaknesses of the National Movement.

6.3 Communal Backlash

6.3.1 The Communal Scenario: A Background

It was a long-term policy of the British to encourage, foster and utilize communal politics to undermine the hegemony of the National Movement (11). This policy of using communalism as a counter-poise to the Congress can be traced right from the 1880s. However, during the late 1930s, communalism became a basic bulwark of British policy, as the social base of the British,

i.e. the zamindars and the princes, was effectively undermined due to the social forces generated by the National Movement. In fact, the most striking feature of the 1937 elections, according to British officials, was the inability of the Government to find a reliable ally who could challenge the Congress with some measure of credibility. As far as zamindars and other elements were concerned, they were singularly unable to mobilize themselves against the Congress with any degree of success (12). A case in point is the National Agriculturist Party in U.P. which was patronised by landed and communal elements but which, in spite of substantial resources and considerable governmental patronage, failed to make a headway against the Congress. Therefore, it had become plain to colonial policy-makers that the princes and the landlords could be utilised for denying nationalist hegemony only in "high politic" Round Table Conferences, but when it came to electoral politics, popular legislatures and nationalist ministries, what was needed was an altogether different strategy.

This alternate strategy, of course, was increasing dependence on communalism, not as an explicit ally but as effective counter-poise against the Congress. This increasing dependence on communalism was to some extent inevitable, given the structure of politics of the Colonial State. The Colonial State was an intended replica of the British capitalist state, with its classic function of mediating between different conflicting interest groups. While it continued to perform this mediatory role in order to maintain its semi-hegemonic character of being "above the struggle", its feudal social base was effectively undermined by the social forces generated by the National Movement. Hence the need for allies against the Congress became a contingent imperative, especially in the context of Provincial Autonomy and the War. And the most effective and willing bed-fellow proved to be communalism. It is in this context that the following views of Churchill are understandable:

> I think the main difference between you and me is that you consider a united all-India an end desirable in itself, whereas I regard it as an abstraction which in so far as it becomes real will be fundamentally injurious to British interests. I look upon India as on the same scale as Europe with all its divisions and counter-poises and upon the British function being to preserve the balance between these great masses, and thus maintain our control for our advantage and their salvation. Following this line of thought, I should regard to like to see the Moslems of the North joining together as a counter-check upon the anti-British tendencies of the Congress .... I am not at all attracted by the prospect of one united India which will show us the door. We might not be able to prevent it, but that we should devote our best efforts to producing it, is to my mind distressing and repugnant to the last degree.
>
> Of course, my ideal is narrow and limited. I want to see the British empire preserved for a few more generations in all its strength and splendour. Only the most prodigious exertions of British genius will achieve this (13).

As far as the nature of communal politics in mid-1930s is concerned, the All-India Muslim League was organised on the politics of promoting the interests of the Muslims. It championed the rights of minorities; however, it never arrogated itself to the position of claiming to be the sole representative of the Muslims; nor did it seriously question the Congress' claim of representing all Indian interests. It essentially, in the words of Jinnah, "consisted mainly of big landlords, title-holders and selfish people who looked to their class and personal interests more than to communal and national interests and who had always been ready to sacrifice them to suit British policies" (14).

As far as the Congress' position among the Muslims was concerned, it had always been critical. At the provincial and grass-roots level, barring the NWFP, the Congress hardly had any Muslim leadership. In fact, the Muslims in the Congress leadership at all levels consisted only of a few prominent leaders. This was symptomatic of the aloofness of the Muslims from the pale of Congress politics.

6.3.2 Muslim League and the Congress Ministries

Given this long-term trend, it was not surprising that the Congress fared badly in the Muslim constituencies in the 1937 elections. Out of the 482 separate Muslim seats, the Congress contested only 58 and could win only 26 (15). However, the only redeeming feature for the Congress was that its principal opponent, the League, also did not do particularly well. It could barely win 109 seats out of the 482 seats allotted to the Muslims, securing only 4.8 percent of the total Muslim votes. It did not win a majority of seats in any of the Muslim-majority provinces. In the legislatures of three Hindu-majority provinces (Bihar, Orissa and Central Provinces), there was not a single Muslim League member. In other four Hindu-majority provinces (Assam, U.P., Bombay and Madras), Muslim League members were in such a minority that they could be ignored by the Congress in the formation of ministries. In the Muslim-majority provinces of Bengal and Punjab, the League's performance was far below the expectation of its leaders (16).

These were the gloomy prospects that confronted Jinnah. Possibilities of coalition ministries were explored in Bombay and the U.P. where the Muslim League was able to emerge as a sizeable opposition. However, the Leagues' overtures were arrogantly rebuffed by the Congress (17).

The events of 1937 shocked Jinnah as "he was faced with the stark fact that his party scarcely figured on the political map of India under the new constitution. While Gandhi, Nehru and other Congress leaders could guide and control six (and later eight) provincial ministries, there was not one ministry which he could call his own or in the formation of which he had a say" (18).

It has been suggested that the whole basis of Jinnah's politics of the

last 20 years, i.e. that an ultimate and amicable solution to the communal problem was possible through constitutional means, was shattered for ever. He came to realize that new methods, strategies and propaganda styles will have to be evolved to strengthen the Muslim League. And the politics of ministry-making provided a fertile ground to Jinnah to practise his new politics.

Within three months of the formation of Congress ministries, Jinnah in his Presidential Address to the Muslim League held in October 1937 at Lucknow, declared that the Congress has been "pursuing the policy which is exclusively Hindu ... they have by their words, deeds and programmes shown more and more that the Mussalmans cannot expect any justice or fairplay at their hands" (19). He further declared that, "on the threshold of what little power or responsibility is given, the majority community have clearly shown their hand; that Hindustan is for the Hindus" (20). Jinnah threateningly declared that "the result of the present Congress policy, I venture to say, will lead to class bitterness, communal war and a strengthening of the imperialist hold, as a consequence" (21).

From now onwards began a war of attrition against the Congress. Jinnah was able to secure and bring together the support of a new breed of political functionaries to displace the older leadership on the plank of extremist programmes. He was able to secure the allegiance of two stalwarts, Fazal Haq, Premier of Bengal, and Sir Sikander Hayat Khan, Premier of Punjab, in addition to Sir Muhammad Sadaullah,. Premier of Assam. Thus soon there were three ministries which were sympathetic to the League. These stalwarts decided to put their support behind the League which, as a result, was soon able to make inroads into the mass base of the Proja Party in Bengal and the Unionist Party in Punjab.

Alongwith these moves of enlisting support of the stalwarts for the new programme, a vigorous drive for organizational self-strengthning and mass membership was launched. Within three months of the Lucknow Conference, more than 170 branches of the League were established all over the country. Ninty of these were in the U.P. and another 40 in the Punjab. During such a short time, the League was able to claim no less than one lakh members in the U.P. alone (22).

For the first time in its long history, the Muslim League made an attempt to go beyond the confines of elite politics. The membership fee of the League was lowered from Re 1 to 2 annas (23). Attempts were made to transform the League into a mass organisation and a populist "Economic Programme", an imitation of the Congress' Karachi Programme (1931), was adopted (24).

Throughout 1938, a vicious propaganda campaign was launched which sought to project an imagecy of "Hindu Raj" among the Muslim masses. In his speech at the All India Muslim League's Special Session at Calcutta in April 1938, Jinnah declared that the Congress is a "Hindu body" trying to establish a "Hindu Raj" in India. He claimed that the League was the sole representative of the Muslims (25). Resolutions were passed condemning the Congress and alleging that "Congress governments have singularly failed to discharge their primary duty of protecting the Muslim minotities in their provinces ... and that, if immediate steps are not taken to protect the Mussalmans by the Congress governments, the consequences to the country as a whole will be disastrous" (26).

From now on began a propaganda campaign which aimed at creating and popularizing the image that the Muslims were being suppressed under the "Hindu" Congress Ministries. A series of Enquiry Committee Reports were published by the Muslim League in which "every instance of communal trouble was scrutinised,

written up and put on record ... and published as a formal indictment of the Congress governments" (27). The first of these reprots came to be known as the Pirpur Report (28). The Report alleged that "the people of a particular community were encouraged to believe that the government was now their" (29). It was alleged that the objective of the Congress was "the establishment of a nation-state of the majority community in which other nationalities and communities have only secondary rights" (30).

A series of other issues and grievances were highlighted by the Pirpur Report. These releated to ban on cow-sacrifices; singing of Bande Mataram; hoisting of Congress flags on public buildings; imposition of the Hindi as well as the Wardha Scheme of Elementary Education which, it was alleged, was aimed at undermining Islamic culture and educational system (31). One of the most important grievances listed by the Pirpur Report releated to the establishment of parallel organs of governmental authority by the Congress Committee throughout the provinces.

The general tone and pitch of the propaganda campaign set out by the Pirpur Report was followed up by a number of similar reports and pamphlets. The report of a committee appointed to enquire into Muslim grievances in Bihar, which came to be popularly known as the "Shareef Report", sought to create an impression that Muslims in Bihar were suffering under the atrocities of Congressmen (32). "Muslims will have to decide soon whether they should migrate from this province or face annihilation" (33).

The final indictment of the Congress came in the form of a pamphlet published by Fazal-ul Haz in December 1939 and entitled provocatively as "Muslims sufferings under Congress Rule" (34). This document provided a description of 72 incidents in Bihar and 33 in the U.P., in which specific

instances of "Congress" atrocities on Muslims were cited.

This kind of vicarious propaganda was bound to lead to communal antagonisms and riots. According to official figures, between October 1937 and September 1939, there were 57 serious communal riots in the "Congress" provinces, resulting in 1700 casualities, of which 130 were fatal (35). Communal riots were, of course, an endemic feature of the politics of the thirties and forties. However, during this period "they seemed to be entering on a new phase. The quarrelling was less spontaneous, more persistent, more deliberate. It was, as if, the two communities were lining up for a coming battle. Particularly disquieting, ... was the growth of communal antagonisms among the younger generations" (36).

Alongwith the increase in communal riots, another new feature which emerged during this period was the establishment of para-military communal organisations. By 1938, there already were two strong bodies. The first was the Muslim League Volunteers Corps which had a claimed membership of 11,000 in the U.P. and 4,000 in NWEP (37). In early 1939, the National Council of the Muslim League met at New Delhi and decided that organization of a `National Guard' sould be undertaken expeditiously on an all India basis (38). Soon there was a `National Muslim Guard', equipped with uniform and flag, and claiming the allegiance of 3,000 people in the U.P. alone (39).

However, the most noticeable feature of communal politics during 1937-39 was that the Muslim League's politics was pitched by Jinnah and the League no longer to promote "Muslim interests" within the confines of constitutional politics. The objective now to popularize the notion that:

a) the Congress was not a national organisation and not

only it did not represent Muslim "interests", but was actually opposed to the advancement of Muslims as a community; and

b) the Muslim League was the sole and true representative of Muslims without whose consent and approval no advance could be made as far as solving the constitutional and communal problems were concerned.

The remarkable feature of the new situtation was that the Muslim League was no longer fighting for petty concessions and gains. It was fighting a battle of hegemony against the Congress. Such a battle necessarily involved the denial of Congress hegemony over the National Movement in so far as the Congress' claim of representation of minorities was concerned. A complement of this was arrogation of the League and its claims to be "the only organization that can speak on behalf of Muslim India" (40).

These two features of Muslim League politics stand out prominently during 1937-39. A vehement propaganda campaign launched to challenge the hegemony of the Congress over the minorities, as is brought out by Jinnah's speeches throughout late-1938 and 1939 (41). Secondly, the Muslim League's claim that it was the only organization which could speak on behalf of the Muslims was encouraged by British policy-makers. The reasons for this were twofold. First, the need to undermine the hegemony of the Congress by promoting the counter-veiling hegemony of the Muslim League and second, the exigencies of the War and the resultant need to win support, forced the British to grant to the Muslim League a status which it had strived for throughout and its claims to which were dubious (42).

Encouraged by these tendencies, the League was tempted to increasingly adopt extremist postures. Threats of direct action were made on insignificant issues and, on the resignation of Congress ministries, Jinnah gave a call for the observance of a "Day of Deliverance and Thanksgiving" as a "mark of relief that the Congress Regime has at last ceased to function" (43). Within three months, the League at its Lahore Session held on 24 March 1940 asked for a seperate state for Muslims--Pakistan.

6.3.3 Congress' Reaction

To what extent was office-acceptance by the Congress responsible for the resurgence and radicalisation of communal politics, eventually leading to the seperatist demand of Pakistan ?

As discussed earlier, Congress' position among the Muslims had always been critical, barring the early Khilafat days and the Non-Cooperation days in which the Muslims participated in large numbers. Otherwise, the Muslims as a community had always remained aloof from the domain of Congress politics during the late 1920s and throughout the 1930s. However, this aloofness was not taken as a sign of major weakness by the Congress leadership which was hopeful even as late as 1936-37 of amicably settling the communal issue. In fact, a large section of the leadership, especially Nehru, the CSP and the CPI did not really consider communalism as a major issue (44). Communalism was seen as a hangover of the past and a fetter which would automatically be wiped out once the "real issues", concerning the economic problems of the masses, were taken up. This perspective informed the politics of a sizable section of Congressmen.

However, it was conceded by all that there still was need for working

among the Muslim masses. Hence an ambitious Muslim Mass Contact Programme was launched in 1936. This programme was beset with a number of problems right from the begining and hardly went beyond search for support of "prominent" Muslim workers who could be mustered for promoting Congress policies and programmes among the Muslims (45).

The Muslim Mass Contact Programme could not make much headway and had to be abondoned formally soon after the formation of ministries. Once the ministries were formed, the attention and energies of the leadership were diverted to different issues and the communal problem acquired only a secondary priority to them. The gravity of the communal problem was barely realised by the leadership with the notable exception of Gandhi, although half-baked and half-hearted attempts were made to tackle the communal issue.

A major failure of the Congress was its inability to keep pace with the fast changing communal reality and refusal to recognise that what Jinnah represented now was a much stronger force than they had assumed. Although the functioning of the ministries, the administrative measures taken by it, and the credentials and anticedents of the ministers were impeccable and no one could accuse the Congress ministries of a communal bias, it was at the level a soceial movement that the Congress failed misserably. Although the growth of communal and seperatist politics cannot be in a direct sense ascribed to any of the actions of the Congress ministries, the period 1937-39 provided a fertile ground and a very good opportunity for the League to practice its politics of seperatism.

The gravity of the communal problem was never fully realised by the Congress leadership. Nehru, while conceding that although, "the situation has

deteriorated and it may be said that there is more general ill-will among the Muslim masses towards the Congress", still had the ill-founded confidence to claim that "the Congress' record is not negligible (46).

As far as concrete work was concerned, all Nehru had to report was the organisation of a Minorities Community consisting of some important Muslim dignatories (this Committee was appointed as an alternative strategy after the formal abondonement of the Muslim Mass Contact Programme), constitution of an Urdu Publicity Department and appointment of some Muslims as inspectors and observers for the Congress (47).

It becomes obvious that the Congress leadership approach to the communal problem during this period was based on a wrong assessment of the strength which the League had come to acquire during the ministry period. This becomes obvious from the fact that the Congress was still operating at the level of forming sub-committees and scouting for prominent Muslims to deal with a problem which ought to have been dealt with on a war-footing.

A major factor which handicapped the Congress was the fact that it was forced to adopt defensive position vis-a-vis the league while dealing with conflict situations as it was the administration and a movement at the same time. It could not have adopted a aggressive strategy to deal with a communal issue as this would have naturally reinforced the psycholical propaganda of the League that the Congress was trying to establish a "Hindu Raj" and was oppressing the minorities. This handicap of the Congress was a source of much concern to local activists of the Congress. As a Congress worker complained in a letter to the Congress president that during this period the Muslim League,

"had an exceptional opportunity of propagating their ideas because every effort on our part to curb communalism is immediately represented as a breach of the elementary right of free speech and our governments are fighting shy of strong measures" (48).

On the resignation of the ministries, it was the League which suffered the greatest setback as it lost a great opportunity to practice its politics of opposing the Congress. As Nehru observed:

> Most of us feel particularly satisfied at the turn of events. You are right in saying that the British Government and the Muslim League are dissatisfied as both of them are hit by this event .... the man who regrets the resignation of the Congress governments most is Mr. Jinnah as he has lost main weapon of attack against the Congress (49).

6.4 The Kisan Sabhas

6.4.1 Organisational Background

The origins of the All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) can be traced to the formation of the West Patna Kisan Sabha in 1927 by Sahajanand Saraswati. This was followed by the organisation of another body called the Bihar Pradesh Kisan Sabha (BPKS), founded in November 1929 with the immediate objective of opposing the ill-famed legislation -- Sifton's Tenency Bill, being ploted by the zamindars' organisation called the United Party. Among the founders of BPKS were Rajendra Prasad and Sri Krishan Sinha, who later became its General Secretary.

The leaders of BPKS took an active part in the preparatory activities leading to the formation of AIKS (1936), and Sahajanand was designated its first President. The other provincial Kisan Sabhas which contributed to the formation of AIKS were Andhra Pradesh, Bengal, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh Kisan Sabhas.

BPKS activists participated actively during the two Civil Disobedience Movements. However, the Sabha was able to secure a firm mass base only after 1933. After 1933, it was active all over Bihar, as can be seen from the fact that between April 1933 and November 1935, it successfully organised more than 500 demonstrations, meetings and conferences in ten districts of Bihar. In addition, meetings were organized in the five districts of Chhota Nagpur and six districts of Santhal Parganas. Besides these, 117 meetings in 1933, 170 in 1934 and 109 in 1935 were held. Of these, 120 were attended by Sahajanand. During this period, he attended 88 meetings in Patna, 38 in Gaya, 57 in Monghyr, 39 in Sahahabad, 22 in Bhagalpur, 38 in Darbhanga, 43 in Muzaffarpur, 19 in Saran, 13 in Purnea and 2 in Champaran.

After 1935, the activities of BPKS intensified, both politically as well as regionally. Between November 1935 and October 1936, the District Kisan Council of Monghyr met seven times and three extra-ordinary meetings were held. District and thana Kisan Sammelans were organised frequently. In addition, 70 large meetings, 124 small meetings and six demonstrations were also conducted. The overall growth of the Kisan Sabhas is reflected in the extra-ordinary growth in the membership of BPKS from 33,000 in 1935 to 70,000 in 1936.

The period 1933 to 1936 saw considerable strengthening of BPKS. The main programme of BPKS during this period was to enlarge the social support of

the Congress by bringing in various peasant strata within its fold. The leadership of BPKS was quite radical and was definitely attracted to non-constitutional methods. Some of the Kisan Sabha leaders like Sahajanand Saraswati, Ramnandan Mishra, Karyanandji were definitely becoming attracted to socialist ideas. However, BPKS remained firmly within the confines of "Gandhian" politics and by 1936, its leadership had yet to evolve any fundamental critique of Gandhian politics.

However, this attraction to non-constitutional politics, radical and direct forms of struggle and leftism was quite evident in the politics of the Kisan Sabhas during the pre-1936 period. This can be ascribed to two major reasons. Firstly, a number of socialists, communists and radical Congressmen such as Nehru, Jayaprakash Narayan, N.G. Ranga, Indulal Yagnik, Achyut Patwardhan and Narendra Dev were greatly interested in Kisan Sabha politics. They actively intervened in various provincial Kisan Sabhas and were, to a great extent, responsible for the formation of (AIKS). These leaders felt that no genuine anti-imperialist movement could be sustained for long unless it enjoyed substantial and deep-rooted mass base in the countryside. Besides, they genuinely made an effort to integrate local economic grievances into nationalist politics.

Secondly, due to their own concrete experiences in the Kisan Sabhas, leaders such as Sahajanand Saraswati were getting attracted towards a more radical agrarian programme. Combined with this was the intense socialist propaganda which turned many Kisan Sabha activists into avowed socialists.

However, the resons for the radicalization of Kisan Sabha politics can not just be reduced to a shift in the perspective of the leadership. A number of socio-economic factors have to be taken into account to explain this

phenomenon of radicalization in a specific regional context (50).

However, the process of ministry-formation and inauguration of a renewed phase of constitutionalism did bring about a fundamental transformation in the relationship of the Kisan Sabhas and the Congress.

6.4.2 Kisan Politics Before 1937

Upto mid-1930s the Kisan Sabhas had been organised mainly on "Gandhian" lines. In fact, the reason why Sahajanand was drawn into peasant politics was precisely to avoid a conflict situation which would adversely affect the mass base of the Congress (51).

The initial focus of the Kisan Sabhas' activities in Bihar was to intervene on behalf of the peasantry to put pressure on the Government for more favourable tenancy legislations (52), to counter the activities of the zamindars and landlords (53), and to bring into the fold of Congress large number of peasants, belonging to different strata.

However, the early politics of intervening on behalf of the Congress to avoid conflict situations and to enlarge the base of the Congress gradually receded into background, as a result of the concrete experiences of peasant politics. A definite shift towards "economistic" struggles came about in the perspective of Sahajanand and other Kisan Sabha leaders. Justifying the need for a seperate class organisation of the kisans, Sahajanand wrote:

> Congress is a national organisation as well as a political organisation. But the Kisan Sabha is the class organisation of the

> Kisans, and is based on their economic demands. As long as there is difference between politics and economics, these two organisations would remain seperate. Congress is a multi-class organisation because it is a national forum. But the Kisan Sabha is the organisation of one class. There cannot be people belonging to other classes in it. Whereas the Congress fights for the independence of the country, the Kisan Sabhas fight for their economic independence. Yes, it is true that economic questions take the peasants towards politics. Likewise, political struggles would bring the Congress towards economic struggles. This happens because politics and economics are complementary to each other (54).

The whole basis of Kisan Sabha politics during this period was to transform the Congress towards economistic struggles by bringing upon it pressures. In fact, the Kisan Sabhas felt that some kind of a process of transition towards more fundamental issues was already underway. Sahajanand optimistically believed that the Karachi Economic Programme was an important milestone and signified a tendency of the Congress to "go beyond political struggle over to economic questions" (55).

This perspective of transforming the Congress into a powerful, radical, nationalist organisation, actively championing the cause of the peasantry as a whole and incorporating within its wider anti-imperialist bloc the local economistic struggles of the peasantry, informed the politics of the leadership. As part of this perspective of transforming the Congress, Sahajanand called upon the Kisan Sabha activists to actively participate in the activities of the Congress and to try to capture various Congress committees at all levels (56).

Sahajanand consistently refuted the charge that the Kisan Sabha was

trying to build a parallel or an alternative movement to the Congress (57). In fact, throughout the pre-1937 period, the consistent position of Sahajanand was that the Kisan Sabhas should strengthen the Congress. The role of the Congress, inspite of its multi-class character and the resultant political complexities and dialemmas was never denigrated by Sahajanand, although he often criticised a part of the leadership and was opposed to constitutional methods of struggle (58). Inspite of his differences and his critique of the constitutional struggle, Sahajanand did not anticipate any acrimony or contradiction between the Kisan Sabhas and the Congress. In fact, he looked at the relationship between the two as complemetary. The multi-class character of the Congress, Sahajanand believed, was an inevitability in the context of the anti-imperialist struggle and was recognized as a parameter within which the Kisan Sabhas had to operate and promote their politics. Recognising these parameters, Sahajanand wrote:

> The major function of the Congress is to maintain harmony between different classes and to further its struggle while doing so. It does not want one class to engage in a struggle with another. Because that will be class-war or class struggle and in such a situation, the Congress will have to take side with one of the classes. As a result, it will be losing its nationalistic character (59).

However, within the framework of this multi-class-based character of the Congress, the Kisan Sabhaites sought to promote the interests of the peasantry and enlarge the character of the National Movement. Sahajanand was convinced that even though "the Congress is a multi-class organisation, and hence it would try to conciliate the demands of various classes, ... the Congress will have to embrace the demands of the peasants. Therefore, it depends on the peasants how they are able to force the Congress to accept their demands. The Congress

cannot reject their demands. If it makes such a mistake, its existence will be in danger" (60).

6.4.3 AIKS and the Elections

However, the process of ministry-making and the actual experiences of the Kisan Sabha activists during 1937-39 irrevocably destroyed this relationship and contributed to the weakening of not only the National Movement but also the Kisan Sabhas. Before we trace this process of divorce between the Kisan Sabhas and the Congress, it would be necessary to trace the role played by AIKS and Kisan Sabha activists in the debate over office-acceptance and the elections of 1937.

Throughout 1935 Sahajanand was in close contact with a number of CSP leaders who were anxious to form AIKS and who exercised considerable influence in shaping his political ideas. During 1936, much of his activities were directed at forming the AIKS. A concrete shape was given to these plans at the time of the Congress Session at Lucknow when a conference of various Kisan organisations was held and Sahajanand was elected its President. In his Presidential Address, Sahajanand favoured the principle of collective affiliation of the proposed AIKS and was supported by Nehru. He declared that the time had come for the kisans to fight for their rights and he hoped that Congress leaders like Nehru and Patel would actively strengthen AIKS (61). This was followed by the adoption of a detailed agrarian programme which included, among other points, abolition of zamindari, 50 percent reduction in rent, abolition of debts and higher prices for crops (62).

This was followed by the adoption of an All-India Kisan Manifesto

(August 1936). This Manifesto was formally presented to the WC of the Congress for incorporation in the Election Manifesto of the Congress. "The AIKS Manifesto influenced the agrarian programme adopted at the Faizpur session of the Congress in December 1936 as well as its election manifesto" (63), although Sahajanand and other AIKS leaders were disappointed by the Election Manifesto eventually adopted by the Congress, as "it is completely silent as to the vital question of the abolition of zamindari .... I appeal to the AICC and Congressmen all over the country to incorporate this vital demand of the peasantry as one of the main planks of the Congress agrarian programme..." (64).

At the Faizpur Session of AIKS, the "imperative need of an unequivocal declaration ... to the effect that the Congress representatives in the legislatures will not become pawns of imperialism by accepting office" (65), was impressed upon the Congress. However, the Kisan Sabhas participated actively in the elections and tried to win as many nominations as possible, even at the risk of alienating a section of Congressmen in Bihar.

The contribution of the Kisan Sabhas to the success of the Congress at the elections, it was claimed by Bihar Kisan Sabha leaders, was "indeed very great", although "it may not be acknowledged by the Congress high priests" (66). Sahajanand claimed that even the opponents of the Kisan Sabhas "had to admit that the marvellous success of the Congress at the polls was due to the Kisan movement and that the kisan versus zamindars and the poor versus rich issue was crystallized during the elections" (67).

6.4.4 Critique of the Ministries

The formation of the ministeries led to a resurgence in the activities

of the Kisan Sabhas. Within one month of the formation of the ministeries, Sahajanand demanded that the ministries implement the Agrarian Programme adopted at Faizpur (68), and AIKS gave a call to observe 1 September 1937 as a Kisan Day in support of this demand. This was followed by the presentation of a Charter of Demands to the Bihar Ministry in November 1937 (69) and organisation of massive demonstrations in other states to the legislative assemblies.

Soon these reminders became open and formal denounciations. Prompted by the Bihar activists, AIKS expressed itself very strongly against the ministries for the "the piecemeal, superficial and perfunctory manner in which the Congress ministries have dealt with some of the problems affecting the kisans" (70). It threatened to take "all necessary steps to see that the Congress pledges are observed fully in letter and spirit before the end of the next year" (71). The Congress ministries of Bihar, U.P., Bombay and Madras were denounced for their allegedly "repressive policy ... displayed so shamelessly in arresting a large number of kisans and comrades, banning kisan conferences promulgating section 144A of the C.P.C (72). It called upon Kisan Sabha activists "to carry on their organisational and propaganda activities undauntedly despite the threats of repression and reprisal on the alleged ground of disseminating class hatred and sedition" (73).

These reminders, threats and denounciations took mere coercive forms and by January 1938 1983, Sahajanand was already calling upon peasant and Kisan Sabha activists to "organise yourself and force the hands of the ministeries. If the ministries fail to give you all you ask for, do not be cheated again, if they come to you for votes again, show your thumb" (74).

With these moves was combined an intense propaganda campign against the Congress. A number of articles appeared in pro-leftist newspapers and journals like Congress Socialist, Sangharsh, Janata, Vishal Bharat. Not to be outdone, a number of conservative newspapers like Searchlight, Young India and Harijan launched a counter-tirade against the Kisan Sabhas and Sahajanand (75).

The Congress ministry in Bihar was criticised for its allegedly pro-zamindar policy and its moves to give compensation to the zamindars for their land (76). The Congress was consistently and vehemently criticised for its pro-propertied stance, its alleged support to the zamindars, its ignorance and side-tracking of the Faizpur Agrarian Programme and its hostility to the Kisan Sabhas (77).

By April 1938, Sahajanand was openly proclaiming that "if ... by class war is meant war aginst zamindars and capitalists, I plead guilty and am most willing to face the consequences" (78). He declared that "weak, selfish and self-serving people and those who want to protect their inequitous, vested interests have joined our ranks", and "the word `Congress' has no former fascination for me until the danger signal is shown and these reactionaries quit by the back door" (79).

At the Haripura Session (February 1938) of the Congress, the tensions between the Kisan Sabhas and the Congress erupted in the open. The Reception Committee of the Congress banned a rally for which thousands of Kisans had come. Bhulabhai Desai wrote a series of articles in Harijan openly denouncing the Kisan Sabhas for introducing "the cult of danda" and spreading "violence" in the name of the Congress.

The Haripura Congress passed a resolution openly denouncing the Kisan

Sabhas. While reaffirming the right of the kisans to organise themselves, the Congress expressed its "inability to associate itself with any activities which are incompatible with the basic priniples of the Congress and will not contenance any of the activities of those Congressmen who, as members of the Kisan Sabhas, help in creating an atmosphere hostile to Congress principles and policy" (80).

Reacting rather strongly to the anti-property propaganda being carried on by the Kisan Sabhas, the Congress in another resolution condemned those "people, including Congressmen, who have been found in the name of civil liberties to advocate murder, arson, looting and class war ... and are continuing a campaign of falsehood and violence. The Congress will consistently, with its tradition, support measures they may be undertaken by Congress Governments for the defence of life and property" (81).

These resolutions and measures were opposed by the Kisan Sabhaites and CSP and a walk-out was led by Narendra Dev when these were passed (82). Sahajanand resigned from the Working Committee of BPCC and protested to Rajendra Prasad for passing an "indirect sentence of death" (83). Writing that, "I would serve the Congress better by remaining outside the Working Committee, and that it does not want me and that there is no place in it for a man like me", Sahajanand protested vehemently that "it is utterly false to suggest that I have preached the right of using "Danda" in self-defence in the regime of the Congress ministries alone and have been encourage by the thought that the Congress ministries will not send me to jail for saying so" (84). He denied that the Kisan Sabhas were taking advantage of the Congress ministries to propagate anti-propertism, class hatred and violence. He warned the Congress leadership that the so-called Congress-Zamindar Pact "will neither strengthen the Congress nor will it lead to justice being done to the kisans, nor the

implementing of the Faizpur resolutions" (85).

By August 1938, Sahajanand was openly denouncing the Congress for "betraying" the kisans. "I dare to declare that to ... enter into an agreement with the zamindars is a betrayal of the kisans. The basis for fighting the Assembly elections was the Agrarian Programme adopted by the Faizpur Congress. The Congress could gain historic success only on the basis of this programme. Now when the Congress is ruling in seven provinces, no one has a right to ignore the Kisan - Congress programme" (86).

Kisan marches and demonstrations became a regular feature of this period. The Kisan Day (1 September) became a permanent feature and was characterised by massive demonstrations and marches. Slogans such as "Down with the Zamindari System!", "Establish Peasant Rule!", "Down with Capitalists!" were openly propagated by the Kisan Sabha (87).

By 1938, Sahajanand was not only declaring that "the kisans are thoroughly disappointed and are revolting" and was continuing a ceaseless dialogue with leftists and CSPites, asking them to review the situation and work out an alternative based on direct struggle. In a letter to CSPites, he wrote: "In the trap of constitutionalism, we are gradually and unconsciously forgetting our direct struggle. Only an uncompromising and direct struggle can lead to the salvation of the masses" (88).

The claims of the Bihar ministry about reduction of rent and other pro-kisan measures were fiercely challenged by the Kisan Sabha. Sahajanand published two phamphlets -- The other Side of the Shield (89) and Rent Reduction in Bihar: How it Works, An Exposure of the Government's Claim (90) to refute the claims of the Bihar ministry about rent reduction (91).

In addition to these issues, the Kisan Sabha agitated over a number of other issues by joining hands with CSP. Among other issues, it strongly protested against the non-lifting of ban on CPI.

At the Comilla Session of AIKS (May 1938), the independence of the kisan movement was reaffirmed with a great deal of vigour. "The Kisan Sabha must be a separate and autonomus organisation. It is dangerous to agree that the Congress is a kisan organisation because 95 percent of its membrs are kisans. Such reasoning would lead to the fallious belief that the Congress is a Hindu organisation because an overwhelming majority of its members are Hindus" (92).

At the Comilla Session, Sahajanand warned the Congress that its "present attitude of indifference ... would be disasterous for the Congress. I am afraid the kisans are fast losing their confidence and respect for the Congress. That is a danger signal the Congress leaders should do well to note before it is too late" (93). In his denouncement of the ministries, Sahajanand charged that "the powers gained through office-acceptance are being systematically used for suppressing the kisan and mazdoor organizations" (94).

6.4.5 Disillusionment

By mid-1938, the acrimonious relationship between the Kisan Sabhas and the Congress reached its climax. A section of the Bihar Congress leadership organised a Khet Mazdoor Sangh by organising the landless labourers for throwing up an ultra-left opposition to the Bihar Kisan Sabha (95). Considerable energies of the Kisan Sabha activists in Bihar were spent in countering such activities (96).

The actual experiences of the Kisan Sabha activists in the long-drawn out, bitterly fought economistic struggles over "Bakashta" lands further contributed to this process of divorce (97). The AIKS soon formally changed its nomanclature from the Tri-colour to the Red Flag (98). The Congress Ministry had to intervene in conflict situations and in Bihar "more than 2000 kisan workers were sent to jail by the Congress Ministry" (99).

By the time the Tripuri Congress met in early 1939, the final parting of ways had come about. Vallabhbhai Patel moved a resolution prohibiting all local level committees and affiliated bodies from launching any form of Civil Disobedience by Congressmen without the previous sanction of the PCC concerned (99). The Kisan Sabhaites believed that this move would, in effect, drive out of the Congress all those who were active in peasant and workers' organisations (100).

At its meeting in Bombay (June 1939), AIKS recorded its "most emphatic protest against the decision of the CWC ... prohibiting Congressmen from offering or organising any form of Satyagraha in the Congress administered provinces" (101). The AIKS declared that the resolution would "deprieve ... kisans and workers who have joined the Congress of their fundamental right to resort to peaceful Satyagraha. For the protection of their just and legitimate rights", and would force the Kisan Sabhaites to "secure their just rights through other ways" (101).

The Kisan Sabha retaliated with Sahajanand issuing a directive on 4 July 1939 as the General Secretary of AIKS, declaring that the AICC directive would not be binding on the Kisan Sabhas (102).

By late 1939, Sahajanand was already trying to convince other leftists within the National Movement of the need of building an alternative to the Congress:

> Fortunately or unfortunately, the idea has seized me that the Congress, constituted as it is today, will never give a serious fight to our masters and the so-called left is so awfuly divided and busy more with the theories of abstract poliics ... that it never thinks in terms of a real struggle .... Really speaking, it is in the circumstances incapable of doing so. At every step, it seems, it is unduly and baselessly obsessed with the Congress being weakened because of independent political initiative taken without the consent of the Congress.
>
> Therefore, as far as the leftists are concerned, they cannot and should not accept any fight ... under the leadership of the Congress (103).

6.5 Working Class: "Politics of Disorder"

Although no micro studies of working class politics during 1937-39 are available, secondary sources of a general nature do point out to certain trends which may be summarized below.

The ministry period saw the resurgence of industrial unrest in a big way. The number of strikes rose drastically during 1937-39. Whereas during 1936, there were only 157 industrial disputes involving 169,029 workers and resulting in the loss of 23,58,662 mandays, during 1937 the number of strikes/lockouts rose to a staggering 379, affecting 647,801 workers and resulting in the loss of 89,82,257 mandays. This trend continued into 1938 and the number of disputes further rose to 399, involving 401,075 workers and resulting in the loss of 91,98,708 mandays. The climax was reached in 1939, with a peak 406 disputes, involving 409,189 workers and leading to 49,92,795

mandays lost (104). This strike wave was unprecedented and was surpassed in labour history only by the famous strike wave of the depression of 1920-21.

During the ministry period, it can be extrapolated from the above statistics of V.B. Karnik, there was a 158% increase in the number of strikes/lockouts and yet another 131% hike in the number of workers involved. The number of mandays lost appreciated by 230%. However, there was a tendency towards shorter and lightening strikes as can be seen from Karnik's data. The average duration of strikes went down and it can be suggested that strikes were now taking place more due to "political" than "economic" causes. However, this generalization needs qualitative data for validation.

In the absence of detailed studies, it is not possible to understand the nature of working class activities in various areas during this period. However, we can take some specific examples and try to extrapolate general tendencies from them.

The Congress `model' in trade-unionism, built under the personal supervison of Gandhi -- the Ahmedabad textile unions, suffered serious tensions during 1937-39. During late-1937, a serious rift emerged between the trade-unionists and Congressmen and, for the first time, the Ahmedabad unions went on a strike without the sanction of the Congress. These developments seriously "disturbed" Gandhi and he came out with public criticism of the Ahmedabad strikes. As he wrote to Nehru:

> The strikes in Ahmedabad, the Sholapur affairs and the labour unrest in Cawnpur show how uncertain is the Congress control over forces of disorder .... It is said that the Red Flag men have been at work.

> We are living in Ahmedabad and Cawnpur in perpetual dread of lightening or unauthorised strikes? Is the Congress unable to influence organised labour in the right direction? If inspited of honest eforts by Congressmen, forces of disorder cannot bc brought under control ... acceptance by Congress of the burden of office loses all force and meaning and is bound to prove detrimental to the Congress cause.(105).

While this was the situation in a place where Congress hegemony over the trade-union movement was well-established, the situation in other trade-union centres was extremely critical. The major trouble-spots for the Congress were Kanpur, Calcutta, Bombay and Bihar(106).

By 1938, the labour situation had become quite alarming for the Congress. Rajendra Prasad, realising the gravity of the situation, hurriedly despatched a number of Congressmen, trained in Ahemdabad, to different industrial centres in Bihar (107). The more important of these were Professor Abdul Bari who was sent to Jamshedpur and Mukut Dhari Singh who was sent to organise coal mine workers in Dhanbad (108). This strategy was successful only to a limited extent and could not be implemented on a large scale, considering how wide-spread industrial unrest was in Bihar (109). Those Congressmen who, however, undertook to control trade-union movements at various centres could do so by playing a mediatory role between labour and capital. A notable example of this kind of activity was the role of the Congress at TISCO, Jamshedpur (110).

The working class activities during 1937-39 were seen by the Congress as "forces of disorder". While the Congress as a movement found itself incapable of dealing with working-class movements and to a large extent kept itself aloof,

it had to confront conflict situations as the administration. This role of the Congress was a constant source of criticism and embrassment. In many cases, especially Kanpur, the Congress ministries found themselves incapable of dealing with labour-capital conflicts. In fact, about Kanpur, Haig reported to Linlithgow the "unwillingness and fear" of the Congress government to take action against the trade unionists (111).

However, Kanpur can not be taken as a typical example of the Congress ministries attitude towards labour unrest. In many cases, the Congress ministries had to use force. For instance, they had to promulgate Section 144 and Criminal Law Amendment Act in Ahmedabad, arrest trade union leaders in Sholapur, and arrest important labour organisers, like S.C. Batliwala of Madras (112).

In many provinces, labour legislations also led to the estrangement of the trade union movement with the Congress. The Trade Disputes Act, enacted by the Bombay ministy, was sharply opposed by the AITUC which gave a call for a strike on November 8, 1938 (113). The demonstrations and strikes were put down by force (114). Similarly, labour committee reports and legislation in the U.P. were also not acceptable to the leading trade unions (115).

To sum up, the intense working class unrest during 1937-39 and the Congress ministries' policy towards it, contributed to a great extent in the undermining of the Congress' hegemony. The industrial unrest, although implicitly did not counter-pose itself against the Congress, had the potential of merging forces with the strong left-wing opposition which emerged strongly against the Congress.

NOTES AND REFERANCES

1. Zaidi, op., cit., p. 109.
2. Congress Socialist, 10 July, 1937.
3. Ibid, 2 November, 1937.
4. `The Fire is Aflame', editorial in ibid, 5 March, 1938.
5. `The Parliamentary Tactics', ibid, 1939.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. `Not Out to Fight the Government', ibid, October, 1937.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. For a discussion on the role of British policy in promoting communalism as well as for a long-term study of communalism, see Bipan Chandra Communalism in Modern India.
12. The highlight of the various reports sent by provincial governors to Linilithgow was that during the elections "there was only one party in the field. It was the Congress versus the Government. But the Government has no party". Michael Keane, Governor of Assam to Linlithgow, 18th Feburary, 1937. It was commented by almost all Governors that the zamindars had been virtually wiped out during the elections and in the non-minority seats the Congress hardly faced any opposition. For instance, see Sifton, Governor of Bihar to Linlithgow, 9 Feburary, 1937. Linlithgow Papers, Roll. No. 112.
13. Winston Churchill to Linlithgow, 3 November, 1937, ibid, Roll. No. 115.
14. This view was expressed by Jinnah to Khaliquzzaman in Feburary 1936. C. Khaliquzzaman, Pathway to Pakistan, p. 141.
15. Coupland, ibid, part II.
16. S.R. Mehrotra, The Congress and the Partition of India in C.H. Philips & Mary Doreen Wainwright (ed.) The Partition of India, Policies and Perspectives, 1935-1947, London, 1970.
17. This issue has generated much controversy ever since, specially after the publication of M.K. Azad's, India Wins Freedom. Arguements for and against co-alition minitries are explained in Nehru's letter to Rajendra Prasad, 21 July 1937, cited in SW, vol.
18. B.R. Nanda, "Nehru and the Partition of India, 1935-47," in Phillip

and Wainwright, op.cit., p. 158.

19. Zaidi (ed.), Evolution of Muslim Political Thought in India, vol. 5, p. 37.

20. Pirzada S.S. (ed.), Foundations of Pakistan, vol. II (Karachi, 1970), pp. 267-68.

21. Zaidi, op. cit., p. 38.

22. Coupland, op. cit., p. 183.

23. Z.H. Zaidi, "Aspects of Muslim League Policy, 1937-47" in Phillip and Wainwright, op. cit., p. 254.

24. Zaidi, op. cit., p. 54.

25. Ibid.

26. Pirzada, Documents, op. cit., p. 298.

27. Coupland, op. cit., p. 185.

28. Report of the Enquiry Committee Appointed by the Counsel of the All India Muslim League to Enquire into Muslim Grievances in Congress Provinces.

29. Ibid., p. 50.

30. Ibid., p. 2.

31. Ibid.

32. Shareef Report, cited in Coupland, op. cit., p. 186.

33. Ibid.

34. Coupland, Ibid., p. 187.

35. The figures for "Non-Congress Provinces" for the same period are: serious riots 27, casualities around 300, deaths 36. Coupland, op. cit., p. 139.

36. Ibid., p. 142. Such a view widely shared by many scholars that there had emerged a sharp communal polarity between Hindus and Muslims by 1937-38 has been challenged recently by Mushrul Hasan in a significant article. Hasan contests the view that "by 1937-39, most Muslims were arrayed against the Congress and had rallied round the League banner". He believes that "in 1937-38 there existed neither a sharp communal polarisation between Hindus and Muslims nor any significant political solidarity in the Muslim community". The Muslim Mass Contact Campaign: An Attempt at Political Mobilisation, NMML Occasional Paper, No. XIV, 1984.

37. Coupland, op. cit., p. 195.

38. Zaidi, op. cit., p. 155.

39. Coupland, op. cit., p. 196.

40. Muslim League Resolution, National Herald, 19 September 1939.

41. A typical example is Jinnah's Presidential Address at the League's Annual Session at Patna in December 1938: "As I have said before, there are four forces at play in this country. Firstly, there is the British Government. Secondly, there are the rulers and peoples of the Indian states. Thirdly, there are the Hindus, and fourthly, there are Muslims. The Congress press may clamour as much as it likes; they may bring out their morning, afternoon, evening and night editions; the Congress leaders may shout as much as they like that the Congress is a national body. But I say it is not true. The Congress is nothing but a Hindu body. That is the truth and the Congress leaders know it. The presence of the few Muslims, the few misled and misguided ones, and the few who are there with ulterior motives, does not, cannot, make it a national body. I challenge anybody to deny that the Congress is not mainly a Hindu body. I ask, does the Congress represent the Muslim? (Shouts of "No, no" which were repeated as indicated below).

I ask does the Congress represent the Christians? ("No").
I ask does the Congress represent the Scheduled Castes? ("No").
I ask does the Congress represent the non-Brahmans? ("No").

I say the Congress does not even represent all the Hindus. What about the Hindu Mahasabha? What about the Liberal Federation? The Congress, no doubt, is the largest single party in the country. But it is nothing more than that. It may arrogate to itself whatever titles it likes, the Congress High Command, in the intoxication of power, like persons who are drunk, may make any claims it pleases them to make. But such claims cannot alter the true character of the Congress. It remains what it is -- mainly - a Hindu body". Zaidi, op., cit.

42. This is illustrated by the negotiations which took place between Linlithgow and various Indian political leaders on the question of support to the Government in its war-efforts. Jinnah's only term for offering co-operation to the British was that the Muslim League should be recognized as the sole representative of the Muslims. It declared that the "entire problem of India's future constitution must be considered `de novo' and that no declartion or commitment should be made by His Majesty's Government without the approval and consent of the Muslim League which is the only authoritative and representative organization of the Muslims of India", National Herald, 19 Oct. 1939.

This claim of the Muslim League was granted by the British Government, although not formally but in a functional sense. This is obvious from Linlithgow's appreciative comment on the Muslim League's position on the war issue to the Secretay of State, Lord Zetland: "The Muslim League resolution so far as it goes is very satisfactory

... it is ... of real value that at this moment, a body representing more than 9,000,000 people should offer us co-operation and accept as genrally satisfactory the declaration which we have made". Linlithgow to Zetland, 23 October 1939, Linlithgow Papers, vol. 18, Roll 6.

43. B.N. Pandey (ed.), The Indian Nationalist Movement, 1885-1947 Select Documents, 1979, p. 153.

44. For a perceptive study of Nehru's understanding of communalism, see Salil Misra, Nehru and Communalism: A Study in Transition, unpublished M.Phil thesis, J.N.U.

45. For an extensive account of the Muslim Mass Contact Programme, see File No. G-22-1938, AICC Papers.

46. Nehru to Rajendra Prasad, SW, vol. 8.

47. Ibid.

48. G-32/1938, AICC Papers.

49. Nehru to Sayyed Mahmud, 2 December 1939, SW, vol. 8, p. 381.

50. Two important studies on the Kisan Sabhas during this period are: Gyan Prakash Sharma: The Congress, Peasant Movement and Agrarian Legislation in Bihar 1937-39 unpublished M. Phil thesis, JNU, 1979 and Rakesh Gupta's book, Bihar Peasantry And the Kisan Sabha (1936-1937), New Delhi, 1982. Also see Walter Hauser's thesis Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha, 1920-40, Chicago University, 1961 (On microfilm at NMML).

51. As Sahajanand explains in his autobiography: "It was decided that we should organise a Kisan Sabha and start a movement to save a catastrophe. This would be a step forward to prevent a struggle between the zamindars and the peasants, and through the principle of compromise, settle the internal quarrels, which has been the principle of the Congress. Specially, Gandhiji always believed like that, and he was my guide". Mera Jeevan Sangharsh, p. 8. Translated from Hindi.

52. The immediate occasion for the organisation of BPKS in November 1929 was to oppose the ill-famous Sifton's Tenency Bill which was being ploted by the Zamindars.

53. There seems to be a distinct tendency during this period for the zamindars, princes and landlords to organise themselves more actively and directly. In fact, a large number of regional parties such as the United Party of Bihar, the Unionist Party in the Punjab, the Nationalist Agriculturist Party in the U.P., the Justice Party in Madras, and the Krishak Proja Party in Bengal were actively promoted during this period.

54. Quoted in Avadeshwar Pratap Singh, Bihar Pradesh Kisan Sabha Ki Report, Translated from Hindi.

55. As he wrote about the possibility of radicalising the Congress: "Perhaps our friends think that the decision of the Karachi Congress

is the limit and the Congress cannot go beyond it. I emphasise in plain words that the Karachi resolution is only the first step towards a long journey. The Karachi resolution has only shown the tendency of the Congress to go beyond political struggle over to economic questions. And the Congress has not done this without reason. It was not the unemployed youth only who had participated in the activities of the Congress. But its front ranks were manned by peasants and workers. We should be happy and should endeavour to get their demands and rights presented in the Congress and get them passed rather than run away from it. Our freedom struggle will not be successful unless we include 80 percent peasants in it". Mera Jeevan Sangharsh, p. 59. translated from Hindi.

56. "The Faizpur Agrarian Programme of the Congress and its decision to abolish zamindari are living evidences that the Congress is the very own organisation of the kisans. Now it is the fault of the kisans if they do not participate in Congress Elections. Even then, they constitute the majority of the Congress membership. In future they should be careful and fight the elections and capture Congress committtees". Kisan Sabha Ke Sansmaran, Sahajanand Saraswati Papers, Roll No. 2, translated from Hindi.

57. "Organized on the basis of the economic interests of the kisans, the Kisan Sabha can never be parallel to the political and multi-class-based Congress. It is foolish to think on these lines". Kisan Sabha Ke Sansmaran, p. 52. Sahajanand Papers, Roll No. 2, Translated from Hindi.

58. A typical critique of the Congress leadership by Sahajanand during this period: "Born, brought up and educated in an aristocratic atmosphere, their swing is more to the right than to the left. They do not want to confront the real issues before the Congress, though they are eager to have the Kisan behind their National Movement. To them, a Kisan, who is always ready to go to jail at their bid, who wears Khadi and votes for their candidates in the elections without murmuring and thinking in terms of his class interest is more dsirable than a militant one". Congress Socialist, 26 December 1936.

59. Kisan Sabha Ke Sansmaran, p. 29. Similarly, he wrote: "As a national organisation, the Congress is the forum of all the classes. All the classes are a part of the Congress, It represents all sections and classes. This is the claim of the Congress and this is desirable also. That is why people belonging to different classes will identify themselves with it, regard it as their own organisation and try to strengthen it," Ibid., p. 28.

60. Sahajanand Papers, Roll No. 3.

61. M.A. Rasul, History of the All India Kisan Sabha.

62. Ibid.

63. Ibid., p. 7.

64. Congress Socialist, 29 August 1936.

65. Rasul, op. cit., p. 11.

66. N.G. Ranga, Congress Socialist, 20 February 1937.

67. Ibid.

68. "There are Congress ministries functioning in six provinces and in view of the Faizpur Resolution and Agrarian Programme put forward in the Election Manifesto, it was naturaly expected that they would begin to implement that programme. But inspite of being in office for over a month they have kept mum, to the utter surprise of all, to this vital issue. It is the bounden duty of all organisers of the Kisan Day (1 September 1937) to remind these ministries of this cardinal point". Congress Socialist, 21.8.1937.

69. The Congress Socialist reported in its December 1937 issue: "Over one lakh peasants attended a mammoth rally at Patna on 26 November 1937 to present a Charter of Demands. The demands included abolition of zamindari, 50 percent reduction in rents, abolition of debts and higher cane prices".

70. Rasul, op. cit., p. 14.

71. Ibid.

72. Ibid., p. 17.

73. Ibid.

74. Searchlight, January 16, 1938. emphasis added.

75. For example, The Searchlight in its Jan. 6, 1938 issue described Sahajanand as a "political turncoat" and being "over anxious for leadership". It accused the Bihar Kisan Sabha of gathering an army of "dissatisfied and disgruntled persons who make no secret of their craving for the blood of Congress leaders".

76. Searchlight, January 19, 1938. Earlier AIKS had denounced "the attempts and proposals made by Congress and other MLAs and ministers to pay compensation at the present swollen market prices to zamindars for the purchase of their zamindaris under the pretext of abolishing the zamindari system by peaceful means", Rasul, op. cit., p. 15.

77. A consistent campaign was launched in various newspapers. For example, in Sangharsh, the following issues carrieded critical articles and comments about the issue: 26-12-1937, 31-1-1938, 7-2-1938, 25-4-1938, 30-5-1938, 4-7-1938, 18-7-1938, 15-8-1938, 29-8-1938, 26-9-1938, 3-10-1938, 24-10-1938. In addition, the Congress ministries wee regularly criticised in the Kisan Bulletin carried by the Congress Socialist.

78. Speech at Champaran, All India Kisan Bulletin, April 1938, AICC Papers, G-40/1940.

79. Ibid.

80. Pattabhi Satarammayya, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 82.

81. Ibid.

82. Ibid., p. 82.

83. Hindustan Times, January 5, 1938.

84. Ibid.

85. Ibid. (Hindustan Times, 5 January 1938, letter to Rajendra Prasad).

86. Sangharsh, 19 September 1938.

87. Another slogan which was extremely popular was "Malguzari Loge Kaise, Danda Hamara Zindabad". See Rajendra Prasad's article in Sangharsh, 17 January 1938.

88. Sangharsh, 22 August 1938.

89. The Other Side of the Shield (Bombay) 1938.

90. Rent Reduction in Bihar: How it Works, An Exposure of the Government's Claim (Patna) 1939.

91. According to a study cited by Rakesh Gupta, new tenancy laws in the four districts of Patna, Gaya, Shahabad and Monghyr gave relief to 150,388 cases, spread over 6,019 vilages. The overall percentage reduction in rent due to new tenancy legislations came to 24.6 percent, op. cit., p. 72.

92. Sahajanand's speech at Comilla Session of AIKS, Rasul op. cit., p. 30.

93. Ibid., p. 34.

94. Ibid., p. 33.

95. Ibid., p. 29.

96. The mechanical understanding of the Kisan Sabha leaders is brought out by Sahajanand's statement made while championing the causes of the landless labour: "The Sabha believes that a revolution is accompanied and sustained only by the lowest classes of society", Ibid. p. 30.

97. For an account of Bakashta struggles and a general assessment of Bihar ministry's agrarian policy, see Gyan Prakash Sharma, Congress, Peasant Movements and Agrarian Legislation in Bihar, 1937-39, M. Phil thesis, JNU, 1979. Also see Rakesh Gupta, op. cit.

and Anil Mishra, The Bakashta Struggles in Bihar, Mimeographical Paper sponsored by Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, 1981.

98. Rasul, op. cit., p. 13.

99. Gyan Prakash Sharma, op. cit., p. 131.

100. Mitra, NN, op. cit., Jan-June 1939.

101. Rasul, op. cit., p. 63.

102. Mitra, op. cit.

103. Sahajanand, 'A letter to some leaders of the Left', November 1939, Sahajanand Papers, Roll No. 8.

104. V.B. Karnik Strikes in India.

105. Gandhi to Nehru, 18 December, 1937, MGCW, vol. 66, p. 258.

106. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, op. cit.

107. Rajendra Prasad Papers.

108. Ibid.

109. Some of the important centres which witnessed large scale unrest in Bihar were: Jamshedpur, Dhanbad, Dalmianagar, Singhbhum, Manbhum, Ghatshila and Golmuri. Annual Reports, 1936-39, Director of Industries, Bihar.

110. To solve the long-standing grivances of the Tata Workers Union, an arbitration board was set-up. The report of this board which consisted of Patel and Nehru was accepted by the TWU only on the mediation of Patel and Rajendra Prasad who pressurised local Congressmen and labour activists. Examples of such mediation can be multiplied.

111. Haig to Linlithgow, December 19, 1938, Linlithgow Papers, op. cit., In fact, for Gandhi it was a matter of principle that "forces of disorder ... should not be brought under control with the assistance of police and the military". MGCW, vol. 66, p. 300.

112. L.P. Sinha: Left-Wing in India, 1919-47, p. 440-43.

113. Ibid.

114. Vishalakshi Menon, op. cit.

CHAPTER 7

PERCEPTIONS: STRENGTH OR WEAKNESS?

The backlash to the ministries decisively contributed to the shifts in the perceptions of the leadership, especially in their assessments of the strength and weaknesses of the Congress. And these shifts in perceptions as well as the divergent assessments of strength and weaknesses led to clash at Tripuri Congress. These changes in perceptions, as seen through the eyes of Gandhi, are described in this Chapter.

In the perceptions of Gandhi, the origins of this shift can be traced to the labour unrest in Ahmedabad and Sholapur which "disturbed" him and he wondered that, "if we cannot control the situation ... our holding of offices is likely to prove detrimental" (1). He publicly declared that "if the outbreaks at Sholapur and the labour unrest in Ahmedabad and Cawnpur ... are signs of weakness of Congress control, the whole situation arising out of acceptance of offices by Congressmen requires reviewing" (2). He wondered that, "if Congressmen are not sure of our own chosen aims, we need not wonder if one fine morning we discover that we had committed a blunder in embarking upon office-acceptance" (3).

However, these utterances were essentially in the nature of doubts, Gandhi, while feeling disturbed with the events, thought that they would blow over and would not fundamentally affect the strategy of office-acceptance. Not only this, he continued to be enamoured of the initial success of the strategy and the strength and prestige which the Congress apparently gained after the formation of ministries. As late as January 1938, Gandhi was enthusiastically declaring that "my ambition is to see the Congress recognised as the one and

only party that can successfully resist the Government and deliver the goods" (4).

This optimism continued upto Haripura and Gandhi was convinced that, "despite all our failings we may be able to see Purna Swaraj within my life-time. If we can accomplish our task intelligently, the British will have to admit defeat at our hands. There will be only one power in India with whom they can discuss matters and that power will be the Congress. We could accomplish whatever we wanted within one year and we ... developed the strength for it" (5).

However, the period immediately followed by Haripura Congress proved to be an anti-climax for Gandhi (6). By March 1938, Gandhi began to publicly declare that "the conclusion which I drew from what I saw in Haripur was erroneous. I believe that if today the Viceroy sent for Subhash Babu, or Jawaharlal or me, and asked what we wanted I WOULD REPLY THAT I WAS NOT EQUAL TO THE TASK. TODAY WE DO NOT HAVE THE STRENGTH TO RESPOND. If I tell the Vicer that we do not need the police and the army and that we can defend ourselves, that we have the weapon of non-violence that the Muslims are our friends, and so are the Pathans, and that we shall bear with the Sikhs, he would conclude that I was out of my mind ... Today we have power neither over the princes, nor over the zamindars, neither over the Muslims or the Sikhs. Leave aside others, do we have control even over those who are within the Congress .... if this state of affairs continued, we would not win Swaraj in 30 years, let alone one" (7).

This was followed by a pathetic letter to Nehru in which Gandhi lamented that "we seem to be weakening from within. It hurts me that, at this very important juncture in our history, we do not see eye to eye in important

matters. I cannot tell you how positively lonely I feel to know that now-a-days I can't carry you with me" (8).

The Kisan Sabha opposition in Bihar to the Congress ministry evoked a strong response from Gandhi: "my study of the seperate kisan organisation has led me definitely to the conclusion that they are not working for the interests of the kisans but are organising only with a view to capturing the Congress organisation. They can do even this by leading the kisans along the right channels, but I am afraid they are misleading them ... But the main question is whether you want the Kisan Sabhas to strengthen the Congress or weaken it, to use the kisan organisation to capture the Congress or service the kisans, whether the Sabha is to be a rival organisation working apparently in the name of the Congress or one carrying out the Congress policy (9).

Similarly, the widespread industrial unrest often leading to adventurist and violent outbursts "disturbed" Gandhi profoundly. "We are living in Ahmedabad and Cawnpur in perpetual dread of lightening and unauthorised strikes. Is the Congress unable to influence organised labour in the right direction?" (10). He wondered whether "holding of offices by Congressmen is justified. If inspite of honest effort by Congressmen, forces of disorder cannot be brought under control without the assistance of the police and the military, in my opinion acceptance by the Congress of the burden of offices loses all force and meaning, and the sooner the Ministers are withdrawn, the better it would be for the Congress and its struggle to achieve complete independence" (11).

By May 1938, Gandhi's ideas had crystallised and he was publicly lementing that "the violence I see running through speeches and writings, the corruption and selfishness among Congressmen, and the petty bickerings fill me

with disgust" (12).

By July 1938, it had become clear to Gandhi that "the darkness that seems to have enveloped us will disappear, and that, with another battle more brillant than the Dandi March, India will come to her own demonstrably through non-violent means. I am praying for the light that will dispel the darkness" (13).

While Gandhi began to see the need for another phase of non-constitutional struggle, he was fully aware that the Congress was losing its organizational reserves of hegemony and that no further non-constitutional struggle was possible in near future. This steady loss of organizational reserves of hegemony was viewed with the greatest alarm by Gandhi. In fact, this is the most persistent underlying theme of his speeches and writings during 1938-39. However, as was typical of Gandhi, he did not theorise about this but chose to refer to it in moral terms like stressing the need for "internal purity", condemning "selfishness" and "violence", etc. Following Gandhi's example, even the Constitutionalists evaded the real issues by making a fetish of "internal purity" and need for "selfless service". Only in the writings of CSP leaders like Narendra Deva does one find some attempts to conceptualise this phenomenon of depletion of the organisational reserves of hegemony of the Congress (14). Nehru did perceive this phenomenon but chose to remain silent about it. His private writings do, however, give us an idea about how his mind was working. His public utterances were discreet as he believed that "we cannot agitate against ourselves" (15).

Thus by January 1939 Gandhi was publicly declaring that "If I was called upon to lead an army of civil resisters, I should be unable to shoulder this

burden. This is a big admission to make .... Out of the present condition of the Congress, I see nothing but anarchy and red ruin in front of the country (16).

By May 1939, Gandhi's impatience had reached its climax:

> We shall not be able to do anything as long as this corruption persists. For me there is no difference between Civil Disobediance and office-acceptance. Both are part of the Satyagraha movement. I have become so impatient of the corruption prevailing in the Congress that I should not hesitate to bury the organisation, if corruption cannot be removed (17).

In fact, Gandhi's clash with Subhash Bose at Tripuri centred on one basic issue: their different assessments of the strengths and weaknesses of the Congress. Bose believed that the Congress was strong enough to give a six months' ultimatum to the Colonial State and could then go over for a decisive all-out non-constitutional struggle. On the contrary, Gandhi believed that the Congress was exhausting its organisational reserves of hegemony and any form of non-constitutional activity would decisively undermine Congress' hegemony. Explaining his differences with Bose, Gandhi wrote:

This fundamental difference of opinion reached a climax at Tripuri and Bose openly accused Vallabhbhai Patel and a section of the top leadership whom he denounced as "Rightists" and of trying to compromise with the British Government (18).

In his attempt to convince Gandhi, Bose wrote:

> If we come to the parting of ways, a bitter civil war will commence and whatever be the upshot of it, the Congress will be weakened for some time to come and the benefit will be reaped by the British Government. It is in your hands to save the Congress. .... If struggle takes place in the present circumstances, it cannot be a long-drawn one. I am so confident and so optimistic on this point that I feel that if we take courage in both hands and go ahead and that we should take 18 months at the most. I feel so strongly on this point that I am prepared to make any sacrifice in this connection. If you take up the struggle, I shall most gladly help you to the best of my ability. If you feel that the Congress will be able to fight better with another President, I shall gladly step aside. If you feel that the Congress will be able to figh more effectively with a Working Committee of your choice, I shall gladly fall in line with your wishes. All I want is that you and the Congress should in this critical hour stand up and rescue the struggle for Swaraj (19).

However, Gandhi was convinced that the "views you seem to express to me appear to be so diametrically opposed to those of others and my own that I do not see any possibility of bridging them" (20).

Making his position clear, Gandhi declared:

> He (Subhas Bose) holds that we possess enough resources for a fight. I am totally opposed to his views. Today we possess no resources for a fight. Today the whole atmosphere is so steeped in violence that I cannot think of fighting .... Pantji could not control things in Cawnpur .... There is no limit to communal strife .... Today we are not able to control more than a handful of people. Workers and peasants too were supposed to be entirely with the Congress. We do not have the same hold among the peasants of Bihar as we used to. Is this a situation favourable for starting a struggle? If today I am asked to start a Dandhi March, I have not the courage to do so. How can we do anything without the workers and peasants? The country belongs only to them. We are not equipped to issue an ultimatum to the Government. The country would be open to ridicule (21).

In a personal letter to Subhash Bose, Gandhi regretted the difference of

opinion between them and explained:

> My prestige does not count. It has no independent value of its own ... India will rise or fall by the quality of the sum total of the acts of her many millions. Individuals are of account in so far as they represent the many millions ...
>
> ... I see no atmosphere for non-violent mass action. An ultimatum without an effective sanction is worse than useless.
>
> But I am an old man, perhaps growing timid and over-cautious, and you have youth before you and reckless optimism born of youth. I hope you are right and I am wrong. I have the firm belief that the Congress, as it is today, cannot deliver the goods, cannot offer civil disobedience worth the name. Therefore, if your prognosis is right, I am a back number and played out as the generalissimo of Satyagraha" (22).

In a letter of protest, he wrote to Bose that "the old colleagues whom you consider as rightists will not serve on your cabinet. You can have their resignations now. Their presence would be unfair to you and to them. You should be left free to frame your own programme and expect the rightists (I wish you could choose better and indigenous terms to designate the parties of your imagination) to support you where they can and abstain where they cannot see eye-to-eye with you" (23).

After the Tripuri crisis was over and the Congress ministries resigned due to the war crisis, Gandhi's sagging morale began to get a boost. As he wrote on the resignation of the ministries:

> I am quite clear in my mind that what has happened is best for the cause. It is a bitter pill I know. But it was needed. It will drive away all the parasites from the body. We have been obliged to do wrong things which we shall be able to avoid (24).

However, he was definite that any moves towards any form of non-constitutional activity were bound to be disastrous. Talking about future

course of action, he declared:

> The resignation of the Congress ministries was a necessity. But the next step is by no means clear. Congressmen seem to be expecting a big movement.
>
> Apart from the uncertainty of the observance of non-violence in Congress ranks, is the tremendous fact that the Muslim League looks upon the Congress as the enemy of the Muslims. This makes it well-nigh impossible for the Congress to organise successfull non-violent revolution through civil disobediance. It will certainly mean Hindu-Muslim riots (25).

Declaring that, "no one has resisted England more effectively, perhaps than I have. And my desire for and power of resistance remains unabated. But there are seasons for speech and action, as there are seasons for silence and inaction"(26), he publicly expressed his apprehensions:

> A false step by the Congress at this stage is bound to retard the country's progress towards its goal. Strange as it may seem to Congressmen, I make bold to suggest that the one way to disarm communal suspicion is not to offer civil disobediance in terms of Swaraj. The prospect that is about to face the country is that of the British Government in alliance with the so-called minorities arrayed against the Congress single-handed. Civil Disobediance against this combination is a contradiction in terms. It would not even be civil war. It will be crimainal war (27).

It has been suggested by Tomlinson that the acceptance of offices led to increase in Congress' strength as during this period the Congress was "feeding on governmental power and prestige" (28). For Gandhi, however, the criterion for strength or weaknes lay in the organisational reserves of hegemony of the Congress, because politics for Gandhi was hegemony.

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1. Letter to Nehru, 8 December 1937, MGCW, vol. 66, p. 258.

2. 'Harijan', 21 November 1937, ibid, p. 300.

3. Ibid.

4. Letter to Lord Lothian, 20 January 1938, ibid, p. 344.

5. Speech at Sarva Seva Sangh, ibid, pp. 420-424.

6. The context in which a drastic change occurred for Gandhi during March-April 1938 is explained in the Introduction of his Collected Works relating to this period (vol. 67, April 1938 to October 1938):

   > It was a period of heightening of the turmoil that had been building up in the country ever since the Congress took offices. There was spurt in peasant marches and demonstrations, strikes and picketing and similar agitational activities ... Impatient spirit in the Congress were inciting the peasants to violence. In U.P., violence was being preached to the peasants, in prose and verse, in words of blood and thunder and peasant marches and demonstrations were being organized at a large scale ... The situation was made worse by the weakening of the Congress from within ...
   >
   > All this was the cause of much distress to Gandhiji. And an ocurrance of a personal nature, an involuntary discharge in a wakeing state, turned the distress, into despondency, bordering on despair ... his confidence in himself was shaken, ibid, vol. 67.

7. Speech at Sarva Seva Sangh, March 1938, ibid, p. 420.

8. 8 December, 1937, ibid, p. 258.

9. 'Harijan', 23 April 1938, ibid, vol. 67, pp. 23-24.

10. Ibid, vol. 66, pp. 300-302.

11. Ibid.

12. Letter to Nehru on 2 April 1938, ibid, vol. 67, p. 47.

13. 'Harijan', 23 July 1938, ibid, p. 197.

14. See Bramhanand (ed.): National Revolution and Socialism and Towards Socialist Unity.

15. Gopal, op. cit, vol. 1, p. 237.

16. 'Harijan', 28 January 1939, MGCW, vol. 68, pp. 320-321.

17. Ibid, May 1939.

18. Bose openly declared: "... can anybody challenge the fact that a belief is widely held that during the coming years, a compromise will be effected between the British Government and the Right-Wing of the Congress. Not only that, it is generally believed that a prospective list of Ministers for the federal cabinet has already been drawn up". Mitra (ed.) op. cit., 1939, part I, p. 44.

19. Bose to Gandhi, 31 March 1939, R.P. Papers, Roll No. 6.

20. 5 March 1939, MGCW, vol. 68, p. 383.

21. 5 May 1939, ibid, vol. 69, pp. 206-207.

22. 2 April 1939, ibid, pp. 96-98.

23. May 1939, ibid, vol. 68,

24. 23 October 1939, ibid, vol. 70, p. 29.

25. `Harijan', 4 November 1939, ibid, pp. 315-316.

26. 11 September 1939, ibid, vol. 68.

27. `Harijan', 11 November 1939, ibid, vol. 70, p. 323.

28. According to Tomlinson, this strength was reflected in the increase in Congress membership from 635,504 in 1936-37 (before office-acceptance) to 4,511,858 in 1938-39. He further says that renounceing of offices led to a sharp decline in membership which slumped to 2,973,452 in 1939-40, op. cit., p. 86.

CHAPTER 8

RECAPITULATIONS

a) The period under study has been variously portrayed in historiographic works. Tomlinson looks upon this period as a catalyst in the long-term swing of the Congress towards constitutionalism -- a phase during which Congress politics achieved institutionalised forms and meshed with institutions of power and authority (1). There is an inherent bias in the framework of Tomlinson to regard the Congress essentially as a `party´ espousing constitutional politics. Partly this bias is due to the very partial view of the Congress politics which Tomlinson is able to obtain due to his very periodization (1934-40). As a result, Tomlinson looks upon the phase of ministries as a period of `fructification´ -- a period in which the Congress grew `stronger´, as it was "feeding on governmental power and authority" and could find "greater favour than a Congress espousing agitation politics" (2).

But then why should a `party´ "feeding on power and authority" renounce offices inspite of a multi-fold increase in "strength" (read membership -- the two being synonymous for Tomlinson!) and despite the fact that the British were willing to give the Congress as much rope as it wanted to hang itself.

The explanation is offered by Tomlinson in terms of `provinicialisation´ of the National Movement -- a trend characterised by the greater degree of assertion of local and provincial functionaries and the resultant pulls and pressures leading to a weakening of control of the central `party bosses´.

Following an almost identical framework, although at the provincial

level, David Arnold's work for Tamil Nadu looks upon this period as that of a "reproachment" between the Congress and the Colonial State (3).

Similarly, the first full-length published account of the `ministry period', Ram Shankardass' study of Bombay, is entitled the "First Congress Raj" (4). In her study, Shankardass has focussed attention almost exclusively on the activities of the Congress as a provincial administration; the crucial inter-linkages of legislative and ministerial activities with other forms of popular protest as well as the tensions and dialemmas of being the provincial administration and a protest movement at the same time have not been explored. No attempt has been made to study the Congress as a social movement; instead the Congress has been reduced during this period to just the administrative and bureaucratic activities of the ministry.

All these writings are manifestations of the historiographic tendency to look upon the Congress during this period as some kind of a `surrogate state' -- although such a characterisation has not been put forward explicitly by any historian so far, it is implicit in the frameworks of many.

From our reading of contemporary sources of the period, it can be definitively argued that it is wrong to suggest that there was a large-scale swing to constitutional politics, that the bulk of Congressmen were no longer interested in agitational and extra-constitutional politics, that a number of them, especially in the leadership, were hankering for power and legislative and ministerial authority. Only a miniscule section of Congressmen, led by Satyamurthy, was enamoured of the prospect of offices and a Congress government at the centre under the Federation. An overwhelming majority of Congressmen looked upon offices as part of a wider perspective of building and extending

nationalist hegemony. This is borne out clearly by the debate which took place on office-acceptance and is substantiated further by the fact that the resignation of the Congress ministries in September 1939 did not lead to any serious dissentions and backlash or even a feeling of regret among the bulk of Congressmen.

No fruitful study of nationalist politics during this period is possible unless the Congress is looked upon essentially as a social movement. Evaluation of Congress politics in terms of just the acts and omissions of the ministries can lead to a very narrow and largely distorted view of history.

b) The long debate which took place among Congressmen over the crucial issue of office-acceptance has not been analysed exhaustively by any historian so far. What were the assumptions, considerations and pressures that led to the suspension of the Second Civil Disobediance Movement and return to constitutioal politics? What were the issues and dialemmas that confronted the mass of Congressmen when they were faced with the challenge of the GOI Act of 1935? What were the hopes and fears of the nationalist leadership when it embarked upon the adventure of office-acceptance?

These questions have not been dealt with adequately by historians so far and the explanations provided are far from satisfactory. The Congress' decision to return to 'council politics', for instance, is casually explained by Sumit Sarkar thus: "Business groups in general were much more interested (now that civil disobedience had failed) in having the Congress back in the legislatures as an effective pressure-group which could lobby for them. The prospect of full responsible governments in provinces added to the attraction, which was strongly

felt by the bulk of Congress leaders" (5).

Thus a whole range of assumptions which went into office-acceptance have been ignored in favour of the now-familiar and convinent way of explaining shifts and changes in Congress politics in terms of the pressures and dictats of the bourgeoise.

As argued earlier, the assumptions that went into office-acceptance and the choice of one form of struggle over the other at a point in time were directly linked to Congressmen's perceptions of the strength and weaknesses of the Congress as an organisation. The organisational aspects involved in nationalist politics have received little attention so far. The result is that the Congress is either perceived as an organisation which could mobilize the masses at any time, on any issue and in any form, or it is perceived as a body of elites which `instrumentalized' the masses.

The objective limitations of the Congress as an organisation as well as the weaknesses and fragility of its social base, consisting of a multitude of classes, communities and social groups, need to examined more comprehensively.

c) The categroics of `Left' and `Right' have been used extensively by all historians of this period to characterize various political trends within the National Movement. However, there is considerable lack of clarity about what constitutes `Leftism' and `Rightism' in the context of a national liberation movement. It may be noted that `Left' and `Right' are not (like capitalism and working class are) universal categories in a historical sense, although they do have certain loosely specific connotations. They are relative categories --

relative to each other in their degree of contra-opposition.

Regretably, these categories have been applied in a most unimaginative manner while dealing with nationalist politics. Most of the time, `Leftist´ has been used interchangably with `Non-Constitutionalist´ and `Rightist´ with `Constitutionalist´. This is amply illustrated by the clash at Tripura which has been very conviently portrayed as a showdown between the `Right´ and the `Left´. As a result, forms of struggle (pertaining strictly to strategy-related issues) have become a fundamental criterion for ideological characterisations.

Perhaps what is needed is a set of agreed criteria, based on which these characterisations can be fruitfully applied. This is not to deny that forms of struggle do not have wider ideological ramnifications, but only to suggest that forms of struggle should not be as an exclusive criterion for ideoligical characterisations.

Hence what is required is a set of criterion to provide an analytical content to these categories, in addition to making them context-specific. There is need to think about what it means to be a `Rightist´ or a `Leftist´ in the context of an anti-imperialist struggle.

In the interim, it would be more meaningful if the necessary distinction between forms of struggle and ideological characterisation distinction is maintained, as choice of forms of struggle at a particular point is determined by a range of factors which may not necessarily reflect the class character of a group. These factors could be related to the structure, policy and tactics of the state, the strength and weaknesses of various parties involved, and a whole range of other conjunctural factors.

d) The limitations and weaknesses of the National Movement need to be analysed more rigourously, not only in terms of `perfect' or `imperfect' mobilization, but also at the level of coming to terms with the problem of multiple `codes of consciousness' and `collective identities'. The continual reassertion of class and communal identities, often in acrimonious opposition to the organised National Movement represented by the Congress, needs to be examined not only at the level of politics but also at a cultural level.

K.N. Panikkar has recently suggested that the cultural struggle against imperialism was "divorced from political reality" due to the mediation of colonial ideology which successfully created and maintained a disjunction between the cultural and political spheres of struggle against imperialism (6). Consequently, "the cultural question ... remained outside the pale of political agitation" and "the cultural-ideological struggle had no chance of linking itself with a political movement aimed against colonial domination" (7). Perhaps another direct implication of this was the failure and weakness of the integrative role of nationalism, i.e., the ability to subsume `secondary' identities of caste and community, etc.

What is perhaps required is a new corpus of evaluative and explanatory concepts to come to terms with a movement which was unique both in terms of form and content and was infinitely more complex than one would suspect. Commenting on the uniqueness and complexity of the movement, Antonio Gramsci wrote:

> The war of position requires a far more complex political struggle, a specific combination of forms of struggle in which the political

element would always prevail over the military. A typical example of this war of position was the anti-colonialist resistance of Gandhi in India .... We would define this war of position as a strategy for long-term resistance -- a people's war in which it is necessary to accumulate thousands of small victories and turn them into a great success.

A long-term struggle of this kind starts from a situation of imbalance, in which the enemy is stronger. But it seeks to change this situation in stages (defensive phase, relative equilibrium, counter-offensive).

The necessary build-up of forces ... unprecedented concentration of hegemony is not simply confined to an assault on the enemy's trenches. It also requires a large mass of people, a struggle of people.

To translate these points into a strategic doctrine, War of Position as a long-term strategy precedes by an unprecedented siege of the principal and secondary contradictions of society in question (8).

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2. Ibid.
3. David Arnold: The Congress in Tamil Nad.
4. Rani Dhawan Shankardass, First Congress Raj: Provincial Autonomy in Bombay.
5. Sarkar, op. cit., p. 330.
6. 'Roots of Cultural Backwardness' in Mainstream, 7 November, 1981.
7. Ibid.
8. Cited in Christine Buci-Glucksmann Gramsci and the State, London, 1981, pp. 251-2.

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