

**Aspects of Provincial Politics in Colonial India:
The Central Provinces and Berar
1936 – 1939**

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DECLARATION

Certified that the dissertation entitled: "ASPECTS OF PROVINCIAL POLITICS IN COLONIAL INDIA : THE CENTRAL PROVINCES AND BERAR, 1936-39", submitted by RICHHA KAPOOR is in partial fulfilment for the Degree of MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY of this University. This dissertation has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this University and is her own work.

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

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Dedicated to the Memory of
My Father-in-Law

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

INTRODUCTION

The Central Provinces and Berar was formed in 1861 by uniting the Nagpur and Saugor Merbudda territories. Later Berar was added to it in 1903. The Saugor Merbudda area was a Hindi-speaking area known as Mahakoshal, whereas Nagpur and Berar were Marathi-speaking areas. Berar was a part of Hyderabad State which was taken by the British government in 1903. Thus the Central Provinces and Berar was one province comprising three distinct regions. This regional variation influenced the course of the Indian national movement in the Central Provinces and Berar. Nagpur and Berar regions, due to their fertile black cotton soil and abundant economic resources, were more advanced than the Mahakoshal region. Political awareness as well as anti-imperialist and national consciousness touched the imagination of the people of Nagpur much earlier than Mahakoshal.

Before the emergence of the Indian National Congress, the 'Indian Sabha' was one of the earliest forums for expression of public opinion in the region. Another important organisation was 'Goraksha Sabha' formed in 1898 which prepared the background for the formation of the Hindu Mahasabha in the province. The impact of the Indian

National Congress increased tremendously after the Swadeshi Movement in the first decade of the twentieth century although as early as 1889 the provincial government was sufficiently worried about Congress influence to pass orders prohibiting local level officials such as patwaris and tehsildars from becoming members of the Congress. The Nagpur region had fully imbibed the extremist ideas of Tilak. Home Rule Leagues were organised in the region in 1916.

The new Constitution adopted in 1920, which reconstituted the Congress organisation on the basis adopted of linguistic provinces, resulted in the division of C.P.& B into three Congress provinces. Mahakoshal, Nagpur and Berar, each under a separate Provincial Congress Committee.

The Indian national movement became a mass movement during the non-cooperation years. In C.P.& B as well, the first mass struggle was launched in this period which manifested itself in strikes, marches and picketing. Many section of society, including students and women, participated actively in the Non-Cooperation Movement. Marwari merchants stopped the sale of foreign goods and started wearing khadi. The movement was more intensive in the urban areas.

The non-cooperation years also saw the emergence of a young leadership of the provincial Congress which included D.P. Misra, R.S. Shukla, B.L. Biyani, Dr. M.B. Khare and Jammalal Bajaj.

The next major movement which gave momentum to mass mobilization was the Civil Disobedience Movement launched in 1930. It increased national awakening and accelerated the pace of mass struggle in the Province. It was more wide-spread than the non-cooperation movement. Besides the participation of students, women and merchants in large numbers a remarkable feature of the movement in C.P.&B was the participation of peasants and tribals in the movement through the forest Satyagraha which aimed at the violation of forest laws. The leader most responsible for initiating this form of struggle was D.P. Misra.

Thus, by 1936, the Indian National Congress had emerged as a popular party in C.P. & B. However, while in the Hindi-speaking Mahakoshal region, it was the sole Party with any significant influence in the Marathi-speaking areas of Nagpur and Berar. The influence of Tilakite parties was also considerable.

These were the Nationalist Party and the Democratic Swarajya Party. Hindu Mahasabha and Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh were the other two influential organisations of the region, and their maximum influence was in the Nagpur region.

In this study, we have taken up the period 1936-39, in order to analyse the impact of the election campaign and of office acceptance by the Congress under the Act of 1935 on provincial politics. On provincial politics we have divided the study into six chapters. The first chapter, titled "The Election Campaign and Ministry Formation in C.P. & B", discusses the position of the different contesting parties, the alliances they sought for winning the elections, their financial resources and methods of campaigning. It also analyses their party programmes and election manifestoes. It attempts to evaluate the causes leading to the Congress victory. The second part of this chapter describes the dilemma^m about office acceptance and ministry formation. It also comments on the nature of bureaucratic assumptions and opinions about the entire process of election and ministry formation.

The second chapter titled, "Some Aspects of the Congress Activity in the Central Provinces and Berar", broadly deals with the work of the Congress ministry both inside and

outside the Legislative Assembly. Among the parliamentary activities of the Congress ministry discussed in this chapter are the tenancy reforms, prohibition scheme and educational, social and administrative reforms. While discussing the extra parliamentary work of the Congress, the main focus is on the mass mobilization conducted by the Congress Party in C.P. & B.

During the ministerial period certain organisational weaknesses also emerged in the Party. Due to the existence of three Provincial Congress organizations representing the three different regions, factionalism and petty squabbles emerged ⁱⁿ the provincial political scene which culminated in the 'Khare Crisis' which for the time being tarnished the image of the Congress Party and also raised many important constitutional and political questions. The third chapter discusses this unhappy episode.

The fourth chapter "Peasant and Labour Mobilization in C.P. & Berar", discusses the role played by the Congress, the Trade Union Congress and the Kisan Sabha in peasant and labour mobilization. It also deals with the Congress and Kisan Sabha relationship in the Province and its stages of cooperation and alienation. This chapter also discusses

the role of Leftist parties in the Province and the Provincial Congress response to their activation. The second section of the ^{chapter} ~~paper~~ deals with the labour mobilization in the province which gave birth to many strikes. It also comments on the Congress ministry's response to the labour movements.

The fifth chapter deals with the formation, consolidation and activities of the Muslim League in the Province. It also deals with the grass-roots mobilization by both Muslims and Hindu communal organisations. It also discusses Congress-Muslim League confrontation on various issues which by 1939 culminated in the alienation of large sections of Muslims from the Congress.

In the conclusion, we try to bring together the different aspects of provincial politics highlighted by our study and try to assess the implications these have for our understanding of the national movement in general.

Chapter-I

ELECTION CAMPAIGN AND MINISTRY FORMATION IN
CENTRAL PROVINCES AND BERAR

ELECTION CAMPAIGN AND MINISTRY FORMATION IN
CENTRAL PROVINCES AND BERAR

This chapter is divided into two sections, election campaign and ministry formation. The first part deals with the election activities of the province from January 1936 to February 1937. It mainly discusses the activities and organisation of the Congress, its division into various factions, the electoral alliances formed by the Congress, the candidates who contested, the finance sought and the objectives and methods of the election campaign. It also briefly discusses the objectives, programmes and alliances of other contending parties. The first section concludes with a statement of the election results and an analysis of the causes which led to the Congress victory.

The second section dwells on the response and reaction of the provincial Congress over the issue of office acceptance, programme of interim ministry and formation of Congress ministry. The chapter ends with a small note on the official policy and attitude during the election campaign and the period of dilemma about office acceptance.

Congress Organisation in C.P.&B

In Central Provinces and Berar, the Congress was divided into three regional provinces - Mahakoshal, Nagpur and Berar. Mahakoshal was a Hindi speaking area whereas Nagpur and Berar were Marathi speaking areas. Under the supervision and of the Central Parliamentary Committee¹ CP & B Parliamentary Committee was formed on 23rd August 1936.² For conducting election campaign Mahakoshal, Nagpur and Berar contributed ten, five and five representatives respectively to CP & B Parliamentary Committee.³ The selection of candidates for each Provincial Congress Committee region had to be made on behalf of respective FCCs.⁴

1 All India Congress Committee Papers, (hereafter AICCP) File no.E1(a)/1936, Report of All India Parliamentary Committee, Circular no.4, dated 4 July 1936.

2 AICCP, File no.E1(a)/1936, letter dated 12 May 1936, and 25 August 1936.

3 AICCP, File no.E1(a)/1936, Report of the AICPC by Prasad and Pant, dated 15 March 1937.

4 AICCP, File no.E1(a)/1936, AICC Circular No.27, dated 2 December 1936.

Congress Factions in CP & B

Mahakoshal, Nagpur and Berar Provincial Congress Committees presented a picture of a house divided against itself. They were prone to factional disputes and linguistic hostilities but later this was partly concealed by cross-Provincial Congress Committee links between the factions.

The Mahakoshal Provincial Congress Committee was divided into Jabalpur and Raipur factions, the first being led by D.P. Misra⁵ and Seth Govind Das⁶ the second by R.S. Shukla⁷. Their infighting had commenced with the formation of the Congress Constitution of 1934 which gave new powers to Congress executives. Shukla, as President of the Provincial Congress Committee exploited his executive powers fully in enhancing his following in adjacent native States and Mahakoshal districts, where he had no direct influence.⁸ Relations between the two factions got more strained due to

5 For biographical data see, Appendix-I

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 AICCP, File no.G5(KW)II/1936, Misra to Nehru, letter dated 23 August 1936.

Shukla's constant attempt to subordinate Jabalpur Congress office to that of Raipur.⁹ The difference became so acute that they were causing incalculable harm to the image and existence of the Congress in CP & B. In fact it was Nehru's intervention that forced Shukla to compromise in August 1936.¹⁰

Both factions promised to close their ranks to fight the Provincial Legislative Assembly elections. But the differences continued and the Jabalpur faction leaders resigned from the Mahakoshal Provincial Congress Committee and other Congress Provincial institutions over the issue of candidates.¹¹ These unending clashes took demonic form while

9 AICCP, File no.P-9/1934-36, Congress Member to President INC, letter dated 4 September 1935;
AICCP, File no.P-9/1934-36, Shukla to General Secretary, AICC, letter dated 21 November 1935;
AICCP, File no.P-9/1934-36, letter of Vice-President, District Congress Committee (hereafter DCC) Hoshangabad to President All India Congress Committee (hereafter AICC), letter dated 11 July 1936;
AICCP, File no.G-5(KW)II/1936, letter of D.P.Misra to Nehru, dated 23/8/36;
AICCP, File no.P-9/1936, letter from Shukla, dated 22 February 1936.

10 AICCP, File no.P-9/1936, letter from Shukla to Nehru, dated 1 September 1936;
Home Political, FR, Second-half of Dec. 1936, F.18/12/36.

11 Madhya Pradesh Congress Committee Papers (hereafter MFCCP), File. Misc.9/1936, letter dated 9/12/36.

selecting the Premier after elections and later on gave birth to CP ministerial crisis which tarnished the image of the Congress in the province.

In Nagpur FCC, the internal strife was between a staunch Tilakite Dr. N.B. Khare¹² and the leader of the Marwari group Seth Poonamchand Ranka.¹³ Ranka was a link between Khare and Misra (Nagpur and Mahakoshal) factions.¹⁴ Khare-Ranka disputes were mainly over matters of selection of candidates, fund distribution, enhancing of their respective Marathi and Marwari influence and the dictatorial attitude of Congress executives in Nagpur Provincial Congress Committee.¹⁵

Factionalism in Berar resulted in an alliance between the Berar Congress led by Brijlal Biyani and the Anti-Communal Award Democratic Swarajya Party of M.S. Aney.¹⁶

12 For biographical data see Appendix-I.

13 Ibid.;
AICCP, File no.P-10/1936, Khare to Nehru,
letter dated 7 December 1936.

14 AICCP, File no.P-10/1935, Prasad to Khare,
letter dated 21 August 1935; Hitvada, 25 August, 1935, p.1.

15 AICCP, File no.E-15/1936-37.

16 AICCP, File no.E-22(1)/1937, T.G. Bande, Secretary
of Yeotmal DCC to Nehru, dated 10 July 1937.

For cementing his deal with M.S. Aney, Biyani completely ditched the dominant Congress faction in Yeotmal district and nominated Aney's followers as Congress candidates.¹⁷ This led to serious differences between the Yeotmal District Congress Committee and Brijlal Biyani.

CP & B Factions and District Congress Committee

The relationship between provincial and district level Congress organisation was very complex in CP & B. The provincial faction leaders had much closer contacts with the districts and were able to control them. Local factional conflicts in the District Congress Committees were expressed in terms of provincial factional battles between Shukla and Misra, not autonomously.

The rivalry between the leaders of the Marathi-speaking area and the Hindi-speaking area (Mahakoshal) increased the Hindi-Marathi linguistic hostility prevailing

17 For biographical data see Appendix-I; AICCP, File no.E-22/1937, appeal against disciplinary action of the Provincial Congress Committee (hereafter PCC) by six Yeotmal Congressmen, dated 7/4/37; File no.E-1/1936, Patel-Nehru-Biyani Correspondence.

in Mahakoshal districts adjoining Nagpur region and weakened the Congress hold in these districts.¹⁸

Muslim League in CP & B

1936-37 were the formative years of the Muslim League in CP & B. The Central Election Board was formed by the Muslim League for organising the election campaign in 1936.¹⁹ Its main object was to identify the suitable Muslim groups in each province and negotiate with them the formation of Muslim League election boards.²⁰

Uptil 1936, there was no Muslim political party in CP & B with well-defined objectives and ideology, but there were two Muslim groups, one led by M.Y. Shareef and the other by Rauf Shah.²¹ In 1936 Shareef responded to the call

18 AICCP, File no.P-9/1936, a letter from Vice-President DCC, Chhindwara to President MFCC, dated 26 June 1936.

19 Linlithgow Papers, MSS Eur F.125/112, letter no.3, Hyde Gowan to Linlithgow, dated 10 November 1936.

20 Rizvi Gowhar, Linlithgow and India : A Study of British Policy and Political Impasse in India, 1936-43, (London,1978), p.22.

21 Linlithgow Papers, MSS Eur F.125/112, letter no.3, Hyde Gowan to Linlithgow, letter dated 10 Nov. 1936.

of Jinnah and formed the Provincial Muslim League with branches in the Nagpur, Berar and Mahakoshal districts in order to contest the Assembly elections in 1937.²² The signs of discontent and opposition were visible in the Muslim League since its inception.²² The cleavage developed further ostensibly as a result of a dispute between Shareef and Rauf Shah over the selection of candidates for Berar and Nagpur constituencies, which ended with the resignation of Rauf Shah from the League and the formation of a new Muslim Parliamentary Party.²⁴ The gulf between the two groups widened to such an extent that all efforts of Jinnah to end the differences failed.²⁵ He declared that he could not affiliate either group to the Muslim League until the results of the elections were out. The reasons behind Jinnah's decision were the grave dissensions of the Muslim League members and their ambition to be selected as

22 Zaidi, A.M. (ed.), Evolution of Muslim Political Thought in India, vol.IV, pp.644-45.

23 Ibid.; Home Political, FR, Second-half of October 1936, F.18/10/36; Linlithgow Papers, MSS Eur F.125/112, letter no.5, Hyde Gowan to Linlithgow, dated 9 December 1936.

24 Linlithgow Papers, MSS Eur F.125/112, letter no.3, Hyde Gowan to Linlithgow, dated 10 November 1936, and 9 December 1936.

25 Home Political, FR, Second-half of December 1936, F.18/12/36.

candidates. Jinnah was also depressed over Nagpur's inability to form a Muslim League election board.²⁶ After the declaration of election results Jinnah affiliated the Rauf Shah group with the Muslim League which had won eight out of fourteen seats.²⁷ The Vice-President of the Rauf Shah group joined the interim ministry formed by E.R. Rao²⁸ and M.Y. Shareef ultimately joined the Congress and was given the law ministry.²⁹

The Nationalist Party

In 1926 the responsivists had formed a ministry in CP & B with the help of Independent Congress Party led by E.R. Rao, Harijans, Independents and non-Brahmins and this coalition was known as the Nationalist Party.³⁰ In 1936 the Nationalist Party was a loosely knit organisation mainly consisting of the Brahmins under the leadership of B.S.Moonje.³¹

26 Hitvada, 3 January 1937, p.14; 6 January 1937, p.2.

27 Hitvada, 10 March 1937, p.12.

28 S.W.A. Rizvi was made the Finance Minister in the interim ministry, Hitvada, 2 April 1937, p.1.

29 Ibid., 15 August 1937, p.3.

30 Ibid., 23 December 1936, p.6.

31 For biographical data see Appendix-I; The majority of the Nationalist Party members were members of the Hindu Mahasabha also.

32 Hitvada Papers, MSS Eur F.125/112, letter no.2, Hyde Gowar to Linlithgow, dated 10 November 1936.

Official opinion about the Congress-Nationalist Party relations ran thus - "The relations between the two parties are very bitter. Most of the Congressmen are non-Brahmin Hindi speaking men, while the Nationalists are mostly Maharashtrian Brahmins who are staunch followers of Tilak and consider Mr. Gandhi as fraud".³²

But despite this fact Congress extended a friendly hand to the Nationalist Party. The Nagpur Provincial Congress Committee President Dr. N.B. Khare, wanted to secure the over-all majority for Congress against the threat of E.R. Rao's Independents,³³ so he formed an alliance with the Nationalist Party in November 1936. The Congress-Nationalist compromise in Nagpur opened the door to trouble. Patel and Nehru disapproved of the compromise as it was based on the Bengal resolution.³⁴ They disliked the Congress

32 Linlithgow Papers, MSS Eur F.125/112, letter no.3, Hyde Gowan to Linlithgow, dated 10 November 1936.

33 Linlithgow Papers, MSS Eur F.125/112, letter no.9, Hyde Gowan to Linlithgow, dated 13 January 1937.

34 AICCP, File no.E-1/1936, Patel to Nehru, Telegram dated 10 November 1936;
B.S. Moonje Papers, File no.18, letters dated 3 Jan.1937; 23 Jan.1937, 6 Feb.1937 -
Khare-Moonje Correspondence.

ideals being sacrificed for winning a few more seats and warned against striving for a fictitious majority.³⁵

At local level this pact caused dissensions in Nagpur, Nagar Congress Committee. Non-Brahmins and Marwari group accused Khare of favouring Marathi Brahmin candidates for insuring his future as Premier of CP & B.³⁶ The alliance however finally broke down in January 1936.³⁷

Democratic Swarajya Party

The Democratic Swaraj Party was a provincial branch of the above mentioned Nationalist Party formed in 1926. The Democratic Swaraj Party was formed in Berar by Tilakites to contest the elections to Central Legislative Assembly in 1934.³⁸ In 1936 it was led by M.S. Aney and R.M.Deshmukh.³⁹

35 AICCP, File no.E1(a)/1936, A joint statement of Patel, Prasad, Abdul G. Khan and Jammalal Bajaj issued on 17 November 1936.

36 Linlithgow Papers, MSS Eur F.125/112, letter no.3, Hyde Gowan to Linlithgow, dated 10 November 1936; Home Political, FR, Second-half of November 1936, File no.18/11/36.

37 Home Political, FR, First-half of January 1937, File no.18/1/37.

38 AICCP, File no.P-7/1936, Biyani to Nehru, dated 6 December 1936.

39 Biographical data, Appendix-I.

Berar Provincial Congress Committee President Brijlal Biyani, like Khare, had apprehensions about Congress victory, for he wrote to Nehru, "Raghvendra Rao is trying to have his majority and if he succeeds all opposition parties will combine against the Congress. I shall try my best to see that Congress prestige is not lowered in this province."⁴⁰ Biyani looked round for an electoral alliance and the Democratic Swaraj Party was also in search of one.⁴¹

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But Nehru objected to this alliance saying that no compromise could be arrived at without the previous consent of the Working Committee. He said the Democratic Swaraj Party was consistently opposed to the Congress and it was for the Congress to determine its policy without compromise with others. He also drew Biyani's attention to the joint statement against fictitious majority. As to Biyani's proposal that a minister may be persuaded to stand on the Congress ticket,⁴³ Nehru considered it "unthinkable". Even

40 AICCP, File no.E-1/1936, Biyani to Nehru, dated 24 October 1936.

41 Home Political, FR, Second-half of May 1936, F.18/5/1936; First-half of July 1936, F.18/7/1936; First-half of August 1936, F.18/8/1936.

42 AICCP, File no.E-1/1936, Nehru to Biyani, dated 30 November 1936.

43 AICCP, File no.E-1/1936, Biyani to Nehru, dated 23 November 1936.

Patel raised objection to the candidates.⁴⁴

But despite these protests, the Congress-Democratic Swaraj Party electoral pact in Berar was implemented.⁴⁵ It was decided that out of nineteen Berar seats Congress would contest eleven and Democratic Swaraj Party eight. The Democratic Swaraj Party promised to submit to Congress discipline and accepted that it would not be given any ministry. The pact was approved by the Congress leadership but was bound to stir up trouble with the CP members as it insisted on the continuance of the Sim formula⁴⁷ regarding

44 AICCP, File no.E-1/1936, Patel to Nehru, dated 26 November 1936.

45 Dr. Rajendra Prasad Papers, File no.2-C/38 cal.no.1, letter from MS. Aney and Deshmukh to Biyani dated 26 November 1936, copy of compromise.

46 AICCP, File no.E-1/1936, Nehru to Biyani, dated 20 November 1936; Patel to Nehru, Telegram dated 23 November 1936.

47 Sim Formula: In 1922 the Government accepted the recommendations of the Sim Committee which allocated the provincial revenues to joint and divisible expenditure between Central Provinces and Berar. It was decided that Central Provinces should receive 60% and Berar 40%.

Baber, D.E.U., Changing Political Leadership in an Indian Province : The Central Provinces and Berar, 1919-1939, (Delhi,1979), p.152.

the financial arrangements between CP & Berar.⁴⁸

Non-Brahmins: The non-Brahmin movement in Central Provinces and Berar was not substantial. A focus was however provided to it by the formation of Shetbari Sangh in 1930.⁴⁹

The Shetbari Sangh enjoyed considerable support and influence among landowners and peasants of the Nagpur and Berar regions.⁵⁰

Berar Provincial Congress Committee president Biyani sought to conclude a comprehensive electoral pact with the

48 AICCP, File no.E-1/1936, Nehru to Biyani, letter dated 20 November 1936; Patel to Nehru, Telegram dated 23 November 1936.

49 Dr. Rajendra Prasad Papers, File No. 2-C/38 cal.no.1 letter from M.S. Aney and Deshmukh to Biyani, dated 26 November 1936, copy of compromise.

49 Baber, op.cit., p.114.

50 Baber, op.cit., pp.111-15.

non-Brahmins for securing more seats in the elections but was unsuccessful.⁵¹ Biyani's alliance with the Democratic Swarajya Party posed a forceful threat to Shetkari Sangh in Berar as the DSP consisted of Brahmins and its alliance with Congress enhanced their influence.⁵² In Nagpur, the breaking down of the Congress-National alliance and the Congress economic and agricultural programme attracted many prominent non-Brahmins to the Congress fold.⁵³ Except those who joined Congress non-Brahmins stood as an independent party in the elections.⁵⁴

51 Non-Brahmins were ready to support only non-Brahmin Congress candidates, that too in those constituencies where a suitable candidate from their own party was not available. On the otherhand, Congress was pledged to support only those candidates who subscribed to the Congress manifesto. Both the parties were firm on their respective stands as the attempts to conclude an electoral pact proved unsuccessful.

Home Political, FR, First-half of June 1936, File no.18/6/36.

52 Linlithgow Papers, MSS Eur F.124/112, letter no.5, Hyde Gowan to Linlithgow, letter dated 9 Dec. 1936.

53 Linlithgow Papers, MSS Eur F.125/112, letter no.9, dated 13 January 1936.

54 Non-Brahmins negotiated with Congress for mutual support in constituencies where the position of either party was weak. Their manifesto was called 'Farmers' Fourteen Points', Home Political, FR, Second-half of October 1936, File no. 18/10/1936.

Hindu Mahasabha : Hindu Mahasabha was organised in the Central Provinces and Berar in 1923 by Dr. B.S. Moonje.⁵⁵

Hindu Mahasabha was more active in Nagpur and Berar region than in Mahakoshal.⁵⁶

In the early part of 1936 Hindu Mahasabha was involved in counter movements against Nagpur Muslim association and Tabliq Committee and some sections of Sikhs who were attempting to convert Mahars and other backward classes into their respective religions.⁵⁷

Hindu Mahasabha and 1937 Elections in CP : Hindu Mahasabha rejected the Communal Award, criticised the Congress election manifesto as it did not give any assurance to the public that Congress representatives would work for the rejection of the communal decision inside and outside the

55 For biographical data see, Appendix-I. Prakash, I., A Review of the History and Work of the Hindu Mahasabha and Hindu Sanghatan Movement, (Delhi: Akhil Bharat Hindu Mahasabha, 1952), pp.245-48.

56 Home Political, FR, Second-half of March 1936,
File no. 18/3/36, Second-half of June 1936
File no. 18/6/36, Second-half of September 1936,
File no. 18/9/36, Second-half of November 1936,
File no. 18/11/36, Second-half of January
File no. 18/1/37, II, 1937.

57 Home Political, FR,
First-half of February 1936, File No. 18/2/36;
Second-half of March 1936, File No. 18/3/36;
Second-half of June 1936, File No. 18/6/36.

the Legislature. The Hindu Mahasabha was in favour of ceaseless and sustained agitation against communal award. So it resolved to fight the elections to discard the communal decision.⁵⁸

Hindu Mahasabha started its campaign from September 1936 by holding a number of meetings in Nagpur.⁵⁹ For election campaign a Marathi weekly Savadhan was started from Nagpur.⁶⁰ It selected the candidates who had been rejected by Dr. Khare.⁶¹ Hindu Mahasabha's main candidate was L. V. Paranjpe, who stood against Dr. Khare from Nagpur constituency. He sought to take advantage of Congress and All India Trade Union Congress split in Nagpur. L. V. Paranjpe wrote to the President, Trade Union Congress, Nagpur, promising the support of the Hindu Mahasabha to the TUC

58 Interview of B.S. Moonje, dated 9 February 1937. Hindu Mahasabha's stand was clear in a resolution passed in Benaras on 31/8/1936.
B.S. Moonje Papers, File No.46-A (1936-37).

59 Home Political, FR, Second-half of September 1936, File no. 18/9/1936.

60 Home Political, FR, Second-half of March 1936, File no. 18/3/1936.

61 Home Political, FR, Second-half of November 1936, File no. 18/11/36.

candidate against Congress in Nagpur Trade Union constituency and in return desired the support of Trade Union Congress against Dr. N.B. Khare.⁶²

The 'Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh' did not participate in the 1937 elections but gave moral support to Hindu Mahasabha in its election campaign. The headquarter of RSS was in Nagpur.⁶³

The Scheduled Castes : The scheduled castes in the Central Provinces and Berar were divided between the parties of Dr. Ambedkar and Mr. Raja, a local scheduled caste leader.⁶⁴ The official opinion about both scheduled caste parties was that both parties accused each other of intrigue, dishonesty and chicanery.⁶⁵

Both the parties stood independently in the CP & B elections but in a number of constituencies both the parties either supported the Congress candidates or joined the

62 B.S. Moonje Papers, File No.46-A (1936-37); L.V. Paranjpe to President TUC, Nagpur, dated 30 January 1937.

63 Home Political, File No. 92/39, Note on the RSS; Home Political, FR, First-half of November 1936, File no. 18/11/36.

64 Reform Office, Franchise, File No.20/IV/36-F.

65 Linlithgow Papers, MSS Eur F.125/112, letter no.3, dated 10th November 1936, Hyde Gowan to Linlithgow.

influential local Independent candidates.⁶⁶

The Satnamis, a scheduled caste in the Chhattisgarh region were a politically conscious group and Congress took advantage of their influence and set up all Satnami candidates in Chhattisgarh region.⁶⁷ Three out of seven Satnamis won the majority in their respective constituencies.⁶⁸

All India Trade Union Congress : For 1937 elections there were two labour seats in Central Provinces and Berar - Nagpur trade union seat and Jabalpur unorganised labour seat. As both seats were special labour seats the right of the All India Trade Union Congress to contest these two seats was unchallenged.

The Trade Union Congress of Nagpur approached the Congress Parliamentary Committee of CP & B for cooperation

66 Reform Office, Franchise, File No.20/IV/36-F.

67 Home Political, FR, Second-half of April 1936, File No. 18/4/36; Linlithgow Papers, MSS Eur F.125/112, letter no.16, Hyde Gowan to Linlithgow, dated 7 March 1937.

68 Reforms Office, Franchise, Election Returns Provincial Legislature, File No. 20-F/1936.

In a spirit of united Anti-Imperialist Front and proposed the names of some candidates for selection.⁶⁹ CP Parliamentary Committee rejected Trade Union Congress's nominations as it was not ready to sign the Congress pledge.⁷⁰

The Congress put up its own candidates in preference to TUC candidates in both the labour constituencies.⁷¹

R.S. Ruikar's⁷² nomination was rejected on the ground that he was not a British Indian subject.⁷³

Relations between Trade Union Congress and Congress completely broke down in Central Provinces and Berar. Provincial Trade Union Congress candidates stood against the Congress candidates. Huge processions and demonstration marches against Congress were carried out. Congress was called a "hypocrite party" who gagged the Socialist Party. Provincial TUC leaders accused Congress, "It only verbally

69 AICCP, File No. E-15/1936-37, Secretary Provincial TUC to Nehru, Letter dated 6 February 1937; MPCCP, File no. Misc.8/1934-39, letter dated 15 September 1936

70 AICCP, File No. E-15/1936-37, letter from Trade Union workers of Nagpur to Nehru dated 19 January 1937; Hitvada, 27 January 1937, p.1.

71 MPCCP, File No. Misc.8/1934-37, U.R. Kallapa to Berar Provincial. Parliamentary Board, dated 4 January 1937.

72 For biographical data, Appendix-I.

73 Home Political, FR, Second-half of January 1937, File No. 18/1/37.

wanted the rule of peasants and workers but can not give their due right of two labour seats."⁷⁴

Trade Union Congress wanted to utilize the elections as a lever to fulfill its historic role as the organiser and the real motive power behind the united imperialist front but it could not be fulfilled at least partly due to its own inhibitions against signing the Congress election pledge.

All India Trade Union Congress and Congress split resulted in the defeat of the Congress candidate and the rout of the Trade Union Congress candidate; an independent candidate won the Nagpur Labour constituency.⁷⁵

This unfortunate incident cost the progressive forces a seat and taught a lesson to the two Congresses that unless they pull together they were inviting disaster for both.

Independents : The Independents were led by E. Raghvendra Rao.⁷⁶ They posed a much greater threat to the Congress

74 Hitvada, 31 January 1937, p.1.

75 Reform Office, Franchise, File No.20F/1936, Election Returns, Provincial Legislatures, 1937.

76 For biographical data, see Appendix-I.



than any other party. In the reserved seats Rao set up Independent schedule caste candidates of standing while in other constituencies his candidates belonged to land owning classes.⁷⁷

Congress sources claimed that Rao distributed patronage to secure votes and also employed official machinery to ensure his elections.⁷⁸ He used Home department resources to harass the Congress, arresting its candidates for making objectionable speeches and demanding security from Congress papers for publishing offensive material.⁷⁹ In the Mahakoshal region the conflict between the Misra and Shukla factions also proved favourable to Rao.

77 AICCP, File No.P-13/1937-38, separate note of S.D. Mishra, dated 17 March 1937;
Hitvada, 25 September 1936, p.6;
Hitvada, 27 January 1937, p.1.

78 Rao used his influence as Home Member and acting Governor in conducting election campaign.
MFCCP, File No.8/1935-36,
Thabar Ghedilal to President, Indian National Congress, dated 28 November 1936.

79 Hitvada, 24 November 1936, p.10;
2 December 1936, p.3; 24 January 1937, p.7;
31 January 1937, p.5; 3 March 1937, p.6.

In his own constituency (Bilaspur) Rao formed an alliance with Malgazars and a Muslim zamindar who between them controlled a large number of votes.⁸⁰ Rao and other independents were supported by Central Provinces government and therefore, Independents came in the category of 'Government Party candidates'.⁸¹

Candidates: Both logically and in point of time the selection of candidates came first in a consideration of the actual campaign. It was the moment at which electoral alliances were cemented and appeals could be made to particular groups by means of a judicious selection of candidates.

It was only within Congress that the selection of candidates was a significant process. While selection of the candidates the leadership had first to ensure that the candidate chosen had a good chance of winning. The personal qualities, sacrifices, inherited prestige, influence of

80 Hitvada, 25 September 1936, p.6;
27 January 1937, p.1.

81 Ibid., 27 January 1937, p.3.

the candidate played a part in determining his chances of success. Secondly, it was desirable that the candidate would maintain the reputation of Congress as a organisation. He should be devoted to the cause of national freedom.⁸²

The selection of the candidates was in the hands of provincial parliamentary committee which from time to time received directions from AICC and Congress Parliamentary Board.⁸³

In the Central Provinces and Berar, the Congress put up eighty-two candidates for one-hundred-and-ten seats. The seats it did not contest were mostly Muhammedan seats.⁸⁴

82 "Select tried congressmen who possess both merit and influence so as to win even apart from the popularity of the Congress ticket. Only those new recruits can be chosen who have got influence and general merits to win the seat. You should be extremely cautious in selecting the new candidates." Letter to C.P. Parliamentary Committee from a provincial congress leader, S.D. Misra, MPCCP, File Hoshangabad DCC 1937-39, letter dated 5 November 1936.

83 AICCP, File No. E-1(a)/1936, Joint Statement issued on 17 November 1936 by Prasad, Pant, Bajaj and Abdul G. Khan.

84 Home Political FR, Second-half of January 1937, File No. 18/1/37.

The Central Provinces and Berar electorate often communicated its likes and dislikes for candidates to Central Provinces Parliamentary Committee, disapproved of nominated candidates and suggested alternatives.⁸⁵ At some places the socialist content of the Congress programme created suspicions among the electorate.⁸⁶

85 "The electorate of Harda-Seoni general constituency preferred the candidature of Thabur Gulzar Singh and Dada Bhai Naiyub for following reasons:

- (a) Thakur caste, profession lawyer, sone of a wealthy Malguzar, all these factors were very influential in rural area;
- (b) Left college studies and joined Non-Cooperation Movement;
- (c) convicted twice during Civil Disobedience Movement;
- (d) devoted sacrificing and impressive as Congress workers;
- (e) enjoy full confidence of the people;
- (f) full chances of victory."

Many letters conveying this viewpoint and signed by hundred to two hundred congressmen (all once or twice convicted for non-cooperation and civil disobedience movement) reached to the MPCC.

MPCC Papers, File DCC Hoshangabad, letter dated 17 October 1936, 27 January 1937.

86 The electorate of Northern Landholder's constituency was conservative, pro-government and scared of Congress due to bogy of socialism. They supported the Congress candidate Beohar Rajendra Singh as a malguzar but were reluctant to vote for him as a Congress candidate. He requested the MPCC to adopt him as an independent candidate. MPCCP, File No. 9/1936-37, Letter dated 18 December 1936.

Congress factional disputes in Central Provinces and Berar caused the drawing up of controversial lists of candidates which were often referred to Patel for final selection. This interference of Patel generated a major controversy of Bhibulal Chandab case, which ultimately resulted in 'Khare crisis'.⁸⁷ The Democratic Swarajya Party candidates who stood on the Congress ticket sometimes faced opposition from Congress party members of Berar.⁸⁸

Disappointed Congress candidates rebelled against the party and stood as independent candidates against the

87 Bhibulal Chandab was substituted by Patel in the place of Khare's candidate Dr. Harbare without Khare's consent. Dr. Khare protested against the "dictatorial and bureaucratic attitude" of Patel. During CPB election Chandab became a symbol of Patel and 'Hitvada' heaved a sigh of relief when he won the constituency. Later on Bhibulal Chandab case became the starting point of Khare crisis.

Home Political, FR, Second-half of December 1936, File No. 18/12/1936.

Hitvada, 21 January 1937, p.6.

Oral History Transcripts, Interview of Dr. N.B. Khare, pp.15-17.

88 AICCP, File No. E-22/1937. W.W. Dange to Nehru, dated 21 November 1936.

official Congress candidates.⁸⁹ During election campaign MPCC took disciplinary action against all twentyfour Congress members who had stood as independents and expelled all of them from all Congress institutions.⁹⁰ Government reports claimed that many independent candidates stood simply to demand money for their withdrawal but no other evidence (MPCCP, AICCP and Newspapers) substantiates this.⁹¹

Official opinion regarding the Congress candidates was very critical. Central Provinces Governor Hyde Gowan wrote to Linlithgow, "Average Congress candidate is of a very poor ability and many more able men who have got the Congress ticket are not congressmen at heart and there is possibility that they may close the ministry to all except true-dyed in the wool congressmen."⁹² Rebellious Congress

89 Hitvada, 20 January 1937, p.8;
22 January 1937, p.1; 15 January 1937, p.6.

90 MPCCP, File No. AICC 11, Letters to AICC, dated 7 January 1937; 23 January 1937; 4 February 1937; 18 February 1937; Hitvada, 29 January 1937, p.2.

91 Home Political, FR, First-half of January 1937, File No.18/1/1937; Linlithgow Papers, MSS Eur F.125/112, Letter no.9, Hyde Gowan to Linlithgow, dated 13-1-1937.

92 Linlithgow Papers, MSS Eur F.125/112, Letter no.15, Hyde Gowan to Linlithgow, dated 26 February 1937.

candidates were seen by British bureaucracy "involved in a race for official posts, hungry for the loaves and fishes of office."⁹³

Finance

Financing of elections is an area where information is very limited even for the Congress and information regarding other parties is almost completely missing. Out of three provincial congress committees of the CP & B, only Vidarbha PCC's expenditure figures are available in the AICC files.

For Vidarbha the total figures of expenditure per candidate range from Rs. 1,700 to Rs. 10,000 with a mean of Rs. 4,787.⁹⁴ Summary figures for a few individual constituencies in the CP & B range from Rs. 1,250 to Rs.20,000.⁹⁵

The central Congress fund was not enough to finance the whole election campaign and the provincial committees,

93 A British Journalist's remark quoted by the Hitvada, 15 January 1937, p.6.

94 AICCP, File No. E-23(1)/1937, Report from the Vidarbha PCC secretary, letter dated 12 April 1937.

95 AICCP, File No. E-23(1)/1937, Report on CP Elections.

the district committees and the Congress volunteers were exhorted to mobilize funds locally.⁹⁶ The CP & B also sent earmarked grants to help specific scheduled caste and Muslim candidates.⁹⁷

As the entire election campaign process was very expensive, all the three provincial Congress committees (Mahakoshal, Nagpur and Vidharbha) of CP & B ran into grave financial scarcity⁹⁸ and faced severe difficulties in raising election funds. Congress candidates who contested against wealthy 'Independents' constantly complained of the paucity of funds and appealed to the party for financial assistance.⁹⁹

96 AICCP, File No. E-2(a)/1936, AICPC, Circular no.8, letter dated 8 November 1936.

97 MPCCP, File DCC, Jabalpur, A.P. Singh to Patel, letter dated January 1937.

98 MPCCP, File DCC Jabalpur, A.P. Singh to Provincial Parliamentary Board, January 1937.
MPCCP, File DCC Bilaspur, 1936-37, Amar Singh Sehgal to R. S. Shukla, dated 2 December 1936.
AICCP, File No.E-15/1936-37, Bajrang Thekedar to Patel, letter dated 22 January 1937.
Home Political, FR, Second-half of August 1936, File No. 18/8/36.

99 MPCCP, File DCC Bilaspur 1936-37, letter dated 2 December 1936; AICCP, File No. E-15/1936-37, letter dated 22 January 1937.

In the CP & B Congress Committees also joined the game of catch as catch can with the other parties in search of wealthy candidates but later on, the Congress gave primary importance to the merits of candidates.¹⁰⁰ Its candidates were dedicated and ardent congressmen belonging to all sections of society.¹⁰¹ Marwari group in CP & B and few other rich Congress candidates donated to the Congress election funds.¹⁰²

Election Campaign

In the Central Provinces and Berar the Congress Party could not have run an expensive campaign. This inability increased its reliance on the nature of its appeal. The vigorous Congress campaign included less expensive methods of propaganda. They utilised large gatherings at melas, Ramnavami fair, debt conciliation board's proceedings

100 Home Political, FR, Second-half of March 1936, F.No. 18/3/36.
MPCCP, File DCC, Hoshangabad 1937, A Congress worker to Shukla, dated 4/6/1936.
Linlithgow Papers, MSS Eur F.125/112, letter no.3, Hyde Gowan to Linlithgow, dated 10 November 1936.

101 The CP & B Congress candidates were pleaders, doctors, advocates, lawyers, malguzars, merchants, shopkeepers, publishers, students suspended patwari and men of no status. Linlithgow Papers, MSS Eur F.125/112, Letter no.16, Hyde Gowan to Linlithgow, 7 March 1937.

102 Oral History Transcripts, Interview of Dr. N.B. Khare, p.1

which large number of rural population attended etc., to propogate the contents of Congress election manifesto and programme.¹⁰³

Congress Election Manifesto:

The campaign themes were first made coherent in the party's manifesto.¹⁰⁴ It identified the main problems of the day and offered a hopeful alternative for the future. It dwelt upon the plight of the common men and promised them a better future.¹⁰⁵

Industrial workers were offered the hope of improved standard of life and freedom to organise trade unions. It spoke vehemently on the question of reforming the system of land tenures, revenue, rent and of giving relief to the agricultural tenants, peasant proprietors and small landholders. Other promises included removal of untouchability encouragement of khadi and village industries, human and rational treatment to political prisoners and disapproval of communal award as it was inconsistent with principles of

103 Home Political, First-half of February 1936, Second-half of May 1936, F.No. 18/2/36, 18/5/36.

104 AICCP, File No. G-71/1936, Draft Manifesto.

105 "In short all the reforms which a popular ministry was **expected to introduce** were envisaged in the manifesto", Prasad Rajendra, Autobiography, (Bombay, 1952), p.427.

democracy and created disruptive tendencies and hindered the national growth.¹⁰⁶

Objects and Theme of Campaign:

Apart from winning the elections the main and fundamental object of the Congress was to create political and national consciousness and mobilize the masses for participating in the national movement.

The Congress knew very well that the electorate under the new franchise was predominantly rural. Therefore it projected the agrarian reforms as the central theme of the election campaign. The oppression of big landlords and the British rule was offered as the explanation for the present condition of rural society and its wide spread distress.¹⁰⁷ These reactionary elements were denounced and a new vision of freedom for which the Congress had fought for so long was shown to the masses.

Campaign Methods:

Newspapers: The Central Provinces and Berar election

106 Zaidi, A.M. (ed.), Promises to Keep, A Study of the Election Manifestoes of INC, 1937-1985, (New Delhi) pp.17-23.

107 Chander, Sunil, The Congress Ministries and the and the British Authorities in the Working of Provincial Autonomy, 1936-39 : Aspects of Conflict Between the Congress and the Raj, (Oxford, 1983, M.Litt.Thesis), p.9.

campaign started with the publication of different newspapers by various parties voicing their election programmes.

'Matribhumi' was started by the Congress, 'Praja Paksha' by the Nationalist Party, 'Savadhan' by the Hindu Mahasabha and 'Shetkari Mitra' by the Shetbari Sangh.¹⁰⁸

Pamphlets: Next to newspapers was distribution of pamphlets in towns and villages but mostly it was done by rich candidates.¹⁰⁹ Often the theme of these pamphlets centered around agrarian reforms. We come across a very interesting pamphlet, issued by a Congress minded cultivator who was not a Congress candidate. It was titled, "Peasants be the Council Members". It advised all the peasants of the region to carry forward the programme of Nehru by voting for the Congress and if possible by contesting of elections as Congress candidates.¹¹⁰

108 Home Political, Second-half of March 1936; First -half of December 1936, File Nos. 18/3/36; 18/12/36; Hitvada, 29 January 1937, p.3.

109 MCCCP, File Misc. 9/1936-37; Hitvada, 27 January 1937, p.3.

110 Pamphlet issued by Thakur Ganpatilal (Bais) cultivator, printed by K.P. Press, Bilaspur, MCCCP, File DCC Bilaspur, 1936-37.

Mass mobilization: The volunteers and canvassers of the Congress met the people and explained to them the constant fight of the Congress for the rights of the Indian people, reviewed its achievements such as increased association of Indians in every branch of administration, enlargement of franchise, political awakening and urge for independence among the people, and acquainted them with the election manifesto.¹¹¹

Employees of district boards also carried out Congress election propaganda. Teachers of district board and employees of Municipal Committees canvassed for Congress.¹¹² Jabalpur district council passed a resolution that all its employees should wear khadi and enlist as Congress members.¹¹³ Nehru and Pant objected to it as it was against the Congress

111 Hitvada, 10 February 1937, p.1.

112 Teachers of Raipur and Jabalpur Municipal Committee Members actively participated in election campaign. Home Political, First-half of August and September, 1939, File No. 18/8/36 and 18/9/36.

113 AICCP, File No.E-1/1936, President DCC Jabalpur to Nehru, dated 14 December 1936; Home Political, First-half of September 1936, File No. 18/9/1936.

norms of volunteer membership. Later on these resolutions were withdrawn.¹¹⁴

Provincial Congress leaders formed agricultural committees, krishak sangh and arranged kisan conferences to enquire into the agrarian situation and agriculturists' condition. Krishak Sanghs were formed in Raipur by Provincial Congress leader R.S. Shukla and peasants of Raipur were exhorted to join the Krishak Sanghs.¹¹⁵ In Betul districts the Congress leaders took advantage of large gatherings of peasants and cultivators during the debt conciliation boards' meetings to propagate the demand for remission and suspension of land revenue.¹¹⁶ Agriculturists' conferences were organised in Jabalpur by the Congress leaders.¹¹⁷ In these Krishak Sanghs, agricultural committees, and debt conciliation boards' meetings, the Congress men and volunteers propagated the agrarian reforms.¹¹⁸

114 AICCP, File No.E-1/1936, Letter from Nehru, dated 14 December 1936;
AICCP, File No.E-1/1936, DCC Jabalpur, Circular No.7910 dated 10 December 1936;
AICCP, File No.E-1/1936, G.B. Pant to Nehru, dated 5 November 1936.

115 Home Political, First and Second-half of May 1936, File No. 18/5/36.

116 Home Political, Second-half of March 1936, File No. 18/3/36.

117 Home Political, Second-half of May 1936, File No. 18/5/36.

118 Home Political, FR, First-half of June 1936, File No. 18/6/36, Second-half of August 1936, 18/8/36.

Extensive tours of Nehru left a great impression on CP & B electorate and contributed greatly to the ultimate Congress victory. He went on a whirlwind campaign in the Central Provinces and Berar and emphasised in his speeches the attainment of 'Swarajya' as the only remedy for the ills of peasantry. He inspired the cultivators and peasants to organise themselves in association and ally with the Congress.¹¹⁹ People responded to his call enthusiastically and his meetings were attended by thousands of people.¹²⁰

Provincial leaders such as D.P. Misra, N.B. Khare, Shukla, Biyani and Mrs Kale conducted extensive campaigning tours. Apart from the core election theme of the Congress their speeches also included attack on the opponents, their parties' and policies. Their speeches were simple but had a direct appeal to the consciousness of the masses. The central theme of their speeches revolved around four major points : attack on government and British imperialism; Congress programme and election manifesto;

119 Home Political, FR, Second-half of November 1936, File No. 18/11/36; AICCP, File No. P-7/1936, Letter from Brijlal Biyani to Nehru, dated 24 October 1936.

120 Home Political FR, Second-half of April 1936, File No. 18/4/36, Second-half of November 18/11/36.

review of Congress activities; attack on opponents.

Among opponents, the Hindu Mahasabha candidate L.V. Paranjpe who was contesting against Dr. Khare and acting Home Member were the main targets of the attack of the provincial leaders.¹²¹

The Congress campaign was more intensive in Berar, Nagpur, Jabalpur and Raipur regions and Betul district than in other parts of the province mainly due to the fact that all top leaders of CP & B belonged to above mentioned regions.¹²² Six important Congress election campaign meetings were reported in the month of June 1936 in Raipur, Nagpur, Betul Chhindwara, Durg and Mandla.¹²³

Campaigning methods of Independents: 'Independents' were led by E.R. Rao¹²⁴ who had been a very influential and powerful leader of CP & B. He was the only powerful

121 Hitvada, 27 January 1937, p.1;
Home Political, FR, Second-half of August 1936,
File No. 18/8/36.

122 Home Political, FR, All the fortnightly reports of
the year 1936.

123 Home Political, FR, First and Second-half of
June 1936, File No. 18/6/36.

124 For biographical data, see Appendix-I.

opponent of the Congress in the province and there was fear that he might win a majority of seats.¹²⁵

Rao was styled in Congress election campaign "as a great enemy of Congress and henchman of government"¹²⁶ and was challenged for a real test without official support.¹²⁷

E.R. Rao adopted a novel method of campaigning. At every village centre he met peasants at the residence of the most influential man, talked to them in private, explaining the new constitution, the powers given to new legislatures, what could be done and what could not be done by ministers. He also explained to the electorate the recent communist trends in Indian politics and defects of communist ideology.¹²⁸

125 AICCP, E-1/1936, Biyani to Nehru, dated 23 November 1936.

126 Hitvada, 20 January 1937, p.8.

127 Rao was given a police guard by the CP government on the basis of complaints that Congressmen hurled abuses and come to rowdyism when Rao passed through the villages. Mr. Waman Rao Joshi of the Congress Party threw an open challenge to Mr. Rao to throw away his official garments and come for a real test of straight fight with the Congress. Hitvada, 20 January 1937, p.8.

128 Hitvada, 27 January 1937, p.1.

Many rich independent and non-Congress candidates turned the election campaign into a corrupt and demoralising affair in CP & B. A large number of voters in Balaghat district were tribals who were habitual users of intoxicants. Non-Congress candidates of Balaghat were reported to have engaged exercise contractors, opium and ganja vendors as their canvassers, who severely criticised Congress policy of prohibition as interference in the religion of the aboriginals.¹²⁹

Response of the electorate: The electorate responded with enthusiasm to the election campaign. In 1936, 3,500 new Congress members were recruited from six districts of the Central Provinces and Berar. Congress election meetings were attended by thousands of people including Gonds and other tribals.¹³⁰ In many villages enthused by

129 Hitvada, 10 February 1937, p.1.

130 Home Political, FR, Second-half of April 1936; File No. 18/4/36; First-half of June 1936, File No. 18/6/36; Second-half of July 1936, File No. 18/7/36; Second-half of October 1936, File No. 18/10/36; Second-half of Nov. 1936, File No. 18/11/36.

the election propaganda, cultivators stopped paying rent and revenue and attempted to organise a campaign for the reduction of rent.¹³¹ Congress campaign also aroused considerable interest among the scheduled castes and 47 seven per cent of the scheduled caste electorate voted. No scheduled caste candidate forfeited his deposit owing to a failure to secure the minimum number of votes.¹³²

The exalted spirit of the rural masses for the prospective Congress victory is reflected by the fact that on the voting day villagers shook their fists in the face of high officials at the polling booths.¹³³ Young kids told people to vote for the Congress. Old men and women, blind and lame trudged miles and miles of the barren countryside to vote for Congress.¹³⁴ The people's enthusiastic response prompted Sardar Patel to anticipate Congress victory in the Central Provinces and Berar.¹³⁵

131 Home Political, FR, First-half of June 1936, File No. 18/6/36.

132 Reform Office, Franchise, File No.20/IV/36.

133 Hitvada, 14 January 1937, p.1.

134 Ibid.

135 Ibid., 24 January 1937, p.1.

Election Results: The elections to the Legislative Assembly in 1937 resulted in a clear win for the Congress in Central Provinces and Berar. Congress candidates gained 60 per cent of votes and 70 of the 112 seats in the Legislature. These comprised 47 out of 55 rural seats, 9 urban seats, 7 of the 20 reserved Harijan seats and 7 of the 14 special seats, consisting of two of the three women's constituencies, 2 of the 3 landowner's seats, one factory labour seat in Jabalpur and one seat allotted to commerce in the CP & B.

As for the opponents of the Congress the different Muslim factions of Muslim League won all the 14 Muslim constituencies. Rauf Shah group won 8 and Shareef group 5 seats. Non-Brahmins 3, Independents won 17 seats, Independent Labour Party 2, Nationalist 2, Ambedkarites 1, Nationalist Raja Party 1, European 1, and Anglo-Indian 1.¹³⁶

136 Reform Office, Federation, File No. 31/37, Election returns - Provincial Legislatures 1937, CP and Berar; Hitvada, 28 February 1937, p.1; Linlithgow Papers, MSS Eur F.125/112, Letter no.16, Hyde Gowan to Linlithgow, dated 7 March 1937.

Result Analysis: The Congress won a sweeping majority in the Central Provinces and Berar. The election results were astonishing, far exceeding the expectations of the Congressmen themselves and upsetting the calculations of the officials. The surprise of the Government was well exemplified in the forecast of CP & B Governor Sir Hyde Gowan. In December 1936 Congress had claimed that it would win sixtyfive out of one-hundred-twelve seats and Gowan considered it an incredible boast. On 14 February 1937 Gowan anticipated on the basis of district reports that the Congress would win 35 seats. By 10 February his estimate was upto 60. Finally on 7 March Gowan reported that the Congress had won 70 seats.¹³⁷

The Congress victory signalled the defeat of E. Raghvendra Rao's Independent candidates though he won the Bilaspur constituency. The non-Brahmins, the Independent Labour Party, the Nationalists, the Muslim groups and the Ambedkarites were all poorly organised parties and contested

137 Linlithgow Papers, MSS Eur F.125/112, Hyde Gowan to Linlithgow, Letter no.7, dated 17 December 1936; no.11, dated 14 February 1937; no.16, dated 7 March 1936; Glendevon, J., The Viceroy at Bay - Lord Linlithgow in India, 1936-43, (Collins, 1971), p.49.

a small number of constituencies. The existing factions and groups within these parties weakened their organisation and hence their election position.

Though the Central Provinces and Berar Congress Party presented a picture of a house divided against itself but it heavily defeated Rao's and other parties only due to its organisational efficiency, anti-imperialist ideology, leftist programme, leadership, nation-wide prestige and name of Mahatma Gandhi which created a wave of support for the party.¹³⁸

A major reason for the Congress victory was its superior organisation. The Commissioner of Nagpur remarked:

"Infact, every contest has been the contest of an individual against a highly organised party with a widespread sentimental appeal. The Congress candidate everywhere has been supported by a host of volunteer workers, while the canvassers of independent candidates have been for the most part

138 Home Political, File No. 4/9/37.
 Report on Elections in the CP & B;
Hitvada, 10 February 1937, p.1; 12 February 1937, p.6;
 14 February 1937, p.1; 17 February 1937, p.6;
 26 March 1937, p.9.

salaried members, who have by no means always been faithful to their pay-masters."¹³⁹

Organisation and efficiency was reflected in the extensive campaign conducted by district, town, tehsil, circle and even mandalla Congress committees and in well organised tours of national and provincial level Congress leaders.¹⁴⁰ Autonomous Congress institutions like Gandhi Seva Sangh, All India Village Industries Association, Seva Dal and Harijan Seva Sangh helped in creating the tremendous appeal of the Congress.¹⁴¹ However the All India Kisan Sabha movement in CP & B was a very feeble affair. In the case of their active presence the Congress could have won more seats.¹⁴²

139 Home Political, FR, First-half of February 1937, File No. 18/2/37.

140 Provincial leaders Shukla, Misra, Khare and Mrs Kale dominated the election campaign scene. AICCP, File No. P-13/1937-38, D.P. Misra to Nehru, letter dated 5 July 1937; Home Political, FR, First and Second-half of November 1936; Second-half of January 1937; File Nos. 18/11/36 and 18/1/37; Hitvada, 29 January 1937, p.3.

141 MFCCP, File DCC Hoshangabad, 1937-39, letter dated 15/9/1936; Home Political, Second-half of February; First-half of March; First and Second-half of August, File Nos. 18/2/36; 18/3/36; 18/8/36.

142 Congress Socialist, 20 February 1937, vol.II, no.7, p.4.

The nature of Congress propaganda was also a major contributing factor in the success of Congress in CP & B elections. Congress programme was more positive and constructive than those of its opponents. Congressmen focussed their attack on government and explained the Congress programme which promised the electorate an improved standard of living.¹⁴³ They analysed the close connection between British rule and poverty and unemployment and explained how this rule affected the whole society. The meaning, power and significance of the vote, difference between foreign rule and 'Swarajya' were carefully reasoned and laid before the people in simplest language. The Congress emphasized that there were in reality only two parties — the Congress and the Government and that,

"One who believes that he is a third party deceives himself and deceives the people If you want to remove untouchability, have full meal, your share of clothes, a habitable house, then vote for the Congress. Congress is the only organisation which can fight for you."¹⁴⁴

143 Hitvada, 10 February 1937, pp.2 & 6;
17 March 1937, p.11.

144 Speech of P.K. Salve, Congress member and Trade Union Congress leader of CP & B.
Hitvada, 13 January 1937, p.1.

The Congress won the elections on issues which appealed to the voters and to million more who had no votes. Extensive programme of agricultural reforms, rent free land, liquidation of debts and higher prices for produce, industrial reforms, untouchability removal won the hearts of the masses. Its agrarian programme made direct appeal to the economic interest of the peasant. It indicated a mature consciousness of its economic exploitation.¹⁴⁵

The impact of the efforts of the top leadership of the Congress was also significant. Nehru's approach to the electorate was ideological, with very few references to individual candidates. "The technique of hammering of a few objectives was successful enough to carry the message effectively to the Indian countryside."¹⁴⁶

Gandhi's name became a magic word in the Central Provinces and Berar. The Congress volunteers succeeded in arousing a wave of pro-Gandhi frenzy, especially in rural areas and a vote for Congress meant a vote for Gandhi.

145 Congress Socialist, vol.II, no.7,
20 February 1937, pp.1-4.

146 Rizvi Gowher, Linlithgow and India : A Study of British Policy and Political Impasse in India, 1936-43, (London, 1978), p.29.

Many people prostrated themselves before the Congress box on the voting day, showing their reverence to Gandhi's box.¹⁴⁷ The candidates of other parties opened free kitchens and provided joy rides for voters but it had become a open secret that after enjoying food at the free kitchens and joy rides to the polling booths, voters voted for Gandhi's Congress.¹⁴⁸ The Governor of CP & B reluctantly accepted Gandhi's charisma in a letter to Linlithgow, "The name of Gandhi is unquestionably one to conjure with among the masses not for any political reason but simply because he is Gandhi."¹⁴⁹

Thus, the people rejected the Independent rich zamindars, Raibahadurs and Malguzars and voted enbloc for the Congress. The Congress therefore proved to be the only popular and democratic representative of the people.

147 Hitvada, 7 February 1937, p.6.

148 Hitvada, 14 February 1937, p.6.

149 Linlithgow Papers, MSS Eur F.125/112, Letter no.13, Hyde Gowan to Linlithgow dated 10 February 1937.

II

OFFICE ACCEPTANCE AND MINISTRY FORMATION

After the elections the main issue before the Congress leadership was to decide whether to accept office or not in the Congress majority provinces. Cf late Nehru had been in a more radical mood in looking at the 'Slave constitution',¹⁵⁰ which he wanted to throw out, 'lock stock and barrel',¹⁵¹ so that the field would be clear for a Constituent Assembly of the Indian people. The majority of the Congressmen however did not share this view. Ultimately everything depended on Gandhi's advice. He was in favour of conditional office acceptance. He impressed upon the working committee of the AICC that since the Congress had entered the legislative assemblies they must demonstrate to the electorate in particular and masses in general, by practical experiment, the incapability of the new constitution. It only deserved to be wrecked and replaced by genuine democratic constitution formed by the people's own representatives.

150 Rizvi Gowhar, Linlithgow and India : A Study of British Policy and Political Impasse in India, 1936-43, (London, 1978), p.49.

151 Pande, B.N. Concise History of the Indian National Congress, 1885-1947 (Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1985), p.192.

Demoralization apprehended by opponents of office acceptance would be prevented effectively by rigidly restricting the selection of candidates for offices and the conduct of Congress legislators in general and the ministers in particular. A resolution of fourteen clauses prescribing rules to regulate the conduct of Congressmen in provincial legislatures was passed.¹⁵²

The Government was expected to dispel some of the Congress misgivings about the stringent restrictions which were likely to render the powers of the ministers futile. Gandhi demanded an assurance that the Government would not use the special powers vested in them by section 93 of the Government of India Act 1935. No such undertaking was forthcoming from the Government and the possibility of any guarantee of non-interference appeared remote and hence Congress refused to accept office.¹⁵³

Soon after the declaration of election results a meeting of provincial assembly was held at Nagpur, which elected Dr. Khare as party leader and set up an enquiry

152 Home Political, FR, Second-half of February 1937, File No. 18/2/37.

153 Pande, B.N., op.cit., p.192.

committee for Bilaspur election case.¹⁵⁴ Due to diversity of opinions the issue of office acceptance would not be discussed at length.¹⁵⁵

In March 1937, all the three Congress provincial committees of CP & B passed resolutions favouring office acceptance, subject to conditions.¹⁵⁶ Several district Congress committees also favoured office acceptance with a view to rejecting the constitution and following the principles laid down at Lucknow and Faizpur.¹⁵⁷

- 154 Bilas^{pur} election case - Bilaspur was the constituency from where E.R. Rao the independent candidate and the leader of the 'Independents' in the CP & B won the elections. The Congress charged him of using corrupt methods and seeking governments' help in winning the elections.
Home Political, FR, File No. 18/2/1937 II
- 155 Home Political, FR, Second half of February 1937, File No. 8/2/1937.
- 156 AICCP, File No.G-39/1937; dated 11 March 1937.
- 157 AICCP, File No.G-39/1937, dated 8 March 1937.

On 1 April, the provisions of the Act concerning provincial responsible Governments were put into force. Since the Congress would not form ministries unconditionally, the Government promptly placed minority ministries in offices of the six Congress majority provinces on interim basis for six months without legislative support. It was a fraud on the electorate. Gandhi wrote in anguish - "What a lie ... This autonomy is still born".¹⁵⁸

Minority Ministry in Central Provinces and Berar

In the CP & B minority ministry was formed by 'United Party' led by E. Raghvendra Rao and consisted of a few Independents and a Muslim candidate. Premiership and Home, Revenue, Finance and Agriculture portfolios were given to E.R. Rao, B.G. Khaparde, S.W.A. Rizvi and Dharam Rao respectively.¹⁵⁹

The formation of minority ministry took the provincial Congress completely by surprise. It was greeted with the wrath of Congressmen which reflected their frustrated hopes

158 'Gandhi to Agatha Harrison' dated 5 April 1937, Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, vol.LXV, 15 March to 31 July, 1937.

159 Hitvada, 31 March 1937, p.1; 2 April 1937, p.1.

of an immediate impasse.¹⁶⁰ The United Party consisted of men who came together not because of any common affiliation but because Congress would not have them. It was a constitutional freak, a stop gap ministry representing the Governor's nominees, Rao and his followers was criticised by Congressmen as 'traitors'.¹⁶¹

1 April was observed by the Congress as "Anti-Constitution Day". Urban parts of the CP & B observed complete 'hartal', in rural areas it was feeble.¹⁶²

The District Commissioner's of the Central Provinces and Berar reported the uneasiness of local congressmen over the decision. They resented the impasse, blamed the Governor and criticised the hollowness of the constitution.¹⁶³

160 Linlithgow Papers, MSS Eur F.125/112, letter no.18, Hyde Gowan to Linlithgow dated 21 April 1937.

161 Hitvada, 22 April 1937, p.6.

162 Hitvada, 4 April 1937, pp.1&12;
MFCCP, File DCC Jabalpur 1937-39, President DCC Sangor to President MFCC, dated 3 April 1937;
Home Political, FR, Second-half of February 1937, File No. 18/2/37.

163 Home Political, FR, Second-half of March 1937, File No. 18/3/37.

General feeling of the people was one of profound discontent and disappointment at the Congress refusal and formation of minority ministry.¹⁶⁴ Villagers seemed unconvinced by the explanations given to them for the Congress decision.¹⁶⁵ Congressmen regretted the loss of a golden opportunity for helping the masses and consolidating the Congress position.¹⁶⁶

Programme of Minority Ministry

In comparison to the high promises of Congress the programme of the minority ministry was welcomed as sensible even by some congressmen.¹⁶⁷ Congressmen sensed the possibility of the minority ministry's programme being successful and were afraid that it would win the trust and

164 Linlithgow Papers, MSS Eur F.125/113, Letter no.17, Hyde Gowan to Linlithgow, dated 1 April 1937.

165 At Akola a meeting called by Brijlal Biyani (a Congress leader of Berar) attracted 600 people and most of them went away unconvinced by the explanations offered to them of the Congress decision.
Home Political, FR, Second-half of March 1937, File No. 18/3/37.

166 Home Political, FR, Second-half of March 1937, File No. 18/3/37.

167 Gokhale a sitting member from Amraoti confessed that the "ministry had stolen the cream off the party's milk pan".
Linlithgow Papers, MSS Eur F.125/113, letter no.24, Hyde Gowan to Linlithgow, dated 6 June 1937.

confidence of the masses unless the Congress takes the opportunity of driving the ministry out of office.¹⁶⁸

At first E.R. Rao was indifferent to a ministerial programme but when he came to know that Congress had been afraid of the Interim Ministry's programme, his ministry got engaged in drawing it up.¹⁶⁹

CP & B interim ministry's programme was inspired by the Congress programme but was more practical and workable.¹⁷⁰ It raised the agrarian issues of land revenue regulations, reduction of rent, enhancement of Takoli, settlement of unoccupied land, prevention of illegal exactions by Malguzars and petty Government officials, Also, questions of licensing of money lenders, increase of land mortgage banks, provision of grazing facilities in Malguzari villages, encouragement of

168 Hitvada, 20 June 1937, p.7; 30 June 1937, p.4.

Dr. Khare criticised the programme as "mere fraud and a crude attempt to pick the pockets of the Congress party".

Linlithgow Papers, MSS Eur F.125/113, letter no.24, Hyde Gowan to Linlithgow, dated 6 June 1937.

169 Linlithgow Papers, MSS Eur F.125/113, letter no.18, Hyde Gowan to Linlithgow, dated 21 April 1937.

170 For details see Chapter-III "Peasant and Labour Movement in Central Provinces".

horticulture and cattle breeding farms, prevention of cattle disease, adjustment of irrigation rates and appointment of a committee to examine the possibility of curtailing the expenditure and retrenchment were brought forth. Issues of industrial workers, public health, primary and adult education were properly dealt with. Besides, it also included a provision of reducing the number and pay scales of high imperial and provincial civil servants.¹⁷¹

The Bihar Premier M. Yunus attempted to co-ordinate the work of all the minority ministries. His plan apparently foundered when E.R. Rao, a Congress renegade who had been Premier under the Act of 1919 and acting Governor of the State in 1936, opposed a formal meeting of the ministries of the six Provinces.¹⁷² Yunus was anxious to introduce progressive measures primarily to embarrass the Congress,¹⁷³

171 It also spoke for the overall improvement of industrial workers and aboriginals, check on the activities of money lenders, Industrial Survey of CP & B, expansion of vocational and agricultural education, expansion of public health service and medical facility, opening of village industries, Linlithgow Papers, MSS Eur F.125/113, Letter no.22, Hyde Gowan to Linlithgow, dated 20 May 1937.

172 E.R. Rao Papers, Rao to M.A. Said Khan Nawab of Chhatri, dated 10 May 1937; Yunus to all Premiers of minority ministries, letter dated 3 May 1937.

173 E.R. Rao Papers, Chhatri to Rao, dated 4 June 1937.

but Chhatri, the UP Premier who was under Rao's influence and was constantly communicating with him told Yunus that by reducing rents they would be doing a disservice to their own class without winning the confidence of the tenantry. The Congress would criticise as inadequate any reduction proposed and if Congress later took office they would double the percentage of relief.¹⁷⁴

Congress Activity During the Period of Interim Ministry

The Congress in CP & B started renewing the process of Congress activities under the directions of Congress Parliamentary sub-Committee to perfect the Congress machinery.¹⁷⁵ In order to counteract any weakening caused by the Congress decision to refuse office, Congress started a vigorous province-wide campaign by forming village Congress committees, holding meetings of kisans and of the general public in which the Congress decision was explained to the people.¹⁷⁶ R. S. Shukla utilised the teachers of the

174 E.R. Rao Papers, Chhatri to Rao, dated 4 June 1937; Dove Marguerite Rose, Forfeited Future : The Conflict over Congress Ministries in British India, (1933-37), Delhi, 1987, p.333.

175 AICCP, File No.G-39(1)/1937, Congress Parliamentary sub-Committee Circular No.1, dated 5 May 1937.

176 Home Political FR, First-half of April 1937, F.18/4/37; FR, Second-half of April 1937, F.18/4/37; FR, Second-half of June 1937, F.18/6/37; Linlithgow Papers, MSS Eur F/125/113, Hyde Gowan to Linlithgow, letter nos.20,23, dated 6 May 1937 and 25 May 1937.

Council Boards to enroll Congress members.¹⁷⁸ The speeches of Congress leaders also underwent a change, for example, instead of the promise of fifty percent reduction in the land revenue they promised to reduce the land revenue as much as possible.¹⁷⁹ In Betul, Amraoti and Jabalpur small peasant agitations took place.¹⁸⁰

The Government of CP & B started a counter-propaganda against Congress. CP Governor issued the translation of his communique about office acceptance in simple vernacular to all Deputy Commissioners for distribution in the districts.¹⁸¹ Government officials while providing relief measures to cultivators for damaged crops explained to the villagers how the Congress escaped from its responsibility of office acceptance due to its inability to fulfil the wild promises kept at the time of election campaign.¹⁸²

178 Home Political, FR, First and Second-half of May 1937, File No. 18/5/1937.

179 Home Political, FR, First and Second-half of April 1937, File No. 18/4/37; First and Second-half of May 1939, File No. 18/5/37; First-half of June 1937, File No. 18/6/37.

180 Home Political, FR, First-half of March 1937, File No. 18/3/37; Hitvada, 19 May 1937, p.8.

181 Linlithgow Papers, MSS Eur F.125/113, letter no.18, Hyde Gowan to Linlithgow, dated 21 April 1937.

182 Hitvada, 14 May 1937, p.5.

Congress Party Squabbles:

As already stated in the first part of the chapter, Congress Party in the Central Provinces and Berar presented a disappointing picture of everlasting squabbles in the Congress organisation over personal ambitions and ego problems.

After elections the Mahakoshal and Nagpur strife sharpened over the selection of party leader. Mahakoshal was anxious to secure its supremacy and dominance as it had more seats, larger area and larger population than Nagpur and had always felt that it was denied its due by Nagpur.¹⁸³

Nagpur was leading the provincial politics since the days of Tilak was not ready to relenquish it. Besides it, the emerging leader of Nagpur Dr. Khare was utterly unpopular with Marwari group,¹⁸⁴ and disliked for his

183 Hitvada, 26 March 1937, p.12.

184 Marwari group was a very powerful faction of Berar Provincial Congress Committee against the Marathi Brahmin leadership of Dr. N.B. Khare. The Marwari group was led by Brijlal Biyani and Poonamchand Ranka, Seth Jammalal Bajaj was very influential in this group. The Marwari group was against Khare's selection as Premier of the CP & B and wanted to depose him from the party leadership. They were also against his selection as President of the Nagpur Provincial Congress Committee, Linlithgow Papers, MSS Eur F.125/113, Hyde Gowan to Linlighgow, Letter no28, and 36, dated 6 July 1937 and 25 August 1937.

tactlessness and dictatorial attitude by the congressmen of Berar and Mahakoshal region.¹⁸⁵ Further Khare could not take Mahakoshal Provincial Congress Committee president Avadesh Pratap Singh into his confidence which resulted in the formation of "Mahakoshal Assembly Party".¹⁸⁶

An all-Party Convention was called by Khare to pass no-confidence resolution against minority ministry and to select Speaker and Deputy Speaker of the Assembly. Khare's invitation to Rao and S.W.A. Rizvi was declined.¹⁸⁷ Only 51 out of the 112 members were present in the meeting. Notable absentees were congressmen from Mahakoshal. Khare

185 'Khare was unpopular with the congressmen of Mahakoshal and Berar. He always reminded me of a loquacious and responsible Jack in the box. Linlithgow Papers, MSS Eur F.125/113, Letter No. 28 Hyde Gowan to Linlithgow, dated 6 July 1937.

186 Home Political, FR, First-Half of March 1937, File No. 18/3/37.

187 Rao refused the invitation of Khare stating that the only authority to convene a meeting was Governor so the election of Speaker and Deputy Speaker would be nonesse in the eyes of the law. E.R. Rao Papers, Rao to Khare, dated, 8 May 1937; Khare to Rao, dated 3 May 1937.

nominated G.S. Gupta and Mrs Kale as Speaker and Deputy Speaker respectively.¹⁸⁸ These selections were protested against by Mahakoshal Raipur group and as a counter-blast a meeting all members of Legislative Assembly was called at Pipariya.¹⁸⁹

The main object of the Pipariya meeting was to consolidate Mahakoshal ranks and secure a more effective voice for them in Congress administration but it did not prove to be any more of a success than the convention at Nagpur. Dr. Khare and his followers were conspicuous by their absence. Their absence again proved the unedifying rivalry of CP & B Congress factions.¹⁹⁰

188 Home Political, FR, First-half of May 1937,
File No. 18/5/37;
Hitvada, 14 May 1937, p.4.

189 Shukla criticised Khare for favouring Marathi Members.
R.P. Papers, File No.2-C/38, Call No.1,
Shukla to Patel, dated 28 June 1937;
Patel to Shukla, dated 10 July 1937.

190 Home Political, FR, First-half of June 1937,
File No.18/6/37;
Linlithgow Papers, MSS Eur F.125/112, Letter no.26,
dated 21 June 1937, Hyde Gowan to Linlithgow.

Office Accepted:

The election had shown the enormous organisational strength and massive influence of the Congress over the masses. The minority ministry could not continue in face of majority opposition and obviously a constitutional deadlock was inevitable. On the other hand Congress was also in trouble. Congressmen were anxious to accept office, public opinion was proministerial, leadership's view was divided and interim ministry's practical and attractive programme was gradually changing the public opinion.¹⁹¹ Amidst all this the matter stood still on the simplest logic that if the Congress did not accept office the Act stood destroyed.

Linlithgow knuckled down from his earlier stand and adopted a softer and wiser attitude.¹⁹² The Viceroy announced

191 Election results of local bodies in CP & B revealed the declining position of the Congress. Out of 204 selected members, Congress could get only 45 seats where as Independents and no-Party men won 47 and 41 seats respectively.

Home Political, FR, Second-half of July 1937, File No. 18/7/37;

In the Municipal elections at Raipur out of 18 candidates set up by the Congress only 8 were successful. Hitvada, 18 April 1937, p.6.

192 Pande, B.N., Concise History of the Indian National Congress, 1885-1947, (Delhi: Vikas, 1985), p.194.

on 21 June 1937,

"I am convinced that the shortest road to that fuller political life which many of you so greatly desire is to accept this constitution and to work for it for all it is worth. Of their nature, politics are ever dynamic and to imagine that their expression in terms of a written constitution can render them static would be utterly to disregard the lessons of history and indeed the dictates of common sense."¹⁹³

It was a flexible statement made by the Viceroy and indirectly it assured the Congress that the question of Governor's exercising the special powers would arise only on the issues of serious disagreement which would be few. On the other hand the Constitution was providing the Congress an opportunity to prove its ability to govern in the interest of the people. With these considerations the Congress Working Committee passed a resolution of Office acceptance in July 1937.¹⁹⁴

193 Glendevon John, The Viceroy at Bay : Lord Linlithgow in India, 1936-43 (Collins, 1971), p.63.

194 Pande, B.N., op.cit., pp.194-95.

General satisfaction was expressed by the people and the Congress at the Congress decision in CP & B. However left leader R.S. Ruikar declared office acceptance as derogatory to the self-respect and dignity of the Congress and was highly detrimental to the welfare of the masses.¹⁹⁵

Dr. Khare was elected the party leader of CP & B Assembly. In view of the 'unhappy Khare Crisis' which ensued immediately it would be appropriate to discuss the causes leading to Khare's election. The first cause leading to it was rivalry between Raipur and Jabalpur factions.¹⁹⁶ By 1937 Shukla emerged as the most powerful leader of the Mahakoshal region. The Jabalpur faction was absolutely antagonised by the Raipur group. D.P. Misra has given his version of Khare's selection :

"It is true that within the previous two years some of Shukla's activities had greatly annoyed me.... In brief Shukla's past, so well known to every member of the party, became one of the decisive factors in inducing Mahakoshalians to instal a dark horse on the provincial gaddi."¹⁹⁷

195 AICCP, File No.G-39(1)/1939, dated, 5 July 1937.

196 As stated in first part of the chapter after elections the breach between the factions of Misra and Shukla had broadened over the issue of decision of a member of DCC's to contest the Municipal and Local Bodies' elections. Hitvada, 26 March 1936, p.12.

Another reason was the established tradition of electing the leader from Nagpur, the headquarters of the province.

Ministry formation:

Thus the Congress assumed ministry in the CP & B in July 1937. The Cabinet included Dr. Khare as the Premier, R.S. Shukla as Education Minister, D.P. Misra as Minister for local self-Government, R.M. Deshmukh for Public Works Department, M.Y. Shareef as Law Minister, D.K. Mehtas as Minister for Finance, and P.B. Gole as Revenue Minister.¹⁹⁸ Congress accepted office of the CP & B on a somewhat insecure basis, since Khare's installation to the Premiership was not due to his universal popularity but due to certain reservations against Shukla's candidature.

Official Assumptions and Expectations:

The criticism of the Congress was a persistent characteristic of official attitude. The real test of

197 Misra D.P., 'Living an Era', India's March to Freedom, vol.I (Delhi: Vikas Publishing House,), pp.271-72.

198 Home Political, FR, First-half of July 1937, File No. 18/7/37. Linlithgow Papers, MSS Eur F.125/113, letter no.32, Hyde Gowan to Linlithgow, dated 21 July 1937; Hitvada, 9 July 1937, p.1.

official expectations concerning provincial autonomy came with the build upto the elections that began in 1936.

During the election campaign, the authorities were more sympathetic towards independent candidates of land-owning classes. The CP & B Governor had an extra-large soft corner for E. Raghavendra Rao, who was granted all possible help and even a police guard from the Government. After elections, Rao as the Premier of the interim ministry was the object of Hyde Gowan's unedifying praise.¹⁹⁹

On the otherhand the authorities expressed disapproval and alarm at the nature of the appeal that the Congress was seen to be propagating. The Governor of CP & B complained to the Viceroy that the Congress was deceiving simple villagers and ignorant aboriginals bribing them with wild and unrealistic promises. He wrote to the Viceroy,

"We are led to the conclusion that in future if the candidates or parties want to succeed in elections they should fight elections on economic programmes. The Congress has been promising the masses on a largescale a new order of

199 Linlithgow Papers, MSS Eur F.125/113, Letter no.24, Hyde Gowan to Linlithgow dated 6 June 1937.

things and naturally the scales have been weighed in its favour. I am afraid that it is true. Congress has been making the most absurd promises of a free house per man, halving the land revenues and so on. A sad comment on democracy."²⁰⁰

The authorities also charged congressmen of exploiting Gandhi's name. A good instance was taken from 'Satpara' region inhabited by 'Gond' aboriginals. Congressmen there campaigned only in the name of Gandhi. They told the electorate, "Put your ticket in the box of your great Bhumia Gandhi who starves like you do and cares for the poor and oppressed and secured all the Gond votes."²⁰¹ Congress candidates were denounced as 'men of straw'²⁰² and Congress squabbles were depicted as "fight of a flock of 'babblers' on a lawn in the early morning, bickering,

200 Linlithgow Papers, MSS Eur F-125/122, Letter No.13, Hyde Gowen to Linlithgow, dated 10 February 1937.

201 Home Political, FR First-half of February 1937, File No. 18/2/37.

202 Linlithgow Papers, MSS Eur F.125/113, Letter no.16, Hyde Gowan to Linlithgow, dated 7 March 1937.

shrieking, fluffing their feathers, and pecking at each other; then the enemy man approaches and they all fly off in a solid phalanx."²⁰³

Signs of Congress unpopularity were welcomed. They always tried to present a distorted version of reality which denied and refused to accept the Congress influence over the masses. In CP & B the authorities presented Gonds' participation in the election campaign in the following manner - "In Betul a thousand Gonds attended a Congress meeting, perhaps as a result of a false rumour that blankets would be distributed in the meeting."²⁰⁴

Till the last months 1937 official reports kept on emphasizing that no response was visible among the electorate for the Congress²⁰⁵ and the results would depend on the personal influence of the candidates. The Congress candidates were seen either avowelly or secretly against the official

203 Linlithgow Papers, MSS Eur F.125/113, Letter no.24, Hyde Gowen to Linlithgow, dated 6 June 1937.

204 Home Political, FR, First-half of June 1936, File No. 18/6/36.

205 Linlithgow Papers, MSS Eur F.125/113, Letter no.3, Hyde Gowan to Linlithgow, November 10, 1936.

Congress policy of wrecking the new Constitution.²⁰⁶

After the formation of the interim ministry Hyde Gowan followed the "Fabian policy of 'masterly inaction'" and believed that "let the Congress chafe against the emptiness of the days".²⁰⁷ On the other hand its policy towards the interim Government was of full participation. Hyde Gowan claimed that the Interim Ministry's programme was made under his guidance and directions and it was purely a Government's programme.²⁰⁸

Amidst vigorous anti-Government campaign of Congress against the Governor for not giving assurances of non-interference, the authorities in CP & B saw one bright spot : that in the countryside people were friendly and cordial as before and voted for Congress only due to the volunteers' exhortations.²⁰⁹

The opinion about Gandhi was distorted. His statements about office acceptance was taken as the bargaining spirit of the baniya and the forensic tricks of the Vakil.²¹⁰

206 Linlithgow Papers, MSS Eur F.125/112, Letter No.3, Hyde Gowan to Linlithgow, November 10, 1936.

207 Ibid., F.125/113, Letter No.24, dated 6 June 1937.

208 Ibid., F.125/113, Letter No.18, dated 21 April 1937.

209 Ibid., F.125/113, Letter No.18, dated 21 April 1937.

210 Home Political, FR, Second-half of March 1937, File No. 18/3/37.

Hyde Gowan opined about Gandhi,

"In the days of my youth there was a certain type of an American politician who was known as 'mugwurap' which was interpreted as a man who sits on the fence and waits to see which way the cat will jump. The term seems to me to apply aptly to Gandhi's feat. He sat on the fence until he saw that every provincial cat in the country was jumping in the same direction, and he then jumped off in front of them, crying 'follow me'."211

The emergence of the Congress as a strong party in the provincial legislature was entertained by the British authorities with grudging recognition and hostile disapproval of Congress strength. The British attitude during the election process inevitably influenced the future working of provincial autonomy. Election campaign became a prelude to tension and conflict between British authorities and the Congress, after acceptance of office.

211 Linlithgow Papers, MSS Eur F.125/113, Letter no.32, Hyde Gowan to Linlithgow, 21 July 1937.

Chapter-II

SOME ASPECTS OF THE CONGRESS ACTIVITY

IN C.P. & BERAR (1937-39)

SOME ASPECTS OF THE CONGRESS ACTIVITY
IN C.P. & BERAR (1937-39)

This chapter discusses the Congress activity inside as well outside the Legislative Assembly. Inside the Legislative Assembly, it deals with the role of the Congress Party as a popular representative ministry and outside the legislative Assembly it analyses its organisation and work as a political party.

The following chapter is divided into two sections. The first section describes the activities of the Congress party outside the legislative in the areas covered by the three Provincial Congress Committees of Nagpur, Mahakoshal and Berar into which the province was divided.

The first section analyses the Congress activity of general mobilization of the masses, the Congress propaganda, formation of a volunteer organisation and the Congress campaign for enrolling the Congress members. It also evaluates the emerging weaknesses in the provincial Congress organisation, its impact on the functioning of the Congress ministry and its effect on the image of the Congress Party.

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The second section deals with the Congress activities inside the Legislative Assembly. It also describes the opposition faced by the Congress over some important legislations like C.P. Tenancy Act and Vidhya Mandir Scheme.

The second section also consists of the policy and work conducted by the Congress regarding prohibition, both inside and outside the legislature.

Lastly the chapter discusses some aspects of the relationship of Congress ministry and British bureaucracy.

GENERAL ACTIVITY OF THE CONGRESS:

For attracting the masses into the Congress fold and their mobilization, the Provincial Congress Committees celebrated 'Ganpati Celebration', 'Gandhi Jayanti', 'Tilak Day', 'Rani Jhansi Day, and 'Independence Day' on 26th January. These celebrations offered Congress an opportunity to mobilise the masses by holding meetings where the people were constantly asked to enroll in maximum numbers in the Congress organisation. These meetings reviewed the Congress performance in past years, criticised British Government, British Imperialism and exhorted the people to

fight for complete independence.¹ The only available annual report of the Mahakoshal Provincial Congress Committee is for the year 1939. It gives in brief an idea of the nature of work done by the Congress. The Provincial Congress Committee hosted the Tripuri Session of the Indian National Congress. Hence in large part of 1938, the attention energies and efforts of the most of Mahakoshal Congress leaders and workers were directed towards the arrangement for the Congress session.

However, the main aim of the Provincial Congress Committee was to consolidate the Congress organisation and this work continued. Mahakoshal District, Tehsil and circle Congress Committees were organised and about 1200 new circle Congress Committees were formed. During the year 1938-39, the Congress won all the elections of local boards district councils, Municipal Committees with a great majority in Mahakoshal.

1. Home Political: F.R.

- II half of Sep 1936, File No 18/9/36
- I half of Aug 1937, File No 18/8/37
- II half of Jan 1938, File No 18/1/38
- II half of Jun 1938, File No 18/6/38
- I half of Aug 1938, File No 18/8/38
- I half of Oct 1938, File No 18/10/38
- II half of Jan 1939, File No 18/1/39
- I half of Aug 1939, File No 18/8/39
- I half of Oct 1939, File No 18/10/39.

Congress leaders made public speeches at many places especially in rural and interior areas of Mahakoshal. The enrollment campaign of Mahakoshal Congress succeeded in enrolling 1,00,115 primary members. As a result of Muslim mass contact programme, many Muslimmen and women were also enrolled as primary members, but their number is not given in the source. Congress also accelerate its work in adjoining princely states of Rewa, Mehar and Rajanandgaon.

In addition, the Mahakoshal Congress observed Rajkot Day, Tilak Day, National Week, Gandhi Jayanti, Independence Day and congratulation's day for ministers' resignation.²

The annual report of the Nagpur Provincial Congress Committee for the year 1938, gives an idea about the organisational work of the Congress for the agriculturists and labour.

The Nagpur Provincial Congress Committee formed "Agricultural Sub-Committee" to organise the agriculturists of the Province. It was called as 'Nagpur Prant Congress Shetkari Committee'. These Shetkari Committees were also formed in taluqua headquarters and in some villages too. To relieve the peasants from distress generated by crop failure, the N.P.C.C. raised its voice for remission of land rents and opening of relief works. Memorials with

2. A.I.C.C.P. File No. P-13 (Part II) 1930-40, Annual Report of Mahakoshal Provincial Congress Committee.

with tens of thousands of signatures were submitted to the local Government through this Committee.

A labour sub-committee was formed to prepare a provincial labour scheme which, after submitting it to P.C.C. was subsequently dissolved.

At the initiative of N.P.C.C. a joint board of two representatives each from Nagpur, Mahakoshal and Berar Provincial Congress Committees was formed with a view to advise the Congress in C.P. & B. This step was essential because the C.P.B. though administratively composed of one province, was divided into three Congress Provinces. This was a significant major step initiated by the Nagpur P.C.C. to encourage unity of the three Congress Provinces.

The N.P.C.C. also carried on the programme of the Muslim Mass contact through a sub-committee headed by P.K. Salve.³

CONGRESS VOLUNTEER ORGANISATION:

There was no volunteer corps organised directly by the Provincial Congress Committees in C.P.B. till the Tripuri

3. Home Political File No 4/2/39, Poll. Notes on the volunteer movement in India.

Session was held in Mahakoshal. Prior to this, there were volunteers in some districts under the Hindustani Seva Dal. At the Tripuri Session (1938), it was decided to organise a permanent⁴ volunteer corps in all the districts of Mahakoshal. Volunteers between the age 18 to 30 were enrolled. Each district was asked to enroll atleast 150 volunteers.

The volunteers were trained intensively. They had to take the following pledge (a) Acceptance of the Congress goal (b) Emphasis on the non-violence (c) carrying out the orders of the Congress from time to time (d) Implicit obedience of the orders of the superiors. Khadi uniform, singing of national songs and hoisting of national flag, etc. were included in the general activity of the volunteers.

There was no permanent female volunteer corps but few female volunteers were included in the organisation. During the Tripuri Session 2156 male and 300 female volunteers worked. The volunteer organisation of Mahakoshal as a whole was fairly successful in the province. However, efforts were not made to make it a mass movement. In Katni in July 1938, a National Youth Conference was organised, where all the Congress programmes were resolved to be followed by the Youth⁵.

4. Home Political File No. 4/2/39 Poll. Notes on the Volunteer Movement in India.

5. M.P.C.C.P. File No. Misc. 17/1938. Report on National Youth Conference, Katni.

Due to the outbreak of Second World War, the Mahakoshal Provincial Congress Committee decided to discontinue the work of Mahakoshal Provincial Volunteer Organisation for the time being from 1 Dec 1939 and issued orders to all districts of Mahakoshal to the same effect.^{5A}

EMERGING WEAKNESSES:

During the ministry period in the Central Provinces and Berar, evidence of growing weaknesses in the Congress Organisation at all levels was becoming increasingly visible.

The Presidents of various Provincial Congress Committees received complaints from the District Congress Committees and Tehsil/Taluqua Congress Committees regarding the misconduct of Congressmen. These complaints revealed that the Congress in C.P. & B. was drifting away from the ideals of sacrifice and high moral standards. Party conflicts and personal rivalries were eating up the strength of the Congress Organisation. In Burhanpur Municipal elections, complaints were made by Congressmen that the persons standing on the Congress seat disgraced

5A M.P.C.C.P. file No. G-I/1939-99;
M.P.C.C.P. file D.C.C. Jabalpur/1939, letter to the Secretary, D.C.C. Jabalpur from P.C.C. Secretary Mahakoshal P.C.C. Volunteer Camp Raipur.

the Congress prestige as these people were selling foreign cloths.⁶ Complaints were also made about Congress members' indulgence in communal organisations and their sluggishness at work.⁷ We come across numerous cases of enrollment of bogus membership, especially in Vidarbha P.C.C. This evil was found at the grass roots level, more in rural areas than in the urban areas. Several cases of bogus enrollment were reported from different Taluqas of the Vidarbha region, for example in Ellichpur (791), in Chandun (257), in Basim (346) and in Khamgaon Taluqa (532) bogus members were enrolled without the payment of fees. At one or two places, members were even elected to the P.C.C. on the strength of these bogus members.⁸

These problems were noted by Congressmen, and a Congress M.L.A.'s remark on the weaknesses of Congress Organisation can be quoted, "A close observation of the Congress work in this district for the last two years reveals one patent fact that the persons holding reins of the D.C.C. are more keen on ensuring their hold on the

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6. A.I.C.C.P. File No P22(KWI)/1938-39.
A.I.C.C.P. File No L71/1937 No.36/3902 dated 4/2/38.
M.P.C.C.P. Misc. File No 8/1934-39 letter of a Congress Member to Thakur Chhedilal, MP.C.C. President dated 28.8.1938.
MP.C.C.P. File DCC Damoh/1931-39, letter to M.P.C.C. President by Premshanker Dhagat.
 7. M.P.C.C.P. Misc. File No 8/1934-39, letter of one Congress Member to M.P.C.C. President Chhedilal 28.8.38.
 8. A.I.C.C.P. File P-22 (P+I)/1938 Report on Congress Organisation in Berar.

office than doing any real Congress work. The result of such a tendency has been that the real and genuine Congress workers who have worked and suffered so far, are brushed aside and unholy combinations are made with self seekers who have absolutely no love for the Congress, but are now joining it for personal gains which are made available since the acceptance of office by the Congress."⁹

THE HARIJAN TEMPLE WORSHIP (REMOVAL OF
CIVIC DISABILITIES) BILL

This bill, in accordance with the Congress policy was introduced in April 1939 for the purpose of achieving social justice. It was in line with the Bombay and Madras Temple Entry Bills of the same nature.¹⁰ It aimed at removal of the disabilities which were imposed by social customs and usages on Harijans by the Hindu community, as it read, "notwithstanding any law, custom, usage or preception to the contrary, no Hindu shall by reason merely of his belonging to any particular community or class (Harijan) untouchable, backward) or like, be prevented or disabled from being appointed to any public office or enjoying or

9. M.P.C.C.P. Misc. File No 8/1934-39. Abdul Quadir Ex, MLA to M.P.C.C. President Thakur Chhedilal dated 2.9.38.

10. Home Political File No 24/5/38, 13/7/39, 13/9/39. The C.P. and Berar Removal of Civic Disabilities Bill 1937.

having access to any public stream, public river, public well, tank, pathway, sanitary, conveniences or transport or any secular institution with the general public." ¹¹ Persons evading this legislation or distructing a Harijan from worship in a temple were to be punished with fine extending upto Rs.200. Therefore, we see that the main purpose of the Bill was to create facilities for the Harijans for uplifting their social status.

The bill was criticised by several Harijan members of opposition in the Legislative Assembly. Along with Mr R.G. Ghodichore (independent, scheduled caste), Mr Keshojanuji (independent scheduled caste), some of the Harijan Congress members like Mr H.J. Khandekar opposed the bill. They condemned the bill saying that it would lead to further communal fights among the Hindus and Harijans, as they feared that orthodox Hindus would not allow Harijans to enter the temples. It was argued that the bill was passed to gain popularity and to impress Gandhiji. They further asserted that such a move could not help the Harijans, as Harijans were mainly poor and could not go to the courts. Instead, they demanded that a bill should be passed ending the four varna system, which was the root cause of all the trouble. They also demanded representation in local bodies. They blamed Congress for

11. LAD Vol V March-April 1939 pg 1667-86

using Harijans as "dummies in the chess". They considered it as a measure for short of their demands. The bill could not be passed into an act.¹²

HARIJAN WELFARE ACTIVITIES:

Several measures were taken to improve the conditions of Harijans in the province by the Congress ministry. Education facilities were extended to Harijans. Free education was granted to Harijan students in all primary, middle and high schools as well as in the colleges. Several incentives were given to promote education among Harijans. Number of scholarships were given for Harijan and backward class students, including the supply of books and stationery. Equality of treatment was ensured by the government. The Congress government followed the principle that "public services should not be the prerogative of any one community", and aimed at adequate representation of all communities including backward classes and Harijans.¹³

RURAL UPLIFT IN C.P.:

In C.P. a rural uplift scheme for the establishment of fifty centres during 1938-39 was drawn up. It combined rural uplift and subsidiary occupations and aimed in the

12. L.A.D. Vol V March-April 1939, pg. 1667-86
 Vol. VI August, 1939 pg.762-777
Home Political; File No.13/7/39.

13. A.I.C.C.P. File No PL-6/1937-39. Press Note.

direction of better farming, better sanitation and better living. In this scheme, a prominent place was given to the encouragement of hand spinning and hand weaving. The All India Village Industries Association and the All India Spinners Association, both with headquarters at Wardha, were expected to supply trained workers to serve in the rural upliftment centres in the Province. The general welfare activities in such centres ~~were~~ ^{aimed to} enhance sanitation, health and hygiene, village roads, cleaning of wells and tanks provision of water supply, adult education and agricultural propaganda. The production of khadi ~~was to be~~ the principal industry and other subsidiary industries such as oil pressing, rope making, rice husking, etc. ~~These~~ ^{These} also ~~to be~~ introduced with some technical improvements.

The C.P.B. government appointed a rural upliftment inquiry committee to examine the whole programme of rural upliftment in the Province and to recommend methods for the improvement of work carried out for the regeneration of village life.¹⁴

The C.P.B. government also opened two cottage industries institutes, one at Jabalpur and another at Akola, where courses in weaving, durrie making, toy making and basket making were introduced. A scheme for the establishment

14. Times of India 20 May 1939, p. 13
Kishori Mohan Patra, op. CIT, p. 177

of a dead cattle institution in the Tannery buildings in Nagpur was approved in order to train village chamars in different types of work for the disposal of dead cattle. Steps were taken to set up umbrella making as a cottage industry in the Province.¹⁵

JAIL REFORMS

The Congress ministry introduced some genuine Jail Reforms in April 1938. After taking a close look at the problems faced by the prisoners and the jail authorities, these reforms were passed. These were a set of 16 reforms, which included better and nutritious food, provisions for two sets of clothes for prisoners in a year, introduction of games, supply of news papers, concession of smoking, installation of wireless sets in important prisons and imposition of punishment of whipping to a very restricted class. Importance was also given to the improvement of jail industry for the self sufficiency of the jails. In commemoration of announcement made by the Premier about these reforms, all prisoners were given a special remission of two months. These reforms were certainly beneficial for the prisoners, who welcomed it. This is quite evident from the decrease in jail offences after the introduction of these reforms.¹⁶

15. Ibid.

16. Hitvada 3 Nov 1939, pg. 3-4. Annual Report of the Jail Department for the year 1938.
A.I.C.C.P. Pl 6/1939, The C.P.B. Prisoners (Amendment Bill) 1938, Press Communique, dated 30 Mar 1938.

C.P. DRIVE AGAINST CORRUPTION:

A communique was issued by the C.P. Government to check bribery and corruption among government servants. Petty local tyranny by subordinate officials was condemned and orders to prevent them by taking vigorous action against such deeds were recommended. It was further decided that if five reputable persons join in making a written complaint, accusing an official of corruption, the departmental superior of the officer in question was bound to make full investigations. The bonafide complaints of corruption were to be promptly and thoroughly investigated and the offenders were to be suitably punished.¹⁷

RESTORATION OF CIVIL LIBERTIES AND
RELEASE OF POLITICAL PRISONERS:

The first step taken by the Congress ministry immediately after accepting office was in the direction of restoration of civic liberties and release of political prisoners.

The securities deposited under the Press Acts were refunded and freedom of press was restored.¹⁸ The prescription on five Marathi books viz. selection of poems "Patri" by

17. A.I.C.C.P. PL-6/1939 Government of C.P.B. General Administration Department, Press Communique, dated 11 April 1938.

18. A.I.C.C.P. file PL-6/1937-39, Press Note.

Mr Sane, 'Nihandha Mala' by Mr Chipbakar, selected essays from the 'KAL', 'The Bunabagar', a novel, and "The life of Mazzini' by Savarkar was removed and the books made available to the readers. The ban on films such as 'Mahatma Gandhi's visit to England', 'Dalit Kusum' and others had also been lifted and these films were allowed to be shown in the cinema houses in the Province.¹⁹

Several political prisoners were released. Persons convicted of objectionable political speeches, bomb cases, sedition, rioting, etc. were released by the ministry.²⁰ It was decided that no prisoner would be sent to Andamans any more. An order was issued stating that grant of licences under Arms Act should be dealt with on a person's merits. Participation of an applicant in the Civil Disobedience movement should not be regarded as a disqualification for a licence.²¹

The C.P.&B. government also issued orders to the effect that no conviction for any offence committed in furtherance of the Non-cooperation or Civil Disobedience movements would hereafter constitute by itself a bar to appointment in the public service.²²

19. Hitvada 25 Aug 1937, p. 3.

20. Hitvada 12 Sep 1937, p. 1.

21. A.I.C.C.P. File PL-6/1937-39 Press Note.

22. A.I.C.C.P. File PL-6/1939 Government of the Central Provinces and Berar, political and military Department, Order No.5588 461/V dated 4 May 1938.

THE VIDYA MANDIR SCHEME:

Vidya Mandir Scheme was one of the major projects undertaken by the ministry. The scheme, which was described as a way to the spread of free and compulsory mass education was sponsored by Pandit R.S. Shukla, Education Minister of the Province.²³

This scheme was designed to combat the pathetic conditions of education in the province and to fight wide spread illiteracy in the province.²⁴ The scheme was in accordance with the ancient Indian practice of the endowment of land for educational purposes. The necessary conditions for establishing Vidya Mandir was the grant of land of sufficient area and to give the teacher a living wage which was calculated to be Rs.15/- per month. Such grant of land was expected from the generally well-to-do people of village specially from the zamindars and malguzars.²⁵ Two Vidya Mandirs in each Tehsil were proposed. Each school was to be provided with one teacher who was not liable to be transferred from one school to another. In the budget

23. The Times of India 27 January 1938, p. 6.

24. M.P.C.C.P. File D.C.C. Jabalpur 1938, Press Communique of the Government of the C.P.B., Education Department dated 14 Sep 1938.

25. The Times of India 27 Jan 1938, P.6, 15 Dec 1938, p.17
M.P.C.C.P. File D.C.C. Jabalpur 1938, Appeal by the Hon'ble Minister for Education for Free gifts of lands for Vidya Mandirs dated 28 April 1938
M.P.C.C.P. Op. it. Circular of Education Department No.634 dated 31 March 1938.

of 1938-39, a grant of Rs. one thousand was proposed in each school to meet the expenditure on buildings, equipment, tools, live stock and the initial salary of the teacher.²⁶

This scheme was started to spread mass education, especially in rural areas. Vidya Mandir was a people's school which aimed at radiating source of life and learning in a village and to serve as a model for all-round progress. The scheme focussed on all-round development of the villages. It aimed at training children to understand the problems of villages and how to solve them. Vidya Mandir Committee was given the responsibility of starting multi-purpose societies to reduce the economic distress of the people and impart in them a national outlook.

The medium of instruction was the mother tongue of the area. Therefore, there was provision for separate Marathi Vidya Mandirs, Hindi Vidya Mandirs and Urdu Vidya Mandirs. The subjects of study were related to the environment of the student, "having an industrial and agricultural bias". These schools followed the Wardha syllabus as well. For this scheme 170 teachers were trained initially. They were taught both Nagri and Urdu script so that they might be able to teach any script, which was desired by the students. The elementary education was proposed to be by means of "basic craft". The main craft

26. Ibid.

which were to be taught were spinning, weaving, wood work, etc.²⁷ Students attention was to be led in the direction of rural problems and rural uplift. The Vidya Mandir farm which was to be managed by the teacher was to serve as a model farm in the village. The school management was to be carried on by a committee called the Vidya Mandir Committee, formed by the teacher of the school, the donor and other adult members of the village. The committee had to meet every alternate day to discuss about the problems of the school as well as the problems of the village.²⁸

There was opposition to this scheme, especially by the Muslims. The main objection was due to the name Vidya Mandir, which it was said "speaks of the dominance of one culture over the other". The ministry clarified that the name 'Mandir' did not mean place of worship, (a Hindu temple), it meant 'an abode'. Therefore, Vidya Mandir meant 'house of learning'. But seeing the strong opposition from Muslims, the ministry made a provision that under the scheme any Muslim person or body could donate land and establish schools on Vidya Mandir lines and call it "Baitool Ilm" or "Madina-tul-ilm" which was the exact translation of Vidya Mandir.²⁹ There was some

27. The Times of India, 27 Jan 1938, P.6, 15 Dec 1938, p.17

28. M.P.C.C.P. File D.C.C. Jabalpur 1938, Press Communique of the Education Department of C.P.B. dated 14.9.1938.

29. M.P.C.C.P. File D.C.C. Jabalpur, Press Communique of Education Department of C.P.B. Government dated 14 Sep 1938
Times of India Op. it.
L.A.D. Vol VII P. 62-92 Nov 1939.

opposition on the ground that it was a wastage of money. Rajurkar, a Nationalist, opposing the bill, asked the Government to utilise such funds in agricultural relief which was the dire need of that time. The ministry, however, did not pay any heed to such opposition.³⁰ Finally, on the eve of minister's quitting office, the bill was passed into law on 1st November 1939.³¹

An encouraging response was received to the appeal of voluntary gift of land and till December 1938 about 100 Vidya Mandir schools were started in the province.³² There was favourable response from the public and press. The ministry on the whole was praised for this move. Mahatma Gandhi fully supported the scheme. Thus, we see that this was a successful project introduced and undertaken by the ministry.

THE PRIMARY EDUCATION (AMENDMENT) ACT

In the field of education, besides the Vidya Mandir scheme, another significant bill was passed by the C.P. legislative Assembly called the Primary Education (Amendment) Bill 1939.³³ It overhauled the Act of 1920 and

30. L.A.D. vol VI Aug 1939 pg. No.779-793.

31. Home Political FR, II Half of Oct and I half of Nov 1939, File No.18/10/39.

32. The Times of India 27 Jan 1938, pg. 6, 15 Dec 1938, p.17
M.P.C.C.P. File D.C.C. Jabalpur Press Communique of Education Department of C.P.B. government dated 14th Sept. 1938.

33. L.A.D. Vol No. VI, Aug 1939, p. 18 to 23.

under its provisions the provincial government could bring into operation schemes for the spread of primary education of girls and boys in particular areas of aboriginal tracts.³⁴

PROHIBITION

The ministry was very keen and enthusiastic about introducing prohibition by legislation in the province. It was a measure taken by the Congress^{and} backed by Gandhi, therefore, it was the pet project of the ministry.³⁵ The C.P. & B. Prohibition bill was introduced under the existing C.P. Excise Act 1915 from 1st January 1938 in six selected areas. These areas were Sagar District, Narsinghpur Sub-Division, towns of Katni and Hingaghat. Akot Taluqua and Badenara Industrial Area.³⁶ The idea of introducing this bill in these selected areas was to gain experience before starting prohibition in other parts of the province.³⁷ Later this bill was passed into law and these areas were declared 'dry'. With Gandhi's inspiration prohibition was later extended to Wardha and Akola Districts and consequently these districts were also declared 'dry'.³⁸

34. Times of India 19 Aug 1938, pg. 5. The first Congress Ministeries: Problems and Prospects (1937-1939) by Kishori Mohan Patra. A centenary history of the Indian National Congress (1885-1985) Vol III, pg. 146-217

35. Linlithgow Papers MSS Eur F. 125/59 Letter No.14, 63 Francis Wyle to Linlithgow dated 9/10/38 and 14/4/39.

36. AI.C.C.P. PL-6/1937-39, Public Department Circular No 1/38;

Hitvada 8 Dec 1937, pg. 5.

Home Political FR, I half of Jan 1938 File No.18/1/38.

37. Ibid.

38. Hitvada 3 Dec 1937, p. 6, 8 Dec 1937, pg. 5.

The Bill was modeled on the Madras Legislation of the same nature.³⁹ The bill aimed at immediate prohibition of traffic in and consumption of liquor in the province. It was designed to eradicate the drink-evil from its root and to improve the social and economic condition of life among the drinking population and to show them a better way of living.⁴⁰ Consumption, manufacture, transport or any type of dealing in liquor was liable to punishment with imprisonment and fine.⁴¹ But aboriginals, the troops and the Europeans were exempted from the provisions of this bill.

The government wanted to eradicate this evil by systematic propaganda and by encouraging existing social religious and traditional disapproval of the drinking habit.⁴² Government tended to rely not so much on administrative machinery, but on the active cooperation of non-official workers to achieve this purpose. Anti-drink committees were set up in almost every tehsil and taluqa for propaganda and taking measures for enforcement of prohibition. The administration of the prohibition act was given to the police department.⁴³ The Government also

39. Hitvada 3 Dec 1937, p.6.

40. Hitvada 3 Dec 1937, p.6, 8 Dec 1937, p.5.

41. Hitvada 3 Dec 1937, p.6.

42. Hitvada 8 Dec 1937, p.5.

. Linlithgow Papers MSS Eur F. 120/60, Letter No.63 Francis Wylie to Linlithgow, dated 14 April 1939.

43. Hitvada 8 Dec 1937. p.5.

decided to forgo the revenue from liquor and close the shops selling liquor.⁴⁴ Ministers frequently delivered lectures for propaganda in favour of prohibition.

The Bill was opposed on several grounds. Mr D.D. Rajurkar, the leader of the opposition, argued that the funds and the energies of the Government should be utilised for giving relief to the agriculturists rather than wasting it on a small drinking population.⁴⁵ Similarly, there was opposition from the press on the ground that great power was being given in the hands of officials which could be misused by them.⁴⁶ There was also criticism of the bill that it adversely affected the finances, as the bill implied loss of excise revenue.⁴⁷ Official opinion was also not in favour of this bill, owing to the financial difficulties. The loss of revenue was calculated to be Rs.8 lakhs per annum. But the ministry did not heed such arguments and continued its policy. The Governor wrote that, "It is useless to hope that my ministry may be persuaded to abandon the policy of prohibition. We are excessively loyal to the Congress High Command these days.... that we should make any suggestion which would turn Wardha against us is quite out of the question."⁴⁸ Thus we see that the principal

44. A.I.C.C.P. File No PL-6/1937-39, Public Department Circular No.1/38.

45. Hitvada 3 Dec 1937, p.6.

46. Hitvada 3 Dec 1937, p.6, 8 Dec 1937, p.5.

47. Ibid.

48. Linlithgow Papers MSS EUR F.125/59 letter No.14, Francis Wylie to Linlithgow dated 9 Oct 1938.

cause behind the pursuance of this policy, despite financial difficulties, was Mahatma Gandhi's special interest in this project.⁴⁹

There was increasing enthusiasm among the Congressmen of the Province to introduce prohibition in Nagpur City, with an object to declare it dry. Much propoganda was carried on for this purpose by the Congressmen of the province as well as outside the province.⁵⁰ Before leaving office, the Ministry passed an order introducing prohibition in Nagpur district from 1st January 1940.⁵¹ This move was criticised on financial grounds. It meant a heavy burden of new taxes on Nagpur citizens. In view of this problem, the bill was later withheld.⁵²

The Congress volunteers and workers participated in this campaign in great numbers. Public meetings, processions, picketing of liquour shops and house to house propoganda to persuade people not to consume liquor were some of the measures taken by the Congress volunteers.⁵³ This shows that the Congress, in the province did not just issue a legislation but actively worked for the cause. On

49. Linlithgow Papers MSS Eur F.125/59 letter No.14. Francis Wylie to Linlithgow, letter dated 9 Oct 1938.

50. Hitvada 16 Aug 1938, p.11.

51. Home Political FR, I half of Aug 1939, File No.18/8/39 Linlithgow Papers MSS EUR F.125/60, letter No.63 Francis Wylie to Linlithgow, dated 14 April 1939.

52. Hitvada 15 Dec 1939, page No.4.

53. Ibid; Home Political: FR I half of Dec 1939, File No 18/12/39.

the whole, prohibition in the province was fairly successful. The popular feeling was in favour of prohibition and people welcomed it.⁵⁴ 75 to 80% of the addicts in the selected areas really gave up drinking. Therefore, these six areas along with Wardha and Akola districts were declared 'dry areas'. The illicit distillation was also effectively controlled.⁵⁵

THE CENTRAL PROVINCES AND BERAR
TENANCY BILL

This bill was one of the major projects undertaken by the ministry with the stated aim of 'improvement in cultivation, good relations between the tenants and malguzars, improvement of conditions of tenants and increase in the wealth and prosperity of the country'.⁵⁶ Government appointed a Revenue Committee on 17th August 1938 to look into the tenancy and related problems of the province and study various legislations in this regard. On the basis of the report and recommendations given by the Committee, the C.P. and Berar Tenancy Bill was formulated. The bill was passed into law on 1st Nov. 1939.⁵⁷ Some of the main provisions of this bill were

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54. Home Political FR, I half of Aug 1939 File No 18/8/39; 18/12/1939
M.P.C.C.P. File D.C.C. Chhindwara 1931-1939.
Resolution passed by Chhindwara D.C.C. on 29.6.38.
55. Linlithgow papers MSS EUR F.125/58, 14 April 1938
—Francis Wylie to Linlithgow letter No.63.
56. Proceedings of the Legislative Assembly of the C.P.B. (hereafter P.L.A.) Vol VI Aug 1939, p.31-37, 78-109, 136-149.
57. Home Political FR II half of Oct 1939, File No.18/10/39.

(1) occupancy tenants were given the right to sublet their holding for a period of five years instead of one year.

(2) occupancy tenants were allowed to alienate their holdings for sale subject to the right of the landlord to charge nazrana at $7\frac{1}{2}\%$ of the sale price; however, no power to mortgage was conferred. (3) absolute occupancy tenants who previously had the right to transfer their holdings on payment of nazrana were given the right to acquire 'malik-mukbuza' title⁵⁸ (full proprietary right) on payment of nazrana equal to ten times the annual rent. Ordinary occupancy tenants could acquire malik-mukbuza rights in their holdings at payment of nazrana equal to 12.1/2 times the annual value. (4) ejectment of occupancy tenants from their holdings for arrears of rent was abolished. (5) There were other minor matters, main among which was, that occupancy tenants were given same rights in all the trees standing in their holdings as they had in the holding themselves.⁵⁹

This indeed was a major step taken in the direction of helping the tenants who were the real tillers of soil. As one of the Congress members in Assembly said, "It is a measure intended to benefit the cultivators and the people

58. Malik-mukhuza was a title given to a person, who within a land revenue estate held land separately assessed to land revenue as proprietor and not as tenant.

Linlithgow Papers MSS Eur F.125/60, letter No.101 Francis Wylie to Linlithgow dated 8 Aug 1939.

59. Ibid.

who are actually tillers of the soil. The aim and object of the Congress Party is to see that the people who actually till the soil are benefitted by this measure". At the same time, it was claimed by the Congress Party that the Bill was designed for the benefit of both malguzars and tenants and would facilitate better relations between them.⁶⁰ No doubt, this bill was a great relief for the tenants and to a marked extent they were really benefitted by it as the tight grip of the malguzars was loosened by this legislation. The ministry deserved ample credit for the same.

This bill was surely not beneficial for the malguzars; instead it was considered to be a step to curb their powers. There was considerable opposition to the bill on this ground. Inside the Assembly hall too, the bill was mainly opposed on this ground. D.D. Rajurkar, opposing the bill said that the government wanted to make charity to the tenants at the cost of the malguzars and landlords. Mr M.G. Chitambar (independent Southern landholders group) among others, also opposed this bill.⁶¹

60. L.A.D. Vol VI 1939, pg. 80-81.

61. L.A.D. Vol VI 1939, pg. 78, 79, 82-83-84

The most important fact of the bill in relation to the Congress party was that it indicated that the ministry was not all that soft with the land owning class, although many of the Congressmen and Congress M.L.As belonged to this class.⁶²

Hitvada criticised the bill. N.K. Kelkar from Balaghat, who issued a series of articles through 'Hitvada'⁶³ condemning the ministry for attempting to abolish malguzari system, wrote in one of his articles, "We find that our representatives who entered in the assemblies with our votes and who eat our salt in the shape of salaries and allowances have become very arrogant and ungrateful."⁶⁴ The Governor was personally in favour of this bill as he believed that the tenancy bill was a drastic piece of legislation which would remove the long standing distress of the peasantry. His opinion is found in his letter to the Viceroy. He writes, "I am myself wholly in favour of the bill and watch the working of the new law with acute interest."⁶⁵ He further writes that he expected "great commotion" from malguzars, but found very little opposition in practice.

62. Linlithgow Papers MSS Eur F.125/60, letter No.101, Francis Wylie to Linlithgow dated 8 Aug 1939.
63. Hitvada 3 Sep 1939, p.2; 29 Sep 1939, p.7, 3 Dec 1939, p.2.
64. Hitvada 20 Aug 1940, pg. 17.
65. Linlithgow Papers MSS Eur F.125/60, letter No.101, Francis Wylie to Linlithgow, dated 8 Aug 1939.

The malguzar Congress M.L.As like others after a little hesitation accepted the bill.⁶⁶ It shows that though opposition was raised against the bill but it was not strong and without any difficulty the Ministry passed the bill into an Act.

RESOLUTION - ABOLITION OF MALGUZARI
SYSTEM

G.A. Gawai⁶⁷ a Nationalist member, moved a resolution for the abolition of Malguzari system in the province. The ensuing debate over this resolution in the legislative assembly amply clarified that the Congress was firmly against such a resolution and consequently the proposal of Mr Gawai was easily defeated.

Mr Gawai pointed out that in view of Malguzars getting 40% of the land revenue it was a heavy burden on the finances of the state. He said that "the pathetic conditions of kisans and tenants was solely due to the

66. Ibid.

67. Member of Nationalist Raja Party and a Mahar by caste.

L.A.D. Vol II Dec 1937. P.404.

over lordship of the Malguzars, who hold proprietary rights not only over the land, but have property rights over the minds and the bodies of the Kisans" .⁶⁸ This resolution came in for severe criticism. Mr M.G. Chitnavis (Central Provinces Southern landlords) representing the Malguzars opposed the resolution and said that the Government could not take such a step as it would disrupt the whole revenue machinery leading to heavy damages to the Government. He pointed out that Malguzars were not tyrants to the tenants, but worked for the betterment of the villagers and added that this system preserved the tenancy land from changing title and thus helped the tenants. Mr Rajendra Sinha from Northern landholders group representing the Malguzars opposed the bill. He said that the Malguzari system was a great help to the government as it relieved the government from the hard task of collecting land revenue. He stressed that Malguzari was very essential for a well organised rural set up. He compared ryotwari system with Malguzari and stated that the former was not as suitable as the latter. Syed Hifat Ali from Muslim League and D.D. Rajurkar the leader of the opposition belonging to Party also spoke on similar lines.

The general pinion in the legislative assembly as a whole, was against this resolution. The Congress Party did not support the move. It was a fact that 21 members

68. Ibid;

Linlithgow Papers MSS Eur F.125/112, letter No.16, Hyde Gowen to Linlithgow, dated 7 March 1937.

from Congress in the Assembly belonged to the Malguzar class itself. Moreover, the Congress party's general policies were against this resolution. In the end, due to severe criticism and lack of support the resolution was declared to have lapsed.⁶⁹ Thus we find that though Congress was willing to grant considerable rights to occupancy tenants which eroded the position of the malguzars, it was not yet willing to advocate the abolition of malguzari, since this was not yet a part of the Congress's immediate programme.

C.P. & B. RELIEF OF INDEBTEDNESS BILL:

The relief of indebtedness bill was presented before the legislative assembly in October 1938. The Bill aimed at providing relief to the peasantry, burdened with heavy indebtedness. The bill was amended and modified in light of Madras Debt Relief Act and Bombay Agricultural Debtors Act 1939. The limit of the conciliation of debt was fixed at Rs.25,000 so that maximum number of debtors could be benefitted by it. It stated that any debtor with debts upto Rs.25,000 could approach the Debt Relief Court and could present his case before it. There were other provisions also to help and ease the condition of agricultural debtors. Under the debt conciliation board debts were

69. L.A.D. Vol II Dec 1937, P.402-419.

reduced upto 50%, therefore, in the bill further reduction was not made. There were some objections and opposition to the bill which led to several amendments. This was one of the major steps undertaken by the Government for agricultural relief.⁷⁰

RESOLUTION -- RELIEF OF AGRICULTURISTS

Khushabchand from Congress moved a resolution in December, 1937 asking the government to take effective measures for the relief of agriculturists. G.S. Page (Trade Union Labour), N.Y. Deotale, Mahant Nain Dass, Congress (S.C.) and V.Y. Tamaskar from Congress, among others, raised several issues and problems faced by the agriculturists of the province and asked government to provide them immediate relief. The main demands raised were that the prices of agricultural commodities be fixed by government, arrangement of proper pasture for the cattle, protection of domestic cattle, 20% reduction in land revenue, taxation in other fields so as to relieve the burden of taxation on agriculturists. Establishment of land mortgage banks reduction in water rates, suitable legislation for relieving heavy debts and appointment of a committee of non-official members to hear grievances of agriculturists and put them before the government were the other issues raised.

70. L.A.D. Vol V April 1939, p.1572-94; Vol VII Nov 1939 pg 277-278;

A.I.C.C.P. File No PL-6/1939 Routine Notes.

The Revenue Minister P.B. Gole gave assurances to the members and put forth some of the measures adopted by the government in that direction. He stated that legislations such as Debit Conciliation Board 1933, Usurious Loans Act 1934, C.P. Moneylender's Act 1934, Reduction of Interest Act 1936, were all under operation and were rendering help to the agriculturists. Government had issued orders not to apply pressure where defaulter could not pay the revenue owing to the circumstances beyond his control for remission and suspension of land revenue wherever required and taccavi loans were being advanced on liberal scale. Arrangements were made for the agriculturists to get reasonable prices for their produce. He said that government had decided to effect permanent reduction of land revenue to the extent of $4\frac{1}{2}$ lakhs rupees per year which were given away at a flat rate of $12\frac{1}{2}\%$ to the small holders. Sixteen land mortgage banks were also under operation in the province.

However, some members remained dis-satisfied with the Revenue Minister's account. Abdul Razak Khan expressed that such measures were not at all sufficient for agricultural relief. The minister promised the house to do more in this direction.⁷¹

71. A.I.C.C.P. File No PL-6/1937-39, Press Note;
L.A.D. Vol II, Dec 1937, P.186-195, 202-214.

CONGRESS MINISTRY'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE BUREACRACY:

The relations between the Congress Ministry and the bureaucracy could not be termed as cordial, though there was no outstanding instance of conflict either. However, some tensions and minor conflicts continued between the two throughout the ministerial period.

Immediately after accepting office, the Congress workers led a vigorous propaganda against the bureaucracy. In towns, taluqas and villages the Congress workers asked the people not to be frightened of the police and administrative officials. Villagers were asked not to cooperate with the touring officials by giving them supplies.⁷² At one or two places some of the Congress workers went to the extent of telling people to shoe-beat the officials, if they acted in a manner contrary to the law.⁷³ Such type of activity was hated by the bureaucracy and the government asked the ministry to take steps to curb the anti-bureaucracy propaganda. The Congress leaders asked the Congress workers to refrain from such vinulent propoganda

72. Linlithgow Papers MSS Eur F.125/112, letter No.33, Francis Wylie to Linlithgow, dated 6 Aug 1937.

73. Home Political FR, I half of Aug 1937; I half of Sep 1937, II half of Oct 1937; I half of Jun 1938, II half of May 1938.

Home political F.R. I half of May 1938, File No 18/5/38.

Linlithgow Papers MSS Eur F.125/112, letter No.33 dated 6th Aug 1937, Hyde Gowen to Linlithgow.

and as a result, the propaganda against the bureaucracy subsided. This resulted in slight improvement in their relationship.⁷⁴ The C.P.B. Governor and the bureaucracy were critical of the ministry especially on the use of government agencies in Congress propaganda. The C.P.B. Governor wrote to Linlithgow, "It is true that whenever an opportunity offers, government agencies and government funds are used for Congress propaganda."⁷⁵

At the time of Tripuri Session of Indian National Congress the ministry frequently made use of the public works department, municipal organisations and educational institutions inspite of resistance from senior officers and governor.⁷⁶ Several times a tug of war between the Ministry and the Governor emerged on the question of transfers of senior officials. The Ministry desired to put the men of its own choice whereas the Governor wanted to have the final say in this matter. Sometimes, these issues strained the relations between the Governor and the Ministry.⁷⁷

For improving the relations with the Congress Ministry, the Governor of C.P.B. visited on frequent social contacts and called the entire legislative Assembly for dinner.

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74. Linlithgow Papers MSS Eur, F.125/113, Hyde Gowen to Linlithgow, letter No.33, dt. 6 Aug 1937, letter No 38, dated 21 Sep 1937.
75. Linlithgow Papers MSS Eur F.125/60 letter No.68, Francis Wylie to Linlithgow, dated 18 April 1939.
76. Linlithgow Papers MSS Eur F.125/59 letter No. 36, dt 29 Dec 1938; 125/60, letter No.31, dt. 22 Feb 1939, C.P. Governor to the Viceroy.
77. Linlithgow papers MSS Eur F.125/59 letter No.3 dated 22/24 Aug 1938

The bureaucracy expected respectful treatment from the ministers.⁷⁸ And the ministry did not leave a chance of attacking a senior official if he was found guilty of something.⁷⁹ The C.P.B. Governor, however, admitted that on the whole, the ministry did not treat the officials unfairly though they often tended to be hostile and critical. The Governor was also obviously not able to stomach the fact that the ministers in a democratically elected government would naturally tend to come from an ordinary social background. For example, he wrote to Linlithgow, "Ministers in the Province are curious, most of them are men of very ordinary status and of extremely limited attainments. They have no outlook beyond their own noses and suffer from an obvious sense of inferiority when dealing with the officials ... Ministers are small people, their minds occupied with petty display of power, petty jealousies and petty intrigues."⁸⁰

Throughout the ministry period the official opinion about the Congress ministry was based on assumptions, which reflected a discomfort in the Congress assuming power and an attitude of social superiority towards men from non-elite background.

78. Linlithgow papers MSS Eur F.125/113, Hyde Gowen to Linlithgow, 6 Aug 1937 3 Sep 1937, 21 Sep 1937, letter No 33, 38.

79. Linlithgow Papers MSS Eur F.125/60, letter No.78, 18 May 1939

80. Linlithgow papers MSS Eur F. 125/60, dated 18 May 1939, letter No.78.

CONCLUSION - At the time of Office Acceptance, the Congress had declared its goal of adopting the policy of utilising the ministries to develop mass struggle, to combat the constitution and to lead towards winning complete independence. It also aimed at a welfare government which would try to abolish suppressive laws passed by British Government and to pass legislations for the benefit of the masses, workers and Kisans⁸¹. The C.P.&B. Congress Ministry tried to follow the same line and vigorously directed its energies towards the above mentioned goals. This was reflected in its parliamentary and extra parliamentary activities.

The Congress Ministry took a major step in giving relief to the peasants by passing the C.P.&B. Tenancy Act. This Act gave to the absolute occupancy tenants the right to acquire 'Malik-Mukbuza' title i.e. full proprietary right, on payment of nazrana to the landlord equal to ten times the annual rent. This was an advance over the U.P. Tenancy Act passed by the Congress Ministry of U.P., which granted full hereditary rights to all statutory tenants in their holdings and took away the landlord's right to prevent the growth of occupancy, but did not have any provision for purchase of full proprietary rights by tenants on the other hand, unlike the tenancy legislation passed by the U.P. and Bihar Congress

81. A.I.C.C.P. File No L-7/1937.

Ministries⁸² the C.P.& B. Tenancy legislation had no provision for reduction of rent and recovery of lands lost through alienation.

The C.P.&B. Congress Ministry also introduced Jail Reforms. It introduced certain measures to check corruption. The Ministry issued orders for the expansion of civil liberties, which gave a considerable fillip to popular mass mobilisation. The release of political prisoners which it sanctioned was particularly important and popular aspect of its activities.

For mass mobilisation and welfare, the Congress in C.P.& B. also undertook other measures. The Vidya Mandir Scheme was introduced and primary education was given an impetus civil disabilities on Harijans were removed and the number of scholarships and free-ships for Harijan students was increased. Special attention was given to the recruitment of the Harijans in the Government services. Prohibition campaign was conducted by the Congress volunteers and workers and the Ministry also declared certain areas as dry on an experimental basis with the object of extending it further. The Mahakoshal Provincial Congress Committee also formed a volunteer corps for Congress rural propaganda.

82. Chandra Bipan, India's Struggle for Independence New Delhi 1988, 327-328.

Many weaknesses were also emerging in the Congress Organisation of C.P. & B. Regional rivalry between the three P.C.C.s, accentuated by petty squabbles and factionalism, resulted in the "Khare Crisis" in C.P. & B. which will be discussed in the next chapter. The evidence of bogus membership was found in Berar Provincial Congress. Several other examples are also found of growing tendency of sluggishness among the Congress members and tendency to avoid work in rural and interior areas. Indiscipline was also increasing.

In spite of these emerging weaknesses, the Congress party in the C.P. & B. successfully conducted the activities of mass welfare and mobilisation. Their administrative, legislative and general party work was positive. In the Central Provinces and Berar, the Congress party was divided into three provincial Congress committees had distinctive regional linguistic and cultural patterns - their requirement in the field of agriculture and development as well their economic resources were different. Each area had exclusive but genuine problems and all of them wanted a solution. Due to the existence of three provincial Congress Committees within a single province, the leadership was also divided and when top leaders of all the three provinces had to work together, confrontations and clash of personalities were inevitable.

Despite all these constraints, within a short span of twenty eight months, the Congress Ministry succeeded in achieving considerable success furthering its goals.

Chapter-III

KHARE CRISIS

KHARE CRISIS

When Congress formed its ministry in the Central Provinces and Berar in August 1937, Dr. Khare was elected as the President of Provincial Congress Parliamentary Board, leader of Congress Parliamentary Party and Premier with the power to choose his own cabinet.¹

Though Mahakoshal had majority of seats in the party but the Premier was selected from Nagpur owing to the differences between R.S. Shukla and D.P. Mishra. Due to these differences, D.P. Mishra supported Dr. Khare instead of R.S. Shukla, which led to his election as the Provincial Party leader and the Premier. Hence, R.S. Shukla who was willing to become a Premier was not allowed to do so due to his differences with Mishra and due to Mishra's very strong position in the party.² But later, the differences between Shukla and Mishra were patched up between December 1937 and January 1938. From this time onwards trouble started brewing for Dr. Khare. A group was formed in the

1 Home Political, FR, Second-half of February 1937, File no.18/2/37; Hitvada, 3 March 1937, p.1, and 26 March 1937, pp.5&12.

2 Dr. Rajendra Prasad Papers (Hereafter R.P.Papers), File No.2-C/38 call no.1, R.M.Deshmukh to Khare dated 9 February 1938; Oral History Transcript, Interview of Seth Govind Das taken by Dr.Hari Dev Sharma, 4/12/67, page no.18.

cabinet with Shukla, D.P. Mishra and Mehta which aimed at deposing Khare from the premiership. The group diverted its energies to make Mahakoshal as the "centre of the gravity of the province".³

The differences started increasing between the Marathi (Nagpur) and Mahakoshal members. The problem started when Mr. Shareef the minister for law released a non-political prisoner convicted in Wardha Rape case. Dr. Khare tried to hush up the case but he was not successful. It became a big scandal. People carried ^{out} demonstrations against the ministers. Inside the Legislative Assembly opposition was raised against Dr. Khare. The Congress Working Committee intervened and Shareef in the end had to resign. Due to this case and several other instances, Mahakoshal members started accumulating grievances against Dr. Khare. They became increasingly dissatisfied with the loose administration, corruption, nepotism and jobbery of the Premier. These all grievances reached the greatest height on the issue of Jabalpur Riot Enquiry Report, an issue over which Mahakoshal members were very critical of the Premier's handling of the

3 Dr. N.B. Khare Papers (Hereafter Khare Papers),
Ref.No.Misc./155/75/P-3.
A booklet "My Defence", p.5.

situation.⁴ All these events culminated on 8 May 1938 in the tendering of resignation by four ministers, namely R.S. Shukla, D.P. Mishra, D.S. Mehta and P.B. Gole.⁵ Mr. Gole later withdrew his resignation when he came to know from Dr. Khare that all this was due to parochial grounds and consequently Gole did not want to involve himself in this.⁶ The resignations were a protest against the premier's malhandling of the Jabalpur riots, Premier's siding with bureaucracy and police and displaying his weakness in doing so. They further charged him with disregarding the advice of his colleagues and not taking them into confidence. Finally they charged him of not properly handling the portfolio of Home Affairs. Shukla wrote to Dr. Khare, "Your handling of Home Affairs, which is the key department of the government, has gradually weakened the hold of the great organisation to serve which you and we took office."⁷

4 The Times of India, 13 May 1938, p.8;
AICCP, File no.P-26/1939, R.M. Deshmukh's statement,
in CP Assembly.

5 The Times of India, 13 May 1938, p.8.

6 RP Papers, File No.2-C/38, call no.1,
P.B.Gole to Shukla, Misra and Mehta, dated
8 May 1938.

7 Ibid.

Khare issued his reply expressing hope that there would not be any break-up. The cabinet went to Bombay on 13 May to put the matter before the Congress Working Committee. The Working Committee asked Khare to place the matter before Parliamentary Party of CP & Berar on 24 May.⁸ The Parliamentary Party met on 24 May at Panchmarhi. But, before the meeting 44 out of 68 members passed a resolution under the Presidentship of Mr. Khandekar that either all the six ministers should continue or there should be entirely a new ministry to the exclusion of the old ministry.⁹ After this, talks of compromise started and a compromise was brought about. Agreement was made for mutual goodwill and comradeship. It was hoped that it would turn a new leaf in their career. Here the joint parliamentary board requested Dr. Khare to relinquish his departments.¹⁰

This Panchmarhi compromise resulted in a more intense conflict in the cabinet. The main conflict was in regard to the relinquishing of portfolios. Several attempts were made in this direction, but of no avail. On 29 June, again an

8 Khare Papers, Ref.No.Misc/155/75/P-3,
My Defence, pp.5-6;
The Times of India, 13 May 1938, p.9.

9 Khare Papers, op.cit., p.6.
Oral History Transcript, Interview of Dr.Khare taken
by Hari Dev Sharma, Page No.033.

10 AICCP, File No,PL-6/1936, R.M. Deshmukh's Statement;
The Times of India, 20 July 1938, p.10.
Khare Papers, op.cit., p.8.

attempt was made in this direction, Khare, Gole and Mehta relinquished control of their department but the move had no effect owing to Mishra, Shukla and Deshmukh's absence.¹¹

A deadlock was created. Depressed by such a situation where spirit of comradeship was not prevailing R.M. Deshmukh and P.B. Gole tendered their resignation to the Prime Minister on 13 July 1938.¹²

Faced with such a situation, Khare could not find a way out and so he wrote a letter to Patel on 15 July placing the matter of redistribution of portfolios in his hands on ground that no decision could be reached among the ministers owing to the difference in outlook.¹³ But Khare received a letter on 16 July from Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, a member of Working Committee saying, "it would be greatly regretted that if the old conditions do not change, the necessary result of which would be to end the CP Ministry for good as I think the Congress will not undertake to continue its ministry there, considering the general conditions of the province."¹⁴

11 Khare Papers, Ref.No.Misc/155/75/P3, 'My Defence', Appendix-A.

12 Khare Papers, op.cit., Appendix-B; The Times of India, 22 July 1938, AICCP, File No.PL-6/1936, R.M.Deshmukh's Statement.

13 Khare Papers, op.cit., Appendix-B.

14 Ibid., p.11.

Maulana had also given some other hints to Khare as "in case of your colleagues default ... your position as a Prime Minister will be strengthened if you do not wish to work with them and take others in their place."¹⁵

This letter of Azad was highly suggestive. First of all it was pointing that there was fear of the province being declared a non-Congress province. At the same time it was also suggested that the situation could be improved upon by the formation of a new cabinet. Khare, finally decided to resign. He wrote to his colleagues about his decision and added that, according to the principle of joint responsibility, he presumed that they would automatically resign with him. Gole and Deshmukh tendered their resignations but Mishra, Shukla and Mehta sent him negative and arrogant replies.¹⁶ Finally, on 20 July Dr. Khare tendered his resignation along with his two colleagues Gole and Deshmukh on the ground that he found it impossible to go along with his intriguing colleagues. Later, the three remaining ministers' services were terminated by the government.¹⁷

15 Khare Papers, Ref.No.Misc/155/75/P3, 'My Defence', p.11.

16 Oral History Transcript, Interview of Dr.Khare, p.25; Khare Papers, op.cit., p.2.

17 The Times of India, 22 July 1938, p.11; 27 July 1938, p.8; Home Political, FR, Second-half of July 1938, File no.18/7/1938.

Khare was sure that he was in the bad books of Patel and that Patel was siding with his Mahakoshal colleagues. Since Faizpur session, Khare's relations with Patel were strained as there he had a straight talk with Patel on the issue of Mr. Chandak's nomination as a candidate for the election to the CP Assembly.¹⁸ Moreover he believed that Patel was opposed to him because he was a Maharashtrian Kokanast Chitpawan Brahmin and Patel was against this class as a whole.¹⁹ He believed that Sardar Patel and Mahakoshal ministers had entered into a plan to depose him from Premiership. He wrote in 'My Defence', "the situation was so ugly that I thought Sardar Patel could not be trusted any more than my three conspiring colleagues".²⁰ Khare had gone to Gandhi, at Wardha, for advice but Gandhi declined to advise him on this matter.²¹ Hence Khare found himself alone and was put to his own resources and found the circumstances against him. This was a moment when Khare finally decided to have his own independent stand on this issue and to cast off the shackles of the High Command. He claimed that he

18 Khare Papers, Ref.No.Misc/155/75/P3, 'My Defence', pp.7&13; Oral History Transcript, Interview of Khare, pp.17-18.

19 Ibid.

20 Khare Papers, op.cit., pp.8&13.

21 Ibid.; Oral History Transcript, op.cit., p.18.

knew fully well that whatever he was doing, he was doing in accordance with the constitutional provisions.

After accepting his resignation the Governor asked Khare to form a new ministry as he was the leader of the majority party in the Assembly.²² On 22 July, the new cabinet was sworn in. The new ministers were Dr. N. B. Khare, R.M. Deshmukh, P.B. Gole, Thakur Pyarelal Singh and R. Agnighosh (a harijan member). The sixth person from Mahakoshal was not decided. The previous three ministers, Mishra, Shukla and Mehta were not taken in the cabinet.²³ We see that here in the new ministry the Mahakoshal group was very weakly represented.

On 22 July itself, Khare was called to Wardha by the High Command. Maulana Azad suggested that a lot of misunderstanding and pain was caused to all of them and the whole issue was obscured by the formation of new ministry and suggested, with the consent of all members of the Parliamentary sub-Committee, that the new ministry should undo what had been done. Khare agreed to retrace the step as his

22 Home Political, FR, Second-half of July 1938, File no.18/7/38; The Times of India, 22 July 1938, p.10. Khare Papers, Ref.No.Misc/155/75/P3, 'My Defence', p.13.

23 The Times of India, 22 July 1938, p.11; 27 July 1938, p.8; Home Political, FR, Second-half of July 1938, File no.18/7/38.

colleagues were in favour of this step. According to Khare, Patel had dictated to him a letter of resignation addressed to the Governor in which he confess that he had committed an error of judgement. He was made to read the resignation the very same night at 11 p.m. to the Governor's secretary. On 23 July he formerly submitted his resignation to the Governor.²⁴ Khare felt this episode 'both 'humiliating' and 'unjust'. This he regarded as an action contrary to the principles of the Congress. In 'My Defence', he states: "my mentors humiliated one of their comrades before one of the agents of imperialism who they claim they are out to humiliate".²⁵

On the 23 July the High Command asked Khare to resign his leadership of the Legislature Party. He agreed on the condition that he should be allowed to contest for leadership again.²⁶ On 25 July the Working Committee asked Dr. Khare to drop his intention of contesting the leadership. Seeing that their requests were of no avail, the members of the Congress Working Committee persuaded him to discuss the matter with Gandhi. It was the first time Gandhi personally intervened

24 Khare Papers, op.cit., pp.16-18; Home Political, FR, Second-half of July 1938, File no.18/7/38; Linlithgow Papers, MSS Eur F.125/58, Letter no.75, Francis Wylie to Brahourne, dated 8 Aug. 1938.

25 Khare Papers, op.cit., p.18;

26 Ibid.; Home Political, FR, Second-half of July 1938, File no.18/7/38.

in the CP tangle. The Mahatma, accused him of gross indiscipline, of bringing down the prestige of Congress, of betraying the nation by entering in conspiracy with the Governor and said that he was unfit to hold office in the Congress organisation. Khare denied these charges. Gandhi asked him that in the best interest of Congress and the province he should lie low for a time.²⁷ Under pressure, Khare drafted a statement, in which he agreed not to contest for party leadership but at the same time he refused to sign it until he had consulted his colleagues at Nagpur.²⁸ Khare was still firm as before, and was unwilling for voluntary withdrawal. He had told the members of Working Committee "I won't retire, you drive me out'. I refuse to commit suicide but would not mind being killed".²⁹ On 26 July he replied to the Congress President stating his inability to withdraw the leadership as he considered the charges against him to be untrue.³⁰ The Working Committee met that evening and imposed a ban on his election to an office of trust and responsibility in the Congress organisation. A resolution to this effect was also passed.³¹

27 Khare Papers, Ref.No.Misc.155/75/P3, 'My Defence', pp.18-19.

28 Ibid.; The Times of India, 27 July 1938, p.9.

29 The Times of India, 27 July 1938, p.8.

30 Khare Papers, op.cit., pp.23-24.

31 Linlithgow Papers, MSS Eur F.125/58, Letter no.75, Francis Wylie to Brahourne, dated 8 August 1938.

The resolution became helpful in Shukla's election as the leader of the Congress Parliamentary Party and later on as Premier. At the party meeting on 27 July, the Working Committee immediately accepted the resolution to endorse Khare's resignation from the Party leadership. The President called for nomination for the Party leader's position, several names were proposed which included Dr. Khare's name too. The Party resolution regarding Khare was read out. It was clear that all the big guns of the Congress Party were against Khare's nomination. Khare's name alongwith others was withdrawn. Shukla was made the leader of the Congress Parliamentary Party of CP and Premier of the Province.³²

R.S. Shukla was then invited to form a new ministry. The new ministry consisted of R.S. Shukla, D.P. Mishra, D.K. Mehra, S.V. Gokhale and S.J. Bharuka.³³ This ministry was sworn in on 29 July. Here the candidate from Nagpur and Berar were weakly represented. The main content of the resolution passed by the Working Committee on 26 July 1938 stated that:

32 Linlithgow Papers, MSS Eur F.125/58, Letter no.75, Francis Wylie to Brabourne, dated 8 August 1938; Khare Papers, op.cit., pp.24-25.

33 Home Political, FR, Second-half of July 1938, File no.18/7/38.

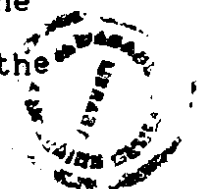
"Dr. Khare was guilty of grave errors of judgement which have exposed the Congress in CP to ridicule and brought down its prestige. He was also guilty of gross indiscipline... in that he acted inspite of warnings against any precipitate action. His resignation was the direct cause of the exercise for the first time since office acceptance by the Congress by a Governor of his special powers Dr.Khare was further guilty of indiscipline in accepting the invitation of the Governor to form a new ministry and contrary to the practice of which he was aware in actually forming a new ministry and taking the oath of alliance without reference to the Parliamentary sub-Committee and the Working Committee, specially when he knew that the meetings of these bodies were imminent".³⁴

The resolution and statements of Congress leaders, while condemning Khare, raised some serious constitutional questions and in doing so the Working Committee weakened its own stand, as Khare refuted these charges strongly, and the press also

34 Khare Papers, Ref.No.Misc/155/75/P3, 'My Defence', p.1. AICCP, PL-26/1938.

came up against the Working Committee's stand.³⁵

One of the most important charges was of Khare conspiring with the Governor and of the Governor using his special powers. Those who supported Khare and the Governor argued that this stand was basically wrong as Governor did not make use of any of his special powers, as appointment and termination of the ministers' services was a matter of routine administration.³⁶ The Governor was accused of fooling his Prime Minister. He was further charged with having been in an ugly haste to force a crisis and of being eager to weaken and discredit the Congress, and of entering into a conspiracy with the Prime Minister. The Governor was condemned for calling upon Dr. Khare to form a new ministry when he knew what was going on among the members of the cabinet and also the instructions of the Parliamentary sub-Committee.³⁷



35 On the 'Khare episode' most of the newspapers (Amrita Bazar Patrika, Tribune, Hindu, The Hindustan Times and the Times of India) were vehement in their criticism of the adoption of 'Fascist' methods by the Congress Working Committee. The only paper which wholeheartedly supported the Wardha decision on the CP ministerial crisis was the Bombay Chronicle. Home Political, File no.53/2/38, Note on the recent tendencies in the Indian Press since the introduction of Provincial Autonomy prepared by Mr.Natrajan.

36 The Times of India, 28 July 1938, p.10.

37 The Times of India, 1 August 1938, p.10; 8 August 1938, p.12; 26 July 1938, p.8; Linlithgow Papers, MSS Eur F.125/59, Letter no.1, Francis Wylie to Brabourne, dated 15 August 1938.

These charges, it was believed by Khare's group as well as by the press, were raised to cloud the main issue.³⁸ Dr. Khare himself strongly refuted the charges of a conspiracy with the Governor.³⁹ Moreover it was argued the Governor was very much within his constitutional right in accepting his Prime Minister's resignation and in dismissing those ministers who did not resign following the principle of joint responsibility. Further, it was argued that if Dr. Khare, who was the leader of the majority party, was willing to reconstitute a new ministry, the Governor was bound to obey. The Governor's responsibility was confined to his legislature and he could not have ignored his Prime Minister and looked to an outside body for advice.⁴⁰ The press criticised the stand taken by the Working Committee and opined that by raising these questions the Working Committee ridiculed its own position.⁴¹

38. The Times of India, 1 August, 1938, p.10.

39. Khare Papers, Ref.No.Misc/155/75/P3, 'My Defence', p.4. The Times of India, 26 July 1938;p.8; 1 August 1938,p.10; 8 August 1938, p.12.

40. Ibid., AICCP, File No.PL-6/1939, Statement of R.M. Deshmukh.

41. Home Political, File no.53/2/38, Note on recent tendencies in the Indian Press since the introduction of Provincial Autonomy prepared by Mr. Natrajan.

Khare refuted the charge that there was an error of judgement and argued that he was within his constitutional right as Premier to resign his office and demand the resignations of his colleagues.⁴² The Congress Working Committee also pointed out that Khare's act of indiscipline culminated in going straight away to the Governor and not coming to the Working Committee or the Parliamentary sub-Committee.⁴³ But we have already seen that on 15 July Khare had asked the help of Sardar Patel but after that he took an independent line as he knew that the High Command was not with him whereas he was constitutionally free to adopt such a policy. He did not have faith in the High Command and in the Congress leaders as he was sure that they were siding with the Mahakoshal members. He wrote in 'My Defence' :

"the quarrel was started by my colleagues and fostered and nourished by certain influential members of the Congress organisation My colleagues got a ready response at Wardha and were backed by a mighty personality second only to Gandhiji and the only course left open to me was to amputate the diseased limb."⁴⁴

42 Khare Papers, Ref.No.Msc.155/75/P3, 'My Defence', pp.1-2; The Times of India, 3 Sept., 1938, p.12.

43 Khare Papers, op.cit., p.3.

44 Ibid.^{pp.1-2,} and The Times of India, 3 Sept., 1938, p.12.

The above incidents and Khare's counter charges against the Working Committee's accusations severely damaged the position and prestige of Congress. Khare came out very bitterly against the Congress and its leaders after these events. Khare became anti-Gandhi and severely attacked him.⁴⁵ He said, "Mahatma wanted to kill me in politics.... I opposed him.... Mahatma is a Bania.

Jo Bania Jhootha Tol Deta Hai Us Ko Khota Paise Dena Hamara Dharam Hai".⁴⁶

It was believed by the press that this crisis was a consequence of clash of personalities. The Times of India called it a direct demerit of the over-centralised and over-concentrated system at the top in the Congress organisation. The top leadership of the Congress attempted to undermine the independence of provincial ministry and expected that provincial Premier should be responsible not to his legislature but to the Working Committee.⁴⁷

45 The Times of India, 1 August 1938, p.10;
8 August 1938, p.12; 3 September 1938, p.12;
Oral History Transcript, Interview of Dr. Khare, p.

46 Khare Papers, Ref.No.Misc.155/75/P3, 'My Defence', pp.20-22.
Oral History Transcript, Interview of Dr.Khare, p.41.

47 The Times of India, 26 July 1938, p.8;
28 July 1938, p.10; 17 September 1938, p.10.

What Khare did was to defy this notion of Congress executive and in the end he had to bear the consequences. The Times of India further observed that the crisis was the outcome of the assumption that ministers were the creatures of High Command which led to excessive and unnecessary interference of the Working Committee which consequently resulted in discontent.⁴⁸

This notion of the Times of India which was a pro-Government paper was not correct. If we look deep, we find that the Congress Working Committee's stand was logical and rational. It asserted that the Congress, as an organisation carrying on a big struggle against a mighty imperialism, had the full authority to control, guide and discipline each Congress institution, whether it was a department or an individual. Dr. Khare as a party member was responsible to the Congress Party and not to the Governor because he could become Premier only due to his party membership. Therefore the authority of the Party was indisputable.

48 The Times of India, 1 August, 1938, p. 10.

In October 1939 Dr. Khare was called by the Working Committee to give an explanation of his conduct.⁴⁹ Khare declined the invitation by sending back a telegram to the effect, "I want an independent tribunal since the Working Committee itself is a contending party, so it can not in fairness sit in judgement over me".⁵⁰ On 2 October 1939 the Working Committee passed a resolution expelling Dr. Khare from the primary membership of the Party for two years till 1 October 1940. The Congress President S.C. Bose issued a statement in reply to virulent propaganda against Gandhi and the Congress High Command,

"If one considers the matter dispassionately, he will be forced to definite conclusion that no injustice has been done to Dr. Khare nor has he been dealt with too harshly. If one argues that he has been punished too severely, I may point out that a leader has to pay the price of leadership.... In no country would a deposed Premier have behaved with such supreme lack of dignity and responsibility as the ex-Premier of CP."⁵¹

49 AICCP, PL-26/1938, Kriplani to Khare, dated 29/9/38. Telegram to Khare 28/9/38.

50 AICCP, File PL-26/1938, Khare's Telegram dated 30/9/38.

51 Kishori Mohan Patra, "The First Congress Ministries : Problems and Prospects (1937-39)", in A Centenary History of the Indian National Congress, (1885-1985), vol.III, p.201.

The 'Khare Crisis' in the Central Provinces and Berar weakened the nationalist cause and shook the confidence of the people in the Congress Party.⁵² A vigorous anti-Congress Working Committee and anti-Gandhi were went round in the province, more especially in Marathi districts and Nagpur city.⁵³ In Berar the anti-Working Committee feeling ran very high. Some members of the Berar Congress Party were agitated over the decision of the Working Committee. Some office bearers of the Taluqua Congress Committees convened meetings, delivered speeches and passed resolutions condemning the Working Committee. The President of the Berar Provincial Congress Committee even complained of the indisciplined conduct of the Congress Party members in Berar, and asked Kriplani's opinion about taking any disciplinary action against them. He wrote, "In absence of any disciplinary action the whole Congress organisation will seem loose".⁵⁴ Similarly Sakoli Taluqua Congress Committee passed a resolution

52 National Front, vol.I, no.15, 29 May 1938, p.5.

53 Home Political, FR, Second-half of August 1938, File no.18/8/38; First-half of September 1938, File no.18/9/38.

54 AICCP, File no.P-22, Part-II/1938, Biyani to Kriplani, Letter dated 20 August 1938.

appealing to the Working Committee to reconsider its decision about Dr. Khare.⁵⁵

In Mahakoshal such propaganda and anti-Working Committee attitude was negligible. However, within a few months, the anti-Congress Working Committee propaganda led by Khare's supporters in Nagpur and Berar also subsided.⁵⁶

55 AICCP, PL-26/1938,
Resolution of Sakoli TCC dated 1/9/38.

56 Home Political, FR,
Second-half of August 1938, File no.18/8/38;
First and
Second-half of September 1938, File no.18/9/38;
First-half of October 1938, File no.18/10/38.

Chapter-IV

PEASANT AND LABOUR MOBILIZATION IN THE
C.P. & BERAR, (1937-1939)

PEASANT AND LABOUR MOBILIZATION IN THE
CENTRAL PROVINCES AND BERAR 1937-1939:

This chapter primarily deals with the mobilization and organisation of peasants and workers by the Indian National Congress, Kisan Sabha, Shetkari Sangh and Trade Union Congress. It also deals with the causes of growing unrest among peasants resulting in agitations and the reaction of the malguzars of the Province. It also discusses the two stages, one of cooperation and the next of alienation, the Congress and Kisan Sabha relationship. It also seeks to find out how far the Congress was successful in fulfilling its election promises through tenancy and labour reforms. It also deals with the British Policy in C.P. regarding peasant and labour mobilization and agitation. This chapter also briefly deals with the leftist organisations in C.P. and Berar, their activities and the opposition of the Provincial Congress Party to their programme. Labour, Kisan and Left are discussed under three different heads.

KISAN MOVEMENT:

The Indian National Congress had grown from strength to strength as the premier national organisation and had gradually drawn different strata of society into the sphere of struggle. A new orientation in its policy which was initiated by Nehru in the Lucknow Congress and formulated

at Faizpur Congress resulted in the inclusion of radical land and labour reforms in the election manifesto. This inclusion could serve two purposes: (a) securing a victory in elections and (b) broadening of the base of the Congress

However, the potential impact of these items of the election manifesto was reduced in C.P. and Berar due to the weakness of the Kisan Sabha. As pointed out in the Congress Socialist weekly, the election results could have been more favourable to the Congress if Kisan Sabha had been more active.¹ The C.P. was also Congress minded but the Congress victory in the C.P. was not as sweeping as in Bihar, Orissa and U.P. Some seats had been lost to Ambedkarites and non-Brahmins. This was largely because the Kisan Sabha was almost non-existent and a sharp cleavage had also developed between the Trade Union Congress and the Indian National Congress in C.P. which caused the left forces to lose a labour seat.^{2(a)}

PEASANT PROBLEM IN C.P.

The peasant problem in C.P. and Berar was a product of the agrarian landholding structure. Malguzari

1. Congress Socialist Vol II No.7. 20/2/37 p.4

2. (a) See Chapter I
Congress Socialist Vol II No.7 20/2/37 p.4

system prevailed in Nagpur and Mahakoshal area, Ryotwari in Berar region and Zamindari system in some districts of Mahakoshal and Nagpur. The basic peasant problem in all the three areas was the same - of making the peasants solvent - which could be made only by reduction of land revenue and rent, abolition of malguzari and the reduction of wajib-ul-urz rights of Zamindars. I have discussed the activity among the ~~peasant~~ ^{peasants} separately for the three years from 1937 to 1938 in order to get a clearer picture of its nature.

CONGRESS AND KISAN SABHA ACTIVITIES IN 1937:

Congress was working with zest among the peasants since the election campaign days and was urging the peasants to join the Congress and support its anti-imperialistic fight. In Dec. 1936 a Kisan Sabha was formed at Kalol (Nagpur). Further attempts were made locally for Kisan Sabha formation at various places but they proved fruitless.³ Another branch of Kisan Sabha was established in Betul in Mahakoshal region on 25th May 1937 with Dr. N.B. Khare as President.⁴ The Kisan Sabha movement in C.P. and Berar

3. A History of the All India Kisan Sabha - M.A. Rasul
Calcutta 1974 pg.24-25.

4. A History of All India Kisan Sabha - M.A. Rasul
Calcutta 1974 pg. 24-25.

aimed at the restoration of solvency of the peasants and abolition of parasitic forces in agriculture. After the inception of Kisan Sabha in C.P., the Congress party of C.P. and the Kisan Sabha worked in total union. The meetings organised by the Kisan Sabha were often presided over by the members of the Legislative party.⁵

During the interim Ministry, the Kisan Sabha organised its meetings and the Congress called Peasant Conference in every nook and corner of C.P. and Berar. At these meetings, resolutions were passed on abolition of malguzari; reduction of revenue by 50%; remission of arrears of rent; taccavi decreased amount and other debts; total remission of rent for the year 1937; compulsory education and unemployment dole.

The Congress attempts at peasant mobilization and the propaganda it carried out resulted in unsatisfactory rental collection.⁶ The C.P. Governor expressed his concern at the low level of collection to Linlithgow, this being the first Province to have

5. Home Political F.R. First half of June 1937.
File No. 18/6/37.

6. Home Political F.R. First second half of July 1937
File No. 18/6/37.

this kind of a problem "Collection of land revenue reached a record low level and collection of taccavi had practically ceased and both were the result of the political propaganda of local Congress workers. This is a serious matter and I think it is the first report of this kind I have received." This was an observation which the Viceroy Lord Linlithgow made to the C.P. Governor Hyde Gowan.⁷

Immediately after accepting office in July, the Congress issued orders to the district officers to avoid coercive processes for the recovery of arrears of land revenue and Taccavi against landlords and tenants till next harvest.⁸ The Congress propaganda in C.P. villages systematically attacked the landlords and encouraged the tenants to refuse to pay the grazing dues.⁹ The All India Kisan Sabha incharge for C.P. Indulal Yagnik, objected to

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7. Linlithgow Papers Linlithgow to Hyde Gowen, 29 Nov. 1937, MSS Eur F 125/113, Letter No. 47
 8. Congress Socialist. Vol II No.31 Dated 7/8/37 pg 17
Hitvada 21 July 1937 Pg 10.
 9. Home Political F.R. First half of March 1937
File No 18/3/37.

the suspension of coercive measures only in land revenue and advocated the suspension of all coercive processes but the application of such an order in Malguzari area of C.P. was very difficult. Further, the order would have to apply even to other forms of revenue collection such as excise. So the Government refused to accept Yagnik's suggestion.¹⁰

The second step taken by the Congress ministry was to commence the discussion on the percentage of rent and land revenue reduction - 5% reduction in rent and 10% in land revenue was placed on the agenda of the Congress Assembly Party.¹¹ The contemplated reduction of 10% land revenue was opposed by Kisan leaders as it was far below the promises made by the Congress and needs and expectations of the tenancy in C.P. and Berar.¹² The Congressmen supported the 50% reduction of land revenue mainly on economic grounds such as rise in prices, previous enhancement of land revenue, crop failure and trade depression which had resulted in a fall of prices of agricultural commodities, which had made agricultural holdings unprofitable.

10. Hitvada 30 July 1937 Pg 6

11. Congress Socialist Vol II No.31 dated 7/8/37 pg 17
Hitvada 21 July 1937 pg 10

12. Hitvada 25 July 1937 pg. 16

However, the Congress Ministry, after assuming the responsibility of office, found itself under constraints to meet the promise of 50% reduction. Now they thought of the accumulated effects of reduction on the finances of the Province and the finance minister completely opposed the 50% reduction, but promised the remission for small and uneconomic holdings and announced the reduction of Rs.8 lakhs in land revenue accounts.¹³ The relief of Rs.8 lakhs constituted only 3% of the total land revenue and would be less than 2% of the rent actually paid by tenants under the Malguzari system. Even this remission, however, was enough to turn the budget into a deficit. Besides, it was beneficial to a small number of people.¹⁴

The Congress Members of the Legislative Assembly were in favour of 50% reduction and suggested certain measures to compensate the reduction of land revenue. The most important proposal was income tax on surplus income from agriculture over Rs.2,000. It was quite socialistic in nature being a direct tax on big land lords and also it was potent enough to make up to an appreciable extent the loss resulting from 50% reduction of land revenue.

13. Hitvada 17 Sept 1937 pg. 6

14. Linlithgow Papers Hyde Gowen to Linlithgow. MSS
Eur F 125/113. 21 Sept 1937 Letter No 38

In Malguzari villages, out of this 50%, 20% would come from the profits of Malguzars and the Government would be losing only 30% of their revenue.

Second proposal was of death duty, an equitable direct tax which would fall on the rich generally.

Third proposal was of employment tax on the employees whose salary exceeded Rs.100 and could be utilized as a relief to unemployment. All these measures proposed by Congress Members were radical and were opposed to the interests of the rich zamindars who, as it was pointed out, had so far enriched themselves at the cost of the poor with the result that villages have been for all purposes turned into deserts and the tenantry into destitutes.¹⁵

The Kisan Sabha leaders further proposed the abolition of Malguzari as the only way to relieve the peasants, directly without loss to the treasury since otherwise in a Province like C.P. where the land revenue of approximately Rs.2.75 crores constituted the major portion of the total revenue of Rs.4.75 crores, it was not possible to forgo an income of Rs.1.3/6 crores at once which is what 50% reduction of revenue would have

15. Hitvada 18 Aug 1937 pg. 7

entailed.¹⁶ The Provincial Kisan Sabhas opposed the Congress on the proposal of 10% reduction of land revenue^{revenue} and accused it of least botnering about the issues of agrarian reforms and instead clamouring about petty reforms like Khaddar and prohibition. In Kisan Sabha meetings kisan leaders explained the difference between the Congress programme and its implementation. It urged the Congress ministry to take immediate steps to relieve the toiling masses by taxing the rich and abolishing the malguzari system that it cannot satisfy both the exploiters and the exploited at one and the same time.¹⁷

The Kisan Sabha propaganda against Congress's inability to bring out any agrarian programme within two months of office acceptance and coercive measures adopted by the revenue authorities for collecting the revenue and taccavi loans despite the Congress Ministry's orders, created restlessness among the peasants of Damoh, Saugor, Patan, Sihora, Katni, Jabalpur and other places.¹⁸ The discontented peasants and malguzars of Jabalpur appealed to the Congress Ministry and sent a deputation of 200 peasants and malguzars to the President of Jabalpur District Kisan and Malguzar Association, Berar.¹⁹

16. Hitvada 18 Aug 1937 pg 7

17. Hitvada 18 Aug 1937 pg 7

18. Hitvada 20 Aug 1937 pg 2

19. Hitvada 20 Aug 1937 pg 2

In 1937 the Berar peasants agitation was in its infancy. Berar was a part of C.P. and consisted of four districts of twenty two taluqas. It was a multi-dimensional agitation which grew out of basically the economic consequences of British policies.

Berar was a fertile cotton growing area with 'javar', groundnuts and pulses as its other main crops. The growing discontentment of peasants at Berar was sensed by the Congress and it took steps in 1937 to organise and mobilize the peasants.

From 1925 a new review of settlement began in Berar. From 1925 to 1929, seven taluqas - three in Akola district (Akot, Balapar, Akola) and four in Buldana district (Malpapur, Lalgaon, Khamgaon and Chikhli) were revised and revenue was enhanced by 35%. By the time these settlements were taking place the world-wide depression came. The prices of the commodities went down beyond expectations. Crop failure added to the depression and made peasants' position miserable. Under these circumstances, it was not possible for the government to review the land revenue settlement of the remaining taluqas in Berar. It created unevenness in the land revenue set up. Fifteen, out of twenty two taluqas were paying the old scale whereas seven taluqas were paying 35% enhanced land revenue for the last 10 years 1927 to 1937.

The resentment multiplied with heavy indebtedness and the vicious system of assessing land tax, low prices of cotton, scarcity of jawar, failure of crops and the subsequent agony of the peasant proprietors and land labourers. The gravity of the situation added to the harassment of the lessess as a class that had grown in numbers as a result of concentration of land.

Money lenders also played a terrible role. As money lenders, they stood in antagonism to the small peasant proprietors, who were heavily indebted to them. As lessors, they harassed the lessess, a class of cultivators and landless peasantry and as landlords they exploited the agricultural labourers.

Crop failure, low yield and lack of capital contributed to the ruin of Berar peasants and their condition deteriorated during the last nine years i.e. from 1927 to 1928 onwards.²⁰

From the very beginning revenue officials and village officials were indifferent to the situation. The Berar P.C.C. was the first to take note of this deteriorating condition and determined to launch an

20. National Front Vol II No. 21 21/7/39 pg. 340
Congress Socialist Vol II No 22 5/6/37 pg. 19

agitation for the reduction of enhanced land revenue in seven taluqas of Berar by appointing a sub-committee under the name of 'Vidarbha Provincial Enhanced Land Revenue Relief Committee' to organise, mobilize and agitate for the reduction of enhanced land revenue in Berar which it ought to have long undertaken. But the Civil Disobedience Movements and the assembly elections diverted the attention of the Provincial Congress Committee.²¹

Vidarbha Congress Committee worked actively on the issue and Peasant Conferences were set up to carry on vigorous propaganda against the obnoxious settlement. These conferences were attended often by as many as 5000 peasants and torch light processions were taken out. These conferences passed resolutions demanding the cancellation of the increase in land revenue including orders on attachment and forfeiture. So great was the people's enthusiasm that once a conference continued in session throughout the night and dispersed at 5 AM next morning.²² The agitation gathered momentum very fast. It caught fire and the kisans of Berar were taking keen interest and in seven taluqas of Berar, Provincial Congress Committee organised the relief committees. Biyani, Gole, Aney and other Congress leaders attended these meetings of the agriculturists.²³ Congress also conducted enquiry into

21. Congress Socialist Vol. II No. 22 5/6/37 Pg. 19
Letter of Biyani President Vidarbha P.C.C. to the editor C.S.

22. Congress Socialist Vol. II No.21 29/5/37 Pg. 21

23. Home Political F.R. I and II half of May 1937,
File No.18/5/37

the condition of peasants and held several meetings.²⁴ In these meetings, the programme of rural upliftment was also propagated.

The meetings passed resolutions advocating reduction in revenue, extension of medical facilities, improvement of rural communication, total prohibition and free compulsory education.²⁵ Throughout the year 1937, Congress predominated the peasant agitation scene in Berar.

In the Legislative Assembly as well this impracticability of Congress propaganda of 50% reduction in land revenue was discussed. Outside legislatures, the Congressmen continued to propagate non-payment of rent and revenue grazing fess and reduction of revenue by 50% and abolition of malguzari and so on.²⁶

After assumption of office by the Congress, Kisan Sabha activity intensified. In conferences, besides propagating radical agrarian reforms, it inspired the peasants to complain against the bad behaviour of government officials and police.²⁷ These conferences were purely

24. Home Political F.R. II half of June 1937
File No 18/6/37
25. Home Political F.R. I half of Nov 1937, File
No 18/11/37.
II half of Dec 1937 File No 18/12/37.
Linlithgow Papers MSS Eur F. 125/113. Linlithgow to
Hyde Gowen 6 June 1937 Letter No 24
26. Home Political F.R. II half of Aug 1937, File No.
18/8/37, I half of Nov 1937, File No 18/11/37
27. Home Political F.R. II half of Nov 1937, File No.
18/11/37, I half of Dec 1937, File No 18/12/37

socialistic in nature and criticised the ministry as well as Marwari and Brahmins as a class.²⁸

Till December 1937, the C.P. Congress Ministry could not produce any substantial agrarian relief. This inability irritated the Kisan Sabha leaders and made them restless. They began criticising the ministry. The provincial Kisan Sabha Secretary P.D. Marathe issued a press statement "What has the Congress ministry done so far except announcing a small reduction in revenue ... It has not given any indication of its policy in the matter of malguzari and debt moratorium, the vital question of the peasantry in the province."²⁹ With the above mentioned press statement, the provincial Kisan Sabha exhorted the peasants of Nagpur and Wardha to arrange a kisan march on 13th December the opening day of legislative assembly session to put forward their demands. He also urged the labourers of Nagpur to support it.³⁰

Congressmen at large grew apprehensive of Kisan Sabha's growing strength in C.P. and Berar. The British bureaucracy observed their growing uneasiness. The governor of C.P. & B. wrote to Linlithgow, "The ordinary land beaded Congressman is fully alive to the danger which

28. Ibid.

29. Hitvada 3 Dec 1937 pg 10

30. Ibid

this movement revolves and to the necessity of keeping it under control".³¹

Congressmen at Nagpur took the peasants' and labourers' demonstration as embarrassing and strongly opposed it. Dhawla, the President of Nagpur Congress Committee, issued a public statement warning against the organisation of march as embarrassing and insulting to the ministry. On behalf of Congress agrarian Committee, the march as 'unwarranted' and directed the peasants and workers not to join such marches.³² He also objected to kisan leaders' virulent speeches and extravagant demands.³³

The opposition of Dhawla only served to increase the zest of the kisan workers which also included the Congressmen. In reply Kisan Sabha Secretary issued separate rejoinder to Dhawla's statement and appealed to Congressmen to encourage such demonstrations and demands.³⁴

On 13th December round about 1500 kisans paraded the Nagpur city with a huge sickle and hammer banner along with a Congress flag and placards bearing inscriptions like

31. Linlithgow Papers MSS Eur F. 125/113 Letter No.50 dated 22 Dec 1937

32. Hitvada 3 Dec 1937 pg 10

33. Linlithgow Papers MSS Eur F. 125/113 Letter No 49 dated 21 Dec 1937

34. Congress Socialist Vol II No. 49 dated 11 Dec 1937 Pg 18

"We are hungry, give us bread", "We are nude, give us clothes", "Abolish Malguzari", "Tiller must be the owner of the land", "Down with capitalism," "Victory to the red flag," borne by the marchess and they shouted slogans demanding 50% reduction in land revenue and creation of a moratorium.³⁵

Congress and Kisan Sabha propaganda advocating abolition of malguzari sistem made the malguzars of the province apprehensive and their fear resulted in the formation of 'Malguzari Defence League'.³⁶

Ironically enough, they considered their condition worse. than peasants and tenants. They urged the government to protect the malguzars and to evolve a 'system which would be beneficial to both the malguzar and the tenant. They were in favour of 25% reduction in land revenue, suggested no change in occupancy rights, demanded the right of selling the occupancy rights to be invested in malguzars, as well as wanted to be empowered to access nazrana at the rate of four-fold, three and two fold of annual land revenue, according to the quality of land. Further, they demanded the right to charge 12% interest on arrears of rent. They should also be given rights to eject a tenant who after two months extension could not pay the land rent and to give land to a new tenant free of nazrana on the same land

35. Congress Socilaist, Vol. II No, 51, dated 25 Dec 1937, pg 18

36. Home Political, F.R., II half of June 1939, File No. 18/6/37

rent.³⁷ To raise above mentioned demands, they organised meetings and distributed questionnaires. A Congress M.L.A. himself a malguzar, Beohar Rajendra Singh was accepted as their leader.³⁸ Malguzars sent their deputations to the Government under the name of 'Kashtkar'.³⁹

Thus, we see that throughout 1937, Congress and Kisan Sabha leaders and workers worked actively to mobilize the peasants. Congress workers as they were already working among the peasants, caught the issues and raised them but after accepting office, the activity of Congress Provincial Leaders slowed down and the field was won by provincial local kisan sabha leaders. Though the local level Congressmen, workers and volunteers were working with zest.

With the passage of time, we observe the growing discontentment among the Congress and Kisan Sabha workers regarding Congress policies. Their disillusionment was complete till Dec 1937 which is reflected in the march of peasants to the legislative assembly. Differences between fancy and reality, high election pledges and their impracticability, use of coercive methods and Congress disapproval of kisan marches were the causes which contributed in the disappointment of the many Congress and Kisan Sabha workers.

37. Hitvada, 26 Sep 1937, pg. 11

38. Ibid.

39. Linlithgow papers, MSS Eur F. 125/113, Letter No.33 dated 6 Aug 1937.

1938

The year 1938 witnessed the gathering momentum of Kisan Sabha activity in Central Provinces and Berar. It formed many branches, conducted the Berar peasant agitation and mobilized the Mahakoshal peasants.

In 1938, Congress in C.P. as usual, continued to mobilize the peasants, but its attention was slightly shifted from Berar and directed towards small zamindars of Mahakoshal and the banner of peasant unrest was raised there. Inside the legislature, it introduced C.P. Tenancy bill and C.P. Relief of Indebtedness Bill.

Berar The visit of Swami Sahajunand proved a magic touch and Berar peasants were awakened at once by his speeches. He accused Congress of ignoring the peasants' grievances but he never asked the peasants to be non-cooperative with the Congress.⁴⁰

The question of the reduction of the land revenue enhancement in seven taluqas of Berar still hung in air. The exaggerate anawari valuations made by village Patels Patwaris were not restrained by the officials. It further aggravated the situation. To make the matters worse,

40. Home Political, F.R., I half of Feb 1938, File No 18/2/38 I.

thousands of warrants of attachment were issued in Akola, Akot and Balapur Taluqas. Patel and Patwaris adopted all sorts of coercive measures for collecting land revenue. The secretaries of Kisan Sabha were made the special targets of coercive processes.⁴¹

Peasants conferences were organised by Congress as well as Kisan Sabha to voice the demands of the peasants.⁴² In these conferences, government was urged to take immediate steps to secure its demands. But revenue officials were indifferent and government was deaf. This naturally increased the tempo of the movement. The Yeotmal peasants threatened to launch 'Satyagrah'.⁴³ All the other taluqa conferences in Berar passed following resolutions demanding the government to stop (a) sales of land for arrear of revenue (b) remit 75% of enhance assessment in seven taluqas of Berar (c) appointment of committee of officials and non-officials to prepare correct annawari of corps.⁴⁴ The Congressmen at Berar raised these demands and urged their own ministry to fulfil them. The Mangrul Circle Conference passed a resolution demanding postponement of auction sales and asked the peasants not to call for bidding. This evoked an immediate response in Berar and Kisan movement

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41. Congress Socialist, Vol III No.14, dated 2 April 1938, Pg 258.
42. Home Political, F.R., I half of Nov 1938, File No 18/11/38; Congress Socialist, Vol II No.21, dated 2/7/38.
43. Home Political, F.R., I half of Nov 1938, File No 18/11/38.
44. Home Political, F.R., I half of Dec 1938, File No. 18/12/38.

embarked on the phase of active resistance. In Chander Biswa a conference ^{was} held under the presidentship of Biyani and passed a resolution commanding the peasants not to participate in auction sale and to boycott those who do so.⁴⁵ Chander Biswa resolution proved effective and it became difficult to collect revenue as no bidder appeared in the region.⁴⁶ The Berar agitation took a serious turn with the effective boycott of land sales.

The attitude of British officials towards the agitation was one of indifference and they doubted its genuineness.⁴⁷

ZAMINDARI TENANTS' UNREST:

The entire year 1938 saw the peasant unrest in the zamindaries of Dondi-Lohara, Panabaras, Khajji, Uprora and Chichgaon. The C.P. Congress Party workers were the force behind the mobilization and organisation of tenants. Dondi Lohara: Inspired by Congress workers of Durg District, the forest satyagrah broke out in Dondi Lohara Zamindari against the highhandedness of Diwan and Zamindarin (a woman zamindar). The uprising was led by a young Congress barrister Surja Prasad Aggarwal.⁴⁸

45. Linlithgow Papers, MSS Eur F 125/51
Letter No 36, dated 29 Dec 1938.

46. Linlithgow Papers, MSS Eur F 125/59
Letter No 36, dated 29 Dec 1938.

47. Ibid.

48. Home Political, F.R., I half of Feb 1938,
File No 18/2/38.

The basic issue behind it was 'begar' and excessive land revenue which the tenants refused to pay. The C.P. government initially sought to suppress the first sparks of agitation by compelling senior Congressmen to interfere in the matter.⁴⁹ Their attempts proved futile. Durg D.C.C. attempts to pacify Surja Prasad by convincing him to the credibility and reliability of Congress proved a catalyst in further aggravating the unrest. He criticised the Congress policy as slow and incapable of redressing peasants grievances. He vigorously launched the forest satyagraha and the tanantraj of Dondi - Lohara actively participated in it. He exhorted the tenants to oust the Diwan within three months.⁵⁰

C.P. and Berar premier ordered an enquiry as he was against the interference of local government officials in the struggle between the Diwan and tenants, as he believed that local officials were willing to arrest Sarju Prasad and were quite hasty in taking administrative measures. Shukla wanted to approach the problem from the economic angle as the imposition of begar, which was illegal, was a problem more of an economic nature which could be solved by inquiring into the case.⁵¹

49. Ibid.

50. Home Political, II half of Sep 1938, File No. 18/9/38; I half of Oct 1938, File No 18/10/38.

51. Linlithgow Papers, MSS Eur F. 125/59; letter No. 20, Francis Wylie to Linlithgow dated 25 Oct 1938.

Dondi-Lohara tenants became the torch bearers of tenant unrest in C.P. and gradually influenced the tenants of other zamindaris. Panabaras tenants arose in an agitation against the zamindar in the Durg District.⁵² The Congress volunteers propagated non-payment of grazing fees, declared it illegal as no rules certifying its legality existed.⁵³

The tenants of Kujji Zamindari inspired by "Dondi-Lohara" and 'Panabaras' also refused to pay grazing and commutation fees.⁵⁴

Khujji Zamindar was a Muslim and tried to colour the tenant unrest in his Zamindari in communal shades. He charged the Congress ministry of following an anti-Muslim policy which was initiating the mobilization of Khujji tenants against him. He also alleged that the Congress was following a policy of revenge because he was pro-government and anti-Congress before the acceptance of office.

52. Home Political, F.R., II half of Aug 1938 File No. 18/8/38; I half of Sept 1938, File No 18/9/38, I half of Dec 1938, File No 18/12/38.

53. Ibid.

54. Home Political, F.R., II half of Aug 1938, File No. 18/8/38, I half of Nov 1938, File No. 18/11/38.

He invited the Congress leaders to intervene and bring about a compromise, but no conclusion was reached. The Congress volunteers continued to mobilize and organise the tenants and tenants enthusiastically cut the trees in Zamindar's forest and stopped paying rents and grazing fees.⁵⁵

Congress workers also mobilized the tenants of 'Uprora' and 'Chichgaon' Zamindari and they refused to pay grazing fees and land revenue.

The British attitude regarding tenants' agitation in the Zamindaries of C.P. was of dual nature. In public they accused Congress workers of spreading lawlessness⁵⁶. The C.P. governor warned the Congress ministry and Congress workers against making objectionable speeches. In private, however, British bureaucracy admitted the genuineness of tenants' grievances, Under the oppressive rule of zamindars 'a worthless lot', and stressed the need of modifications in 'Wajib-ul-arz' rights of Zamindars.⁵⁷

55. Home Political, F.R., I half of Nov 1938, File No. 18/11/38. II half of Dec 1938, File No 18/12/38.

56. Home Political, F.R. I half of Nov 1938, File No. 18/11/38.

57. Linlithgow Papers, MSS Eur F 125/58, Letter No 17 Hyde Howen to Linlithgow, dated 8 Feb 1938.

They also observed the rising consciousness among the tenants and realised the urgent need of reorganisation of entire system for avoiding the zamindar-tenant conflicts. Franis Wylie wrote to Linlithgow, "I have strong feeling also that if we are not to have a series of politico - economic agitations in these areas, the Zamindars must put their houses in order and the wise course for the government is to make them do so."⁵⁸

Entire Mahakoshal and Nagpur region witnessed the massive mobilization campaign of peasants under the auspices of Congress and Kisan Sabha.

The main centres of convulsions were Betul, Nagpur, Wardha, Hoshangabad and Jabalpur. Local Congress and Kisan Sabha leaders organised the peasants to raise the following demands @ 50% reduction in government demands, remission of grazing fees, total cancellation of all debts, provision of cheap credit, stay of transfer of land and provision of sufficient grazing grounds near every village.⁵⁹

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58. Linlithgow Papers, MSS Eur F. 125/59, Franis Wylie to Linlithgow, Letter No. 20, dated 25 Oct 1938.
59. Home Political, I half of Jan 1938, File No 18/1/38, I half of May 1938, File No 18/5/38;
Hitavada, 18 April 1938, pg no. 17, 23;
Congress Socilaist, Vol II, No. 45, dated 13 Nov 1938 pg no. 18.

The Divisional Kisan Sabha Session was held at Nagpur.⁶⁰ A large number of peasants attended the conference. Two thousand members were enrolled both in Mahakoshal and Nagpur P.C.C. areas.^{61.}

Malguzars of C.P. also held meetings and conferences and passed resolutions demanding remission of taccavi loans and grant of more grazing concessions.⁶² This they did mainly to show sympathies with the peasants and to draw the attention of the Government and the Congress Party to their own position which they claimed was worse than that of the tenants. The Governor called it a complete humbug.⁶³ The Governor observed that the Malguzars' sympathies were a pretence as they were enjoying a far greater portion of the profits of cultivation than they had any claim to, and he recommended action to be taken against them.⁶⁴

The year 1938 ended and Congress also completed one and half year of its existence in C.P. ministry, but it could not satisfy the agrarian demands of the peasants.

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60. National Front, Vol I, No. 10, dated 24 April 1938, pg 4
61. Congress Socialist, Vol III No.20, dated 7 May 1938, pg No 342
62. Home Political, F.R., Second half of Aug 1938, File No. 18/8/38, II half of Sep 1938, File No. 18/9/38.
63. Linlithgow Papers, MSS Eur F. 125/113, letter No 33, Hyde Gowen to Linlithgow, dated 6 August 1937.
64. Ibid.

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In 1939, the agrarian situation in Central Provinces and Berar grew worse. The efforts of the Congress government to ameliorate the condition of the peasants in respect of day-to-day cultivation as well as rights over land had not fully succeeded in appeasing the peasants.

1939 was a year of crop failure in C.P. and Berar which aggravated the misery of peasants. As a result, 1939, year in C.P. also witnessed the aggravated kisan unrest in Berar, Dondi-Lohara and breakout of peasant agitation in Umrer, Jabalpur and Chhuikadsn state of Chhattisgarh. It also saw the intense activity of Congress and Kisan Sabha among the peasants.

Dondi-Lohara - The situation of Dondi Lohara grew worse. All efforts of Deputy Commissioner Chhattisgarh and Congress leaders to bring out some amicable compromise failed⁶⁵ and Dondi Lohara agitation continued. Surju Prasad went on hunger strike. The forest satyagrah of 1938 caused a loss of Rs.10,000 to the estate.⁶⁶ The situation grew worse with the cutting ~~down~~ of forests.⁶⁷

65. Hitvade, 19 Feb 1939, pg no.

National Front, Vol II No.22 9 July 1939, pg No 355

66. National Front, Vol II No.22, dated 9 July 1939, pg 355

67. Home Political, F.R., I half of August 1939, File No. 18/8/39.

13 local leaders were prosecuted⁶⁸ No compromise was reached as the situation came to a stand still with the resignation of the Congress ministry after the outbreak of II World War.⁶⁹

Chhuikadan State: Chhuikadan was a small state in Chhattisgarh Division in Central Provinces. The state authorities imposed a ban on the activity of the Congress Committee in the state. To defy the State authorities, Congress workers mobilised the long oppressed peasants and they launched forest and Jhanda stayagrah and refused to pay rent. Harshul Mishra, a Congress worker in Chhuikadan, campaigned vigorously and enrolled volunteers in the State.⁷⁰

Umrer - Kisan struggle at Umrer Tehsil of Nagpur District was launched by the Kisan Sabha for the suspension of revenue, stopping of eviction of tenants and attachments for recovery of debts. The method it adopted was of 'No tax' campaign.⁷¹ It was a protest against the coercive methods of money lenders and landlords. Congress in Nagpur tried to restrain this agitation by issuing a statement, "There

68. Home Political F.R. First half of August 1939, File No.18/8/39; I and II half of Sep 1939, File No 18/9/39.

69. Home Political, F.R., I half of Nov 1939, File No 18/11/39.

70. Hitvada, 12 Feb 1939, pg 3, 14.
Hitvada, 17 Feb 1939, pg 9.

71. Congress Socialist, Vol. IV No.24, 11 June 1939, pg 11;
Congress Socialist, Vol. IV No.14, dated 14 May 1939, pg. 227.

is no justification for launching a movement which can only bring further hardship and misery to the tenants.⁷² The cause was genuine and Kisan Sabha workers were enthusiastic and peasants' restive, so the Congress statement went unheeded and the agitation was in full swing. All of 17 Kisan Sabha leaders were arrested and put in Nagpur Central jail. Six men and five women, three of whom were carrying with them babies under one year old, were arrested when Umrer Tehsil was picketed.⁷³

Mahakoshal Jabalpur region became a scene of intensive peasant activity under the guidance of Congress and Kisan Sabha.

Kisan Sabha branches were formed in a number of Tehsils in Jabalpur. Kisan Sabha was also formed at Harda and Chhindwara. These branches enrolled members, carried on marches and contemplated the launching of a 'No tax' campaign if demands were not met. Disappointed by the Congress ministry, the Kisan Sabha of Sitapur demanded the resignation of Congress ministry.⁷⁴

72. Congress Socialist, Vol II No.16, dated 28 May 1939, pg 259.

73. Congress Socialist, Vol IV No.24, dated 11 Jun 1939, pg 11.

74. Hitvada, 12 Feb 1939, pg.3
Congress Socialist, Vol II No.8, 2nd April 1939, P.131
Congress Socialist, Vol II No.14, 14 May 1939, Pg. 227;
 Vol IV No.22, 28th May 1939 pg.8.

Congressmen in Jabalpur region demanded taccavi loans and othe relief measures to fight the crop failure. They threatened to launch styagraha.⁷⁵

Berar - Inspite of their incessent cry for relief, the Berar peasants were faced with inhuman atrocities and highhandedness of the government officials who adopted coercive measures to realize the kind revenue. The Congress ministry lost the confidence of peasants in Berar. The peasants of Berar relied more now on its own strength than on the promises of the Congress.

Kisan Sabha activity increased in every taluqa of the Berar. Districts Kisan Sabha was formed and Berar provincial Kisan Sabha decided to enroll 6000 members by the end of November.⁷⁶

The peasants of Amraoti Taluqa declared their determination of not becoming a party to the auction sale of land belonging to the kisans for the recovery of revenue or realisation of the instalment fixed by district board.

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75. M.P.C.C. P. File, D.C.C. Jabalpur 1939
Peasants of Sihora to President D.C.C. Jabalpur dated 23 May 1939; President D.C.C. Jabalpur to President M.P.C.C. dated 18 May 1939.
76. Hitvada, 6 Jan 1939, pg. 2.
National Front, Vol. II No.8, 2nd April 1939, pg. 131
National Front, Vol II No.14, 14th May 1939, pg.

It was also declared that those who act against this determination would be deemed as a vowed enemies of kisans. The declaration said, "We shall not cultivate the land of such people, shall not work on their lands and if necessary, shall declare a social boycott of them".⁷⁷

The Kisan Sabha organised 25 kisan committees in Akot, Jalgaon and Morsi taluqa to propagate the kisan Sabha demands.

The whole Berar was sizzling with discontent against the policy pursued by the ministry. Even the Berar P.C.C. voiced its emphatic protest against the refusal of government to rescind the wholly unjust revenue in crores assessed in seven taluqas. The Congress M.L.As of Berar were thoroughly dissatisfied with the new Berar land revenue code amendment bill due to⁷⁸ crop failure, drought and starvation. The peasant agitation in Berar was intense. Congress prestige deteriorated in Berar.

The Kisan Sabhas, fully alive to the situation, organised Kisan Marches to bring to the front the grievances of the kisans and workers of Berar. Big demonstrations were carried out in almost all the taluqas of Berar. At Naurpur 2000 peasants and Wardha 2500 carried demonstrations and marchas. These marchas were directed towards the tehsil

77. Hitavada, 6 Jan 1939, p.6.

78. Hitavada, 25 Jan 1939, p.7.

office.⁷⁹ The immediate demands made were (a) famine works, (b) minimum wages, (c) jawar prices to be regularised (d) jangles to be opened free of 'vanchari' for the cattle (e) village should be opened free of cost to collect fuel, stones and grass⁸⁰

LEGISLATION:

The Congress ministry passed three important bills for the relief of the aggrieved peasantry. First was C.P. tenancy bill⁸¹ It was a drastic piece of legislation but not upto the expectations of the peasantry. The most important provisions of this Act are as following:

- (a) Occupancy tenants were given the right to sublet their holdings for a period of five years instead of one year.
- (b) Occupancy tenants were allowed to alievate their holdings by sale subject to the right of the landlord to charge nazrana at 7.1/8 percent of the sale price. No power to mortgage conferred.

79. Inspite of cotton crop failure in Berar, collection of land revenue was going on. Government failed to provide immediate relief;
National Front, Vol II, No. 1, dated 12 Feb 1939, pg. 16;
Hitvada, 20 Jan 1939, pg. 3;

Linlithgow Papers, MSS Eur F. 125/60, Letter No.12, Francis Wylie to Linlithgow, 22 Jan 1939.

80. Hitvada, 18 Aug 1939, pg. 2

81. L.A.D., C.P. and Berar Tenancy Bill, Vol. VII 1939, pg. 93-107.

- (c) Absolute occupancy tenants who previously had the right to transfer their holdings on payment of nazrana were given right to acquire 'malik-mukbaiza',⁸² title (which implied a person who within a land revenue estate holds land separately assessed to land revenue and who holds it as proprietor and not as tenant) on payment of nazrana to the landlord equal to ten times the annual rent. Ordinary occupancy tenants could acquire malik-makluza rights in their holdings at payment of nazrana equal to $12\frac{1}{2}$ times the annual value.
- (d) Ejectment of occupancy tenants from their holdings for arrears of rent was to be abolished. This removed a very old grievance of the tenantry of the province.
- (e) Among minor matters occupancy tenants to be given some rights in all trees standing in their holdings as they have in the holding themselves.

Congress ministry presented this bill with the aim of good relations between landlords and tenants, improvement in cultivation and increase in the wealth of the country. Malguzar independent members of the legislative assembly opposed the bill on the ground that it will adversely hit the landlords.⁸³ Press in C.P. also opposed this bill.

82. See II Chapter.

83. L.A.D., Vol VII 1939, pg. 93-107.

Hitvada presented a series of articles denouncing this bill. It severely attacked Congress ministry for ignoring the interests of malguzars and empowering the tenants to acquire propriety rights. It also accused Congress ministry's anti-malguzar policies as a result of prejudice against them.⁸⁴ It was also pointed out by 'Hitvada' that payment of nazrana in cases of transfer to the Malguzar was also not in favour of the tenants and benefitted the malguzars and sahu-kars.⁸⁵ The Bill was approved by the Governor. Franis Wylie expected 'great commotion' from malguzars but actually very little opposition was there and Congress M.L.A. who were malguzars, after a little hesitation accepted it.⁸⁶

Another important bill, C.P. and Berar money lenders (Amendment) Bill 1937 was aimed at providing relief to the poor debtor and restraining the creditor from capitalizing the interest.⁸⁷

84. Hitvada 29 Sep 1939 pg. 7
 3 Sep 1939 pg. 2
 3 Dec 1939 pg. 2

85. Ibid.

86. Linlithgow Papers MSS Eur F 125/60 Letter No.101, Franis Wylie to Linlithgow dated 8th Aug 1939.

87. L.A.D. Vol V 1939.

A prolonged debate took place over the C.P. and Berar Relief of indebtedness bill⁸⁸. The bill was modified in the light of Madras Debt Relief Act and Bombay Agricultural Debtors Bill 1939. The limit for debt conciliation was fixed at Rs.25,000/-. A person having a debt of upto Rs.25,000/- could present his case to the Debt Relief Court.

BRITISH POLICY

The British bureaucracy was never ready to accept that C.P. had any agrarian grievances. It always believed that Congress raised the agrarian issues to its own advantage. Hyde Gowen wrote to Linlithgow, "Personally I have never been able to regard this sort of thing very seriously in C.P. It is very difficult to work up a dangerous mass agitation unless there is some real grievance behind it... At the same time, our policy with regard to remission and suspensions goes to the extreme of liberality; and we have given the lead to India in debt conciliation and the control of money lending. Even in the last Civil Disobedience movement of no rent campaign made very little Broadway, and I cannot bring myself to believe that any purely agrarian agitation is a serious menace."⁸⁹

88. L.A.D. Vol V 1939 Vol VII 1939.

89. Linlithgow Papers MSS Eur F.125/113, Hyde Gowen to Linlithgow dated 6 June 1937, letter No.24.

British bureaucracy was also unhappy with the slow and decreased collection of land revenue due to Congress's constant propaganda. It apprehended the cracking of the entire revenue set-up. Linlithgow also expressed his surprise at the fall of Rs.28 lakhs in C.P. revenue collection. In a letter to C.P. Governor, he wrote, "This is a serious matter and I think it is the first report of this kind I have received."⁹⁰ Hyde Gowen received reports of hurdles in collection of revenue due to Congress propaganda. Deputy Commissioner of Nagpur reported that in the Congress propaganda, the Congress workers were assuring the peasants that election pledge about the reduction of rents and land revenue was certain to be carried out, consequently the peasants started holding back the payments. Hyde Gowen grew anxious at this situation and wrote, "There is little doubt that the agriculturists are holding back payment in the expectation of a substantial reduction in land revenue, and that the revenue paying conscience, which we have sedulously cultivated for so many years, has begun to waver."⁹¹

The Governor impressed upon the council the gravity of the situation due to low collections. The Minister for

90. Linlithgow Papers MSS Eur F. 125/113 Linlithgow to Hyde Gowen 29 Nov 1937 letter No.47

91. Linlithgow papers MSS Eur. F.125/58 Hyde Gowen to Linlithgow dated 8 Feb 1938 letter No.99.

Revenue then issued a circular to commissioners promising support in any action which they considered necessary for collection of revenue. Ministers also made various public announcements on the necessity of punctual payment.⁹² As mentioned above, in the Chapter, The British attitude towards peasant unrest was of dual nature. Bureaucracy never tried to look deep into the causes of unrest and were mainly concerned with the maintenance of law and order and exaction of land revenue.

CONCLUSION:

The Kissan movement in C.P. and Brer was at a very low point in 1936, but due to the efforts of individual Congressmen the branches of A.I.K.S were formed in C.P.

The Congress election campaign contributed tremendously to the growth of peasant consciousness. The election manifesto itself was a potent catalyst ~~to~~ awaken the peasant masses. The Congress assumption of office was seen by peasants as their own victory. The Congress rule implied to them no payment of revenue and rent. The expectations were very high from the Congress ministry which ~~it~~ could not be fulfilled. Within one year, peasants started getting disillusioned by the Congress ministry's work and policies.

92. Linlithgow Papers MSS Eur F. 125/58 Hyde Gowen to Linlithgow dated 22 Feb 1938 letter No. 17a.

Congress ministry worked under a number of constraints but we cannot call it a utter failure with regard to its implementation of the agrarian programme. Congress volunteers worked with great enthusiasm and zest among the peasants and built a strong foundation, firm and flexible enough to shoulder the ensuing mass agitations

LABOUR UNREST IN C.P.:

1920s saw the immense industrial growth and expansion in cotton and bidi industry in the Central Provinces and Berar.⁹³ Between 1925 and 1929 the leaders of the Congress party of Nagpur consolidated their hold upon working classes. Dr. N.B. Khare and R.S. Ruikar brought textile and railway workers under Congress influence. A branch of A.I.T.U.C. was formed in Nagpur in 1928 by Khare and Ruikar. Congress connections with the working classes in Nagpur led to their participation in civil disobedience movement.⁹⁴ Foremost labour leaders were Awari, Naidu, Salve, Marathe, Shalekar and Jaiyant, Kallapa and Mrs Amosuya Bai Kale.⁹⁵

In the 1937 elections, there were two labour seats in C.P.&B. (a) Nagpur trade union seat and Jabalpur unorganised labour seat. Both seats were special labour seats and the right of the A.I.T.U.C. to contest these two seats was unchallengeable, but a misunderstanding kept in and both A.I.T.U.C. and Congress lost the Nagpur trade union seat. The Congress and T.U.C. split did not

93. In 1921 there were 164 bidi factories employing 7680 workers, in 1931 866 factories employing 42,460 workers. C.P. Repoert 1931 Census pg. 82, 239-40 cotton industry- Model Bill, Vidharbha Mill opened in 1920s.

94. N.M.M.L. A.I.C.C.P. File No.24/1930. Annual report of C.P. Marathe P.C.C. 1930.

95. Ibid.

last long and in this chapter (1937-39) we behold the labour mobilization in C.P. both by T.U.C. and Congress and their cooperative activity.

The ministerial period in C.P.&B. faced many labour problems and solved them reasonably well.

Rajnandgaon Mill Struggle:

The Rajnandgaon state adjoining the Durg Dist of B.C.P., which became one of the most important venues of labour struggle during the ministerial period, illustrates one of the most successful labour movements organized and led by C.P. labour leaders and backed by Congress.

The labour trouble in the Bengal Nagpur Cotton Mills Rajnandgaon started since February 1937, after which a series of strikes were organised and led by Ruikar. The main strike however, started from 24 September 1938 over the grievances of wages, working hours, dismissal of Naidu, the weaving master, on grounds of mal-treatment of workers, etc. ⁹⁶ An effective struggle was launched very ably by R.S. Ruikar. First a compromise was brought about on 29th December 1938 which, however, failed as Ruikar was disallowed in the Union. Thereafter between the second half

96. Hitvada 19 Feb 1939, pg. 9

of Dec and first half of Jan 1939, the struggle brewed up, turned violent and involved mass participation from below- from working as well as non-working sections.⁹⁷

The Rajnandgaon Railway Station became a historical venue of labour struggle where Ruikar and others made fiery speeches, arousing the agitation, as he was prohibited from being within the State boundaries.⁹⁸ During these meetings stones, rotten eggs, etc. were thrown on agitators and some were even beaten by the people who were believed to be the men of State authorities. Lawlessness started prevailing. On 3rd Jan 1939, the city observed complete hartal which continued for quite a few days. Agitating groups were indiscriminately lathi-charged by the police which injured not only hundreds of men but also women and children and the Viceroy was asked to intervene.⁹⁹

Thereafter unrest increased as the grievance against Mill Management was coupled with the grievance against the State for its 'brutal reign of terror'. 50 school boys entered the Magistrate's courtroom demanding release of a prisoner. Women took part in demonstrations. Three policemen were beaten by agitators and a policeman's head dress was burnt and thus the movement grew violent¹⁰⁰

96. Hitvada 19 Feb 1939 pg. 9

97. Home Political F.R. II half of Dec 1938. F.R. I half of Jan 1939.

98. Ibid.

99. Hitvada 4 Jan 1939, pg. 1, 6th Jan 1939 pg. 7; 8 Jan 1939 pg. 1

100. Hitvada 19 Feb 1939 pg. 9.

But at last an amicable compromise was brought about between the Management and the representatives of strikers (Rajnandgaon Mill Mazdoor Sangh) Mr Ratnakar Jha, and work was resumed. However, the struggle started again in July-Aug 1939.

But it is clear that the trouble could not have brewed up so dramatically and so successfully without the support of Congress from C.P. Durg D.C.C. was fully involved in it. Ratnakar Jha, the main representative of the strikers, was the President of the Durg D.C.C.¹⁰¹ The leaders of this struggle had the backing of C.P. Congressmen, is also highlighted by the fact that the C.P. Government rejected the appeal of Rajnandgaon State authorities to prohibit Ruikar to hold meetings on the Railway Station of Rajnandgaon.¹⁰² Moreover, Ruikar and others had frequent talks ~~with~~ and advice from D.P. Misra^{and}, had correspondence with Jamnalal Bajaj¹⁰³ and with Gandhi himself.

The importance of this mill struggle is that it was one of the most effectively led and ably organized mass labour struggles drawing following not only from workers, but non-workers also and from women and school students too.

101. Hitvada 19 Feb 1939 pg. 9

102. Hitvada 8 Jan 1939 pg. 1

103. A.C.C. No.442 Corr. with R.S. Ruikar
Ruikar to Baj Durg 26 Dec 1938.

It had the participation from below in maximum numbers. But it was important in this respect also that it was a labour struggle which was effectively led by able men like Ruikar, who were backed by C.P. Congress, for a struggle, which was launched outside the boundary of the Province, in a Princely State.

Bidi workers strikes:

Bidi industry was the most flourishing industry of C.P. and the second largest in the province after the textile industry, involving around 50,000 workers, mostly in Bhandara, Nagpur and Jabalpur districts.

Bidi industry was a very simple industry, requiring no machinery etc. and thrives on cheap labour (which was abundant in C.P.) and drawing most of its work force in C.P. from backward and depressed classes.¹⁰⁴ But the labour force was also not dormant altogether. Strikes, agitations, etc. were common. Most of the grievances were against low wages, long working hours and bad working conditions. There were instances when the labour fought the antagonism of the management as in the case of Mohanlal Hargobinddas Co.'s Bidi Factory in Jabalpur where the management imposed fines on workers for poor work. However, the fine was later refunded when workers struck work.¹⁰⁵ In Bhandara also a manager was assaulted.¹⁰⁶

104. Hitvada 18 Jan 1939 pg. 10

105. Home Political weekly summary of labour situation dated 19 Sep 1939, File No 12/3/39

106. Home Political F.R. II half of Oct 1938, File No. 8/10/38. I half of Nov 1939, F.No. 18/11/39; I half of Oct 1939 File No. 18/10/39

Bidi workers' strike was motivated and mobilized by trade union leaders. Bidi workers were organised into C.P.& B. Bidi Workers' Union at Nagpur. Local leaders mostly led the strike and some prominent Congressmen were also involved in it such as S.Y. Kulkarni, Mote, Fuley etc. ~~and~~ They organised a Provincial Bidi Workers' Conference at Nagpur.¹⁰⁷ Here, the ministry was criticised for not taking adequate measures for the welfare of the Bidi workers. They demanded that certain legislative measures of the ministry like "The unregulated factories Act" and "payment of Wage Act" should be modified according to the conditions and needs of Bidi industry and Bidi workers¹⁰⁸ "Bidi Industrial Committee" was set up by the ministry to look into the grievances of Bidi workers.¹⁰⁹

Thus we find that irrespective of the fact that they belonged to backward classes, they were quite successful in carrying on agitation for the fulfilment of their demands.

Perfect Pottery Co., Jabalpur - strike:

The socialist and communist leader S.Y. Kulkarni, who was the President of the Perfect Pottery Cos' Workers' Union was able to initiate and instigate workers of the same company to strike. It was one of the most important

107. Hitvada 18 Jan 1939 p. 10

108. Ibid.

109. Home Political Deptt weekly summary of labour situation dated 18 Oct 1939, F. No.12/4/39.

industries in Jabalpur. The main issues pointed out in the strike were high wages, better working conditions, less working hours and working men's quarters, etc.¹¹⁰

The strike lasted for 16 days.¹¹¹ Excessive picketing, creation of human wall, resulted in lockout by the Company. Later the strike could end only after intervention by the Labour Officer. It was a successful strike.

Katni Cement Workers' Strike:

The workers of Asbestos Cement Company Ltd., Kymore in the Katni Tehsil struck work due to the termination of services of 2000 daily-wage workers by the Management.¹¹² This was due to the closure of the lime-stone quarries.¹¹³ The workers, however, were also dissatisfied with the Management due to grievances of wages, working conditions, etc.

Katni Cement Workers Union was the chief and able organizer of the struggle. Congress attention was sought by the citizens. Congress Government looked into the trouble and was able to bring about a solution and work was finally resumed on 25th June 1939.¹¹⁴

110. "Labour strike at Perfect Pottery Works Jabalpur. Enforced declaration of lock out by R.N. Srivastava of Perfect Pottery Co Ltd. 3 June 1939.

111. The Times of India 15 Jun 1939, pg. 12.

112. National Front Vol I, No.25, 7 Aug 1938, pg. No.7

113. M.P.C.C.P. File D.C.C. Jabalpur 1939, letter to the President Tehsil C.C. Katni by citizens of Katni 1.10.1939 - File No. G-22/1939-40.

114. Home Political Deptt 1939 weekly summary of labour situation dated 2nd Aug 1939, File No. 12/3/39.

But some Congressmén were not in favour of the union as shown by the Katni T.C.C. President's correspondence, which reveals that he thought that the union was prolonging the strike due to selfish motives. He also did not like involvement of Kalappa, a Congress representative, in the strike.¹¹⁵

Municipal Committee's Sweepers Strikes:

Municipal Committee's sweepers and other employees were quite enlightened, and fought for their rights. Numerous Municipal Sweepers' strikes used to take place in different places like Katni, Jabalpur, Damoh, Buldana, etc.^{116.}

Labour struggles of other industries usually demanded increase in wages and working condition improvements. But one extra-ordinary feature of Municipal Workers' struggle was that, besides asking or demanding higher wages, their main demands were maternity and sick leave, work distribution, supply of clothes, workers quarters, etc. This was perhaps due to the fact that they were Government employees and had a comparatively secure job with satisfactory wages. Therefore, they could think of something else.^{117.}

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115. M.P.C.C.P. Corr of President Katni Tehsil C.C. to the President D.C.C. Jabalpur dated 30.5.1939.
116. Home Pol Deptt 1939, weekly summary of the labour situation dated 5.1.1938, 5.12.1938, File No.12/1/39
117. Home Poll Deptt 1939, weekly summary of the labour situation File No.12/4/39 (Political)

Central Province and Berar Municipal Employees Association was affiliated to Trade Union Congress ~~also~~ and worked for redressing the grievances of the Municipal Workers.¹¹⁸ Main motivation was due to affiliation with Trade Union of C.P. & B. ^{with} Municipal Employees Association, Nagpur ~~and~~ Municipal Employees Union Buldana and Raipur Municipal Employees Association.¹¹⁹

The Nagpur Textile Union and Textile Mill's strikes:

The Nagpur Textile Union was a major component of Trade Union movement in C.P. & B. It was one of the most prominent unions of the working classes in the Province.¹²⁰ Cotton textile was the most important industry of C.P. and Berar. The textile workers' strikes were quite numerous as the union and its able leaders like R.S. Ruikar, V.G. Balawik, Jagam, Kulkarni, Mote, etc. were always ready to enlighten workers, to put forth their grievances and their demands.

It put forth demands of workers, like increase in wages, better working conditions, abolition of one-loom system against the maltreatment of workers, etc.¹²¹ The

118. A.I.C.C.P. File No. L-5/1939.

119. A.I.C.C.P. File No L-9/1936.

120. Hitvada 18 Jun 1937, pg. 7

121. Home Political F.R. I half of Feb 1938, File No. 18/2/38.
Hitvada 18 Jun 1937, pg. 7

Nagpur Textile Union fought with many important mills for its recognition. The main centre of its activity was Nagpur, the textile capital of the Province. However, in other textile centres like Burhanpur, Jabalpur, Hinghaghat also union was quite active and held several stubborn and prolonged strikes for its demands. Along with Nagpur, Hinghaghat also proved to be a very firm ground for the Union as big strikes were organized there quite a few times and the Premier and Finance Minister personally had to resolve the situation.¹²²

Besides these strikes, owing to various grievances of textile mills, the Nagpur Textile Union demanded the appointment of textile labour enquiry committee to look into the grievances of the workers and to improve their condition. Due to their effective demand the C.P.&B. Provincial Government following the line of Bombay and U.P., appointed a 'Textile Labour Inquiry Committee' in May 1938.¹²³ But the Union's struggle was not over. The Inquiry had more official members than publicmen drawn from the national movement, as was done in Bombay and U.P. This became one of the major grievances of the union towards the Inquiry Committee. And when the majority of the Textile Labour Enquiry Committee recommended 40% wage

122. Home Political F.R. for 1938 & 1939 (strikes in different months at different places).

123. A.I.C.C.P. PL-6/1938 Note dealing with the resolutions of first meeting of the Congress Labour Committee held at Bombay in May 1938.

cut, another major grievance came into being. Consequently, Kalappa, an M.L.A. and a member of the Textile Labour Inquiry Committee filed a minute of dissent for restoration of 75% wage-cut along with other issues.¹²⁴ This minute of dissent was supported by a workers' organisation which resolved to strike if it was not accepted.¹²⁵

Finally, the Government accepted the recommendation of the majority of Textile Labour Enquiry Committee of restoration of 60% of wage cut and the minute of dissent was not heeded.¹²⁶ Notices were served in the mills at Nagour, Hinghaghat, Burhanpur and Jabalpur by the union leaders saying that if 75% restoration of wage was not done by Mill Management, they would strike again. But due to the consultation between the textile union leaders, Government and Congress workers, the strike was postponed.¹²⁷ But at Hinghaghat strikes started demanding 75% restoration of wage cut. The labour leaders and union leaders i.e. R.S. Ruikar, etc. supported it. Excessive picketing started and lockout was declared. The situation could become normal only after three months, when negotiations with the Premier and Finance Minister were concluded.¹²⁸

124. A.I.C.C.P. PL-6/1938.

Hitvada 25 May 1938 pg. 9, 18 June 1938, pg. 7, 20 Jun 1938, pg. 10

125. Home Political F.R., II half of June 1938, File No. 18/6/38

126. Ibid.

127. Home Political F.R. II half of June 1938. File No. 18/6/38, II half of July 1938, File No. 18/7/38.

128. Home Political F.R. I half of Aug 1938, F.No.18/8/38; I & II half of July 1938 F.N.18/7/38; I & II half of Sep 1938 F.No.18/9/38; I half of Oct 1938 F.No.18/10/38.

The workers had to go back to work on the same terms which were available when they had decided to go on strike. Later, the labour demand of restoration of 75% of wage cut was met.¹²⁹

The strike at Bengal-Nagpur Cotton Mill, Rajnandgaon could also be brought about by the able participation of the Nagpur Textile Union leaders like R.S. Ruikar, Kulkarni etc.¹³⁰

The textile labour was also quite enlightened as is proved by some instances like 640 workers at Tapti Mills, Burhanpur readily joined the union at one call of R.S. Ruikar.¹³¹

Government policy on the whole was quite sympathetic. Many a times, the Premier and Finance Minister directly intervened and negotiated and brought about compromise. Generally, speaking the Union members were more unsatisfied with the mill owners and management than with the Government policy. Of course, the Textile Inquiry Committee's report was, however, a major contribution of C.P. Ministry towards labour cause in the Province as it fulfilled the demands of textile labour and was able to pacify one of the most active labour groups in the Province.

129. Hitvada 10 Sep 1939 pg. 10, File No. 5.

130. Home Political F.R. II half of Dec 1938, F.No.18/12/38
Hitvada 8 Jan 1939, pg. 1

131. Home Political F.R. II half of Jun 1937 F.No.18/6/37.

Trade Unionism in C.P. and Berar:

Trade unionism was not very strong in C.P. and Berar as compared to other provinces.¹³² Backwardness of the area and lack of modern industries were the main obstacles in the spread of trade unionism in C.P. on a wider scale. Though trade unions in C.P. had some able leaders like R.S. Ruikar, Kulkarni, Mote, etc., but the whole province had only 17 registered trade unions in 1936. The main among them were (1) Nagpur Trade Union (2) C.P. and Berar Textile Labour Union (3) C.P. and Berar Motor Drivers Union, Nagpur (4) C.P. and Berar Municipal Employees Association, Nagpur (5) Girni Kamgar Union, Hinghaghat and at other places also.¹³³ Out of these, C.P. and Berar Textile Union was the only powerful and active union

Though Nagpur had been an important venue of National level trade union events, like the fusion of the two wings of trade unionism i.e. Trade union Congress and National Federation of Trade Unions in A.I.T.U.C. in April 1938 at Nagpur, but still the movement itself cannot claim to be active in the province.¹³⁴

132. National Front Vol I, No.25 dated 7 Aug 1938, pg. 7.

133. A.I.C.C.P. File No L-9/1936.

134. Hitvada 18 April 1938 pg. no. 16
Home Political F.R. II half of April 1938, File No. 18/4/38.

Occasionally it fetched large crowds in its meetings like the "High Prices Day" celebrated by Trade Union at Nagpur, which was attended by 2000 people.¹³⁵

Its policy towards Congress, was generally speaking ^{was} of cooperation.¹³⁶ Though the leaders of trade union were very critical towards Congress policy, towards legislations and towards its methodology and even Gandhism was criticised by Ruikar once in a trade union meeting¹³⁷. Yet the unionists understood the importance of connections with Congress as they knew that their independent strength was not very great, and at several places and at several meetings, cooperation with Congress was always called for, by the Trade Unionists.¹³⁸

Policy of Congress Ministry:

The C.P. and Berar Congress Ministry was on the whole, quite successful in dealing with the labour situation, though, it had not to face very serious labour problems.

135. Home Political F.R.. II half of Dec 1939, File No. 18/12/39.

136. The Congress and T.U.C. relationship in C.P. and Berar underwent different phases during 1937 elections and afterwards. (See chapter I)
Home Political F.R. II Half of Dec 1939, File No.18/12/39.

137. Home Political F.R. II half of Sep 1938, File No.18/9/38.

138. Hitvada 18 April 1938, pg No.16
National Front Vol I, No 9 dated 17 April 1938, pg. 9.

Some of the major labour struggles were on the part of Nagpur Textile Labour Union - Textile Mill Strike, the Bidi Workers Strike, Kymore Cement Factory Strike, Pottery Strike of Jabalpur and Sweepers and Mochi Strikes. It tackled most of these problems quite reasonably.

Nagpur Textile Union's demand for Textile Labour Inquiry Committee was agreed to. Though there was some dissatisfaction in the beginning but soon the matter came to an amicable settlement and the desired 75% wage cut was restored. ~~later~~. Though, at Hinghaghat some trouble brewed up for a while, but later due to the Premier's intervention, it was settled. The Nagpur Textile Union put forth the following demands:

- (1) Recognition of Trade Union
- (2) Fixation of minimum wages
- (3) Holidays with pay
- (4) Redress of grievances against Empress Mill, Nagpur.

Most of these demands were met. Similarly, the strike and disputes at other mills and industries were looked into by the labour officer. Bidi workers grievances were also looked into by an Inquiry Committee appointed for the purpose. At some times, if complex situations developed, Finance Minister and even the Premier solved the problem themselves. Some of C.P. Government's legislations like unregulated Factories Act and C.P. Maternity Benefit Act were followed and adopted by other Provinces also. ¹³⁹ But sometimes, the

139. A.I.C.C.P. File No. PL-6/1938. Note dealing with the resolutions of the first meeting of the Congress

C.P. Government also depended upon the decisions of the other Provinces, in certain matters, so as to gain by their experience.

But as regards forms of agitation which implied defiance of Congress Policy, such as excessive picketing, creating a human wall, forms which were considered against principles of non-violence, ~~these~~ were condemned by the Government and action was taken against them, for example, Hinghaghat strikes, etc. Congress Government was also particular that no Congress Representative should be involved in the strikes so much as would create loss of face for the Congress - the instance of Katni Tehsil C.C. President trying to keep away Kalappa (M.L.A.) from Cement Factory strike.^{140.}

Some times, ministerial negotiations with labour leaders were quite successful and led to cancellation of even big organized plans of strike and demonstration. For instance, at first on 13 Nov 1937, workers and peasants had to participate in a march to assembly but owing to negotiations and talks between Ruikar and the Finance Minister, the workers did not join the Kisans.¹⁴¹ Similarly, ministers were quite tactful in averting big plans of strike such as at Textile Mills in Nagpur and other places on the issue of Textile Labour Inquiry Committee when, at final stages an assurance was given by ministers to consider the matter, and the strike was postponed

140. Hitvada 10 Sep 1939 pg. No.10.

141. Home Political F.R. II half of Dec 1937, File No 18/12/37

142. Home Political F.R. II half of Jun 1938, File No. 18/6/38

LABOUR AGITATION - GENERAL ANALYSIS

The labour agitations in C.P. were quite numerous. Many agitations were led in the ministerial period and most of these were quite successful. Some of the biggest labour strikes and unrests were those of textile labour especially at Hinghaghat, Bidi workers, cement factory workers, pottery workers, etc.¹⁴³

Though Trade Unionism was there, but was not widely spread. Till 1936, there were 17 registered trade unions. Out of them, only C.P. and Berar Textile Labour Union was very active under the able leadership of R.S. Ruikar which was responsible for the strike and agitation on Textile Labour Inquiry Committee issue and other issues of Textile Industry, which was the biggest industry in C.P.¹⁴⁴

The efforts of mobilization of labour for launching a struggle were mostly successful. No doubt, there were able labour leaders like R.S. Ruikar, who was one of the most prominent left leader also, others being messers Mote, Kulkarni, Jagam, etc. Participation from below was better when the workers were aroused properly and motivated in the right direction as is shown by the strikes at Textile Mills of Nagpur and Highhaghat where men and women actively participated. At Hinghaghat the struggle ensued for a longer

143. Hitvada 10 Sep 1939, pg. 10.

144. A.I.C.C.P. File No L9/1936.

time with vigorous labour agitation, etc. and could be pacified by no less than the Premier himself. Similarly, in pottery works of Jabalpur, men as well as women were actively involved in picketing and other forms of agitation.¹⁴⁵ Similarly, at Tapti Mills, Burhanpur, when Ruikar called the workers to join the labour union, all 640 of them readily joined it at one instance.¹⁴⁶ The most important feature in C.P. & Berar labour strikes and agitations which attracts attention is that mass participation was there, in which backward classes and depressed classes were also involved. Most of the Bidi workers in the province came from these classes, but they participated actively and fought for their ends. Similarly, the sweepers' strike and even Mochis' strike in Nagpur also attract attention as these classes traditionally or due to their low social position, generally used to get less involved in such types of activities. But they participated in strikes and showed that they were fully conscious of their rights and had full opportunity and enlightenment to fight for their rights and for their betterment.¹⁴⁷

The usual methods adopted were strikes, picketing, creation of human wall, prohibiting willing workers to go inside and carrying demonstration. Some of the labour leaders held secret classes to impart to the workers, how labour agitations should be carried out. Mr G.M. Mote,

145. N.M.M.I. Hitvada 10 Sep 1939 pg. No.10.

146. Home Political F.R. II Half of Jun 1937, FN 18/6/37.

147. Hitvada 10 Sep 1939, pg. No.10

Hitvada 18 Jan 1938 pg. No.10

S.Y. Kulkarni and P.D. Deshmukh were main among them.¹⁴⁸

At times, the above measures caused some problems as Congress leaders termed them against non-violence whereas labour leaders were not ready to accept this. When such type of agitation took place, the Ministry took some strong steps also as in case of Highghat Mill Strike.¹⁴⁹

But we still can't say that labour movement in C.P. was a great success. Firstly, we see that the labour force was not fully mobilized. They were not always able to put forth a concrete movement though, at times, they were successful. Let us also view the All India Statistics of labour disputes in the Province:

<u>Province:</u>	<u>No. of disputes:</u>	<u>No. of labour involved:</u>	<u>Year 1939 31st March</u>
C.P.&.B.	1	10,606	-do-
Bombay	19	90,833	-do-
Madras	18	3,08,410	-do-
Bengal	35	2,27,218	-do-
U.P.	11	37,626	-do-
Bihar	9	1,12,060	-do-
Assam	4	14,546	-do-
Punjab	7	1,028	-do-
Sind	1	924	-do-

148. Home Political F.R. II half of Sep 1937 File No 18/9/37.

149. Hitvada 10th Sep 1939, pg. 10

The All India statistics in the table given above show that the number of disputes was lower, and lesser number of workers were involved in agitation in C.P. & B. One reason was that the province itself was less industrialized and consequently lesser number of agitations took place.¹⁵⁰

LEGISLATION:

Some major labour legislations were passed by the Congress in the C.P., a portion of them being^{were} passed after learning from the experiences of Bombay, U.P., Madras and other provinces. It also appointed the Textile Labour Inquiry Committees in C.P. and Berar to look into the grievances of the textile labour in the province and for increasing their wages. This was also a result of vigorous pressure put by the Nagpur Textile Labour Union, which was a part of trade union, to appoint such a committee. In doing so, C.P. & B. were in full line with Bombay and U.P. This restored the desired 75% wage cut in Textile Mills and in Empress Mills Nagpur. The restoration was about 77-80%. Thus it gave a relief to the workers of the province.

C.P. Maternity Benefit Act was also a very important legislation passed by the Ministry and it was the first Act of its type in Congress Provinces in 1938. It was later followed by U.P. and on similar lines an Act was devised in other provinces like Bengal. It was a product of the demand made by different labour organizations and Trade Unions.

150. Home Political Deptt File No. 12/4/39. Political weekly summary of labour situation dated 31.3.1939.

It also passed unregulated Factories Act affecting Bidi, Shellack and similar industrial workers and promoting their welfare.

It decided to establish labour office in the Province. It also considered the proposal of appointing a "Bidi Inquiry Committee" for the study of the problems of Bidi workers.¹⁵¹

151. A.I.C.C.P. File No PL-6/1938. Notes on the resolution of the first meeting of the Congress Labour Committee held at Bombay on 14-15 May 1938. Hitvada 10 Sep 1939 pg No.10 Mr Bharuka explains government labour policy.

LEFT:

The leftist activity in the province was not very marked, as most of the leading Congressmen could be described as right wingers. Left wing had a lesser number of ~~its~~ leaders who held important portfolios or were on higher Congress posts. Therefore, their influence was less.

But there was a batch of leftist leaders who were devoted to the cause of socialism and eradication of capitalism. Main among them were R.S. Ruikar, S.Y. Kulkarni, Jagam, Mote, Deshmukh, etc.¹⁵². They were actively involved in propogating leftist ideology in the province and were affiliated to the leftist and socialist parties of the province.

There were many leftist organisations in the province though they can't be termed as very active. The main among them were Congress Socialist Party, the League against Imperialism, the A.I.S.F., the Left Consolidation Board, the Radical Workers' League and the Forward Block which had attracted many socialists and leftists.¹⁵³.

152. Home Political F.R., I half of March 1937, File No. 18/3/37, I half of Aug 1937, File No 18/8/37, I half of Sep 1937, File No 18/9/37, II half of Nov 1937, file No.18/11/37, II half of Jun 1938, file No 18/6/38.

153. Ibid.

Their main object was to bring a socialistic set up in India for which first freedom of India was necessary. Therefore, their main aim was to fight imperialism. They were against office acceptance and opposed Congress "Pro-capitalist activities". They considered that the Congress had become an agent of British imperialism and had imbibed parliamentary mentality and considered it to be favouring capitalism and was for removed from workers' government which they desired.¹⁵⁴ Gandhism and Gandhi himself also came in for criticism. R.S. Ruikar once said "Gandhism was the essence of futility and was quite unable to cope with British Imperialism," and asked people to forget about non-violence. Leftists were also opposed to the Gandhian view^{of} excessive picketing and creation of human wall as against non-violence.¹⁵⁵ The leftists were actually involved in the mobilisation of the working classes and such ideology naturally obstructed their way.

The Congress disciplinarians or the 'Rights' were also not happy with the leftists and opposed to the extreme leftist speeches of their leaders and their anti-Congress speeches. At a private gathering where Mrs Sarojini Naidu was present, a Congress leader said that if Ruikar and other leftists continue their objectionable speeches, the ministry might prosecute them. At other times also ministers in

154. Ibid.

155. Home Political F.R., I half of Jan 1938, File No.18/1/38; II half of Sep 1938, File No.18/9/38
Linlithgow Papers MSS Eur F.125/113 Hyde Gowen to Linlithgow dated 21 Dec 1937 Letter No.49

their public speeches asked people not to be led away by the anti-Congress propoganda of the left wing.¹⁵⁶

They expressed socialistic views and some speakers even expressed extremely communistic views in meetings and organised 'Russian Revolution Day' at Nagpur. S.Y. Kulkarni said that ^{the war} was a suitable time for the workers to unite and throw off the yoke of slavery and India should take advantage of such a situation. Dandekar said that his ambition was to ruin imperialism, eradicate capitalism and establish Bolshevism in India.¹⁵⁷

The main programme undertaken by it were organising lectures of eminent socialists like Mr Masani and Jhabwala, celebration of May Day, Russian Revolution Day, organising labour movement and enlightening peasant and working classes with socialistic ideas. Forward Block and Left Consolidation organised "National Struggle Week" in which several meetings and lectures were organized. Similarly, A.I.S.F. organized "World Today" series in which also, eminent socialists and leftists delivered lectures, etc.¹⁵⁸.

But some times, speakers went so deep into socialist and communist ideas, that it was beyond the understanding of the common man.¹⁵⁹.

156. Home Political I half of Nov 1937, File No.18/11/37. Linlithgow papers MSS Eur F 125/113. Hyde Gowen to Linlithgow dated 25 Oct 1937 Letter No 35.

157. Home Political F.R. I half of May 1938, File No. 18/9/38.

158. Home Political F.R. II half of Nov 1937, Bill No. 18/11/37.

159. Home Political

F.R. first half of am unt of September, 1937. File No. 18/9/37.

Forward Block too was not quite strong in the province. The official view was that the organisation was joined by mostly disgruntled Maharashtrians who joined it to damage the ministry, and half hearted Congressmen joined it for local and regional jealousies. Trade union leaders like R.S. Ruikar joined the movement. In Nagpur, Mr Kedara, a Congressman, the Vice Chancellor was made the President of Forward Block. He was considered a "very unpleasant and unreliable person".¹⁶⁰

Meetings organized for propoganda by Forward Block were generally poorly attended. Its work in C.P. was not important. However, at the meetings it organised, imperialism was denounced, Congress was criticised for imbibing parliamentary mentality, opposed~~ed~~ federation, etc.¹⁶¹

S.C. Bose visited Nagpur in September 1939 and held public meetings. He addressed a crowd of 15,000 and blamed Congress, that by accepting office, it imbibed parliamentary mentality and forgot and the idea of freedom. He said that Gandhi was deceived by a small circle of followers into the belief that the country was not prepared for another civil disobedience movement. Hr addressed meetings at several places in the province and said that India should not participate in next war unless promised to be granted independence.¹⁶²

160. Linlithgow Papers MSS Eur F. 125/60. Francis Wylie to Linlithgow dated 23 June, 1939.

161. Home Political F.R. II half of Aug 1939, Fil No.18/8/39.

162. Ibid.

S.C. Bose and Gandhi's split had a mixed reaction in the province. Mostly pro-Gandhi-school Congressmen were leading in the province, and favoured the decision of ousting S.C. Bose from Congress Committee.¹⁶³ From beginning, the general Congress view towards leftist ideology and leftist leaders like S.C. Bose was of some disaffection. When S.C. Bose was President, and visited Nagpur and opposed federation, and hinted at possible Civil Disobedience Movement, the Ministry and Congress^{workers} did not like his attitude and said that Gandhi would soon knock that sort of stuff out of him and when Gandhi had tackled him he would sound a different tune. The Governor observed that the impression in the Province was that Gandhi wanted to sober Bose as he did Nehru and use him as a break on the growing leftist elements in Congress and this, was the reason why he chose him as the Congress President.¹⁶⁴ It amply reflects that Congress ministry and men strictly opposed their activities and apprehended their growing influence.

163. Hitvada 18 Aug 1939 p;1.

164. Linlithgow Papers MSS Eur F.12b/58, C.P. Governor to Viceroy dated 8th Feb 1938 letter No.99

Chapter-V

CONGRESS MINISTRY AND MUSLIM LEAGUE CONFRONTATIONS

IN CENTRAL PROVINCES AND BERAR (1938-39)

CONGRESS MINISTRY AND MUSLIM LEAGUE CONFRONTATIONS
IN CENTRAL PROVINCES AND BERAR (1935-39)

This chapter discusses the confrontation between the Congress Ministry and the Muslim League in the Province in three parts. The first part deals with the background of the Muslim League in CP, its emergence as a minority party after elections, formation of its identity as a party claiming to represent the interests of the Muslims, confrontations with the Congress Government, intensification of communal tension and consequently its complete alienation from the Congress. The second part analysis the causes leading to the Muslim League's growing support with the help of grass roots expansion and volunteer movements. The third part evaluates the role of the British in the context of the Muslim League and the Congress Ministry in CP & B.

The working of the 1919 Act had contributed powerfully to the process of alienation of the Muslims. This process was accentuated in the following years reaching high water marks with the Communal Award of 1932 and later with the assumption of office in 1937. Throughout the 1920s this Muslim separation was countered by the increasing communal

leaning of a section of the Congress. This consequently led to further Muslim estrangement in the electoral politics of the country.

The Background

In the CP & B the Muslims constituted 4.4 per cent of the entire population. Before 1920 an atmosphere of communal amity existed between the Hindus and Muslims. During the Non-Cooperation and Khilafat days hardly any Hindu-Muslim clash took place. This peaceful combination became a cause of anxiety for the opponents of the political advancement of India who fanned their notorious policy of divide and rule to set one community against the other. As a consequence communalism began to gain ground and to a large extent succeeded in rousing the communal feeling amongst the Hindu and Muslim masses.

The first serious communal riot in CP & B occurred at Nagpur in 1927. In CP & B the Muslims had not taken part in the Civil Disobedience Movement in large numbers and one effect of it was that their alienation from the national movement increased¹ political consciousness among

1 Linlithgow Papers, MSS Eur F.125/60, Letter no.32, Sir Francis Wylie to the Viceroy, dated 22 May 1939.

them had not risen to the level which would have made them throw in their lot with the Congress in the freedom struggle.

As stated earlier upto 1936 there was no unified separate Muslim identity in the CP & B with well defined objectives and ideology. The Muslim community was divided between the groups of M.Y. Shareef and Rauf Shah.² At the call of Jinnah, M.Y. Shareef formed the CP Muslim League in order to contest the Legislative Assembly elections. At the first meeting of CP Muslim League Party the signs of discontent and opposition were visible. The Rauf Shah group objected to the form of the pledge, protested against the selection of the personnel of the board and was suspicious of the whole scheme.³ The cleavage developed further ostensibly as a result of a dispute between Sharif and Rauf Shah over the selection of candidates for Berar and Nagpur constituencies which resulted in the resignation of Abdul Rauf Shah with fourteen of his followers.⁴ Rauf Shah set up a new Muslim Parliamentary Party.

2 Linlithgow Papers, MSS Eur F.125/112, Letter no.3, Hyde Gowan to Linlithgow, dated 10 November 1936.

3 Zaidi A.M. (ed.), Evolution of Muslim Political Thought in India, vol.IV, pp.644-45.

4 Linlithgow Papers, MSS Eur F.125/112, Letter no.3, Hyde Gowan to Linlithgow, dated 10 November 1936; Letter no.5, Hyde Gowan to Linlithgow, dated 9 December 1936.

The gulf between the two groups widened to the extent that all efforts of Jinnah to reconcile the groups failed and he disowned the candidature of all the Muslim candidates. He declared that he could not affiliate either groups to the Muslim League until the results of the elections were out.⁵

In the words of Sunil Chander, "the Hindu communal idiom in Congress was one facet of anti-Muslim propaganda on the ground. Another was the emergence of alignment between congressmen and Hindu Mahasabha."⁶ CP & B was the stronghold of Hindu Mahasabha. Both the communal organisations, the Hindu Mahasabha and the Muslim League, carried on vigorous communal propaganda against each other. In the 1937 elections the Muslim League utilized the separate electorate and fought on clear communal lines. The results confirmed the complete Muslim rejection of the Congress. All the fourteen seats were won by the Muslim groups.

After the declaration of results Jinnah affiliated Rauf Shah's group, which had won eight out of fourteen seats, with the Muslim League.⁷ Vice-President of the

5 Home Political, FR, First-half of December 1936, File No.18/12/1936 I.

6 Chander Sunil, "The Congress Ministries and the British Authorities in the Working of Provincial Autonomy 1936-39 : Aspects of Conflict Between the Congress and the Raj", (Oxford: M.Litt Thesis, 1983).

7 Hitvada, 28 February 1937, p.1.

Rauf Shah group joined hands with E.R. Rao's United Party and formed 'Interim Ministry'.⁸ M.Y. Shareef ultimately joined the Congress and was given Law Ministry in the Congress Cabinet in July 1937.⁹

Though the Muslim groups won all the Muslim seats in CP & B but the Muslim League did not yet enjoy the popular support which it claimed.¹⁰

Interim Ministry:

E.R. Rao formed the interim ministry in CP & B with the help of Independent zamindar elements and Vice-President of Rauf Shah group, S.W.A. Rizvi.¹¹ The Congress Party of CP disfavoured the formation of Interim ministry and observed 1st April 1937, as 'Anti-Constitution Day'. 1 April 1937 was going to be a turning point and the first acid test of

Vice-President

- 8 / Rizvi was made Finance Minister, Hitvada, 2 April 1937, p.1.
- 9 Hitvada, 15 August 1937, p.3.
- 10 It is evident from the fact that a large number of Muslims used to attend Congress meetings, Hitvada, 15 August 1937, p.3; and 29 Sept.1937,p.2.
- 11 Hitvada, 31 March 1937, p.1; and 2 April 1937, p.1.

Hindu Muslim relations in CP & B. Jinnah asked the Muslims not to participate in the hartal.¹² Congress, Muslim League and the British authorities all watched to see what the Muslims would do. But the alienation and separation of Muslims in CP & B from the Congress was complete and they remained completely apathetic towards the hartal.¹³ After the Congress victory in the Legislative Assembly in CP & B this was the first open expression of the Muslim indifference towards the Congress and an effort to prove their separate identity.

After accepting office the Congress Ministry included M.Y. Shareef as Law Minister, this inclusion in the Congress proved beneficial for Muslim mass contact programme in particular and Hindu-Muslim relations in general.¹⁴ He was the most accredited and trusted leader of the Muslims of the CP & B other than the League leaders.

12 Indian Annual Register, 1937, I, Chronicle of Events.

13 Home Political, FR, Second-half of March 1937, File No.18/3/37; Linlithgow Papers, MSS Eur F.125/113, Letter no.17, Hyde Gowan to Linlithgow, "Muhammadans as a class abstained from participating and in Berar seized the opportunity to celebrate the "recognition of the Nizam's rights" instead".

14 Text of Resolutions passed by Nationalist Muslim Conference of CP, AICCP, B-13/1938.

After joining the Congress Cabinet Shareef launched an anti-Muslim League campaign. He accused the League of creating separation among Hindus and Muslims. He made it clear in his speeches that there was no difference between the basic tenets of Congress and Muslim League, therefore there was no viable reason for the Muslims, not joining the Congress. He exhorted the Muslims to join the Congress in the name of Islam which aimed at Independence.¹⁵

The loss of Shareef to the Congress was a severe blow to the newly born Muslim League in CP. The Muslim League started a counter movement against the Congress in particular and Hindus in general. It launched a tirade against the fluctuating policies of the Congress in comparison to the consistent policy of the Muslim League. The Muslim League accused the Congress of disrespecting its holy vow of wrecking the present Government by securing the ministerial salaried jobs under the same Government.¹⁶ They stopped viewing the Congress as a political body but rather ^{as} a tool for the religious supremacy of the Hindu community in the hands of

15 Hitvada, 15 August 1937, p.3; and 29 September 1937, p.2.

16 Hitvada, 29 August 1937, p.14.

Gandhi.¹⁷ It was bitterly critical of Gandhi's Harijan movement which indirectly prevented conversion of backward classes to Islam. Muslims were told by the Muslim League that by joining the Congress they would ^{be} politically converted which would consequently affect their culture.

Mr. Shareef was called a 'kafir' for joining the Congress for the sake of office and thus lowering the position of the Muslim community and the Muslim League in the eyes of the world.¹⁸ Muslim League urged the Muslims not to support the Congress Party and youths were encouraged to join the Muslim League for self-protection.¹⁹ It alleged that the Congress ministry was purely a communal ministry which did not have the consent, approval and co-operation of the Muslims.²⁰ The All India Muslim League

17 Hitvada, 29 August 1937, p.14.

18 Ibid.

19 Home Political, FR, Second-half of August 1937, File No. 18/8/37; First-half of September 1937, File No. 18/9/37.

20 Home Political, File No. 31/30/39 Pub., Firpur Committee Report, Central Provinces and Berar, pp.49-58.

during its session in October 1937 declared a war against the Congress. It passed a resolution on the failure of the Congress provincial governments to safeguard the Muslim interests.²¹

The first confrontation between the Congress ministry and the Muslim League emerged over the question of 'Bande-Mataram' and 'National Flag' immediately after the assumption of office. It accused the Congress of following an exclusively Hindu policy. Resolutions were passed to the effect that no Muslim should stand when the Bande Mataram is being sung in the Assembly, in district branches of the Muslim League.²² The Muslim League condemned the attitude of the Congress foisting anti-Islamic and idolatrous 'Bande Mataram' as the national anthem upon the country in callous disregard of the feelings of the Muslims.²³

The All India Congress Working Committee at once responded and recommended that the first two stanzas of the song should be sung, which describe the beauty and

21 Resolutions, All India Muslim League (hereafter AIML) from October 1937 to December 1938 published by Liaqat Ali Khan, Secretary AIML, Delhi n.d., p.4, Resolution no.7, Aziz (ed.), Muslims Under the Congress Rule (1937-1939), A Documentary Record, vol.I, p.151.

22 Home Political, FR, Second-half of September 1937, File No. 18/9/1937; First-half of October 1937, File No. 18/10/37.

23 Aziz, op.cit., vol.I, p.150.

abundant gifts of the motherland and there was absolutely nothing objectionable which could be taken as a challenge or an offence to any group or community in India.²⁴

But the issue of 'Bande Mataram' proved to be a sensitive point with Muslims at large and it was raised again in 1939 by a congressman Saiyed Kasim Ali. He translated a book 'Mystery of Bande Mataram' which depicted the song as a black communal spot on the Congress image, an impediment in the way of Congress programme of Muslim mass contact and a catalyst in provoking Hindu-Muslim tension in Hyderabad.²⁵ Kasim Ali was duly informed about the Congress Working Committee's resolution of November 1937²⁶, but due to his adamant stand he was expelled from the Central Provinces Congress Party.²⁷

Shareef's exodus was fresh in the Muslim League's memory when another severe blow came in the guise of the Vidya Mandir scheme. The Vidya Mandir scheme was proposed

24 The Indian Annual Register, 1937, (Calcutta, 1938), vol.II, pp.327-28.

25 AICC Papers, p.13(part I) 1938, Booklet on 'Bande Mataram Rahasya' and correspondence of Saiyed Kasim Khan with FCC.

26 Indian Annual Register, 1937 (Calcutta, 1938) vol.III, pp.327-28.

27 AICCP, File no.P-13(part-I) 1938, letter dated 22 June 1938.

by the CP education minister R.S. Shukla. It was based on the 'Wardha Education System' and it contemplated that every village or group of villages within a radius of a mile having no school and having 40 boys and girls of school going age available would have a Vidya Mandir. Medium of instruction would be the mother tongue, so there would be Hindu Vidya Mandirs, Marathi Vidya Mandirs and Urdu Vidya Mandirs. The education imparted would be industrial and agricultural oriented with a national outlook. It was expected that generous tenants or landlords would donate land for Vidya Mandirs.²⁸

The Vidya Mandir education scheme of the Congress Government of CP & B had the full potentialities of attacking the problem of mass illiteracy, if properly organised. But sadly it proved singularly unfortunate and mis-represented the intentions of the CP & B Government. The word 'Mandir' seemed to Muslim communalists an instrument for destroying their culture and identity. The Muslim League totally disapproved of this scheme on the ground that it proposed to adopt the Wardha syllabus which was rejected by the Education Committee appointed by the All India Muslim League.

28 Times of India, 27 January 1938, p.6.

Their view was that the Wardha syllabus avoided the religious and ethical teachings of Islam. The Muslim League feared that the elective system would enable the managing committee of the Vidya Mandir to be a creature of the Hindu majority. Hence no Muslim would be willing to donate land. It had been proposed that since the number of Urdu knowing teachers was scarce, the Hindi and Marathi teachers would be given two months' training in Urdu language to enable them to take up Urdu classes. But the Muslim League considered this ineffective as a teacher would prefer a language in which he was efficient and would find it difficult to teach in other languages.²⁹

The Nationalist Muslim Conference also announced its disapproval of the scheme as it said that it disregarded the educational needs of the Muslims and had the disruptive features which negate the very principles of nationalism and tend to segregate the Muslim and widen the breach which already existed.³⁰

The Congress Government in its various communiques made it clear that 'Mandir' did not imply here 'Temple' but

29 Legislative Assembly Debates, vol. VI, August 1939, pp.782-92, and Vol. VII, November 1939, pp.62-87.

30 AICCP, File No. B-13/1938, Text of Resolutions by CP & B Nationalist Muslim Conference.

'House'. It promised further that the CP & B Government would change the name of 'Urdu Vidya Mandirs' in the interest of communal appeasement.³¹

Communalism like other reactionary movement breeds on the fertile grounds of imaginary wrongs and artificially manufactured atrocities. The word 'Mandir' had been misutilized for creating communal tension. The Provincial Muslim League declared its determination to launch a civil disobedience movement against the Vidya Mandir scheme.³²

A representative of the All India Muslim League came to CP, assessed the situation and came to the conclusion that there was not enough cause for launching the civil disobedience movement.³³ The All India Muslim League passed a resolution on 5 December 1938 deputing Nawabzada Liaquat Ali Khan, honorary Secretary of the All India Muslim League, to visit CP & B and submit his report before the annual session of the League at Patna.³⁴

31 Times of India, 27 January 1938, p.6;
21 March 1938, p.7; and 17 Sept. 1938, p.13.

32 Home Political, FR, Second-half of October 1938,
File No. 18/10/1938; First-half and Second-half of
November 1938, File No. 18/11/38.

33 Linlithgow Papers, MSS Eur F.125/59, Letter no.36,
Francis Wylie to Linlithgow, dated 29 December 1938.

34 Aziz, op.cit., vol.I, p.167.

Against the wishes of the All India Muslim League, the provincial branch of the Muslim League started the civil disobedience movement against the Vidya Mandir scheme in CP & B.³⁵

Anti-Congress feelings were running very high and created an atmosphere of hatred, bitterness and communal tension. An instance may be cited here. In a Muslim League meeting at Nagpur attended by five thousand persons, the League leaders persuaded the Muslims to throw away their Gandhi caps and these were subsequently burnt. Mahatma Gandhi was criticised as aspiring to crush the Muslims and to establish 'Ramrajya'.³⁶

In February 1939 a conference of the Muslim members of CP & B Legislative Assembly, Congress Cabinet and Nawabzada Liaquat Ali Khan was convened to discuss the question of Vidya Mandir scheme and of giving impetus to the Muslim education. In this conference R.S. Shukla reemphasized that the name of the scheme was not intended to hurt the feelings of any community. The syllabus of the scheme was recommended by the Zakir Hussain Committee appointed by the

35 Hitvada, 3 February 1939 , p.9.

36 Home Political, FR, Second-half of September 1938, File No. 18/9/1938.

provincial Government. It was decided that it would be open to Muslims to select any name like 'Anjuman-Madina-tul-ilm' or Baitul-^{-Ilm} for the Urdu schools of Vidya Mandir.³⁷ After the decision the provincial Muslim League withdrew its agitation.

The Vidya Mandir scheme apart, the condition of Urdu education in CP & B, the grants and other facilities provided by the Congress Government were fairly judicious in proportion to the Muslim population.³⁸

Another issue on which CP & B Congress faced the opposition and confrontation of the Muslim League was the Congress programme of 'Muslim mass contact'. The Muslim mass contact programme emerged logically out of the Congress's definite decision against coalition Governments and was also a facet of socialist influence upon the Congress.³⁹ The

37 AICCP, File No. PL-6/1939, Press Communique on the Conference.

38 There were 323 schools exclusively for Muslims, comprising 278 primary schools, 16 anglo-vernacular middle schools, 1 normal school, 22 vernacular middle schools and 6 high schools. The total number of students during the year 1936-37 was 29,513 and the total grant provided by the Government amounted to Rs.29,737.

AICCP, File no. PL-6/1939. A brief note on the steps taken by the Congress Government to safeguard the interests of Muslims in CP & B.

39 Dove Marguirite, Forfeited Future : The Conflict Over Congress Ministries in British India, 1933-37, (Delhi, 1987), p.404.

Congress wanted to win the Muslims, if not in elections but in the mass contact programme.

In CP & B the Congress launched the Muslim mass contact programme with great enthusiasm to win the support of the Muslim masses in rural and urban areas.⁴⁰ It was commenced with a spirit not of essentially enrolling them as Congress members, but of serving them and of opening the ways to the Congress fold.⁴¹ The provincial Congress was instructed to convince the Muslim masses of the Congress ideas, objects and stand against the British rule with the method of speeches and distribution of pamphlets.⁴²

40 AICCP, File No. G-22/1938, Muslim mass contact work circular no.22. The INC President instructed the FCCs to take in hand the work of Muslim mass contact.

AICCP, File No.G-22/1938, Mass contact committees were formed, meetings and speeches were arranged and Muslim primary members were enrolled. In Mahakoshal 1766 members were enrolled and in Nagpur 861 members were enrolled.

AICCP, Misc. File no.49/1938. Durgabai Joshi to President INC, dated 29 June 1937, President MFCC to President INC, dated 31 May 1937, 19 May 1937.

41 AICCP, File No.G-34/1939, Gandhi's draft on the communal question.

42 AICCP, File No. Misc. 54/1937, District Congress mass contact Committee Jabalpur to Manzar Rizvi Esqur., AICC office, Allahabad for sending the literature and pamphlets, dated 27 December 1937. Another letter dated 15 December 1937 from Convenor Muslim mass contact Committee Jabalpur to A.K.M. Ashraf dated 15 December 1937 for sending pamphlets and literature to be distributed among the workers and masses.

The inception of Muslim mass contact programme had shown that the Congress after the elections had realized that it lacked a strong base among Muslims and considered it politically essential to win their support.

But the programme was an utter failure in CP & B and breded an atmosphere of communal acrimony, provoked the Muslim League and consequently intensified communal tension as the League was apprehensive of its success and expressed its reaction in a counter propaganda against the Congress.⁴³ The suppressed annoyance and dissatisfaction over controvertial issues like 'Bande Mataram', 'National Flag', 'Shareef Case', Congress denial of coalition ministry in UP and hundreds of other grievances found outlet in propaganda against the Muslim mass contact programme which in their view aimed at the unconditional surrender of the Muslims at the altar of the Congress.⁴⁴

43 MPCCP, File No. Misc.8/1934-39, Ithad Committee Narsinghpur to President MPCC Jabalpur, undated.

"Ministers were touring all the CP & B in order to exhort Muslims to join the Congress but it had only provoked the Muslim League and is totally unsuccessful in CP & B".

Linlithgow Papers, MSS Eur F.125/113, Letter no.40, Sir Hyde Gowan to Linlithgow, dated 7 October 1937.

44 Home Political, FR, First-half of May 1937, File No.18/5/37; Second-half of October 1937, File No.18/10/37.

One cause of its failure was the half-hearted manner in which it was conducted. It was totally unorganised except for the formal formation of Muslim mass contact committees and enrolment of Muslim primary members. No efforts were made to come into direct contact with Muslims in large numbers.⁴⁵ Official reports also confirmed this- "Little progress was made in Congress attempt to win over Muslim masses".⁴⁶ Another cause was the general indifference and alienation of the Muslim masses which still regarded the Congress as too Hindu an organisation.⁴⁷

Yet another cause can be described in the words of the Governor of CP & B -

"The root cause of failure of Muslim mass contact programme was that a Muslim MLA elected on League or non-Congress ticket had been won over by Congress with the lure of office."⁴⁸

The obvious hint is at M.Y. Shareef who was awarded the Law portfolio in the Congress ministry.

45 AICCP, File No.G-32/1938, p.15.

46 Linlithgow Papers, MSS Eur F.125/113, Letter no.38, dated 21 September 1937. Note of Trivedi, District Commissioner of Chhattisgarh, quoted by Hyde Gowan.

47 Home Political, File No.31/30/39-Pub. Pimpur Committee Report, Central Provinces and Berar, pp.49-58.

48 Linlithgow Papers, MSS Eur F.125/113, Letter no.42, Hyde Gowan to Linlithgow, dated 20 October 1937.

At its outset the Muslim mass contact programme appeared to be going well but afterwards the tide began to turn. Muslim League was critical of the programme since its inception but the anti-Congress propoganda of the League gained new heights when the All India Muslim League passed a resolution instructing the provincial Muslim League to utilise the influence of 'Ulema' in warning the Muslims against joining the Congress as it was disadvantageous from the religious point of view.⁴⁹

Muslim League rejected the Muslim mass contact programme adopted by the Congress on the basis that the Congress, by means of its powerful press and purse, wanted to cause disruption and division of the Muslim community, with the object of deceiving the world into the belief that it was the sole representative organisation of entire India.⁵⁰

The failure of Muslim mass contact programme was well reflected in the results of bye-elections of Muslim constituencies of Satgore and Narsinghpur. In Sangor and Narsinghpur the Congress had no Muslim volunteers for campaigning. It had to take the help of Rafi Ahmed Kidwai

49 Aziz, op.cit., vol.II, pp.46-47.

50 Ibid., pp.63-65.

and Muslim volunteers were imported from UP to campaign for Congress candidate in Muslim constituency.⁵¹ The Congress propaganda was confined to political and economic issues, whereas the Muslim League laid emphasis on the purely communal aspects. Consequently the League candidate won the Sangor-Narsinghpur constituency.⁵²

Another significant and important issue of Congress and Muslim League confrontation was the 'Hyderabad agitation'. This agitation was started as a movement to secure redress of restrictions on the free practice of their religion by the Hindus in the Hyderabad State. It was controlled by militant Hindu communal organisations as the 'Hindu Mahasabha' and the 'Arya Samaj'. The Hindu Mahasabha had a stronghold in CP and Berar.

The CP government, because of the peculiar way Berar was situated, could be made a base for curbing the agitation but had been completely non-cooperative and refused to give any help or information regarding jathas etc. to Hyderabad authorities. The CP government was reluctant to take any

51 AICCP, File No. Misc.38/1937, DCC Sangor CP to Dr. Ashraf, dated 28 January 1938.
AICCP, File No. G-22/1938, Report on Muslim mass contact work.

52 Linlithgow Papers, MSS Eur F-125/58, Letter no.17a, Hyde Gowan to Linlithgow, dated 22 February 1938.
Home Political, FR, First-half of February 1938, File No. 18/2/1938.

action against the violent speeches of Hindu Mahasabha leaders and congressmen. The Speaker of the CP & B Legislative Assembly G.S. Gupta was one of the ardent supporters of the agitation.⁵³ Four jathas (groups) of Hindu Mahasabha volunteers were sent from CP & B to agitate against the Nizam's Government.

The clandestine help of CP Government to Hyderabad agitation proved indirectly an incentive to the agitation and resulted in the aggravation of Hindu-Muslim tension in CP & B. Satyagrahis were assaulted during 'Prabhat Pheris'. The Muslim League started a fervently anti-Congress and anti-Hindu propaanda which resulted in atrocities, communal clashes and riots. The Muslim League immediately recruited volunteers for protection. If Hindus organised 'Prabhat Pheris' to enlist the support for the Hyderabad agitation, Muslims retaliated by taking out 'Night Pheris'.⁵⁴

- 53 Home Political, File No.42/3/39. Political, A report on Hyderabad agitation prepared by the Intelligence Bureau dated 9 May 1939.
Home Political, FR, First-half of November 1938
 File No.18/11/38; Second-half of December 1938;
 File No.18/12/38; First-half of August 1939,
 File No.18/8/39.
- 54 Home Political, FR,
 Second-half of February 1939, File No. 18/2/39;
 First and second-half of March, 1939, File No. 18/3/39;
 First-half of May 1939, File No. 18/5/39;
 First-half of August 1939, File No. 18/8/39;
Home Political File No. 42/3/39, A report on
 Hyderabad agitation prepared by Intelligence Bureau,
 dated 9 May 1939.

During the two years of Congress ministry in CP & B the Hindu-Muslim relationship remained always surcharged with communal strains emerging out of the issues of Congress and Muslim League confrontations. The Muslim League always needed an apology to stir the communal feelings of the Muslim masses. It got an opportunity again when the only Muslim minister in the Congress cabinet was expelled from the Congress.* It gave a fillip to the most mischievous and disruptive propaganda by an antagonistic Muslim League.⁵⁵

Previously when Shareef was included in the Congress cabinet the League was critical of the Congress for trapping a Muslim by the lure of office. After Shareef's resignation many months passed but no Muslim minister was included in the cabinet. The Muslims instead of being contented, again started crying now for the inclusion of a Muslim member. Nationalist Muslims demanded the vacant seat to be filled by a Muslim only, to rehabilitate the Muslim mass contact movement and confidence of the Nationalist Muslims.⁵⁶

* Because he, i.e., Shareef, as Law Minister showed leniency to a fellow Muslim convicted of a brutal offence on a Hindu girl.

55 Linlithgow Papers, MSS Eur F.125/58, Letter no.25, dated 23 March 1938.

56 AICCP, File No.B-11/1938, Resolutions passed by the Nationalist Muslim Conference, published in The Star, 24 July 1938.
AICCP, File No.G-34/1939, A meeting of the Muslims of Itarasi, dated 12/4/39.

As a consequence of the failure of the Muslim mass contact programme, resignation of Shareef, Hyderabad agitation, Hindu Sabha and Muslim League propaganda, tension intensified. This aggravated Hindu Muslim tension resulted in ~~the~~ Jabalpur, Mandla and Sangor riots during the Holi and Muharram festivals.⁵⁷ Throughout the ministry period I have come across the two phrases: (a) Anti-Muslim/Anti-Hindu campaign; (b) Communal clashes or tension, if not in all then in every second fortnightly report.⁵⁸ With the passing of years the frequency of such references increased.

Pirpur Committee Report:⁵⁹

The Pirpur Committee conducted an enquiry into the Muslim grievances in the Congress Provinces. Regarding CP and Berar it contended that the Muslims in no other province had suffered so much as in CP & B where they

57 Home Political, File No.5/6/38 - Political, Note on Jabalpur riot.
Linlithgow Papers, MSS Eur 125/58, Letter nos. 25,55,56, CP Governor to the Viceroy, dated 23 March 1938, 20 March 1939 and 23 March 1939.

58 Home Political, FR, all the fortnightly reports of the CP & B from July 1937 to September 1939.

59 The following 8 paragraphs will be under the same foot note.
Home Political, File no.31/30/39 - Pub., Pirpur Committee Report, CP & B, pp.49-58.

formed a very small minority, were poor and educationally backward.

The Congress Government was accused of deliberately engaging in actions and policies that offended the religious sentiments of Muslims. Among the issues raised by the Pirpur report were the singing of Bande Mataram in Vidya Mandir schools, Muslim boys forced to offer prayers before the goddess Saraswati, attacks on the religious rights of Muslims to slaughter cows, pro-Hindu tendencies of the Congress Government, no Muslim representation in local bodies and debt conciliation boards, suppression of the Urdu language and ~~ruining of~~ Muslim culture in toto.⁶⁰ All these accusations implied that Hindus, Hindu communalism and Congress Government were all synonymous. This report was inclined to suggest that the general policy of the Government has not been conducive to the creation of a peaceful atmosphere.

The Congress Government of CP & B was also accused of discrimination against Urdu and of efforts to impose

60 Home Political, File no.31/30/39, Pub.,
Pirpur Committee Report CP & B, pp.49-58.

Hindi on Muslims. The Muslims spoke Urdu and the imparting of education in Hindi would lead to their cultural degradation and would place Muslim students at a disadvantage in competition with Hindu boys who were receiving education in their mother tongue.⁶¹ It alleged that the CP & B Government was reluctant to open Urdu schools and was also not ready to give grant to them. The Congress was accused of adopting the policy of indirectly systematically converting the whole Muslim population into a Hindi-speaking entity at the cost of their culture. It had abolished Urdu schools in Betul and the district had been converted into a compulsory education area where the Government had provided for expenditure with the express condition that the medium of instruction would be only Hindi.⁶²

The Vidya Mandir scheme introduced by the CP & B Government was criticised on the ground that the word 'Mandir' connoting idol worship went against the tenets of Islam and was repulsive to the Muslims. It alleged that

61 Home Political, File No.31/30/39 - Pub.,
Pirpur Committee Report CP & B, pp.49-58.

62 Home Political, FR, Second-half of December 1938,
File no.18/12/38.

Vidya Mandir scheme did not only neglect Urdu but in actual practice Urdu had been entirely extinguished.

The Pirpur Committee report tried to 'expose' the high handedness and hostility of the Congress regime towards the Muslims. It alleged that the Congress Government provided large sums of money to Hindu Communal Institutions like 'Hanuman Akhara' which worked as a training ground for the Mahasabha. After Congress' rise to power the Government had stopped the amount that used to be paid to Muhammed Ali Serai and transferred it to 'Shradhanand Asthan'.

It criticised the dual policy of the Congress regarding simultaneous membership of Congress and communal parties. It alleged that while a Hindu could enlist himself as a member of the Mahasabha and the Congress at one and the same time, no Muslim could become a member both of the Congress and League. Hindu Mahasabha meetings and lectures were often attended by the Congress ministers and workers.⁶³

The report accused the CP & B Congress ministry of conniving with Hindu mobs who tried to prevent the Muslims

63 Home Political, File no.31/30/39 - Pub.,
Pirpur Committee Report CP & B, pp.49-58.

from exercising their religious and cultural rights. It alleged that there were deeper reasons for the communal tensions, outbreaks and riots and even suggested the participation of some responsible members of the Congress Party. Causes leading to the riots such as stone throwing, Hindus placing obstacles to Tazias, music before Mosque and boycott of Muslim festivals were pre-arranged, it said, and had the consent of the Congress ministry which strengthened the Muslim view that the Congress Government implied 'Hindu Raj'.⁶⁴

Thus the Pirpur Committee report sought to embarrass the Congress Government and also instilled in Muslims the fear that under 'Hindu Raj' they would always be a weak, powerless and oppressed community.

After the Pirpur Committee Report came A.K. Fazlul Haq's personal production of "Muslim sufferings under Congress rule"⁶⁵ which also dealt with the Muslim charges against the Congress ministry in CP & B. It accused the Congress ministry of its incapability to protect the interests of Muslims and of its pro-Hindu policy which

64 Ibid.

65 Fazlul Haq, A.K., "Muslim Sufferings Under Congress Rule, December 1939", in Aziz (ed.), Muslims Under the Congress Rule 1937-1939, A Documentary Record, vol.II, pp.414-19.

allows rather tacitly the unfettered virulent anti-Muslim propaganda of Hindu Mahasabha, boycott of Muslim trade and business, desecration of Muslim worshipping places, imposition of taxes and fees for sale, purchase or slaughters of cattle, stopping the grants to Urdu Schools, prosecution of Muslim subordinates by Hindu officials, harassment of Muslim agriculturists by Hindu Patels and Patwaris, forcible singing of Bande Mataram, release of Hindu murderers of the Muslims immediately after the assumption of office by the Congress Party and biased investigations conducted by the Congress ministry in communal riots' cases which always prosecutes the Muslims and releases the Hindus.

Fazlul Haq's report concluded with a focus on the supposedly grave outrages committed on the helpless Muslims living surrounded and outnumbered by Hindus and suffering in consequence. The Muslims during the Congress regime were condemned to live in terror, it said, and to suffer these atrocities while the law moved tardily or did not move at all.⁶⁶

66 Fazlul Haq, A.K., "Muslim Suffering under Congress Rule, December 1939", in Aziz (ed.), op.cit., vol.II, pp.414-19.

The Congress ministry of R.S. Shukla denied all the charges of Haq as a 'Himalaya of lies'.⁶⁷ But Dr. N. B. Khare disclosed the pro-Hindu leanings of the CP & B Congress ministry by citing three instances related to his Premiership. Those were the following:

- (a) Transfer of Deputy Superintendent of Police Niaz Ahmad investigating the famous Hasina kidnapping case where Misra was involved;
- (b) Victimization of a Muslim officer by forcing Dr. Khare not to confirm him;
- (c) The famous Shareef case in which he was expelled from the Congress Party and Misra in a similar situation was retained in the Party just on the apology letter simply on the basis that Shareef was a Muslim and Misra was a Hindu.⁶⁸

The Provincial Government issued a lengthy note refuting the allegations of the Pirpur Committee report regarding the persecution of Muslims in the CP & B. It alleged that

67 The Star of India, Bombay, 16 January 1940, in Aziz (ed.), op.cit., vol.I, pp.134-35.

68 Ibid., pp.134-35.

the Muslim League was trying to manufacture an agitation out of vacuum.⁶⁹

The Congress Government held all the allegations made by the Pirpur Committee report as without any foundation and cautioned the Muslims that their wild allegations would not deflect the Congress Government from the hitherto pursued policy of justice and fairplay towards the Muslim community.⁷⁰ British official opinion also quickly perceived in private that all the allegations were baseless and without any effect.⁷¹

The breakout of Second World War had a restraining influence on the communal situation.⁷² After the ministry dissolved, the All India Muslim League observed 'Day of Deliverance' on the complete failure of the scheme of provincial autonomy.⁷³

69 AICCP, File No. PL-6/1937-39, dated 9 February 1939, CP & B Government Press Note.

70 Ibid.

71 Linlithgow Papers, MSS Eur F.125/60, Letter no.66, Francis Wylie to Linlithgow, dated 18 April 1939.

72 Home Political FR, Second-half of October 1939, File no.18/10/39; First-half of September 1939, File no.18/9/39.

73 Home Political, FR, First and Second-half of December 1939, File no.18/12/39; K.K. Aziz, op.cit., vol.II, p.116.

Ground Level Activism:

In CP & B the ground level activism manifested in Hindu and Muslim volunteer movements increased tremendously both in strength and volume during the ministry period.

These volunteer movements were communal in nature and emphasised on the military or semi-military training of the volunteers. The dangers of this tendency were potentially great.⁷⁴

Elements in Muslim Activism:

From the Wahabis to the Khilafatists grass-root activism had played a significant role in the politicisation of Muslims. In a few years time common purpose between the Khilafatists and Congressmen evaporated and they turned into communal rivals. During this time the Muslim participation in the Congress tradition had significantly declined and the leaders of the Khilafat movement found themselves caught among contending forces - Nationalist organisations like the Congress and Jamat-i-Ulema-i-Hind

74 Home Political, File no.4/2/39 - Pol.,
Notes on the volunteer movements in India.

and Muslim organisations like the Muslim League.⁷⁵

The late 1930s saw the growth of a new kind of Muslim activism, the 'Khaksars'⁷⁶ who addressed themselves primarily to the social and religious concerns of Muslims by launching a programme of mobilization. They soon got involved in political action and contributed indirectly to the emergence of the Muslim League as a popular party.

To begin with there were no institutional links between the League and the Khaksars. But gradually their similarity of concerns brought them together and prompted the League to build-up its popular base.

The Khaksars were a closely built body under the stern control of their leader Inayatullah Mashrigi. They derived their inspiration primarily from the leader who exercised a general control over the movement, partly through the emissaries in various parts of the country but chiefly through 'Al Islah', a journal.

75 Haq, M.U., Muslim Politics in Modern India, 1857-1947, (Meerut: Meenakshi Prakashan, 1970), p.139.

76 Home Political, File No.92/39 - Poll., All India Survey of the Khaksar movement, dated 11 July 1939.
The next four paragraphs would come under the same foot-note.

In the CP & B the Khaksar movement started in 1936-37 in Nagpur and Hoshangabad and soon spread to other places. The Arya Samaj and Hindu Mahasabha led the 'Hyderabad Agitation' against the Hyderabad State, which became the indirect cause of the Khaksars gaining a foothold in the CP.⁷⁷ Their strength rose to 1200. The principal centres of Khaksar activity were Nagapur, Amravati, Ellichpur and Paratwada. Maksud Ali Beg, a landlord of Ellichpur, district Amravati, was the provincial organiser and leader of the Khaksar movement in Berar. Other prominent leaders were Muhammad Ibrahim Sherar, Pleader of Ellichpur, Ahmadullah, ex-Sub-Inspector of Police, Nagpur, Muhammad Azim, school master of Ellichpur and Ismail, hotel keeper of Paratwada. But, however, no evidence is available of the Khaksars prominently interfering in the agitation against the State.

The Khaksars offered the Muslims an opportunity for raising a Volunteer Corps of their own. In a Muslim minority province like CP the Khaksar movement appeared to have been seized upon as a ready means of ensuring communal solidarity.

77 Home Political, FR,
 Second-half of August 1939, File no. 18/8/39;
 Second-half of May 1939, File no. 18/5/39;
 First-half of October 1939, File no. 18/10/39.

The Muslim League had no specific volunteers of its own in the CP & B but some other Muslim Volunteer Corps like Khilafat Committee Volunteer Corps and Central Board of Muslim Volunteer Corps were active.⁷⁸ Tabliq Committee and Nagpur Muslim Association were also actively influential in the Muslim community. Both the institutions were communal in nature and were involved in the conversion of depressed classes into Islam.⁷⁹

The Muslim League realized the importance of building up mass support. The membership fee was lowered from one rupee to two annas and it opened a number of branches in various parts of the province.⁸⁰ The reaction to Hindu communal institutions such as 'Akhadas', Muslim League also established a Mohammadan 'Akhada' in Basim⁸¹ and added a new strand to Muslim activism.

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- 78 Home Political, File no.4/2/39 - Pol.
Notes on the volunteer movement in India.
- 79 Home Political, FR,
First-half of February 1936, File no.18/2/36;
First-half of March 1936, File no.18/3/36.
- 80 Home Political, FR,
Second-half of February, 1938 File no.18/2/38;
First-half of November, 1937, File no.18/11/37;
First-half of January, 1938, File no.18/1/38.
- 81 Home Political, FR,
Second-half of January, 1938, File no.18/1/38.

Elements in Hindu Activism:

Organisations such as the Hindu Mahasabha, Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh, Mahabir Dal, the Hanuman Prasarak Mandal, Balbkim Vijayam Shala and Hanuman Akhadars were distinct Hindu communalists in their orientation and character. During the ministry period they were quite active on the ground and maintained an aggressive public presence in the CP & B.⁸²

Most significantly active among them were the Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS. RSS was a well-organised Hindu volunteer corp. It was essentially an anti-Muslim organisation aiming at the exclusive Hindu supremacy in the country. It was opposed to the idea of non-violence. The organisation had the full support of the Hindu Mahasabha which gave it recognition in the year 1932.⁸³ The CP & B were the strong forts of both the Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS. The RSS was formed at Nagpur in 1925 by Dr. K.B. Hedgewar and had its headquarters at Nagpur.

82 Home Political, File no. 4/2/39 - Pol.,
Notes on the volunteer movements in India.
Hitvada, 20 January 1939, p.3.

83 Home Political, File no. 92/39 - Pol.,
Notes on the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh and the
Khaksar movement.

In the CP the Sangh was most active. On special occasions of the Ganapati and Dassehra festivals, the Sangh held a ceremonial worship of arms and a review of volunteers. Gradually it also started taking interest in the political movement as a result of which the CP & B Government issued orders advising the Government Servants of the communal and political nature of the Sangh and at the same time forbidding them to become members or to participate in any of the activities of the organisation.⁸⁴

The Sangh was extremely communal in nature. It used to take a prominent part in celebrating Dassehra in several towns in Nagpur and Berar divisions. In Dassehra greatly provocative and aggressively communal speeches were made asserting that the Hindus as a majority community should have complete control of the affairs of India.⁸⁵ In 1937 the Sangh had 3,000 members on its roll and had 60 branches in Berar alone. It expanded to just double within two years. In 1939 its membership rose to 6,000.⁸⁶ This Hindu

84 Home Political, File no.92/39, Notes of RSS and Khaksar movements.

85 Ibid.

86 Hitvada, 4 April 1937, p.3;
Home Political, FR, Second-half of May 1939,
 File no.18/5/39;
Home Political, File no.4/2/39 - Pol.,
 Notes on the volunteer movement in India.

organisation was originally chiefly concerned with physical culture. It had its own uniform and flag and dummy guns. In 1939, 400 volunteers at a time were getting training at Amravati.

These Hindu communal organisations' volunteers were given to using evocative military idiom and glorifying the aspects of Hindu tradition and mythology. They also claimed a special concern for the social and religious life of the Hindus and were actively hostile towards the Muslims and the League. They also claimed that Congress was turning anti-Hindu to appease the Muslims.⁸⁷

87 Many branches of the Hindu Mahasabha came up which were involved in Congress and anti-Muslim propaganda.

Home Political, FR,
 First-half of August 1939, File no.18/8/39;
 First-half and Second-half
 of September 1939, File no.18/9/39;
 Second-half of February, 1939, File no.18/2/39;

Anti-Muslim and anti-Congress activities of the Hindu Mahasabha, ~~and~~ and various 'Akhadas'.

Home Political, FR,
 First-half of August 1939, File no.18/8/39;
 First and Second-half of
 September 1939, File no.18/9/39;
 Second-half of February 1939, File no.18/2/39;
Times of India, 27 April 1938, p.11.

Home Political, FR,
 First-half of October 1937, File no.18/10/37;
 Second-half of November 1937, File no.18/11/37;
 Second-half of December 1937, File no.18/12/37;
 Second-half of March 1938, File no.18/3/38;
 Second-half of May 1938, File no.18/5/38;
 Second-half of December 1938, File no.18/12/38;
 Second-half of February 1939, File no.18/2/39;
 First-half of July, 1939, File no.18/7/39;
 First-half of December 1939, File no.18/12/39.

The Muslim League responded to such exhortations by calling for counter measures to preserve Muslim identity and interests.⁸⁸ In the prevailing communalised atmosphere the Hindu Muslim counter propaganda was potent ammunition for provoking communal clashes.

The Congress aggressively criticised what it called the League's reactionary and communal methods. But it could do little to reorganise and built its own support among the Muslims. Specific incidents of discrimination against Muslims by high handed local Congressmen, only further alienated Muslims from the Congress.⁸⁹

At a more popular level Congress attempts to win Muslim support through Muslim mass contact programme proved to be counter productive. In comparison to the Congress, the Muslim League was turning increasingly and

88 Home Political, FR,
 First-half of January 1938, File no.18/1/38;
 Second-half of May 1939, File no.18/5/39;
 First half of October 1937, File no.18/10/37;
 First-half of November 1937, File no.18/11/37.

89 Linlithgow Papers, MSS Eur F.125/107,
 Letter no.223a, Sir Francis Wylie's to Linlithgow,
 dated 24 December 1939.

successfully to techniques of propaganda and politicisation through grass-roots organisation.⁹⁰

British authorities, Muslim League and
the Congress Government:

During the election campaign of 1936-37 the British Government tried to arrest the Congress tide which they had underestimated at first. Their old allies suffered ignominious defeats in the Congress Provinces. The authorities

90 "Congress organisation at the moment are generally not well organised or centrally controlled, although their numbers have reached considerable proportions... By contrast the Muslim League organisation seems to be better and has the advantage of some form of central control. The obvious dangers of two rival bodies such as these vieing with each other in strengthening their volunteer organisations cannot be overemphasised. Moreover the present lack of strong discipline, control and leadership could not fail to react seriously at the time of crisis."

Home Political, File no.4/2/39 - Pol.,
Notes on the volunteer movement in India.

explored an alternative possibility. They looked round for a powerful force which could counter the increasing Congress mobilization and found it in the League's mobilization of the Muslim masses .

In their experience of provincial autonomy the British authorities became increasingly aware of the weight of the Congress Party behind the Congress ministries. The resurgence of the ground level activism of the Congress added another dimension to this awareness. This was the context in which the British authorities began to take notice of the Muslim League. As the League extended its challenge to its main rival the authorities discovered a new approach to the Congress. Conflict in Provincial autonomy provided an important context for the shaping of the British Raj's relation with the Muslim League.⁹¹ Although

91 Previously the British officials looked for an ally in E.R. Rao and expected the victory of the Independents for a solid opposition to the Congress in the Legislative Assembly. Linlithgow Papers, MSS Eur F.125/112, Letter no.11, and Letter no.3, Hyde Gowan to Linlithgow, dated 14th February 1937 and 10th November 1936 respectively.

the political loyalties of both the communities were not cent-percent and the Congress attempted to build Muslim support, the British officials constantly emphasized that the Congress was a 'Hindu Party' and the 'Muslim League' was the sole representative of the entire Muslim population.

In practice there was no dearth of evidence for communal Hindu influence in the Congress. Instances could be found of insensitivity, intolerance and interference towards the Muslims among congressmen and provincial Congress leaders.⁹² But the evidence of counterveiling influences

92 In the following two letters Francis Wylie characterized the education minister R.S. Shukla as a "communalist through the core".
Linlithgow Papers, MSS Eur F.125/60, Letter no.75, and Letter no.55, Sir Francis Wylie to Linlithgow, dated 8 August 1938 and 20 March 1939 respectively.

Many instances were cited by Sir Francis Wylie regarding pro-Hindu bias of the Congress ministers mainly in communal matters related to (a) Hoshangabad Pan Case, (b) Chander Biswa Case, (c) Transfer of Muslim officials, (d) Withdrawal of cases against Hindus, (e) Prosecution of Muslims.

Linlithgow Papers, MSS Eur F.125/60, Letter no.66, dated 18 April 1939.

"Whenever opportunity offers the Government funds and Government agencies are used for Congress propaganda and that too frequently this propaganda has a strongly pro-Hindu flavour."

Linlithgow Papers, MSS Eur F.125/60, Letter no.66, Sir Francis Wylie to Linlithgow, dated 18 April 1939.

was also compelling. Ironically this too the Governor recognized.

Such recognition was reflected significantly in the Governor's reactions to the Muslim League's allegations against the Congress ministries. The nature of the League's criticism of the ministry emerged out of the fear of perpetual Hindu domination concluding in complete elimination of Muslim culture.⁹³

The Pirpur report in particular constructed a most comprehensive denouncement of the Congress Ministry. The main charge levelled against it was that the Congress was incapable of representing or safeguarding Muslim interests. Conversely the Muslim League presented itself as the champion of the Muslims under grave threat from the Congress' Hindu Rule. The Pirpur report was just one element in the League's constant propaganda against the Hindu character of the Congress. In their public speeches, bye-election campaigns, press and representations to the British authorities, the League emphasised the same message over and over again.

93 Home Political, File no.31/30/39 - Pub.,
Pirpur Committee Report, CP & B, pp.49-58.

The British authorities admitted in private that the League's claims were often without any substantive factual basis. "In this Province the Muslims really had no cause for complaint"... "it is the galling thought that their communal opponents are in political domination over them, that hurts most and it is this feeling which leads them to make sometimes quite baseless accusations."⁹⁴ They confessed that Muslim grievances were not genuine but a reflection of a feeling of dissatisfaction which often presented itself guised in the pretext of Congress programme like the 'Vidya Mandir scheme' to provide a necessary peg for a considerable agitation.⁹⁵ In their own circular the British authorities infact absolved the Congress ministry of much of the League's criticism.

"It is untrue that Muslims do not get a fair share of public appointments in the CP & B. The reality is that Muslims have a share far beyond the percentage to which they would be entitled on a population basis. They have some 22% of public appointments in the province whereas they form only 4% of the population."⁹⁶

94 Linlithgow Papers, MSS Eur F.125/60, letter no.66, & 82, Francis Wylie to Linlithgow, dated 18 April 1939 and 22 May 1939.

95 Ibid., Letter no.36, Sir Francis Wylie to Linlithgow, dated 29 December 1938.

96 Ibid., Letter no.66, Sir Francis Wylie to Linlithgow, dated 18 April 1939.

They held the League and the Hindu Mahasabha responsible for preaching communalism and creating communal tension in the province.⁹⁷ The communal agitation carried on in CP & B was not purely provincial but conceived and generated by the All India organisation of both the Hindu Mahasabha and the Muslim League with the help of their volunteer bodies. They were encouraged to do so as the Congress had given full freedom of speech to all the parties. The Governor of CP & B clearly stated in his letter to Linlithgow that organised efforts were made to create disturbances in order to turn the people against the Congress ministry.⁹⁸ He suggested imposition of a ban on volunteer organisations like the RSS and Khaksar movement, which helped to create rather than curb the communal tension and riots. He also proposed 'Goonda Act' to restrain most of the trouble.⁹⁹

97 Linlithgow Papers, MSS Eur F.125/60, Letter no.82, Sir Francis Wylie to Linlithgow, dated 22 May 1939.

98 Ibid.

99 Ibid.

The Governor of CP & B also believed that despite the fact that the Muslim League held that injustice towards the Muslims was a very crucial aspect of Congress rule, it really did not have that much to be worried about since it could rely, firstly, on the force of public opinion, for the Congress ministry would not dare to be too openly and blatantly communal, and secondly, on the power of the Governor to save them.¹⁰⁰

After the Congress resigned in 1939 the India Office asked the provinces to examine the Congress record on Muslim minorities as comprehensively as possible. The general conclusion that emerged from this exercise was that the ministries had not displayed an anti-Muslim pro-Hindu bias, though there had been a few lapses.¹⁰¹

The British officialdom had always counted on the strong support of their local allies. In CP & B they encouraged E.R. Rao who was hostile to the Congress.¹⁰²

100 Linlithgow Papers, MSS Eur F.125/60, Letter no.66, Sir Francis Wylie to Linlithgow, dated 18 April 1939.

101 Ibid., F.125/107, Letter no.223aa, Sir Francis Wylie to Linlithgow, dated 24 Dec. 1939.

102 Ibid., F.125/112, Letter no.11 and 3, Hyde Gowan to Linlithgow, dated 14 February 1937, and 10 November 1936 respectively.

Muslim League's intense opposition to the Congress ministry was a reason potent enough to encourage the British authorities to extend a friendly hand towards them. The conditions and manner in which the League worked provided a new focus for the political identity of the Muslims. The relationship of Muslim League with British authorities cannot be seen without its connections with the Congress in office.

Conclusion

On the eve of 1937 elections the Muslim League did not even exist in Central Provinces and Berar. The Muslim groups did not contest the elections on the Muslim League ticket but independently. The Muslim League was formed after the declaration of election results by the Rauf Shah group which won more seats than M.Y. Shareef's group. Its emergence, formation, consolidation and expansion in CP & Berar took place during the twentyeight months of Congress rule. Within a short span of time, however, its emergence as a political party in the province, claiming to represent the Muslim interests attracts our attention.

One significant cause of its rapid development was manifested in its confrontations with the Congress Party.

The Congress being a majority party was constituted mainly of Hindus. The Muslim League treated acceptance of office as tantamount to the establishment of Hindu Raj over the Muslims. The apprehension of being minority community under the tyranny of a Hindu Raj led to an abandonment of all rationality. The imaginative fears and suspicions about the Congress Ministry led to their confrontation with the Congress. Every move of the Congress, however logical and rational, was seen by the Muslim League in communal shades and this contributed to the growth of communal tension. The Muslim League fully exploited each situation which gave them even a slight opportunity to prove that the Congress was a Hindu communal body. It availed the opportunity to malign the Congress over the issues of National Flag, Bande Matram, Vidhya Mandir scheme and Hyderabad agitation. Vidhya Mandir scheme became a communal controversy, as Muslims objected to the name 'Vidya Mandir', despite the fact that it was made clear that the word Mandir did not mean a Hindu Temple in that context. The programme of Muslim mass contact, inspite of all good intentions, also served to heighten tension since it was projected by Muslim League as an attempt to wean away Muslims to a 'Hindu' body, the Congress.

Muslim grass-roots activism also gained strength during the ministry period. This trend was furthered by the consistent communal propaganda that carried on by the Hindu communal bodies and volunteer movements which were quite powerful in CP & B, since ~~communalism~~, a sort of competition started between the two, reflected in "night pheris" and opening of "Muslim Akhadas" by the Muslims as an answer to the Hindu "phrabhat pheris" and akhadas of Hindus. Provocation by volunteer organisations often generated outbreak of violence and riots.

The Congress attitude on the whole was secular but the inclination or softness of some individual congressmen towards Hindu communalism affected the Congress image in Muslim eyes. The Muslims complained of the local congressmen's and Congress workers' Hindu bias and accused Congressmen of favouring Hindu candidates while distributing the election tickets for the municipal committees.¹⁰³

The British policy towards Muslim League and its confrontation with the Congress ministry was peculiar in its

103 AICCP, File no. P-22(part-II)/1938.
Complaint of a Muslim candidate of Jalagaon taluqa to Kriplani, dated 17 August 1938.
Appeal of Muslim Congress member of Digras taluqa, dated 17 August 1938.

duality. In public, they blamed the Congress leaders and ministers for adopting a communal bias against Muslims. In private, however, they admitted the baselessness and exaggeration of Muslim fears and self-imposed tyranny of Hindu Raj. Their judgement of Congress and Muslim League relationship was influenced by their own imperial interests.

Thus by 1939, the Muslim League had emerged as a powerful Muslim political party and the alienation of a large section of Muslims from the Congress Party was complete.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION

We shall attempt in this chapter an assessment of the experience of the election campaign of 1936-37, the process of ministry formation in 1937, and the activities of the Congress and other organisations during the period of the Congress Ministry from 1937-39.

During the period of the election campaign, we find that the first problem that confronted the Congress was selection of candidates. There was an inevitable period of conflict within the organisation as different groups tried to secure tickets for their candidates. While this gave rise to considerable dimension and conflict, the basic strength of the organisation was reflected in the fact that once the wrangling was over and tickets were distributed, the organisation closed its ranks and worked unitedly to secure a victory for the party.

During the campaign, the main planks of the Congress programme were freedom from British rule and measures for ameliorating the conditions of the masses, especially peasants and workers. The methods used for propaganda were newspapers, pamphlets, and especially tours by

leaders, both local and national. As elsewhere in the country, Jawaharlal Nehru was the most popular and large crowds attended his meetings. The tremendous power of Gandhi's name was also revealed in the campaign. The tremendous impact of the election campaign in extending mass consciousness and arousing hopes of change is shown by the fact that in many areas peasants stopped paying revenue and rent, and on election days people shook their fists in the face of officials who manned the polling booths as if to tell them that their days were over.

Once the Congress formed the ministry, it quickly undertook the tasks of legislative reform and welfare in various spheres. A significant tenancy legislation was passed which extended to tenants the right to purchase proprietary rights. Debt legislation and legislation for extending workers' rights were also passed, including a Maternity Leave Bill for women workers which was the only one of its kind in the country. The extension of civil liberties by the Ministry contributed in no small way to the upsurge in mass political activity witnessed in this period. The release of political prisoners and jail reforms were two measures that the Ministry took which were intended to improve the situation in which political workers carried on their activity.

Several other welfare measures were also undertaken by the Congress Ministry. Prohibition of intoxicating drinks ^{was} ~~were~~ one of the most important and popular of these.

In the field of education, the emphasis on primary education, the emphasis on primary education, and the introduction of the Vidhya Mandir scheme, which combined private and government initiative, were very significant measures were also undertaken for Harijan welfare, including greater facilities for their education and legal removal of social disabilities sanctioned by tradition. Schemes for rural uplift were also started.

However, as important a feature of this period as the legislative measures was the mass mobilisation and mass activity witnessed among different sections of the population. Among peasants, for example, both the Congress and the Kisan Sabha were active in mobilisation and agitation and even leading struggles against specific zamindars. Congress activity among Kisans, however, tended to decline over the period whereas Kisan Sabha activity showed an increase. Among labour, there was a considerable mass upsurge, partly no doubt a result of the expanded civil liberties and the aroused hopes. The number of strikes that took place in almost all kinds of industries was significant, and in many of these the Congress Minister and other leaders played a role in bringing about a settlement. The organisations that were important among labour were the Congress and the Trade Union Congress. Besides, the Congress also carried on considerable mass mobilisation around other issues and

programmes such as prohibition, Harijan welfare, Vidhya Mandir scheme, and release of political prisoners. Thus in many spheres, there was a successful combination of legislative and mass activity, a task not easy for a party in power to perform.

However, the period was not one of glory or achievements alone. Conflicts, dissensions and problems were there as well. One problem was the dissensions within the Congress organisation, some of which were based on regional rivalries and others on personal or factional ones, the ~~most~~ extreme manifestation being the Khare crisis. This, as we have shown above, caused considerable tension within the Congress and led to a loss of its prestige in the province and the country, despite the fact that it was ultimately resolved in favour of the unity of the organisation. Other instances of organizational weakness, such as the problem of Congress memberships, also come to light in this period. But on the whole the organisation succeeded, despite these weaknesses, in maintaining its essential discipline and unity.

Another major problem faced by the Congress was on the communal front. The Muslim League was determined to use every opportunity, real and imaginary, to advance its position and the Congress was thus always on the defensive. Even innocent measures such as the Vidhya Mandir scheme were misinterpreted, and its attempts

at Muslim mass contact treated as hostile acts. The pro-Hindu bias of some individual Congressmen gave a further fillip to Muslim communal propoganda against Congress. Activities of Hindu communal groups contributed their own mite to the accentuation of the communal problem and the alienation of the Muslims.

The Congress faced some problems on the Kisan and labour front as well. High expectations aroused by the formation of the first popular ministry could naturally not be fulfilled in toto, and some disillusionment and criticism was inevitable. But at times, the highly critical tone adopted by the Kisan Sabha and labour organisations, as well as direct methods like marches on the state capital, led to friction between the Congress and these organisations. As in the case of the Muslim League, those organisations which had no constraints of running a government could afford the freedom of making unbridled criticism, a luxury the Congress could no longer afford.

The relationship of the Congress with the bureaucracy was also bedevilled with problems. The bureaucracy was naturally averse to sharing power with the Congress, the organisation that they had continuously treated as an enemy. They tried, therefore, to strengthen the hands of those groups and individuals on whose loyalty they could rely. Thus, during the election campaign, they

helped E.R. Rao and other independents. They also had a similar attitude towards the Muslim League, since it could help them to keep the Congress in check. Even while recognising in private that the Congress had on the whole behaved in a non-communal fashion, they took a different posture in public. Similarly, at a personal plane, the Governor Francis Wylie recognised the beneficial aspects of the tenancy legislation passed by the Congress, but this would not form a part of the public stand on the Congress Ministry.

In conclusion, it seems possible to assert that despite the many problems and weaknesses that surfaced in this period, the Congress was able to advance the national cause by forming a ministry in the C.P.& B. It kept itself reasonably free of the pitfalls and lures of office, remained fair on the communal front, brought in important welfare measures and advanced the process of mass mobilisation. The people benefitted from the extension of civil liberties and breathed in a free atmosphere. Their fear of government officials was lessened, they grew more confident of their own strength and were inspired by the experience of having had 'their own government' in power, something which the British had said they were not capable of doing as a people.

A P P E N D I X

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

1. Abhyankar Moreshwar Vasudeo - Born 1886, died 1935, joined Swarjists 1920; imprisoned 1930-32; joined Hindu Mahasabha 1922, left in 1927; President Harijan Seva Mandal; called 'Nar Kesari'.
2. Aney Madhav Shrikasi - Born 1880, died 1968; Vice President Home Rule League; joined Swarajya Party 1923; Swarajya party member in Central Legislative Assembly 1924-26; Secretary Nationalist party; member A.I.C.C. 1920-30, A.I.C.W. 1924-25, Imprisoned 1930; Acting President I.N.C. 1933; joined Viceroy's council 1941; Member C.P. Legislative Assembly 1937; High Commissioner Ceylon 1943-47; Member constituent assembly 1945, Governor of Bihar 1948, Member Lok Sabha 1959.
3. Awari Manchersha - Born 1898, imprisoned 1921; led Shastra andolan 1924, 1930-32; organised Republican Army 1932; Member A.I.C.C. President Nagpur Nagar C.C.; Independent member M.P. Legislative Assembly 1952; Labour leader popularly known as "General Awari".
4. Bajaj Jamnalal - Born 1889, died 1942; rich marwari follower of Gandhi 1915, participated Non-cooperative Movement 1921, Flag Styagrah 1923; imprisoned 1923; founded Gandhi Seva Sangh 1924; President Nagpur P.C.C. 1929, President Jaipur State Praja Mandal 1938.

5. Biyani Baijlal - Born 1896, died 1968, imprisoned 1930; 1921, member provincial legislative 1926-29; President Vidharbha P.C.C. 1935-1948; member A.I.C.C. President Berar Congress Parliamentary committee, led Free Berar Movement, called "Vidharbha Kesari".
6. Chauhan Subhadra Kumari - Born 1904, died 1948; first woman satyagrahi in the country; imprisoned 1923, 1940, 1942, member C.P. legislative assembly in 1936, 1946.
7. Deshmukh Punjabrao Shemrao - Born 1898 died 1968, education minister C.P.B. legislature 1930, founded Shivaji Education Society 1931; founded Shetkari Sangh and many other agricultural organisations; member Lok Sabha 1952- 1957; Minister (Central) for agriculture 1962, member A.I.C.C. 1952.
8. Deshmukh Ramrao Madhavrao - Born 1892. Member Central Provinces Legislature 1920, 1923, on Swarajya party ticket; minister Responsivist party ministry 1927; returned to Congress 1932; member C.P.B. Legislature 1937; founder president of Nationalist Party 1931-1935; High commissioner in South Africa; a staunch Tilakite.
9. Sir Hyde Gowen - Born 1878 died 1938. Entered I.C.S. 1902 under Secretary to Governor of the Central Provinces and Berar 1904-1908; financial Secretary 1918-1921, 1925-1926, chief secretary 1927-32, member of Executive Council 1932-33, Governor of the Central Provinces and Berar 1933-38.
10. Hedqwar Keshavrao Baliram Dr. - Born 1889, died 1940; founder of R.S.S. 1925, imprisoned 1921, 1931;

11. Kale Anusayabai - Born 1896 died 1958, member C.P. Legislative Council 1928; member international Labour Organisation 1929; imprisoned 1931; member A.I.C.C. 1932, president Nagpur P.C.C. 1935, member C.P.B. Legislature 1937, Deputy Speaker C.P.B. legislature 1937, member Lok Sabha 1952, 1957.
12. Khare Narayan Bhaskar Dr - Born 1882. Follower of Tilak, imprisoned 1930, member of legislative assembly (Indian) Premier C.P.B. legislature 1937-38; de-throned by Shukla 1938; Khare crisis, named member Viceroy's executive council 1943; president All India Hindu Mahasabha 1944, 1950, 1951.
13. Misra Dwarka Prasad (Pandit) - Born 1901 died 1988; joined Congress 1921; member Swarajya party; imprisoned 1930-31, 1942, minister C.P. legislative assembly 1937, 1946, Chief Minister of M.P. 1986 .
14. Moonje Balakrishna Shivaram Dr - Born 1872, died 1948 follower of Tilak, participated in Swadeshi movement 1906, imprisoned 1907, 1921, in Forest Satyagrah; member Swarajya party, member Responsive Party; President Hindu Mahasabha 1927-1933; concluded pact with Harijan leader Mr Raja; formed Hindu Military Education Society 1937.
15. Ranka Poonamchand - Born 1878 died 1973 closed down his business of foreign cloth 1921; financed flag Satyagrah; imprisoned 1930, 1932, 1942, president Nagpur P.C.C. for thirteen years leading role in Vidharbha movement in early fifties.

16. Rao Raghvendra E. Dr. - Born 1889, died 1942; joined Home rule Movement 1917; elected president of Hindi C.P. Provincial Congress Committee 1921; C.P. Swarajya Party got majority under Rao's leadership 1923; formed independent Congress party in C.P.B. 1926; formed Nationalist party 1927, Home Minister C.P. 1930; Acting Governor of C.P. 1936, member C.P.B. legislative assembly 1937, premier interim ministry April to July 1937, advisor to Secretary of State for India 1939; Civil Defence Minister in the Viceroy's executive Council 1947.
17. Ruikar Ramchandra Sakharan - Born 1895 died 1954; Trade Union leader; president A.I.T.U.C. 1932, 1935, first president Hind Mazdoor Sabha 1948, ardent supporter of forward block, member M.P. legislative assembly 1946; imprisoned 1930, 1936, 1942-45.
18. Seth Govind Das - Born 1896, member Central Assembly 1923, 1934, imprisoned 1930, 1931, 1942, visited South Africa 1934, President Hindi Sahitya Sammelan 1950; author of many Hindi literary books.
19. Shukla Ravi Shanker - Born 1878, imprisoned 1921, 1930, 1931, 1941 and 1942; member of C.P. legislative council 1922; Swarajya party member in legislative council 1924, 1926, education minister in first Congress ministry 1937-38; premier C.P.B. 1938-39; 1946, Chief Minister of M.P. till his death in 1956.
20. Singh Awadesh Pratap (Captain) - Born 1888 died 1967 Lieutenant Rewa State Army 1906, member Anarchist Party 1907; imprisoned 1921, 1931, 1932, 1942; President M.P.C.C.C. 1937; member constituent assembly 1946-50; prime Minister of Vidya Pradesh 1948-49; member Rajya Sabha 1954-60
21. Singh Thakur Pyare Lal - Born 1891 died 1954; pioneer of organised labour movement in country; managed longest labourer's strike in Rajnandgaon; organised

Jhanda Satyagrah 1923; imprisoned 1930, 1932; secretary M.P.C.C. 1933-1937; member C.P. legislative assembly 1937; minister in C.P. legislative assembly during Khare crises 1938, Bhodan movement in C.P. 1956.

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