FOR A MARXIST PERSPECTIVE

I. EVALUATION OF INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS

The Indian National Congress as an organization had a not insignificant place in the emergent anti-imperialist front comprising the left-wing Congressmen and the revolutionary organizations including the Communist Party. But in evaluating the exact place of the Congress, two distinct approaches surfaced in the anti-imperialist front. The Communist Party was the most important organization which represented one of these approaches, while the other approach was represented by the Congress Socialist Party.

Each of these thoughts had its own part to play in determining the direction of the anti-imperialist movement which had developed in strength both before and during the Second World War. Even inside the Communist Party, there were reflections of these two mutually conflicting
trends of opinion and it was, in fact, the clash between these two trends within the Communist Party which led to the split in the Party about three decades later.

It may be noted that in the early years of the Communist International, there were similarly two approaches on the question of building the working class revolutionary movement in the colonial countries, including India. M. N. Roy argued that since capitalism was developing in the colonial countries and since the classes representing capitalism were striving to further develop by bringing a rapprochement with colonialism, the task of the communists in the colonial countries was to fight against the indigenous bourgeoisie. Opposing Roy's arguments, Lenin asserted in the colonial commission of the Second Congress of the International that although capitalism was developing in the colonial countries and the task of communists in these countries was to organize the working class on a revolutionary basis, colonialism was a burden which had to be borne by all sections of the people including the bourgeoisie. Therefore, the working class as an independent political force should organize the majority of the people, especially the peasants, on a revolutionary basis and, at the same time, make maximum use of the anti-imperialist mentality being expressed by the bourgeoisie.

The peasantry has a vital role to play in bringing this Leninist tactics into practice. Looking from the class point of view, the peasantry is a part of the bourgeoisie, although they are subject to oppression and exploitation by indigenous feudalism and foreign imperialist domination. As the slogan “Land to the Tiller” indicates, they desire to abolish the feudal property rights on land (instrument of production) and to establish the property rights of the peasantry. This desire draws them to the struggle against feudalism and imperialism. Although this struggle is not for socialism, alliance with peasantry would help the working class to earn a powerful ally in its fights against its class enemy. Therefore, communists in the colonial countries should take upon to
themselves the task of organizing the rural poor yearning to own piece of land, under the leadership of the working class.

If the communists were able to accomplish this task, the working class would be able to rise as a class capable of strengthening the anti-imperialist movement making use of the contradiction between the colonialists and the indigenous bourgeoisie and, at the same time, of exposing effectively and opposing the waverings and treacheries of the bourgeoisie in the anti-imperialist struggle. In other words, the working class, standing independent of and working against the bourgeoisie must rise to the leadership of the poor including the peasantry and join hands with the bourgeoisie in the fight against imperialist domination.

From the very outset, the Communists had been working in accordance with this tactics. As part of this, they had succeeded to a great extent in exposing the bourgeois leaders, including Gandhi, and others holding social democratic views.

However, the communists committed certain grave errors in the process of putting into practice this tactics which was formulated by the Communist International under the personal leadership of Lenin. The organ of the International, Inprecor, wrote in its issue of 3rd March 1935 that Indian communists committed a number of errors on the question of participation in the anti-imperialist struggle and that they took a number of wrong actions. The article pointed out that these were particularly manifest during the struggle of 1930 when new sections of the people were entering in it with petty bourgeois notions, with a tendency to blindly trusting the bourgeoisie. In this situation, Communists should not confine only to giving a call for an anti-imperialist and anti-feudal revolution. Rather, they should enter among the masses waging the struggle and try to draw them to their side. They should bring into practice the revolutionary tactics of united front giving importance to the needs of the anti-imperialist struggle and to its concrete slogans. As a result of the failure in this task, the struggle against national
moderatism remained separated from the struggle against imperialism and for the realization of the immediate demands of the peasantry. Thus, the activities Communists should have conducted among the workers who were coming under the influence of national moderatism were obstructed and remained weakened. It also weakened the work they should have undertaken inside the trade unions organized by the moderate leadership. The inability to link the task of standing in the forefront of the people engaged actively in the anti-imperialist struggle with the struggle against national moderatism facilitated the growth of sectarian views and tendencies which were yet to be defeated.

What has been stated above relates to the views and tendencies which had gained strength not only in the Communist Party of India, but in the world communist movement as well. The Seventh Congress of the Communist International gave a powerful call for a struggle against these views and tendencies. Georgi Dimitrov stated in his historic report to the Seventh Congress of the International:

Sectarianism finds expression particularly in overestimating the revolutionization of the masses, in overestimating the speed at which they are abandoning the positions of reformism, in attempts to leap over difficult stages and over-complicated tasks of the movement. Methods of leading the masses have in practice been frequently replaced by the methods of leading a narrow party group. The power of the traditional contacts between the masses and their organizations and leaders has been underestimated, and when the masses did not break off these contacts immediately, the attitudes taken towards them was just as harsh as that adopted towards their reactionary leaders. Tactics and slogans have tended to become stereotyped for all countries, and the special features of the specific conditions in each individual country have been left out of account. The necessity of stubborn struggle in the very midst of the masses themselves to win their confidence has tended to be ignored...."
Although the Salt Satyagraha and other struggles that followed it were devised under the leadership of the bourgeoisie with a feudal-medieval outlook, millions of people came forward to participate in these struggles and challenge the imperialist domination. The Communists in those days were engaged themselves in merely exposing the policies and programmes of the bourgeois leaders including Gandhi without participating in these struggles and sharing their bitter experience. The result was that the bourgeois leadership and the people were getting closer to each other. The same Inprecor article referred to above pointed out that unless strong actions were taken to wipe out this sectarian disease, Communists would not be able to strengthen their influence on the people and to lead the workers, peasants and the urban poor who were turning rapidly towards revolutionary attitude to the path of the revolutionary organizations of a higher form.

Rectifying this error, the Communists were formulating in 1935 the policy of effectively participating in the anti-imperialist struggles led by the Congress. However, with the emergence of the Congress Socialist Party, a non-sectarian, apparently anti-sectarian trend of thought developed in the anti-imperialist camp. The opinion that the Communists had started rectifying the errors they had been committing hitherto had begun to emerge in the leadership of the Congress Socialists. To an extent, this created an atmosphere for Communists and Congress Socialists to work together. But, in the midst of these joint activities also surfaced differences in approach between them.

We have noted that it was the Communists who had consistently and uncompromisingly opposed the policies of the bourgeois national leadership including Gandhi and exposed their class character. The emergence of the Congress Socialist Party was an open recognition of the correctness of these criticisms and exposures. Among the Congressmen who effectively opposed the Gandhian leadership in the 1934 Bombay session of the Congress and in the AICC meeting
that preceded it, the Congress Socialist played a highly significant role. In these meetings, Jayaprakash Narayan and other Congress Socialists strongly protested against both the bourgeois parliamentarianism and Gandhism. That was why the Congress leadership looked upon the emergence of the Congress Socialist Party with suspicion and animosity.

As pointed out in the document of the Communist International, a considerable section of the people who entered the movement through the struggles of 1930s came with petty-bourgeois ideas and confidence in the bourgeois leadership. This was true of the Congress Socialists also. In the voice of protest they raised against bourgeois parliamentarianism and Gandhism also contained a tendency of compromise with bourgeois parliamentarianism and Gandhism as well as confidence in the bourgeois leadership. This was evident in the records of the proceedings of the Bombay Conference (October 1934) of the Congress Socialist Party as well as in the very condition set up by the Party that every Congress Socialist must be a Congressman.

The main document adopted by the Conference declared that the aim of the Congress Socialist Party was to get the Indian National Congress adopt socialism as its objective and to transform it into a socialist organization. Basic to the declaration of this objective was the hope that the Congress could be converted into an organization fighting for socialism, just as the Congress had adopted the objective of Full Independence in 1925 after changing the leadership earlier from Tilak to Gandhi. Thus, they thought that with the strength of the “class struggle” through trade unions, peasant unions and other mass organizations, the Congress could be used as the platform for the struggle for national independence. It was a part of this strategy that the constitution of the Party made membership in the Congress a condition for eligibility of membership in the Congress Socialist Party.

It can be seen that this is totally devoid of any concept of class struggle. For them class struggle is an economic struggle conducted through trade unions and other mass
organizations. Behind this lay hidden the thinking that class relations have no relevance in the struggle for independence. The Congress Socialists refused to perceive the fact that the bourgeoisie and the working class were in conflict with each other even in the freedom struggle, that the bourgeois political leadership exerted influence not only on the peasantry and other sections of petty bourgeois elements, but also on the rear section of the working class and that the task of the communists and socialists was to rally the masses in the anti-imperialist revolutionary camp through struggles against the influence of the bourgeoisie. They expected that the Indian National Congress, the instrument of struggle of the bourgeoisie and which emerged out the development of the bourgeoisie, would turn itself into an instrument for socialism.

The Communist could not but oppose these views. Exposing the approach of the Congress Socialists of transforming the Congress into a socialist organization, the Communists said that the Congress was the political party of the bourgeoisie and it would be a self-deception and a betrayal of the people to attempt to make it accept socialism. They further pointed out that the task of communists and socialists was to effectively oppose the vacillations and deceptiveness of the Congress by organizing the ranks as well as the anti-imperialist elements in its leadership.

In other words, both the policy being pursued by the Communists since 1930 of merely exposing orally the bourgeoisie without joining the struggles led by the bourgeoisie and the policy of the Congress Socialists working with the illusion of turning the Congress into a socialist organization without perceiving the class character of that organization had to be rectified. The concept of anti-imperialist front was, in fact, a result of the process of this rectification and the Lucknow session of the Congress held in April 1936 was the culmination of this process.
II. BACKGROUND OF THE LUCKNOW SESSION

Like the Lahore session held in 1929, the Lucknow session of the Congress was a turning point in the history of Indian Freedom movement. While the Lahore session adopted the objective of Full Independence under the pressure of leftists inside and outside the Congress, the Lucknow session adopted a clear anti-imperialist programme to achieve that objective. Significantly, Jawaharlal Nehru who was the president of the Congress at the time of the Lahore session, presided over the Lucknow session. Again, as in the case of his Lahore presidential speech which gave expression to the feelings of the supporters of Full Independence, the presidential speech of Nehru at the Lucknow session gave expression to the feelings of the anti-imperialist revolutionaries, including the Communists and Congress Socialists.

We have noted earlier that, although Nehru was elected president of the Congress for the Lahore session and the period following it, his leftist followers found no place in the Working Committee. But as compared with the Lahore session, the influence of the leftists was demonstrated more strongly in the Lucknow session and this was reflected in the composition of the Working Committee. Thus, out of 15 members elected to the Committee, only 10 belonged to the right-wing. Of the remaining five, three were prominent Congress Socialists, viz., Jayaprakash Narayan, Acharya Narendra Dev and Achyut Patwardhan. In addition, Subhas Bose who was in prison was also elected to the Working Committee. These four and Jawaharlal Nehru had one way or the other held leftist outlook. Thus for the first time the voice of the leftists began to be heard right inside the leadership of the Congress.

Efforts have been made consciously by some to attribute these political changes to Nehru’s personality and to his personal leadership. If one studies only his speeches and articles, it is natural that one may get this impression. No
one can deny the personal contributions he has made for the emergence and growth of the anti-imperialist front. However, it would be absurd to maintain that it was because of his contribution alone that the front had emerged. The truth is that even in his absence, the front had begun to emerge, and that it had considerably helped for the development of Nehru's personality.

We have made reference in some details to the reorganization of the Communist Party, the emergence of the Congress Socialist Party and their mutual criticisms with regard to their policies and approaches to different political issues. Here we shall mention specifically certain significant changes that had come about in the policies of these parties in 1935 as a result of these developments.

As we have noted in the previous section, the Communist Party had been in effect taking the sectarian attitude of opposing the entire Congress without making a discrimination between the bourgeois leadership of the Congress and its ranks. The Communist Party decided to put an end to this and to become the activists of the Congress in order to draw the ranks of the Congress as well as the common people behind it into the anti-imperialist front.

Almost in the same period, the Congress Socialist Party also made changes in its basic outlook and policies. The Party gave up the objective of transforming the Congress into a socialist organization and adopted the outlook of converting it into an anti-imperialist organization. The process of this change in outlook started in the beginning of 1935 (about six months after its first all-India conference) and ended with its Meerut conference in the beginning of 1936.

Even before the Meerut conference of the Congress Socialist Party, the relationship between the Socialists and Communists had become one of cooperation which was extended from the work of organizing the left inside the Congress against its right-wing leadership to areas of workers, peasants and students organizations. The political rethinking that took place in the Communist Party before and
after the Seventh Congress of the Communist International helped this process. As a result of all this, the second all-India conference of the Congress Socialist Party adopted a new "thesis" setting certain urgent tasks before the Party, such as unification of all the anti-imperialist forces, joining hands with other leftist forces which stood in the forefront of this work and strengthening the organization of workers, peasants and other sections of the people. These programmes represented the attempt being made to rectify the errors contained in the programmes formulated in the Party’s first conference. In addition, the thesis also contained an outlook based on Marxism-Leninism in place of the vague idea of socialism contained in the earlier programme.

However, many socialist leaders like Jayaprakash Narayan were inwardly in disagreement with the general perspective and approach contained in the Meerut Thesis. This disagreement, in fact, led later to intra-party struggles among the Congress Socialists on the one hand and to fierce conflicts between the Party and the Communist Party. Nevertheless, the Meerut Thesis was a clear indication to the fact that the Congress Socialist leadership did recognize at least to an extent the changes that were taking place in the international and national politics. Besides, these developments prepared the ground for cooperation between the Congress Socialist Party and the Communist Party at least for the time being. Immediately before and after the Meerut conference, the General Secretary of the Congress Socialist Party, Jayaprakash Narayan and the Communist Party General Secretary, P. C. Joshi, held talks with each other and arrived at an understanding on the question of "transforming the Congress into a national united front".

It must be noted that while these developments were taking place, Nehru was either in prison or he was in Europe in connection with the medical treatment of his ailing wife Kamala Nehru, preventing him from taking part in active politics. However, these developments did effect certain changes in him. We have already referred earlier to the articles
he had written during the short period he was out of the prison in 1933. Nehru said: "I do believe that fundamentally the choice before the world today is between some form of Communism and some form of Fascism... one has to choose between the two and I choose the Communist ideal."  

Nehru expressed the same opinion in his presidential address in the Lucknow session of the Congress. Earlier, he formed his opinion on the basis of information collected through newspapers and journals. But his stay in Europe in 1935 provided him opportunities to study these problems rather closely. There he also got an opportunity to meet and discuss with Ben Bradley who had spent some years in the Indian prison in connection with the Meerut Conspiracy Case and with another British Communist R Palme Dutt. S. Gopal, the biographer of Nehru, stated:

He (Nehru) agreed that the Congress was, on the whole, moving towards the right, but was himself willing to work in close collaboration with communists. He was not well read in Marxism but was persuaded of its vitality and emotionally inclines toward it. He also had a deep admiration for the achievements of the Soviet Union. Russia was the land of future....Civil liberties to Jawaharlal was of absolute value, and the communists had to reckon with this.  

In other words, Nehru desired the kind of economic and social transformations that the Soviet Union was undergoing to take place in India and other countries in the world 'without the use of force'. He did not accept class struggle, the basic principle of Marxism-Leninism, its logical conclusions of dictatorship of the proletariat, etc.

Here one can perceive both the agreement and disagreement between a top ranking Congress leader like Nehru and the Communists. As compared to 1929, Nehru came

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1 Quoted in R. C. Majumdar (ed), The History and Culture Indian People, vol II, Bombay, Bharatiya Vidyapith, 1969, p. 558.

closer to the Communists. The rise of fascism and the role played by Communists in the fight against it brought him to take this position. At the same time, he believed that the Congress led by Gandhi was the only organization capable of carrying forward successfully the struggle for India’s national independence. Nehru assured Bradley and Dutt that he was prepared to cooperate with the Communist Party, provided the Communists realized this fact and worked accordingly.

Following these talks, an article entitled “The anti-imperialist People’s Front in India” under the joint authorship of Dutt and Bradely appeared in Labour Monthly in March 1936. In the article they stated that although the Congress was the main mass organization of the different sections of people striving for national liberation, it had not yet risen as the united front of the Indian people. The article pointed out that if it had to rise to that position, the constitution, programme and the leadership of the Congress had to change. The article further suggested that the organizations of the workers and peasants and other mass organizations must either be brought into a fighting front associated with the Congress or they must be affiliated to the Congress. At the local, district, provincial and all-India levels, these organizations must be given collective membership and a united fighting organization formed immediately with their participation.

Further, the article also suggested an organizational form in which the ranks would be able to take better initiative in place of the centralized organization with the domination of the Working Committee. That is, there must be democratic centralization, instead of a leadership of the individual.

In sum, the Congress as a whole must be reformed making its function more democratic with better position for the labouring masses. The Dutt-Bradley article also contained suggestions with regard to the Gandhian non-violence and the approach the Congress must take towards the constitutional reforms enacted by the British government.
These were the suggestions acceptable not only to the Communists but also to other leftists. Nehru had indicated in his *Autobiography* that the contents of this article were acceptable to him. In any case, he had included the objectives and slogans contained in the Dutt-Bradley article in his presidential address at the Lucknow session.

But many of these suggestions turned out to be the target of attack from the right-wing leadership of the Congress and certain others were accepted by them. The spokesmen of the left-wing forcefully argued for those suggestions which were rejected by the right-wing, for which they had the backing of a considerable section of the delegates. However, those suggestions which were opposed by the right-wing were rejected by the session.

There was a significant difference between the situation now and that prevailed in the Bombay session held a year and a half ago. There was not one leftist leader in the Congress with Nehru's stature in the Bombay session, whereas now the voices of the left were heard right through the presidential address.

One of the reasons for this situation was, of course, the personal contribution made by Nehru. But it would have been impossible for Nehru to take such a clear stand, nor would have been the right-wing leadership compelled to listen to him, had there not been the kind of changes in the international and national politics we have described above.

III. NEHRU’S MARXISM AND INDIAN BOURGEOISIE

As we have seen in the preceding section, many thought that Jawaharlal Nehru had been showing leanings towards communism in the early 1930s. In particular, basing on the articles Nehru had written in this period and on his speeches and press interviews, Bipan Chandra stated that the years
1933-36 constituted the period in which he was in "his most 'Marxist' phase'.

Bipan Chandra tried to establish that rather than talking vaguely about socialism, Nehru expressed faith in class struggle, the cornerstone of Marxism, and emphasized that it was a fact of life and not the creation of some agitators and philosophers. Bipan Chadra also pointed out that Nehru accepted the Marxist theory of state as well as the necessity of revolutionary struggle against this oppressive instrument of the exploiting classes. This was also the period, according to him, in which Nehru's estrangement with the bourgeois ideologies and policies including Gandhism, reached its peak, as evidenced by his presidential address at the Lucknow session of the Congress.

We have noted that Gandhi and other right-wing Congress leaders had been endeavouring to negotiate and arrive at a compromise with the Viceroy following the failure of the 1932 struggle. Bipan Chandra has pointed out that in parallel to and as part of these attempts, the Indian industrialist G. D. Birla had conducted negotiations with the rulers with the blessings of Gandhi. Birla directly and Gandhi indirectly through Birla had assured the British that Congress, regardless of objections, was prepared to bring into force the constitutional reforms in India. But Nehru and the left-wing Congressmen led by him were opposed to this, Bipan Chandra pointed out.

The main political problem which came up before the Lucknow session was the attitude of Congress towards the constitutional reforms. Although the Congress was opposed to the reforms, it did not formulate a programme of boycott of the legislature as it did in the case of the 1919 reforms. The futility of the boycott programme and the subsequent formation of the Swaraj Party earlier had taught the Congressmen including Gandhi a lesson.

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Even the left-wing Congressmen who expressed emotional opposition to the adoption of the parliamentary programme by the leadership in 1934 did not demand boycott of elections that were going to be held in accordance with the provisions of the new constitution. Instead, they suggested adopting a policy of obstructionist tactics inside the legislature and organizing agitations outside it.

The question arose if the Congress would go in for forming ministries in the provinces in the event it obtained majority in the legislatures after the elections. The right-wing Congressmen argued that the formation of ministries was the logical extension of participation in the elections. They thought that accepting office would further strengthen the Congress, which would enable them to bargain with the authorities in a better way. However, this policy was forcefully opposed by the left-wing. They feared that if the Congress accepted office, it would lose the character of a fighting organization it had acquired. They also feared that instead of fighting against the British imperialism, the Congress ministers, as part of the British administrative machinery, would be compelled to take actions against the people. This opinion was in fact expressed by Nehru in his Lucknow presidential address. Nehru stated:

Behind it (acceptance of office) lies, somewhat hidden, the question of independence and whether we seek revolutionary changes in India or are working for part reforms under the aegis of British imperialism...To accept office and ministry, under the conditions of the Act, is to negative our rejection of it, and to stand self-condemned. National honour and self-respect cannot accept this position, for it would inevitably mean our cooperation, in some measure with the repressive apparatus of imperialism, and we would become partners in this repression and in the exploitation of our people. 4

There was a related organizational problem. Nehru supported in his presidential address the leftist proposal to democratize the Congress by giving collective affiliation to the workers’ and peasants’ and other mass organizations and by assigning active roles to the Congress units at the lowest level and to the ordinary Congressmen. The opposition to the acceptance of office and the proposals for democratization of the Congress constituted a political and organizational challenge to the right-wing leadership. Bipan Chandra points out that Nehru’s merit in the period 1933-36 consisted in that he acted as the spokesman of Communists, Socialists and other leftist Congressmen in raising this challenge.

According to Bipan Chandra, it was not an expression of the contradiction between bourgeois ideology and socialism, but a conflict between two approaches in regard to the freedom struggle. He says: “…he (Nehru) challenged the basic nationalist political strategy followed by the Congress leadership since the 1880s—i.e., the strategy of advancing towards political power and independence by stages arrived at through a series of compromises to be forced on the colonial power through the application of ever-increasing political pressure. …I have described this strategy as that of Pressure—Compromise—Pressure....”

Bipan Chandra’s analysis was as follows: “In the concrete Indian political situation of 1934-36, the dominant congress leadership and the leadership of the Indian capitalist class felt that the stage of pressure or active struggle was over and the stage of compromise, co-operation, and ‘good-will’ had to be ushered in. They had been quietly working towards a political compromise, in fact, since the end of 1933, for the civil disobedience movement had definitely petered out by that time....Gandhi and dominant right-wing leadership of the Congress strained all their nerves to prevent the Congress form adopting a policy of office-rejection... This was very clearly brought out by the encouragement

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5 Bipan Chandra, op cit. p. 1309
that Gandhi gave to G. D. Birla to bring about a spirit of mutual trust and ‘personal touch’ between the rulers and the Congress leadership in general and Gandhi in particular".6

Bipan Chandra tries to make it appear that the approach of the spokesman of the leftists, Nehru, was a counter to this tactics of the bourgeoisic. The opposition to the acceptance of office, according to Bipan Chandra, was in fact an opposition to the tactics of compromise. The indication here is that Nehru and his associates were trying to adopt a tactics of “pressure-victory” (i.e., uncompromising struggles till the victory is achieved) in place of the ‘pressure—compromise—pressure’ tactics adopted by Gandhi and other right-wing Congress leaders.

The facts we have presented so far would show that this analysis is basically erroneous. The constantly developing bourgeoisie had been striving to exert more and more pressure on imperialism and to acquire more and more powers making use of this pressure. The adoption of the “extremist” programme under the leadership of Tilak and later of the “non-violent non-cooperation programme” under Gandhi’s leadership by the Congress originally started as a moderate organization were developments that revealed this truth. As indicated in the preceding chapters, it was as part of implementing this same programme that the Congress proceeded along the line of the formation of the Swaraj Party, the initiative taken by the left-wing Congressmen for the adoption of Purna Swaraj and the consequent Lahore session, the civil disobedience movement that followed and so on.

It was as part of the same strategy that Nehru’s name was proposed by Gandhi himself as the president of the Lahore session. And he was again made the president at the Lucknow session by Gandhi and the right-wing leadership. As we are going to see in the following pages, the same right-wing leadership extended the presidency of Nehru for another year and appointed another leader of the left-wing, Subhas

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6 Ibid.
Bose to succeed Nehru. It must be mentioned specifically that it was not on account of the pressure from the left-wing that the right-wing leadership appointed leftists consecutively for three years; it was on its own free will. Why did the leadership make such a choice? In order to find an answer to this question, we would have to establish that the very basis of Bipan Chandra’s analyses was wrong.

First, it is not consistent with facts to maintain that the right-wing Congress leadership gave up the strategy of “pressure-compromise-pressure” and adopted exclusively the approach of compromise. It is true that both Gandhi and Birla were moving with an intention of reaching a final compromise. But the bourgeois leadership knew that this was not easy to bring about. They were convinced that a final compromise would be possible only through increasing the pressure.

Second, it is equally wrong to state that the strategy adopted by Nehru was one of “pressure-victory” in place of the strategy of “pressure-compromise-pressure”. Although Nehru had often pursued policies which were for the time being opposed to that of the right-wing leadership, his fundamental political outlook (even during 1933-36) was that of the Congress. While opposing the opinions of Gandhi and other right-wing Congress leaders on various political issues in words, he had always submitted himself in action to the Congress discipline. This was the main factor which motivated the right-wing Congress leaders to nominate Nehru to the presidency of the Congress now at the Lucknow session as it was in the case of the Lahore session. Bipan Chandra himself has cited certain statements made by Gandhi and Birla which would lend support to this. Let us also note in passing that even during the 1933-36 period in which, according to Bipan Chandra, Nehru had accepted the Marxist theory of class struggle, he looked at the Congress under the bourgeois leadership as the only platform for the struggle against imperialism.
Third, it is advantageous for the pressure tactics of the bourgeoisie to install the leftist Nehru whom they were confident of "taming" as the president of the Congress and thereby to create the impression that leftist outlook was growing in the organization. In order for the acceptance of office and the subsequent efforts to become effective, there must have a leadership capable of inspiring and unleashing the left forces in the country. The person best suited for that purpose was Jawaharlal Nehru. The bourgeois leadership was in need of a president with leaning towards Marxism and outwardly opposed to right-wing ideologies including Gandhism. In the absence of such a leftist backing, it would have been impossible for them even to make an attempt for compromise with the rulers.

In his article, Bipan Chandra cites an incident which clearly reveals this fact. A group of Bombay capitalists who were angered at the Lucknow presidential address of Nehru issued a statement sharply condemning him and also criticizing the Congress leadership which made him the president of the Congress. Another prominent capitalist of Bombay, Purushottamdas Thakurdas, who did not quite agree with this approach exchanged a number of letters with G.D. Birla on this subject.

The Birla-Thakurdas correspondence revealed what that section of the Indian capitalists who are described as "the more far-sighted" had in mind. It revealed their confidence that no matter what game Nehru played with words, there was no ground for them to get frightened, became Gandhi and other right-wing leaders of the Congress would be able to contain him. The exchange of correspondence also revealed that Gandhi and other right-wing Congress leaders had assured these leading capitalists that the final decision of the Congress with regard to the acceptance of office would go in favour of it regardless of the opposition of Nehru and other left-wing leaders towards it.

In any case, subsequent events have demonstrated the materialization of the optimism displayed by Gandhi,
Birla and Thakurdas that the bourgeoisie would be able to "tame" Nehru who had been making leftist speeches, and the falsity of the analysis of Bipan Chandra made on the basis of Nehru's speeches and articles that in the years 1933-36 Nehru had reached "his most 'Marxist' phase". Nehru was a tool of the bourgeois tactics of pressure-compromise-pressure. It was a period in which the Indian bourgeoisie was in need of a leader verbally favouring Marxism and opposing Gandhism in order for their pressure tactics to succeed.

IV. THE LUCKNOW SESSION: AN EVALUATION

Two principal issues raised by the Congress President Nehru and other leftist Congressmen at the Lucknow session, namely, opposition to the acceptance of office, and actions for democratizing Congress organization including collective affiliation to trade unions and other mass organizations, were not accepted by the Congress.

The issue of acceptance of office was deferred by the session. A resolution adopted by the Congress to this effect stated: "The question of acceptance or non-acceptance of office by Congress members elected to the legislatures under the constitution having been agitated in the country the Congress, in view of the uncertainties of the situation as it may develop, considers it advisable to commit itself to any decision at this stage on the question and leaves it to be decided at the proper time by the AICC after consulting the Provincial Congress Committees."7

In deferring a decision on this matter, the Congress was, in effect, rejecting the arguments of the leftists. The issue of acceptance or non-acceptance of office was a fundamental problem relating to the approach towards the British rulers. What lay behind the debate on the acceptance of office was

7. Zaidi and Zaidi (eds) op. cit, p. 33. (Italics added)
the question whether the Congress would adopt the method of compromise with the British rulers on the basis of the reforms that were being introduced step by step or it would organize the people on a revolutionary basis and establish a free democratic state by the people themselves after victoriously destroying the foundations of the British rule. If it accepted the latter, for which Nehru and other leftist leaders were arguing in the Lucknow session, then the question of taking a decision “at the proper time” as stated in the resolution did not arise. Deferring the decision meant that Congress might take a decision in favour of acceptance of office some time in future (that is, when the situation became favourable).

The Congress, on the other hand, outrightly rejected the issue of democratization of the Congress by giving collective affiliation to trade unions and other mass organizations. The leadership was not prepared to consider this issue. It maintained that the Congress was not against the trade unions and other mass organizations growing in strength and that it was even prepared to take an attitude favourable to their growth. But it insisted that these organizations should be made to accept the leadership of the Congress. For this purpose the Congress would form a workers sub-committee to give guidance and leadership to those Congressmen working in trade unions.

This was not merely an organizational problem; behind it lay the differences of opinion between the left-wing and right-wing on the question of building the anti-imperialist front. By the anti-imperialist front the leftists meant creating a great mass upsurge against the imperialist forces by rallying the masses jointly by the Congress, Congress Socialist and Communist parties, the trade unions and other mass organizations. On the other hand, the right-wing interpreted the front as the Socialist and Communist parties and the mass organizations like the trade unions strengthening the Congress by accepting its political leadership, thereby regarding the Congress as the anti-imperialist front. Rejecting
the proposal put forward by the leftists meant acceptance of the latter interpretation by the Congress.

In sum, although the leftists made a good performance with many major and minor speeches, including the presidential address, all the proposals put forward by them were rejected at the Lucknow session. Some historians have tried to characterize this as a defeat for the leftists. Bipan Chandra, for instance, says: "From now on, the chief role of the masses was to listen to his speeches. In ideology, not Marxism but a mild form of Fabianism become the norm though once in a while there came flashes of his old Marxism."  

Whether this was true or false of Nehru is not relevant now. But what is relevant is the question how did the leftists in general react to these developments. Did they feel that they were defeated? Did they consider, as Nehru is reported to have felt, that it was futile to fight against the right-wing leadership and hence need not continue?

The leftists, except a few like Nehru, did not have any illusion that they would succeed in getting all their proposals accepted by the Congress, that too, in a single conference.

The Communists who regarded that the Congress was the political party of Indian bourgeoisie viewed the fight between the left and right sections in the Congress as an important form of class struggle. They never had the illusion which Nehru and the Congress Socialists had with regard to the political character of the Congress. They knew that the anti-imperialist front would emerge only out of the clashes between the compromising policy of the bourgeois politicians dominating the Congress and the uncompromising attitude of the masses rallied behind them. Even the Congress Socialists were working with the understanding that the struggle against the right-wing leadership inside the Congress would be an intense one.

A majority of left-wing Congressmen who belonged to neither of these groups, on the other hand, examined the whole developments from the point of view of whether or

8. Bipan Chandra, op cit. p 1321
not the Lucknow session gave a new impetus to the struggle they had started and not whether or not the struggle they put up on the platform of the session turned out to be effective for the time being. And looked from this angle, they had sufficient reason to remain contented. Whatever the decisions of the Congress session, the proceedings of the session turned out to be useful in taking the issue they had raised jointly with Communists and Socialists to the delegates and the common people. They were able to bring about a change in the thinking of a considerable section of the people who had not yet taken part in the activities of the Communist and Socialist parties or in the left movements. The Lucknow session also helped them to extend to a large section of the people the revolutionary perspective with regard to the constitutional reforms and the practical problems relating to them which had hitherto been confined to narrow groups. In other words, in the Lucknow session they were able to organize to a great extent the leftist forces for the coming struggles between the left and the right.

In order to make use of these favourable situations effectively, certain other activities were also organized outside the conference, which brought far-reaching effects. The "anti-imperialist rally" held during the interval in the conference venue deserves particular mention. The rally which was organized on the initiative of Communists and Socialists attracted a large section of the delegates. The organizers of the rally tried to examine the problems of Indian freedom struggle in the background of international developments, the danger of war that rose in the wake of the rise of fascism and the role of British imperialism in it. Discussions were held which inspired the ordinary Congressmen to wage a more effective struggle against the right-wing leadership with a clear idea of how to conduct the mass struggles against the Government of India Act which was fabricated by the imperialist rulers and of the weakness of the Congress in conducting such struggles. This helped to lay a strong ideological
and political foundation to the anti-imperialist front that the Communists, Socialists and other leftists were striving to build.

The Communist Party also distributed a leaflet in the venue of the conference explaining its stand on various issues. It may be noted that since the party had been banned since 1934, this could not be done openly and legally. Despite this, many Socialist activists and Congress volunteers helped the Communists in distributing the leaflet extensively in the delegate camps and in the conference Pantal. A number of leaders in the Reception Committee and AICC also extended cooperation to the Communists in the distribution of the leaflets. The successful anti-imperialist rally and the distribution of the communist leaflet were indications to the fact that not only certain top Congress leaders like Nehru but a considerable section of the ordinary Congressmen and delegates had started getting attracted to the ideologies of communism and socialism. The ordinary Congressmen who had been fed up with Gandhism, parliamentarism and the wavering and pusillanimity displayed by Nehru who had been indulging in leftist rhetorics were yearning for a new programme and were eagerly looking upon the Communist and Socialist parties which had been giving leadership for taking the national movement in a new direction. Opportunities were opening up for a fruitful exchange of views among ordinary Congressmen and the representatives of the Communist and Socialist parties as well as for practical cooperation among them.

The emergence of All-India Kisan Sabha was another important event that took place in the venue of the Lucknow session. The grounds for this had, in fact, been cleared earlier. Peasant agitations had been going on for quite some time in the different provinces in different forms according to the specific characteristics of each province. In many of these agitations the leadership was with the Congress. Consequently they did not assume the form of a regular peasant organization. These were, in fact, attempts to bring the peasant under the Congress.
It was in the early 1930s that peasant organizations began to emerge at local and provincial levels. Even at this stage the leadership of a major section was with the Congress. With the expansion of the activities of the Communist and Socialist parties, the activists of the leftist parties began to take part in the activities among the peasants. For example, it was the left Congressmen who were also the Congress-Socialists who laid the foundation for the peasant movement in the Malabar region. With this, workers functioning in the peasant movements began to feel the need of a central organization for the peasant movement like the AITUC for the trade unions. Accordingly, a preparatory conference of the workers in the peasant movements was held in January 1936 at Meerut while the Congress Socialist Party was holding its Second All-India Conference there. The Meerut Conference formed an organizing committee with N. G. Ranga and Jayaprakash Narayan as joint convenors to organize an All-India Kisan Conference. The Lucknow conference was a result of the activities of this committee.

The Lucknow conference was attended by Swami Sahajanand Saraswati and Indulal Yagnik who later became prominent leaders of Indian peasant movement, and N. G. Ranga, a leftist leader who later turned to the rightist camp. The name of the organization formed in that conference was All-India Kisan Congress, also called the All-India Kisan Sangh by some, which was further changed to All-India Kisan Sabha. The Lucknow conference is regarded as the founding conference of the Sabha.

It may be noted that the All-India Kisan Sabha was formed 16 years after the formation of All-Indian Trade Union Congress. The peasants had hitherto been depending on the Congress not only for the solution of political problems including that of national freedom but also for getting their immediate demands conceded. (This was also the position with workers till the formation of the AITUC.) But the growth of the left parties, the emergence of the anti-imperialist front and the influence it was able to gain even within the
Congress exerted considerable influence among the peasants. They began to work with the perspective of forming an independent class organization of their own and fighting against British imperialism by joining hands with all other mass organizations and political parties including the Congress. The All-India Kisan Conference held in Lucknow provided leadership for these activities.

The main resolution adopted by the conference set the objective of the Kisan Congress as complete liberation of peasants from economic exploitation and achievement of economic and political power to peasants, workers and other exploited sections of the people. The resolution stated that the task of the Kisan Congress was to organize peasants to fight for their immediate political and economic demands and to obtain liberation from exploitation. The resolution called upon the peasants to actively participate in the struggles for complete independence for India so as to enable the producing masses to obtain ultimate economic and political power.

The conference adopted two more resolutions which were of considerable importance. One of them demanded abolition of landlordism which had been existing in different forms such as Zemindari, Talukdari, Malguzari, Estemardari, Khot, Janmi, Inamdari, etc., and conferring landownership on the cultivating peasants. The other resolution demanded radical change in the land tax system in the Ryotwari regions and the introduction of a graduated system of tax, exempting peasants with income less than Rs 500 from payment of land tax.

These resolutions constituted an outline of the policies of the Kisan Sabha. The conference elected a Central Kisan Committee with Swami Sahajanand as president and N G Ranga as secretary and also an A I K C with larger membership.

Yet another event that took place in the venue of the Congress session was the formation of All-India Progressive Writers’ Association for which the inspiration came from the organization of anti-fascist writers led by Maxim Gorki and
other progressive writers in Europe. Formed on the initiative of the communists, it had the blessings of Rabindranath Tagore, Sarojini Naidu, Munshi Premchand and other top-ranking writers in the country. The Lucknow conference of Indian writers which was presided over by Premchand was an indication to suggest that the messages of the anti-imperialist front and the anti-fascist international front had started making impacts on the intelligentsia in India.

All in all, although the Lucknow session of the Congress rejected the resolutions introduced by the left-wing, the event that took place inside and outside the conference _Pantal_ demonstrated that the ideas propagated by them had started spreading far and wide. It had also become obvious that communists and socialists were leading these movements.
TACTICS OF BOURGEOIS LEADERSHIP

I. AFTER THE LUCKNOW SESSION

Although there was a similarity between the Lahore and Lucknow sessions of the Congress in that the right-wing leadership decided to install a known leftist as president for both these sessions, the political backgrounds of these decisions were different. The Lahore session was held at a time when even the right-wing leadership had taken a position in which it was impossible to avoid country-wide mass agitation against the British rulers. In order for them to make this agitation country-wide, they had to secure the whole-hearted cooperation of the leftists. Therefore, not only did they install Nehru as the president of the session, they also took over the slogan of Full Independence raised by leftists represented by him. Thus, both the president of the Lahore session and the
decisions taken in that session helped create the impression that politically the Congress was moving towards the left.

The background of the Lucknow session was completely different. It had become certain that the immediate objective of the right-wing Congress leadership was to arrive at a compromise with the British rulers and not a struggle against them. For that purpose, they had to have inspiring policy declarations and a suitable president. However, the leadership could not afford to accept the suggestion of the president and the left-wing to reject office, for they would achieve their objective of compromise with the rulers only by making use of favourable situations emerging out of office acceptance. Besides, the proposals put forward by the left-wing (collective affiliation to mass organizations, etc.) for democratizing the Congress organization were regarded extremely dangerous by the right-wing leadership. Consequently, they could not but defeat right in the Conferance the proposals put forward by the left-wing president. Thus, the right-wing leadership adopted the policy of rejecting all the proposals put forward by Nehru, while keeping him in the presidentship. The state of affairs that prevailed within the Congress leadership as a consequence of these developments has been described by Pattabhi Sitaramayya as follows:

The President was out of tune with the majority of the Working Committee. The three new friends (Congress Socialists) taken into it would, with him make a good four or more than a fourth of the Committee but generally speaking the deliberations and decisions were not conditioned or conducted by majorities and minorities. Jawaharlal had offered his resignation at the very outset but he was persuaded to remain and continue. Continue he did but qualms of conscience which created uneasy feelings in his presidential address which was not meant to be a mere thesis but a programme of action. On the other, there was Gandhi with his following of ten members in the Working Committee thinking and acting as a solid block. ¹

What motivated Nehru to remain a prisoner of the majority in the Working Committee while occupying the presidency of the Congress? What motivated the right-wing Congress leaders to keep him in the presidency in such a condition? According to his biographer, Sarvpally Gopal:

By now Jawaharlal was as indispensible to the Congress as the party was to him. He commanded, even before his election tours gave him a wide popular appeal, the support of large sections of radical youth who, but for him, would have left the Congress for left-wing parties. Even the Congress Socialist Party might have broken away from the parent body... He was, too, the only Indian politician who had an international audience, and it was he who secured for the party recognition on the world stage. Had Jawaharlal, therefore, insisted in the summer of 1936 on resigning the presidency, it is difficult to believe that Gandhi and his followers would have been shortsighted enough to let him do so.²

Why did then Nehru submit himself to this situation? His biographer adds:

The psychological hankering to follow Gandhi and the ingrained loyalty to the party were only part of the explanation. Jawaharlal Nehru knew that there was no working-class leadership or even an alternative elite leadership available; and as long as this was the case, it would have been disastrous to weaken the Congress. And, as ever, his colleagues took advantage of this.³

Our discussions in the preceding chapter show that this analysis is incorrect. An alternate leadership in which the working class had active roles had been emerging and getting strong day by day. The Lucknow session had shown that the influence of this emergent alternate leadership was by no means small. The truth was that other than making policy statements like the Lucknow presidential speech Nehru was not prepared to put up an uncompromising fight

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3. Ibid.
against the views of the right-wing in accordance with the contents of his declarations.

As S. Gopal has pointed out, Nehru’s views were full of contradictions and his political outlook weak. His seemingly Marxist philosophical outlook and his leanings towards the political slogans of the anti-imperialist front that included communists and socialists were found reflected throughout in his speeches and writings. However, his actions were limited within the ambit of discipline of the Congress led by the bourgeoisie.

As we are going to see in the following pages, whenever the contradiction between the left-wing and the right-wing became acute, Nehru either gave up his own position and surrendered to the right-wing leadership, or remained neutral. Never did he stand firm with the left-wing to effectively challenge the right-wing. However, a few weeks after the Lucknow session Nehru came in clash with the right-wing leadership of the Congress. Although the proposals he had put forward in his presidential address had been rejected by the Congress, he continued to make speeches and write articles which resembled in content his presidential address.

Not only the capitalists of Bombay as we have noted earlier, but many right-wing Congress leaders like Vallabhbhai Patel, Rajendra Prasad and Rajagopalachari severely criticized him for the opinions he expressed. Following, Nehru offered his resignation, an action which was disapproved by Gandhi who advised him to submit to the majority of the Working Committee and work without creating problems. The right-wing leadership in the Congress and the moderates outside it stood witness to Nehru’s acceptance of Gandhi’s advice and to the disappearance from his speeches and writings of the “triumphant freshness” which had been found expressed in them earlier.

This process of change in Nehru reached the zenith as preparations began for contesting the elections scheduled to be held in early 1937. We shall return to it in the following chapters. Before that we shall refer to certain activities of Nehru to which the right-wing leadership had no objection.
By 1936 the world political atmosphere was becoming dark. Abyssinia became the victim of aggression of fascists Italy. In Spain, rebellion broke out under the leadership of Franco against the elected government. Added to these were the inhuman regime of Hitler who had already come to power in Germany and Japan’s war of aggression against China, which together gave rise to peoples’ ire against imperialist powers which were rendering assistance to the fascist forces around the world.

This had its reflection in India also. The Congress Working Committee decided to observe 9th May as “Abyssinia Day”. The Working Committee also deputed V. K. Krishna Menon to represent the Congress in the World Peace Conference which was scheduled to be held in Brussels in September 1936, and in the World Peace Congress which were organized jointly by the socialists, communists and certain sections of bourgeois political parties in Europe. And it was a part of these activities that Nehru visited Spain and sent aids to the Spanish democrats.

Nehru considered that this was the symbol of the leftist views he was representing. The right-wing leadership thought this would help, like many other things, to create popular pressure which was needed to achieve the objective of compromise with the British rulers, because any move against fascism would also turn against the British rulers. The message sent by Nehru to the World Peace Congress stated:

... I should like to emphasize that peace in colonial countries can only be established with the removal of imperialist domination for imperialism is itself a negation of peace. Therefore, for us in India, as well as for other countries, situated like us, the first step must be political freedom, to be followed, I hope, by social freedom. Thus we shall be able to build up our country, in common with the rest of the world, an enduring foundation for peace and freedom and human progress.⁴

In order to rouse world public opinion and fight for civil liberties in India, a Civil Liberties Union was formed on Nehru’s initiative. The Union endeavoured to collect information on the violation of civil liberties in foreign countries and also to provide similar information on the violation of civil liberties in India to foreigners. According to the official historian of the Congress, Pattabhi Sitaramayya:

In India...where no rights exist for the people, when the so-called constitution itself is undemocratic and is a standing negation of civil rights and popular liberties, a Union such as the one contemplated would be more or less an imitation unless it super-arrogated itself the whole range of stupendous task undertaken and carried on with success by Indian National Congress for over half a century. For the Civil Liberties Union that is contemplated should in any case of India strive to establish civil liberties in the first place, not merely preserve them as in the case of France, America and England. But one justification we can sense instantly and instinctively. The Union that was being established in 1936 might form the nucleus of that larger union which must necessarily function even after India shall have established a full democratic constitution.5

We have referred earlier to Nehru’s opinion on the communist approach to civil liberties. Nehru considered civil liberties as a set of values which had to be unconditionally preserved always and everywhere and declared that he was opposed to violation of civil liberties to introduce revolutionary change in the economic and social life as in the Soviet Union. Therefore, the Civil Liberties Union formed under the leadership of Nehru was meant to serve the dual purpose of opposing the repressive actions of the British rulers in India and laying the foundation of future Indian democracy.

Thus, the right-wing Congress leaders left Nehru free to work in the areas of fascist aggression and preparation

for war at the international level and against the violation of civil liberties at the national level with which they had no quarrel, while preserving their domination over the Congress organization.

II. PREPARATIONS FOR ELECTIONS

For those who retain in memory the fact that it was on the slogan of boycott of legislatures and other institutions that Gandhi brought the masses to the battle ground, it may appear surprising to see the Congress making preparations for elections without ruling out the probability of accepting office after winning the elections. But no one who examines objectively the growth of the bourgeoisie which controlled the Congress politically and organizationally would find anything surprising in it.

The bourgeois political leadership came to the fore with a programme of agitations and struggles first under Tilak's leadership and later under Gandhi's when it was felt necessary to mobilize the people discarding the style of work of the earlier generation of moderates. And it was the same leadership which gained self-confidence through the struggles for over a decade came to the conclusion that it was possible to negotiate and reach compromise with the rulers without giving up the programme of rallying the masses behind itself.

While this was the position with the right-wing leadership, the leftists did not favour the approach of boycotting elections either. They understood that elections and battles in the legislature had an important place in organizing the people against imperialism and its Indian agents. As Lenin pointed out in the midst of a controversy in the world communist movement on the same issue, the argument against parliamentary activities was an "infantile disorder" that had affected the revolutionary movement. The world revolutionary working class movement rejected both the right opportunist view of the possibility of bringing revolution by
contesting elections and using parliamentary majority and the left opportunism of keeping aloof from class struggles on the scene of parliamentary activities. The Communist Party which had been organized on the basis of this ideological position, and the Congress Socialist Party viewed the electoral activities as an important means to strengthen the anti-imperialist struggle. However, the Communists, Congress Socialists and other leftists differed from the right-wing leadership, including Gandhi, on the question of why and how to participate in the elections. The leftists were opposed to the right-wing approach of entering the legislatures and forming ministries wherever there was a majority strictly in conformity with the provisions of the constitution and using the authority and power thus acquired to bargain with the imperialist rulers. They, on the other hand, tried to create a revolutionary mass movement by combining the majority in the legislatures with people’s force outside the legislatures. They adopted the approach of “wrecking the constitution” with popular force and framing a constitution for India by a constituent assembly which would be constituted by the people in the process of this struggle.

On that basis and as an integral part of the process of “wrecking the constitution”, the Communist and Socialist parties were pondering independently and collectively how best the election propaganda could be used, what were the policies and programmes needed for building the anti-imperialist front and now to propagate the programmes of these parties independently while propagating the common programmes of the front and so on. The right-wing Congress leadership, the leftist Congress president and his socialist colleagues in the Working Committee also paid attention to these problems.

As a result of the discussions that took place at different levels, the Communist Party, the Congress Socialist Party and other leftist parties adopted their respective programmes which, however, failed to create any impact on the masses. The election manifesto of the Congress, on the other
hand, attracted the people. The election propaganda conducted by the Congress leaders in general and Nehru in particular based on the manifesto, despite the constraints placed by the right-wing leadership, helped the spread of the anti-imperialist views represented by Nehru among the people.

The nature and character of the Congress leadership was, in fact, reflected in its election manifesto. For instance, although the right-wing leaders had already decided to form ministries wherever the Congress won a majority in the elections, the manifesto remained silent on the subject. On the other hand, it contained an inspiring call for anti-imperialist struggles.

The Congress election manifesto was written by Nehru as it was the case with many other documents which had become beneficial to the right-wing in the Congress. Therefore it would sound to the people under the influence of the leftists that it embodied their hopes and aspirations. Moreover, Nehru conducted the election propaganda in such a way as to strengthen this impression. But the question of forming ministries was left open in the manifesto.

The manifesto began with a description of the deepening economic crisis and the problems of increasing unemployment and poverty. It reiterated that the only condition for the solution of these problems is the attainment of independence. It emphasized the fact that the struggle for independence had ended up in the suppression of civil liberties. The manifesto specifically stated that the Congress had rejected the constitution prepared in these backgrounds and that the activities inside the legislature was one of the facets of the struggle to get it rescinded.

What was the nature of activities contemplated in the legislature? Were they intended to “wreck the constitution” as proposed by the lift-wing or to prepare the ground for a compromise with the British rulers? These questions were not answered in the manifesto. The contents of the manifesto were so vague that they could be interpreted in either way.
At the same time, it repeated the contents of the resolution on civil rights adopted by the Karachi session of the Congress. Besides, an appendix containing certain proposals for the solution of the agrarian problems raised following the emergence of the Kisan Sabha was added to the manifesto.

In short, the Congress election manifesto contained an approach which, while providing facilities to the leftists to conduct propaganda in accordance with their own views, was helpful to the right-wing to take an "appropriate decision" after the elections with the support of the people attracted by the leftist countenance of the manifesto.

Based on the manifesto, Jawaharlal Nehru conducted a country-wide propaganda campaign in the capacity of President of the Congress. The campaign was organized on the model of the country-wide tours conducted by Gandhi in 1921-22 and in the subsequent years. But unlike Gandhi, Nehru endeavoured to spread the message of the left-oriented anti-imperialist front throughout the country. In the tour Nehru proved that he was as good a crowd collector as Gandhi was.

The election campaign tours also showed that in popularity Nehru was next only to Gandhi. However, more important was the change that had come about in the nature of the Congress and the anti-imperialist movement. The idea of uncompromising struggles against imperialism as demanded by Communists, Socialists and other leftists, the organizations of workers, peasants and other working masses as an integral part of these struggles, the communist and socialist ideologies that helped and strengthened those who were working in these organizations, and above all, the close link between the Indian freedom struggle and the revolutionary movements all over the world—all these were brought closer to the masses by Nehru through his election campaign.

In the background, however; certain other developments were taking place. The right-wing leadership which assigned Nehru the work of writing an election manifesto capable of inspiring millions of left-minded youth and the working
masses as well as the task of conducting a country-wide election campaign basing on the manifesto was striving to win the elections by all means by reaching an electoral understanding with the moderate sections outside the Congress.

This was the approach which Nehru had sharply criticized earlier. He accused the majority of Congress leaders of moving in the direction of aligning with anyone and adopting any method with the sole objective of winning the elections. However, Nehru himself played later in the hands of the right-wing in creating situations for gaining majority and forming ministries at least in the non-Muslim majority provinces. For instance, his biographer points out that “within a few days he (Nehru) began negotiations with Pandit Malaviya, whose outlook in politics was frankly communal, for an electoral alliance with his Nationalist Party.”

However compromising Nehru might have been with the right-wing leaders at the high level, ordinary Congressmen, Congress Socialists, Communists and other leftists were striving at strengthening the left-oriented anti-imperialist front which found expression in the Lucknow session and in the subsequent election campaign. The Kisan Sabha had been gaining strength day by day. In accordance with the decision of the Lucknow Conference, 1st September was observed as All-India Kisan Day and a charter of demands was adopted incorporating the immediate demands of the peasantry. Many Kisan jathas were led from different parts of Maharashtra to Faizpur where the Congress was holding its fiftieth session, demanding correction in the programme of the Congress in the light of the charter of demands. Partly on account of this, the Faizpur session adopted an agrarian programme to be added to the election manifesto as an appendix.

Besides working in trade unions and the Kisan Sabha, efforts were also made by the leftists to organize a student

movement. It may be noted that the All-India Students Federation was founded in the intervening period between the Lucknow and Faizpur sessions of the Congress. It was also in the same period that people’s struggles started to emerge in the princely states against autocratic rule and for responsible governments.

The Students Federation was founded on the initiative taken by the leftist parties. Therefore, in the outlook as well as in the policies and programmes of that organization could be found the general anti-imperialist views and also the influence socialist and communist ideologies. The situation in the people’s movements in the princely states was, however, different. Along with Communists and Socialists, Congress sympathizers and bourgeois nationalists were also taking part in these movements. However, like the mass movements and organizations led by the leftists, this turned out to be a challenge to the right-wing leaders including Gandhi.

As we have seen earlier, because of the policy of “non-interference in the internal affairs of the princely states” pursued by Gandhi and other right-wing Congress leaders, the Congress had never come forward to actively support the democratic struggles of the people in these states. The leftists in the Congress were too weak to get this policy reversed. However, in response to the developments that began with the Round Table Conferences and the reforms proposals that emerged in the Conferences, a section of non-leftist bourgeois nationalists emerged in the princely states. Agitations for responsible government were organized under their leadership compelling even the rightist Congressmen to take part in them. These agitations gave rise to political organizations of the subject people in the various princely states.

The leftists made significant contributions to the growth of these new movements. The influence of the leftists in Travancore, Cochin, Hyderabad and several other states was undeniable. The political experience of many non-left
democrats in the course of the movements turned them to the left. Even a large section of bourgeois democrats who thus turned to the left had to clash with the right-wing Congress leadership at least on questions relating to the movements in the princely states.

Thus, it can be seen that while the right-wing Congress leadership was engaged in the selection of candidates and in other activities for winning the elections, the leftists were utilizing the election campaign politically and organizationally to further strengthen the anti-imperialist mass movement.

III. THE FAIZPUR SESSION

In less than a year after the Lucknow session the next session of the Congress was held in December 1936 in Faizpur, an obscure village in Maharashtra.

Holding a Congress session in a rural area was contrary to the tradition of the Congress since 1885 when it started holding annual sessions regularly. The sessions held during the past 16 years during which the Congress led directly by Gandhi was considered an organization identified with the peasant masses were no exception. For the first time the Congress was now holding its session in a backward village with entirely rural amities.

The Faizpur session was noteworthy in another respect also. For the first time, again, a person, particularly one who was known to hold differences with the majority in the leadership, was presiding over the session for a second time in succession. Jawaharlal Nehru who had declared himself in the previous Lucknow presidential address to be holding views that were different from those of Gandhi and other right-wing leaders presided over the Faizpur session.

In a sense this was an indication to the growing influence of the left forces in the Congress. But the election of Nehru to the presidency was not the result of a leftist
victory over the right-wing; rather, the election took place in a manner which showed that the differences between the two wings in the organization were becoming sharper. As with the earlier Lahore and Lucknow sessions, Nehru’s name was proposed for the presidenship for the Faizpur session by Gandhi and other right-wing leaders. As soon as the decision of the leadership was announced, Nehru issued a statement saying, “I shall welcome the election of any of my colleagues and co-operate with him in another capacity in the great enterprise we have undertaken. Should, however, the choice of my countrymen fall on me, I dare not say ‘no’ to it. I shall submit to their pleasure. But before they so decide they must realise fully what I stand for, what thoughts move me, what the springs of actions are for me in speech and writing. I have given enough indication of this and from this I wanted to be judged.”

Vallabhbhai Patel was nominated to the presidency as the representative of the right-wing. Withdrawing from the contest Patel said in a statement:

My withdrawal should not be taken to mean that I endorse all the views Jawaharlalji stands for. Indeed Congressmen know that on some vital matters my views are in conflict with those held by Jawaharlalji.8

The statement added:

The question of ‘holding office’ is not a live issue today. But I can visualise an occasion when acceptance of office may be desirable to achieve the common purpose. There may then be a sharp division of opinion between Jawaharlalji and myself or rather among Congressmen. We know Jawaharlalji to be too loyal to the Congress to disregard the decision of the majority, assuming that the latter lays down a policy repugnant to him... The Congress President has no dictatorial powers. He is the chairman of our well-built organization. He regulates the proceedings and carries out the decisions of the Congress as they

7. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, op. cit pp. 31-32.
8. Ibid, p. 32.
may be arrived from time to time. The Congress does not part with its ample powers by electing any individual no matter who he is.\(^9\)

That is, Patel’s statement withdrawing his own candidature was a clear indication to the fact that the right-wing leadership had already gained enough confidence of “taming” Nehru. As we have shown earlier, Nehru acted after the Lucknow session in a manner helpful to this. Rajagopalachari in a letter to Gandhi stated that he was “charmed” by this change in Nehru. Patel also spoke highly of Nehru in a letter to Gandhi. He stated: “We found not the slightest difficulty in cooperating with him and adjusting ourselves to his views on certain points. I have an impression that he is also satisfied.” Quoting these two letters, Nehru’s biographer states:

Whether, as claimed, Jawaharlal was equally satisfied is doubtful. But he made no public grievance of the clipping of his wings. If he realized that, though he was president, he was being steadily forced to continue the retreat which had begun at Lucknow, he did not disclose it even to his closest friends and threw all his energies into the winning of the elections.\(^10\)

In any case, in Nehru’s rejoinder to Patel’s statement he had assured that he would strive to loyally implement the Congress decisions whatever his own opinion on them. He agreed that his re-nomination to the Congress presidency was not a recognition to his ideologies, but that it was a general recognition to his actions as president of the Congress for the past eight months. He reiterated that irrespective of whether he was elected to the presidency or not, he would loyally abide by the decisions of the Congress.

In short, the strategy of the right-wing to “tame” him to the presidency had been successful. As desired by Gandhi and other right-wing Congress leaders as well as by Birla

\(^9\) Ibid, p. 32.

\(^10\) S. Gopai, op cit p. 215.
and other capitalists, they had got a Congress president now who would be ready to loyally implement even a decision to accept office that the Congress might take in future. On the other side, his presidency would attract the left-minded youth and the labouring masses to the Congress. What we find in the statement of Patel is the self-confidence arising out of this calculation. In other words, what was indicated at the Faizpur session was not merely the surge of the left forces as thought of by many, but also the skillful tactics of the right-wing leadership of maximally utilizing the advancing left forces to serve its own class interests.

It must be noted that all these developments took place at a time when the left movement in general and the socialist-communist forces in particular were able to make significant advances. Explaining the background of the Faizpur session, the official historian of the Congress, Pattabhi Sitaramayya, has dealt at length with the new constitution adopted by the Soviet Union a month before the Faizpur session.

It was on the 25th November, 1936 just a month prior to the Faizpur session of the Congress that in the great Kremlin Palace 2040 delegates gathered to discuss and adopt the New Constitution of the U. S. S. R. It was the embodiment of, even as it was the testimony to, the economic and political, the cultural and social progress achieved, particularly during the previous twelve years. In one bound, what was purely an agricultural State in the world was transformed into one of the most advanced powers of the world where industries flourished commensurately with agriculture, organized according to modern technique. The New Constitution introduced a new era and a new organisation of the State.”

Sitaramayya added that it was no wonder that at Faizpur the atmosphere was surcharged with socialist slogans, emphasizing the rights of workers and peasants on the one hand and declaiming against the forces of imperialism and fascism on the other. As an evidence to this he cites the resolution

11. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, op. cit., p. 29
introduced by the Congress Socialist Party at the Subjects Committee which stated that “the Congress declares the solidarity of Indian people with the enslaved peoples of the world, whether the colonial or the so-called ‘Sovereign’ States and with the people of U. S. S. R."

Apart from introducing this resolution, the socialists, communists and other left-wing sections also used the conference venue for free political activities. The organization of the Kisan jatha which was mentioned earlier was part of these activities. The jatha was received by the Congress president Nehru and the Chairman of the Reception Committee, Shankar Rao Deo when it reached the conference venue. Greeting the members of the jatha on behalf of the Congress, Nehru congratulated them for the work they did in the villages along their way.

Presiding over the Kisan Conference, N. G. Ranga felicitated Nehru on behalf of the Kisan Congress and on his own behalf for his election to the Congress presidency for a second term. Expressing satisfaction on the performance of Nehru, Ranga hoped that he would introduce the necessary provisions to give representation to the kisans in all the elected bodies of the Congress.

Conferences and committee meetings of the Congress Socialist Party and many other anti-imperialist organizations were also held in the venue of the Faizpur session. The conference provided opportunities for the different groups and organizations of leftists to exchange views among themselves and to propagate the views of these groups and organization among the Congress delegates. As was the case with the Lucknow session, the activities carried out outside the Congress session were broader and more successful than the resolutions adopted formally in the Congress session. However, what attracted the attention of the people inside and outside the session was the spirited debates that took place on the platform of the session. And these debates were centred round the questions of election and the future course of action.
As was the case in the Lucknow session, the right-wing Congress leaders were not prepared to take a clear and final decision on the question of office acceptance. In view of their objectives, taking a decision in favour of office acceptance in the prevailing situation was inopportune. If they took a decision against office acceptance as demanded by the leftists, it would be impossible for them to change the decision later. Besides, at a time when it was necessary to earn the support of a majority of the voters by inspiring the entire people through a massive propaganda against the constitution, it would be unwise to divide the Congress by taking a decision either in favour of or against office acceptance. A decision on the question of office acceptance at that stage would create problems in starting negotiations with the British authorities even after securing a majority in the elections on the same question. These were the considerations that motivated the leadership to defer the decision once again.

As noted earlier, the demand for constituting a Constituent Assembly by Indians themselves was part of the agitations against the constitutional reforms proposed by the British. How such a Constituent Assembly would be formed, what were the conditions necessary for its formation and how these conditions would be brought into force—these questions came up for lively discussions in which the right and left wings came to clash with each other. Finally the conference decided under the pressure of the right-wing leadership to hold a convention comprising the members elected to the Central and provincial legislatures, members of the A I C C and others who might be invited by the Congress Working Committee and constitute a constitution making body.

This was a move made by the right-wing leadership to get their policy relating to the Constituent Assembly accepted by the Congress as was the case with the question of acceptance of office. It was their intention to reduce the Constituent Assembly into a convention and destroy its revolutionary character.
In sum, as in the case of the Lucknow session, the Faizpur session ended in a manner in which the right-wing leadership could claim victory. However, the activities conducted by the leftists outside the conference pantal and the propaganda carried out inside the pantal stood witness to the advance and the organized character of the leftists. The Kisan rally organized by the re-organized Communist Party which had been in a state of disorganization until the last three years, the Congress Socialist Party which was formed just two years ago and other left forces was an indication to the growing strength of the left. Although Nehru had been “tamed” according to the deliberate plans of the right-wing leadership, the leftist movement claimed to be represented by Nehru was surging ahead without being amenable to be tamed or destroyed.

A related event was the appearance of M.N. Roy in public. Roy who had reached India through illegal means after being expelled from the Communist International and formed what was called the “Royist Group” was subsequently arrested and had been released just before the Faizpur session after a long period of imprisonment. He was naturally recognized as one of the leaders of the left. Nehru in his presidential address had extended welcome to Roy. He was one of the leaders who were present to receive the Kisan jatha.

However, right in the Faizpur session Roy had started taking an attitude of leaving the left camp and helping the right-wing leadership directly or indirectly. It may be recalled that Roy had argued that the Indian bourgeoisie had completely fallen in line with the reactionary forces in contradiction to the Marxist analysis made by Lenin in the Communist International. As a result of the re-thinking he had done after reaching India following his expulsion from the Communist International, Roy had begun to transform himself as the founder leader of a new “radical movement” within the framework of the bourgeois leadership, giving up the idea of independent leadership of the working class. Although this change in him had not taken its full form in
the Faizpur session, its beginning could have been discerned at that stage.

IV. THE ELECTIONS AND AFTER

In accordance with the provisions of the Reforms Act of 1935, elections to the provincial legislatures were held a few weeks after the Faizpur session. The elections were politically significant in many respects. It was for the first time in the political history of India that such a massive electorate was participating in an election. Any one who paid a certain minimum amount to the government as tax or one who was a literate had now the right to vote. The names of about 35 million voters satisfying these qualifications would appear on the electoral list.

Besides, any party winning a majority of seats could form a government at the provincial level and carry on administration on a wide range of subjects. In other words, an unprecedentedly large section of the population had now obtained the right and opportunity to decide who or which party should handle the administrative machinery in the near future, although the administration was confined to the province. Both the right and the left-wings in the Congress had been striving, from their respective stand-points, to strengthen the anti-imperialist movement making use of this right and opportunity.

At the same time, the new constitution was one of placing obstructions before the anti-imperialists striving to win the objective of expelling the British from power and establishing people's governments at all levels. Even in the provincial sector in which powers had been transferred to people's representatives, special powers were vested in the Governor. At the Centre, the hold of the British authorities remained as before and provisions had been made in the new constitution which were suited to serve this purpose.

In the circumstances, the Congress and other anti-imperialist organizations were participating in the elections
to the provincial legislatures not to "bring into force creatively" the provisions of provincial autonomy contained in the constitution, but to "combat" and destroy the whole constitution, particularly the federal system contained in it. That is, the anti-imperialists including the Congress were conducting the election campaign as part of the activities to rally the masses on a wide scale in the struggle to reject the very constitution based on which the elections were being held.

As distinct from this, certain parties and organizations adopting a "creative" approach towards at least the provisions of provincial autonomy in the constitution appeared on the election scene. The Justice Party in the province of Madras, the Independent Labour Party led by B. R. Ambedkar in Bombay and Central Provinces, the National Agricultural Party of Zamindars and landlords in U. P., its counterpart in Punjab, called the Unionist Party and the Krishak Praja Party led by Fazlul Huq in Bengal were prominent among such parties. These were in addition to the communal parties like the Hindu Mahasabha and the Muslim League.

The British rulers came forward to encourage and assist each of these parties and individuals not affiliated to any of them. Thus, the candidates of these and similar other parties and groups as well as independents entered the election field opposing the candidates of the anti-imperialist front represented by the Congress and other anti-imperialist organizations, although the latter were not contesting the elections under a unified leadership or based on a common programme acceptable to them.

The question of the approach towards the constitution prepared by the British government became a lively issue before the 35 million strong electorate. The election became a platform of conflict between two large camps: one comprising all the anti-imperialist forces which, though divided between the left and the right-wings, were fighting against the constitution and striving to draw the entire people in that fight, and the other made up of the different political groups
which, though based on different programmes, were opposed to the anti-imperialist front and for that reason receiving the overt and covert assistance from the British rulers. In the election battle between these two camps the British authorities took certain actions against the anti-imperialist camp and in favour of the camp which was opposed to it. Even while the election campaigns were in progress thousands of prisoners, including the Congress Working Committee member, Subhas Bose, were languishing in the prisons all over the country. Although Abdul Gaffar Khan was set free, he was externed from his home province. The anti-imperialist camp had to face all these obstructions and other kinds of repressive actions by the government in conducting the election campaign.

Nevertheless, the Congress secured an absolute majority in five provinces, Madras, the United Provinces, the Central Provinces, Bihar and Orissa. In Bombay it reached very close to a majority and in Bengal, Assam and NWF Province it became the biggest single party in the legislatures. Only in Punjab and Sind did the Congress turn up as a minority party. The total number of seats in all the 11 provinces was 1585 out of which the Congress won 715 seats. It must be specifically stated that the Congress contested mainly in the general seats. The total number of seats reserved for Muslims in the assemblies was 482. The Congress contested 58 seats and won 26. Similarly, the Congress contested 20 seats out of a total number of 38 reserved for labour and won 18 seats. The total number of seats reserved for landholders was 37 out of which it contested 8 seats and won 4. Of the total number of 56 seats reserved for industries and commerce, the Congress contested 8 seats and won 3.

It can be seen that the Congress victory was confined largely to the general constituencies and that its performance in the reserved constituencies was rather poor. It contested only a few seats in the reserved constituencies and won still a lesser number of seats. But, it is worth noticing that among the reserved constituencies, only in the constituencies reserved
for labour the Congress was able to contest and win a comparatively higher number of seats.

It is also significant to note that there was not one single political party to contest seats reserved for Muslims comparable in proportion to the number of seats the Congress had contested in the general constituencies. The Muslim League contested only 123 seats out of a total number of 482 seats reserved for Muslims. A majority of Muslim seats were shared by the Unionist Party in Punjab and the Krishak Praja Party in Bengal and by unattached independents.

The elections to the provincial legislatures in 1937 in a way reflected, in general, the political situation prevailing then in India. The victory of the Congress in the general constituencies on one side and its defeat in the constituencies reserved for religious minorities, including the Muslims, the depressed and backward communities and for other special interests, but a stronger support in the seats reserved for labour on the other — this was the picture that emerged. At the same time, there was no political organization to challenge the Congress at the all-India level.

As soon as the elections were over, the question on the future course of action arose before the Congress. An important aspect of this question was office acceptance. Questions also arose as to what the elected Congress members should do inside and outside the legislatures and how should they behave and with what perspective. These and several other problems of similar nature had to be resolved. Needless to say, on each such problem the left and the right clashed with each other. Finally, the Congress Working Committee held at Wardha in February-March 1937 adopted a resolution, the major features of which are as follows.

1. The Congress has entered the legislatures not to cooperate with the new constitution or the government but to combat the Act and the policy underlying it. The Congress adheres to its general and basic policy of non-cooperation with the apparatus of British imperialism except insofar as circumstances may require a variation.
2. The objective of the Congress is *Purna Swaraj* and to that end all its activities are directed. The Congress stands for a genuine democratic state and such a state can only be created by the Indian people themselves through a constituent assembly elected by adult franchise, which can only come into existence when the Indian people have developed sufficient power and sanctions to shape their destiny without external interference.

3. The immediate objective of the Congress in the legislatures is to fight the new constitution—particularly the federal part of it—and to lay stress on the nations demand for a constituent assembly. Congress members have been directed to take the earliest opportunity to put forward in the new Assemblies this demand for a Constituent Assembly, and to support it by mass agitation outside.

4. The Congress policy is not of assisting or cooperating with any function or activity, calculated to enhance the power or prestige of British imperialism in India. Ceremonial, official or social functions of this kind must therefore be avoided and no Congress member should take part in them.

5. No Congress member of the legislatures may accept a title given by the British Government.

6. The Congress Party in each provincial Assembly must act as a disciplined body. Individual members shall have no official contacts with Government other than those resulting from their duties as members, and such as may be expressly authorized by the Party.

7. Congress members should press for the carrying out of the Congress programme as enunciated in the election manifesto and the Congress agrarian resolution. In particular, they should work for

i) A substantial reduction in rent and revenue.

ii) Assessment of income-tax, on a progressive scale, on agricultural incomes, subject to a prescribed minimum.
iii) Fixity of tenure.
iv) Relief from the burden of rural debt and arrears of rent and revenue.
v) Repeal of all repressive laws.
vi) Release of political prisoners, internees and detenues.
vii) Restoration of lands and property confiscated or sold by government during civil disobedience movements.
viii) Eight hours day for industrial workers, without reduction of pay, living wage.
ix) Prohibition of intoxicating liquor and drugs.
x) Unemployment relief.
xi) Reduction of high salaries, allowances, and cost of administration of government.

Congress members elected to the provincial legislature were also directed to give expression to certain important demands of all India application, such as substantial reduction of the military expenditure as well as of the higher civil services, complete national control over trade and tariffs and currency, repeal of all repressive legislation, freedom of speech, press and association, and opposition to war preparations, credit and loans.¹²

Doubts arose regarding the propriety of taking the Oath of Allegiance to the British rulers by members elected to the legislatures before assuming office. It was feared that taking such an oath would go counter to the objective of Purna Swaraj. The working committee declared that “the taking of that oath, in order to enable participation in the work of the legislatures, in no way lessens or varies the demand for independence”. However, it was also decided that before taking that oath, the members elected should take a pledge declaring allegiance to the Indian people. The all-India convention held on 19th and 20th March 1937 was utilized to take the pledge which stated as follows.

I, a member of this All India Convention convened by the Indian National Congress, pledge myself to the service of

India and to work in the legislatures and outside for the Independence of India and the ending of the exploitation and poverty of our people. I pledge myself to work under the discipline of the Congress for the furtherance of Congress ideals and objectives to the end that India may be free and independent and her millions freed from the heavy burdens they suffer from.\(^{13}\)

V. CONDITIONAL ACCEPTANCE OF MINISTRIES

The Congress Working Committee which met on 17th-18th March 1937, immediately before the Convention referred to above, finally took a decision on the controversial question of office acceptance.

The Working Committee decided not reject office as demanded by the left-wing. The Committee was also against acceptance of office just because the Congress commanded a majority in a number of provinces, as argued by the right-wing leaders. It wanted to be satisfied that "the Governor would not use his special powers of interference or set aside the advice of ministers in regard to constitutional activities". In the absence of such an assurance from the rulers, the Congress would not accept office and if it obtained the assurance, it would accept office. The justification for this policy, in the words of the official historian of the Congress, is as follows.

In six out of eleven provinces, the party that came in a majority would not touch office with a pair of tongs nor would it keep its hands wholly off the business. If the Congress annihilated itself as a parliamentary limb of the nation, the Government knew what to do. If the Congress on the contrary assumed office, the Government would soon adjust themselves to their new environment, for the bureaucracy is an expert in the art of adjusting itself to the

\(^{13}\) ibid, p. 515.
changing conditions and biding its time for an opportunity to overthrow them. The Congress would not let Government play their game according to their wonted lines. 14

Earlier, we had dealt at length with the attitude of the Congress, the moderates and the caste-communal politicians towards the new constitution. The federal system with regard to the central government was equally unacceptable to all of them. As with the provincial administration, the constitutional provisions might be acceptable to them, provided the special powers vested in the Governor were removed.

The Congress was now trying to get the special powers vested in the Governor freezed at the provincial level, while rejecting the federal system at the Centre. Such a policy was well suited to the needs of the bourgeois politicians outside the Congress. However, the bourgeois parties were not prepared to organize struggles against the Federation at the Centre and to refuse to form ministries at least temporarily in the provinces in order to get the special powers of the Governor freezed. The Congress was ready to rally the people against the Federation and to keep away from forming ministries at the provincial level until a clear assurance was obtained from the British with regard to the special powers vested in the Governor. The Congress, in fact, maintained that position for three months even in the provinces in which it commanded a majority in the legislature. Such a situation never existed before or after it in Indian politics.

It was relatively easy to take this decision rather than implementing it. None of the Governors, nor the Viceroy nor the British Government was prepared to give such an assurance as demanded by the Congress. They maintained that giving an assurance against the exercise of powers vested in accordance with the provisions of the constitution was "unconstitutional". Not only the British authorities, but even the moderates like Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru took this attitude. On the contrary, many Indians who were known to be constitutional experts maintained that the attitude of the Congress

was correct both politically and constitutionally. A.B Kieths, the top constitutional expert in England, concurred with this view.

However, rather than remaining confined within the narrow circles of constitutional experts and politicians as a point of debate, it became a live political issue with the people. A country-wide hartal was observed on 1st April, the day on which the provisions with regard to provincial autonomy in the new constitution came into force. On that day millions of people were rallied behind the proposal put forward by the Congress to reject the British made constitution and to constitute a constituent assembly to frame a constitution of the Indian people. Not only the Congress committees and activists, but also trade unions and other mass organizations and the Communist and Socialist parties actively participated in the hartal and demonstrations. These demonstrations naturally provided support to the Congress stipulation for forming ministries.

But both the British authorities and the right-wing Congress leadership equally dreaded the continuance of this struggle with the direct participation of the people. Although 'interim' minority governments were formed by other parties where the Congress had kept itself away, the British rulers knew that these governments had no popular backing. Those who joined these 'governments' were known imperialist agents and were hated by a vast majority of the people. From the past experience the authorities had learnt that if such a situation was allowed to continue, people would resort to fierce struggles which they would not be able to put down even by repressive measures.

The right-wing Congress leaders, on the other hand, could not even think of overthrowing the British rule through a mass revolution and establishing a state of the Indian people. Whenever mass struggles broke out, they stood in the forefront claiming themselves to be the leaders of these struggles and utilizing that position to bargain with the rulers. This had been their tactics. Precisely for the same reason,
they could accept neither the anti-struggle approach of the moderates nor the leftist approach of leading militant mass struggles along revolutionary paths. They wanted to strive for a compromise with the rulers by standing in the forefront of the struggles. This was what happened, in fact, in 1920-21 and 1930-31 and the same was being repeated in 1937. Unlike the moderates and the caste-communal politicians, the right-wing Congress leaders were not ready to form ministries “strictly in accordance with the constitution” as soon as they obtained a majority in the legislatures. At the same time, they were frightened by the waves of people’s struggles that might naturally arise out of the political uncertainty following the refusal to form the ministries. They indisputably wanted to avoid such a situation.

It was in this circumstance that Gandhi and other right-wing Congress leaders together with the legal experts supporting their views entered into a controversy with the British authorities and their legal experts on the “legal validity of demanding assurance” with regard to the excercise of special powers vested in Governor. Although in form the controversy was legal as it related to the interpretation of the constitution, in content it was political. The crux of the issue was whether the people’s representatives (the bourgeoisie and its companions) should be able to run the administration, though within the framework of limited provincial autonomy, without interference from the Governor. Although both sides displayed extreme rigidity in presenting their arguments, they had a desire to reach a settlement. Both adopted a tone, language and arguments which were helpful to avoid a clash and to facilitate a settlement.

Since neither side was in a position to backslide, the resulting deadlock continued for three months. During this period “interim” governments were in power in the Congress majority provinces. The popular feelings rose high against them and their British supporters, and the Communists, Socialists and other leftists tried to give these feelings an organized form of anti-imperialist struggle. In the ‘war of statements’
between the British and the Congress in this period, each stage turned out to be a step towards a compromise. Finally, on 21st June the Viceroy made a statement which helped to end the deadlock.

The Viceroy's statement may be summarized as follows. There need be no fear that the Governors would take steps over the heads of the popular ministers, whatever be the wordings in the constitution. The experience of the non-Congress ministries, majority as well as minority, bears witness to this. Even assuming that doubts and distrust expressed by the Congress are honest, it can feel assured that the Governors will not unnecessarily interfere in the day-to-day functioning of the ministers and that there will be no hindrance to their carrying on the rule in accordance with their policies.

Did this constitute the assurance the Congress had sought? The right-wing leadership (Working Committee) said it did. Because, the Viceroy, while admitting the probability of the Governor dismissing the ministry in extraordinary circumstances or the ministry resigning, had clarified that the Governor would not interfere in the day-to-day functioning of the ministry. Once this approach was adopted, its practice depended mainly on the personal relation between the Governor and the ministers. The moment this relation was vitiating, the ministry could resign. If there was a difference of opinion between the Governor and the ministry which might not be too crucial to warrant its resignation, the ministers had the right to place it before the people. Therefore, the Working Committee which met in the first week of July 1937 resolved that "Congressmen be permitted to accept office where they may be invited thereto. But it desires to make it clear that office is to be accepted and utilised for the purpose of working in accordance with lines laid down in the Congress election manifesto and to further in every possible way the Congress policy of combating the new Act on the one hand and of prosecuting the constructive programmes on the other."
The Working Committee was of the view that though the assurance demanded by the AICC in March was not there in the literal sense, its essence was contained in the official statement. So, the Committee took the decision without calling another meeting of the AICC to ratify it, since it considered that any further delay in taking a decision would be detrimental to the interests of the nation.

It may be recalled that Nehru who was the president of the Congress when the Working Committee took this decision had been opposed to the approach contained in the resolution of the Committee. Besides him, there were many others among the leaders and ordinary Congressmen who were similarly opposed to office acceptance. Yet they were prepared to implement the decision, since the minority had to abide by the majority decision. Accordingly, Congress ministries were formed not only in five provinces where it had commanded a majority but also in Bombay and the NWF Province with the help of certain others. After a few months Congress ministries were formed in Sind and Assam also with the help of certain other groups. Thus the Congress transformed itself into a ruling party at the provincial level.