unprecedented scale, the national movement under the Congress still fought on valiantly for about a year and a half before admitting defeat. Estimates of arrests during the fifteen months between January 1932 and March 1933 go up to as high as 120,000, though it must be added that this is not a valid indication of relative strength as compared to the figure of 90,000 for 1930-31. Many more were arrested this time because repression had become so much more intense and systematic. There was also a significant and quite rapid decline over time. An official break-up of 74,671 convictions up to April 1933 lists 14,803 for January 1932, 17,818 in February, 6909 in March, and 5254 in April. The monthly figure never exceeded 4000 thereafter and Willingdon was reporting conditions as 'well under control' by 4 April 1932 and Civil Disobedience to be 'almost in a moribund condition' on 6 November of the same year. (Templewood Collection) Provincial break ups for convictions give high percentages relative to total population for Bombay Presidency (14,101; 0.064%), Bihar and Orissa (14,903; 0.040%), U.P. (14,659; 0.030%), Bengal (12,791; 0.026%) and C.P. (4014; 0.026%)—as contrasted to only 0.008% in Punjab and 0.007% in Madras. Though Muslim participation remained generally low, the percentage of convictions in N.W.F.P. was the highest for the entire country (6053; 0.25%). Women numbered 3630, and the extent to which the Congress had become a real mass movement is indicated by the fact that illiterates comprised 759 out of 904 in Madras and 1550 out of 2004 in U.P. in an early 1932 estimate; 1397 out of this U.P. figure were described as tenants or labourers. (Home Pol., F.N. 3/11/1933-q. in Judith Brown, Gandhi and Civil Disobedience, pp. 284-6).

Civil Disobedience in 1932-33 comprised a wide range of activities, in part because so very many things had now become illegal, and civil liberties almost totally suppressed. Willingdon while finalizing plans for the 4 January attack confessed that he felt he was 'becoming a sort of Mussolini in India'. (letter to Hoare, 20 December 1931) The forms of defiance included picketing of cloth and liquor shops, closing of markets and boycott of white or loyalist business concerns, symbolic hoisting of Congress flags, holding in public of illegal Congress sessions (as near the Chandni Chowk Clock Tower in Delhi in April 1932, and on the Calcutta Maidan next year), salt satyagrahas, non-
payment of chaukidari taxes, no-rent as well as no-revenue, forest law violations, and a certain amount of illegal Congress functioning (including even a secret radio transmitter near Bombay in August 1932) and use of bombs—the latter two methods later strongly condemned by Gandhi.

Willingdon's letter of 4 April 1932 described Bombay city and Bengal as the 'two black spots'. Bombay city to its Governor remained 'the keep of Gandhism', where the 'Congress have got a deeper hold... than anywhere else in India'. (Sykes to Hoare, 6 March 1932, Sykes Collection, MSS Eur., F. 150). Massive participation by the Gujarati business community, and particularly, it seems, of the smaller traders, badly disrupted the central Mulji Jethe raw cotton market till October 1932, when the government decided to help white firms threatened with ruin by very effective blacklisting and pushed through a law establishing official regulation of the cotton trade. But mill-workers remained aloof, as in 1930, and Muslims at times hostile—there was in fact a major series of communal riots in Bombay city between May and July 1932. In the countryside, whether in Bombay or elsewhere, response on the whole seems to have been less than in 1930, for the Congress had spiked its own guns during the 1931 truce and missed the psychological moment for an all-out no-revenue and no-rent movement. Kheda and Bardoli were handicapped this time by the British success in pressurizing Baroda to close its borders and only 15 villages were withholding revenue in Kheda by February 1932. A village like Ras, in Kheda, however, was still refusing revenue in 1933, though its Patidars had lost by then 2000 acres of land, and some of them had been stripped naked, publicly whipped, and given electric shocks by the police.

A powerful no-tax movement developed in parts of Karnataka, particularly in Ankola and Siddapur talukas of north Kanara where more than 200 villages withheld revenue, and the AICC reports refer to scattered outbursts of forest satyagraha in many parts of central and south India. In Ankola on 1 May 1932, for instance, 4000 villagers poured into the taluka headquarters carrying freshly cut firewood for auction, and in Betul in C.P. in the same month, forest satyagraha was offered under tribal leaders like Mannu Gond and Chaitu Koiku. The Kerala PCC also reported forest satyagraha in Kasergod taluka of Malabar in August and October 1932. (AICC, F.N. I/1932)
Civil Disobedience was weaker in Tamilnadu and Andhra as compared to 1930, though there were some active centres of urban picketing (e.g., Madras City, Madura and Virudhunagar in Tamilnadu), and the British were seriously alarmed for a while in 1933 by signs of a revival of no-revenue movements in coastal Andhra. In Bihar, there were several mass attacks on police stations in Monghyr and Muzaffarpur districts in February 1932 by crowds of up to 7000, and excise revenues continued to decline till 1933. In U.P., though a secret AICC bulletin of March 1932 reported no-rent movements in a number of districts (R.E. Hawkins Papers in Cambridge South Asian Centre), Civil Disobedience was now becoming much more of an urban affair. Agra district for instance was now quiet except for an isolated no-rent movement in Barauda village, while 80% of land revenue due from Rae Bareli had been collected by July 1932, two months before time (G. Pandey, pp. 177, 187).

In Bengal, the March 1932 AICC bulletin reported revival of salt satyagraha in coastal areas, non-payment of chaukidari taxes and Union Board boycott in many districts and no-rent in Arambagh sub-division of Hooghly and parts of Tippera, Sylhet and Jalpaiguri. The continued failure of the Congress leadership to espouse agrarian radicalism even in Depression conditions, however, encouraged Muslim peasant movements to develop increasingly on separatist lines. The Praja movement gathered strength during these years, and in December 1932 Maulana Bhasani, who throughout his career would combine genuine agrarian populism with communist appeals, organized a big Praja Sammelan at Sirajgunj which demanded abolition of zamindari and scaling-down of debts. Bengal remained a nightmare for the British, however, because of terrorism. Though the new governor Anderson was a specialist in repression ever since the Irish Civil War days, the number of terrorist cases was the highest ever in 1932 (104), before declining to 33 in 1933 and 17 in 1934. Two more white district magistrates were killed in Midnapur, Governor Jackson was attacked at the University Convocation by a girl student, and Surjya Sen could be arrested only in February 1933. More than 3000 were detained at concentration camps in Buxa, Hijli and Deoli, while the Chittagong prisoners were sent to the Andamans.

The second Civil Disobedience movement coincided with signi-
significant upsurges in two princely states. In Kashmir, the concessions offered by the Grievances Enquiry Commission in April 1932 (steps to promote Muslim education, return of government-occupied Muslim religious buildings, partial suspension of a grazing tax, and payments for state-requisitioned labour) failed to stop a growing movement. The Muslim Conference was started in October 1932, and though it would be renamed the National Conference only six years later, its leader Sheikh Abdullah had already started to develop close contacts with a group of anti-autocratic Jammu Hindus under P.N. Bazaz. In the Rajasthan state of Alwar in early 1933, there was a formidable rising against Maharaja Jaisingh Sawai’s revenue enhancements, begar, grazing dues, and reservation of forests for hunting. The Meos, a self-contained semi-tribal peasant community with a largely formal affinity to Islam, began guerrilla war on a large scale. On 12 February 1933, Willingdon reported the Alwar conditions to be ‘getting as bad as they can be’, and the Indian Annual Register spoke of 80-90,000 Meos participating in what it predictably but mistakenly dubbed ‘communal trouble’. While the Punjab Muslim leader Mohammed Yasin Khan did try to give the anti-Maharaja movement a communal (as well as pro-British) colour, an alternative, consciously radical trend was also developing, associated with Syed Mutalabi Faridabadi, and, interestingly, enough, K.M. Ashraf, soon to become one of India’s first Marxist historians. Eventually the British decided to pack off the unpopular Maharaja to Europe, and take over Alwar administration for some years (Chaudhuri Abdul Haye’s article in H. Kruger (ed.), K.M. Ashraf, Delhi, 1969).

By the second half of 1932, Civil Disobedience was evidently going down in defeat. It is true that the decline in peasant participation evident for instance in Gujarat, Andhra or U.P. was clearly a submission to overwhelmingly superior force rather than any loss of faith in the Congress, and the halo of sacrifice and martyrdom won by the latter during 1930-34 helped decisively in the winning of elections from 1934 onwards. Yet Hardiman has a point when he reminds us that ‘voting was not the same as agitating . . . . The days of the classic Gandhian satyagrahas had passed’. Propertied peasants would go on voting Congress, but were no longer so ready to sacrifice their land, now that Gandhi had failed to get it restored for them in 1931; and in some areas,
most notably Gujarat, they would also become more prosperous after Depression was succeeded by a war boom (when tobacco prices went up 500% in Kheda) and, correspondingly, less militant. Rural capitalism developed only in a few scattered pockets before 1947, and peasant radicalism retained its potentialities in the greater part of the country, and particularly so in the zamindari areas. This was a radicalism, however, which from the mid-1930s would increasingly seek forms of expression outside the Congress proper, through Left-leaning Kisan Sabhas as well as sometimes through communal organizations.

Business Realignments

If peasant response was becoming increasingly contradictory, urban bourgeois attitudes towards Civil Disobedience also showed considerable ambivalence. Gujarat merchant support throughout 1932 made the Bombay movement formidable, the Indian Merchants Chamber of that city was captured by a nationalist group in early 1932 against the opposition of Thakurdas, and, when Civil Disobedience was resumed, the FICCI decided to keep away from constitutional discussions for the time being. But G.D. Birla, who had pleasantly surprised Benthall by appearing quite accommodating in private discussions during the 1931 Round Table session, hastened to assure Hoare on 14 March 1932 that the door to cooperation was by no means entirely closed, and that the resolution boycotting the R.T.C. had been unwillingly taken by the FICCI leaders under great pressure from member-bodies (In the Shadow of the Mahatma, pp. 54-5).

As the mass movement declined, political ‘realism’ plus certain sectional economic calculations pushed some business groups towards collaboration. At the Ottawa Imperial Economic Conference in the summer of 1932, India conceded lower import duty rates for a number of British commodities in return for preferential treatment in the U.K. for some raw material exports, most of which, like tea or hides and skins, faced little competition in any case. Though strongly denounced by nationalists as well as, in public, by Birla, the Agreement was ratified fairly easily in the Legislative Assembly. Bombay textile magnates in 1932-33 were much more worried by Japanese competition in coarser piecegoods than by an evidently weakened Lancashire, and this provided the basis for the notorious Lees-Mody Pact of
October 1933, by which Bombay agreed to further preferences for British textiles imports in return for a Lancashire promise to buy more Indian raw cotton. Japan had been cutting down its Indian raw cotton purchases as retaliation for high import duties in India, and so a new outlet for Indian cotton was needed if anti-Japanese tariff walls were to be retained. Nationalists were furious at this 'betrayal' through acceptance of lower tariffs for Lancashire, and so were Ahmedabad textile magnates who produced fine cloth in competition with Lancashire and had no desire to see the long-staple cotton it needed flowing away to the U.K. But Bombay mill-owners and Tatas (who signed a similar agreement with British steel interests in face of Belgian competition soon afterwards) together represented a formidable combination, and politically, too, Thakurdas was pleading for 'some understanding' by June 1932, and Birla repeatedly tried his hand as mediator between the government and Gandhi during 1932-34.

Yet strong objective compulsions, both economic and political, existed to prevent anything like total sell-out or unqualified collaboration by Indian business groups. British insistence on retaining the 1s 6d ratio remained a permanent grievance, for it encouraged imports and required for its maintenance deflationary fiscal and monetary policies. Governments elsewhere in the capitalist world were fighting Depression by greatly extending public expenditure, but in India so-called 'sound finance' remained a dogma, and investments in railways and irrigation were drastically cut down (Bagchi pp. 18, 46-7). The massive gold exports which began from 1931 (due to the decline in the gold value of the rupee after sterling had gone off the gold standard) helped the government to meet Home Charges and debt payments at a time when commodity exports were declining catastrophically. They were deeply resented, however, by Indian business and public opinion, which attributed them to distress sales by Depression-affected peasants, and Congress volunteers tried to picket gold export shops in Bombay—though radical nationalists also suspected at times that men like Thakurdas and Birla were secretly making 'lakhs... from this immoral traffic'. (Illegal Bombay Congress Bulletin, 17 October 1932, Thakurdas Papers, F.N. 101). Lalji Naranji, who had opposed Non-Cooperation publicly in 1921, warned the Liberal leader Jayakar on 27 Jan-
uary, 1932 that ‘I in my commercial way of thinking believe more in Gandhiji’s policy’, for ‘Government indifference to us’ has driven ‘we capitalists to work with socialistic organizations like Congress . . .’. On a purely temporary and limited basis, Naranji hastened to add. If the British stopped export of gold, gave protection to Indian textiles, modified currency, excise, and fiscal policies, and relaxed their near-monopoly on banking, insurance and shipping, he felt that Congress would soon withdraw Civil Disobedience, of which ‘they are not fond . . . particularly Mahatmaji is sure to withdraw if we are given what we want’. (M.R. Jayakar Papers, F.N. 456)

Above all, collaboration was made difficult by the fact that the years 1932-34 were marked by a full-scale counter-offensive by British business interests, with Lancashire in particular closely aligning itself with the ultra-Tory opposition led by Churchill to any constitutional concession going beyond the Simon framework. Demands were raised for indefinite postponement of any changes in the centre, or alternatively for stringent commercial and financial safeguards which would virtually abrogate the Fiscal Autonomy Convention of 1919. Lancashire pressure led to suppression of the December 1932 Tariff Board recommendations for higher cotton import duties without preferences to Britain, and efforts were made during 1934 to get the Lees-Mody concessions formalized. The Indo-British Supplementary Agreement of January 1935 brought cotton duties, previously excluded from the Ottawa arrangement, within its scope, and visualized a reduction in the 25% import duty as soon as finances allowed. (Basudev Chatterji, Ch. 6) Birla dramatically warned Thakurdas on 14 November 1934: ‘I think Lancashire has now tasted the human blood and they are no longer satisfied with Mody-Lees Pact’. (Thakurdas Papers, F.N. 126)

The ultimate result of the opposite pressures towards collaboration and conflict was an important re-alignment of business attitudes in support of a change in Congress policy, away from mass agitation and towards Assembly and eventually ministerial participation. This re-alignment enabled Indian capitalists to overcome the fairly sharp split between near-loyalists and nationalists within their own ranks which had become quite marked during the early 1930s. It also fitted in with developments within the Congress leadership as it came to terms gradually with
the evident decline of Civil Disobedience in face of overwhelming repression.

Harijan Campaign

By the second half of 1932, Gandhi in jail had probably started thinking in terms of an honourable retreat from a confrontation which had failed—something made very difficult this time because of the obstinate British determination to hold no political discussions with him. His instinctive first reaction, as after 1922, was to shift to constructive village work, and Macdonald’s Communal Award of August 1932 with its creation of separate electorates for untouchables helped to focus his attention primarily on ‘Harijan’ welfare. Gandhi began a ‘fast unto death’ on the untouchable separate electorate issue on 20 September, and was able to secure an agreement between caste Hindu and untouchable leaders (Poona Pact) by which the Award was modified. The Hindu joint electorate was retained with reserved seats for untouchables who were given greater representation than by Macdonald. This was essentially the system which continued after 1947 also. Harijan upliftment now became Gandhi’s principal concern; starting an All India Anti-Untouchability League (September 1932) and the weekly Harijan (January 1933) even before his release, going out on a 12,500 mile ‘Harijan tour’ between November 1933 and August 1934, and even attributing the terrible Bihar earthquake of 15 January 1934 to divine punishment for the sins of caste Hindus—an obscurantist flourish which deeply shocked Rabindranath. Civil Disobedience was gradually allowed to slip into the background. It was suspended temporarily in May 1933, Gandhi personally decided to abstain from it after his final release from jail on 23 August 1933, and the movement was formally withdrawn in April 1934.

Like so many of Gandhi’s programmes, the Harijan campaign was richly ambiguous in motives and significance. Radical nationalists like Jawaharlal felt it to be a harmful diversion from the main task of anti-imperialist struggle—a feeling encouraged by the British readiness to let Gandhi conduct Harijan work even from jail. At the same time, orthodox Hindus within the Congress increasingly disliked the new emphasis: Malaviya, for instance, who had been very close to Gandhi in the mid-1920s, now began to drift away. Hindu communalist resentment was sharpened by
Gandhi’s refusal to concern himself overmuch with other provisions of the MacDonald Award which had given Muslims 49% of seats in the Punjab and 48.6% in Bengal (i.e., together with European members, majorities in both provinces). Orthodox Hindu opinion in Bengal bitterly attacked the acceptance of a permanent caste Hindu minority status by the Poona Pact, but the Congress Working Committee in June 1934 adopted a compromise ‘neither rejection-nor-acceptance’ formula which led Malaviya to start a breakaway Congress Nationalist Party. Gandhi’s Harijan meetings had been disrupted in April and July 1934 in Buxar, Jasidih and Ajmer by Sanatanists, and there was even a bomb attack on his car in Poona on 25 June. The British Government, too, despite its claims to be a modernizing influence, had no intention at all of alienating orthodox opinion, and official members helped to defeat the Temple Entry Bill in the Legislative Assembly in August 1934.

From a more long-term point of view, Harijan welfare work by Gandhians must have indirectly helped to spread the message of nationalism down to the lowest and most oppressed sections of rural society, and Harijans in most parts of the country did come to develop a traditional loyalty towards the Congress which would greatly help the party after independence, too. Like other Gandhian mass movements, extension was combined with control, for Gandhi deliberately confined the Harijan campaign to limited social reform (opening of wells, roads, and particularly temples, plus humanitarian work), delinking it from any economic demands (though very many Harijans were agricultural labourers) and also refusing to attack caste as a whole. He advised caution on inter-dining and inter-marriage, and went on defending the original Varnasrama system—with the result that Ambedkar refused a message to the Harijan weekly on the ground that ‘nothing can emancipate the outcaste except the destruction of the caste system’. (Tendulkar, Vol. III, pp. 236-8) As with peasant movements, Gandhian Harijan work seems to have been in part a bid to establish hegemony over potentially more radical pressures from below. In Tamilnadu, E.V. Ramaswami Naicker’s Self-Respect Movement advanced rapidly in the early 1930s, developing a populist style of anti-Brahmanism quite distinct from the loyalist and elitist Justice Party. Naicker after a trip to Soviet Union in 1932 built a ‘Stalin Hall’ in Coimbatore and
opened his journal, *Kudi Arasu*, to the atheist and socialist writings of the elderly Communist Singaravelu Chettiar. Though Naicker’s ‘socialism’ proved a passing flirtation, some Self-Respect cadres like P. Jeevanandan did later become Communist leaders. Gandhi encountered an anti-religious mood in Kerala, too, for here the Ezhava caste organization, SNDP-Yogam, had been captured after the death of the Gandhian T.K. Madhavan in 1930 by leaders like C. Kesavan and K. Aiyappan, radicals who thought temple-entry to be relatively trivial, and who became militant atheists, inspiring many to take the Communist road though never becoming Marxists themselves. In general, however, the Indian Left failed to devote sufficient attention to the complex inter-relations of caste and class, and Gandhi surely had a point when he rebuked Narendra Dev on 2 August 1934 for forgetting to mention untouchability in the draft programme of the Congress Socialist Party. (Tendulkar, Vol. III, p. 344).

*Return to Council Politics*

While Birla contributed financially to the Harijan campaign, and even agreed to preside over the Anti-Uncouchability League, business groups in general were much more interested (now that Civil Disobedience had failed), in having the Congress back in the legislatures as an effective pressure-group which could lobby for them. The prospect of full responsible government in provinces added to the attraction, which was strongly felt also by the bulk of the Congress leaders. Plans for a return to electoral politics through a revived Swarajya Party were floated by Satyamurti in October 1933, and quickly taken up by Bhulabhai Desai, Ansari and B.C. Roy in April 1934. Things were somewhat complicated by the breakaway of the Hindu-communalist Malaviya-Aney group on the Communal Award question, but the trend back towards conventional politics was clear. It is significant that Gandhi in a letter to Birla in April 1934 acknowledged ‘that there will always be a party within the Congress wedded to the idea of Council-entry. The reins of the Congress should be in the hands of that group’. (*In the Shadow of the Mahatma*, p. 138). Council-entry supporters in Tamilnadu in 1934 included Rajagopalachari, the staunch No-Changer of the 1920s, as much as the Swarajist veteran Satyamurti. The mid-1930s would be marked by a gradual coming-together of orthodox Gandhian constructive-
workers and advocates of Council-entry (and soon of ministry-
formation, too) in a common front against a growing challenge
from the Left, and there is ample evidence that business advice
and pressures played an important part in this process of forma-
tion of a definite Congress Right. 'I should like you to keep
yourself in touch with Bhalabhai (Desai)', Birla advised Thakur-
das on 12 April 1934. 'If the Swaraj Party is to be successful,
they will have to collect some fund for fighting the new election
and I would suggest that fund should not be supplied from
Bombay without being satisfied that the right type of men are
being sent.' And again, on 3 August 1934. 'Vallabhai, Rajaji
and Rajendra Babu are all fighting Communism and Socialism.
It is therefore necessary that some of us who represent the healthy
Capitalism should help Gandhiji as far as possible and work with
a common object.' [Thakurdas Papers, FN 126. 42(vi)].

The Left Alternative

The emergence of the Left alternative which obviously alarmed
such men lay in the logic of Civil Disobedience itself, for it had
inevitably aroused expectations which it could not satisfy. World
events also played a notable part: while world capitalism was
afflicted by the absurdity of a crisis of over-production, and was
breeding in Nazism the negation of all human and democratic
values, the Soviet Union seemed to go ahead through Five Year
Plans with constructing what two life-long critics of Marxism
would soon hail as a 'new civilization'. Its image had not yet been
tarnished by Stalinist purges or a Nazi-Soviet Pact.

In May 1933, when Gandhi suspended Civil Disobedience for
the first time, Subhas Bose and Vithalbhai Patel issued a state-
ment from Europe repudiating his leadership. More significant,
as representing an ideological alternative, was Jawaharlal's intel-
lectual radicalization in prison. His letters to his daughter, later
published as Glimpses of World History (1934), and the Autobi-
ography written in jail in 1934-35, mark the height of Nehru's
interest in and partial commitment to Marxian socialist ideas.
Out of jail for a brief period between July 1933 and February
1934, Nehru made clear his theoretical differences with Gandhi
in letters and articles published as Whither India? 'Repeatedly
emphasized the need to combine nationalist objectives with rad.
cal social and economic programmes and also bitterly attacked
Hindu communalism. (The Hindu Mahasabha at its October 1933 Ajmer session had combined calls for Hindu ‘self-defence’ with denunciation of ‘any movement advocating extinction of capitalists and landlords as a class’). As always, however, Nehru drew back from any total breach with Gandhi and saw no reason why he ‘should walk out of the Congress leaving the field clear to the social reactionaries’. He did not approve of the moves being made then to start a socialist party. Gandhi was not particularly alarmed, ‘His communist views need not ... frighten anyone’ (*Bombay Chronicle* interview, 18 September 1933) but many British officials considered Nehru to be ‘the high-priest of Communism’, and packed him off to jail again at a time when practically every other leader was being released.

The idea of a distinct Socialist ginger-group, working within the Congress but trying to push it Leftwards, had been floated in Nasik jail meetings in 1933 where the participants included Jayaprakash Narayan, Achhut Patwardhan, Yusuf Meherali, Ashok Mehta and Minoo Masani. The U.P. Congress leader Sampurnanand drew up ‘A Tentative Socialist Programme for India’ in April 1934, and the Congress Socialist Party was formally started next month at a conference in Patna chaired by Narendra Dev. Ambiguities were there from the beginning, for the C.S.P. wanted to remain within the Congress, but was sharply opposed to its leadership and ready to cooperate with non-Congress Leftist groups. The ideology of its founders ranged from vague and mixed-up radical nationalism to fairly firm advocacy of Marxian ‘scientific socialism’, which Narendra Dev at the Patna meeting distinguished sharply from mere ‘social reformism’. Right-leaning Congress leaders disliked the new trend intensely, Sitaramayya going so far as to describe its founders as ‘scum’ in a letter to Patel on 21 September 1934, and the Working Committee in June 1934 condemned ‘loose talk about confiscation of private property and necessity of class war’ as contrary to non-violence. Nehru was sympathetic, but never formally joined the C.S.P., and it is interesting that Gandhi in his already-cited letter to Narendra Dev (2 August 1934) felt that Jawaharlal ‘who has given us the mantra of socialism ... would have hastened slowly’ if he had been out of jail. The letter went on to make the prediction that Nehru would be ‘the natural wearer of the Congress crown of thorns when I and other elderly men and women
retire’—a point which Gandhi repeated soon afterwards for the benefit of Vallabhbhai Patel, too. (Tendulkar, Vol. III, p. 386)

The C.S.P.’s quick advance in provinces like U.P. (where 7 out of 11 members of the Provincial Congress Executive were described as Socialists by a government source already in September 1934) was somewhat illusory. Much of the support was purely opportunistic, coming from groups with factional quarrels with the established Congress leadership at various levels, and most of the C.S.P. founding-fathers were to have extremely chequered and by no means consistently Leftist political careers in the future. Yet C.S.P. propaganda did help considerably in stimulating thinking in Congress ranks and leadership on questions like radical agrarian reform, problems of industrial labour, the future of princely states, and non-Gandhian methods of mass mobilization and struggle—Narendra Dev’s ‘general strike of workers and peasants’ which Gandhi found ‘intoxicating’ and ‘too dangerous’ in August 1934.

C.S.P. activists were able to develop close connections with the emerging Kisan Sabha movement, particularly in Bihar and Andhra. Several kisan marches were organized in 1933-34 through coastal Andhra districts, the Ellore Zamindari Ryots Conference in 1933 demanded abolition of zamindari, and the C.S.P. leader N.G. Ranga started an Indian Peasant Institute at Nidubrolu to train kisan cadres. In Bihar, a section of the Congress leadership had initially encouraged Sahajananda in 1933 to revive the Kisan Sabha, which had been allowed to go defunct during Civil Disobedience, as a counter to the moves of the loyalist zamindar-dominated United Party to woo peasants for electoral purposes through concessions on minor issues like right to plant trees, dig wells, and transfer holdings after paying salami. The United Party kept silent on the much more important questions of rent-remissions, landlord efforts to increase zerait (private holdings), and bakashi, land on which hereditary tenants were being replaced by short-term leases during the Depression years. Sahajananda was able to quickly mobilize large sections of the peasants of central and north Bihar around such issues, and the membership of his Kisan Sabha shot up to 80,000 by 1935. He was initially opposed to any calls for abolition of zamindari or clearcut class struggle, but sustained C.S.P. pressure-cum-persuasion led to the acceptance of this radical programme by Sahajananda and the
entire Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha at its third, Hajipur session in November 1935. It needs to be added that the C.S.P. throughout the mid and late-1930s acted objectively as a kind of bridge across which radical nationalists passed on their road to the full-fledged Marxism of the Communist Party. N.G. Ranga later complained bitterly that the C.P.I. captured one-third of the 2000 peasant youths he had trained at Nidubrolu, and no less than 90% of the original Andhra C.S.P. membership. (Revolutionary Peasants, pp. 75-6). The C.S.P. also was made use of as a legal ‘front’ or cover by growing numbers of convinced Communists, as the C.P.I. remained illegal from 1934 to 1942.

1933 and 1934, finally, were years of a significant labour revival, closely associated, like the late-1920s, with Communist activity. The number of strikes, which had touched the lowest ever figure since 1920 in 1932, began rising again from next year:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of strikes</th>
<th>Number of workers involved</th>
<th>Work days lost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1932</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>128,099</td>
<td>1,922,437</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>164,938</td>
<td>2,168,961</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1934</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>220,808</td>
<td>4,775,599</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

C. Revri, Indian Trade Union Movement, (1972), pp. 183-5

British jute and Indian cotton mill-owners alike tried to pass the burden of Depression on to the workers through retrenchment, rationalization and wage cuts. Average daily earnings in Bombay textiles, for instance, had fallen by 16.94% in December 1933 as compared to July 1926, and despite the counter-balancing effect produced by falling prices, even real wages had started declining in 1934. (Revri, p. 176; Bagchi, p. 122) The trade union movement had been gravely weakened by the Meerut arrests and the repeated splits in 1929 and 1931, creating the moderate National Trade Union Federation and the Communist Red Trade Union Congress as rivals to the AITUC. Though the jailed leaders were soon replaced by younger Communist militants headed by men like B.T. Ranadive and S.V. Deshpande in Bombay and Abdul Halim, Somnath Lahiri and Ranen Sen in Calcutta, the ‘ultra-Leftism’ of the early 1930s led to a multiplicity of mutually hostile groups and general isolation from the
nationalist mainstream. Things were further complicated by the efforts of the Comintern dissidents, M.N. Roy and Soumendra-nath Tagore, to start groups of their own and the Royists soon achieved considerable success in trade union activities through leaders like V.B. Karnik, Maniben Kara and Rajani Mukherji. A ‘Labour Party’ was started in Calcutta by Niharendu Dutta Majumdar, a barrister who developed into an effective trade union leader.

From 1934 onwards, however, there were clear signs both of renewed labour militancy and of tendencies towards reunion of Communist and trade union factions. Communists and Royists tried to organize a general strike in textiles in 1934, and there were big strikes in Sholapur (February-May), Nagpur (May-July), and, above all, a Bombay general strike from April. The alarm caused in government circles by this renewed labour and Communist militancy is indicated by the flood of official papers dealing with the subject in 1934, and the C.P.I. was formally banned on 23 July under the old 1908 Act against seditious associations. Unlike in 1929, however, repression failed to seriously weaken the Communist movement, for the mid-1930s would be marked rather by consolidation and advance through a new ‘United Front’ strategy, with Communists progressively developing contacts with Left-nationalist elements by work within the C.S.P. and the Congress. The formal shift in party line was clearly associated with the United Front perspective worked out in Dimitrov’s report to the Seventh Comintern Congress in 1935 in the context of the menace of Fascism. But it needs to be emphasized that there were probably some internal pressures, too, for the aftermath of Civil Disobedience brought into the Communist movement a new generation of disillusioned Gandhian nationalists and revolutionary terrorists with much wider contacts with and prestige among the nationalist mainstream than the Bombay and Calcutta sects of the 1920s could have possibly enjoyed. In Kerala, for instance, leaders like P. Krishna Pillai, E.M.S. Namboodripad and A.K. Gopalan were by the mid-1930s simultaneously rebuilding a Congress organization shattered by repression, forming the local unit of the C.S.P., and laying the foundations of the Communist Party in Kerala, and absorbing in that process the small and rather sectarian Trivandrum Communist League group which had been the first avowedly Marxist
circle in the region. In Bengal, too, the real spread of Communism into the districts came with the large scale conversion of terrorists to Marxism in detention camps and in the Andamans during the mid-1930s through intense ideological debates and heroic self-searching. From terrorism came Bengal Communist leaders of the stature of Bhowani Sen and Harekrishna Konar, and the Party eventually was able to recruit a big majority of the most prestigious revolutionary group of all—the heroes of the Chittagong Armoury Raid.

The stage had thus been set for a major confrontation between Right and Left within the national movement, and increasingly from 1935 a touchstone was provided by the opportunities and snares offered by the new constitutional structure being imposed by the British.

1935-37: THE CONSTITUTION AND THE CONGRESS

The 1935 Act
In August 1935, the long and tortuous process started eight years earlier with the appointment of the Simon Commission at last ended with the Government of India Act. From 1932 onwards, real Indian participation in the making of this 'Constitution' had become negligible. A largely formal and unimportant third and last session of the Round Table Conference held in November-December 1932 with only 46 delegates present (as against 112 in 1931), was followed by the British Government issuing a White Paper (March 1933) and setting up a Joint Select Committee of Parliament with a provision merely for 'consulting' Indians. The final Act emerged after intense debates within the British Parliament alone. Not unnaturally, many of the admittedly limited concessions offered in 1930-31 under pressure of Civil Disobedience were reduced through this process, and the resultant Act was criticized by virtually all sections of Indian public opinion (by Liberals and by Jinnah, as well as the Congress) as representing little real advance over 1919. Right wing Tory pressure, for instance, spearheaded by Churchill with Lancashire support, replaced direct by indirect elections at the Federal level, and extended and tightened up the machinery of official 'discretionary powers', 'reservations' and 'safeguards'.

The only significant steps forward were in the provinces, where dyarchy was replaced by responsible government, theor-
retically in all departments, and the electorate was increased from 6½ to about 30 million. But Governors retained 'discretionary powers' regarding summoning of legislatures, giving assent to bills, and administering certain special regions (mostly tribal)—and on these matters Ministers were not entitled to give advice. They were also empowered 'to exercise individual judgement'—Ministers could give advice 'but their views could be rejected, on matters like minority rights, privileges of civil servants, and prevention of discrimination against British business interests. The Governor in addition could take over and indefinitely run the administration of a province under the notorious Section 93 clause of the 1935 Act. The proposed Federal structure, to come into effect only after 50% of the princes had formally acceded to it, introduced a kind of dyarchy in the administration of what remained a fairly strong centre. The subjects 'transferred' to elected Ministers were limited by 'safeguards' of the type created in the provinces, while foreign affairs and defence remained entirely under Viceregal control. The new Central Reserve Bank was carefully kept outside Assembly control, as well as Railways, while debt services and ICS salaries were also reserved subjects, and legislation on currency and exchange required prior Viceregal permission. Ultimate financial control, it is true, was transferred by the Act from London to New Delhi, a point much emphasized by some recent historians like Tomlinson; one may be permitted a little scepticism, however, over the real significance of a shift from a Secretary of State to a Viceroy also appointed by the British Government. In the bicameral Central Legislature, members nominated by princes would occupy 30 to 40% of the seats (104 out of 276 in the Council of State and 125 out of 375 in the Federal Assembly), while Muslims and other special electorates were also given considerable weightage both in the centre and in the provinces through the inclusion in the Act of the Macdonald Award (as revised by the Poona Pact). A further, very dangerous, provision of the Act was the transfer of relations between the Crown and Indian states to the 'Crown Representative'—in practice, the Viceroy himself but functioning not through responsible ministers but via the purely official Political Department, local Residents and Political Agents. The Federal part of the 1935 Act in any case proved to be a total non-starter, as the princes had become
quite unenthusiastic once with the decline of Civil Disobedience the prospect of a real Congress takeover of the central government had receded, and once the realization had spread that the British were quite unwilling to reduce paramountcy claims in return for accession to Federation. Muslim political leaders, too, felt that the proposed Federal structure was still too unitary, and hence subject to the danger of Hindu majority domination, while all sections of the Congress denounced Federation as a sham. The British on their part were clearly not too unhappy with a deadlock which allowed the 1919 system of total official control at the centre to continue unchanged indefinitely. Finally, it needs to be emphasized that six years after the much-trumpeted Irwin offer of November 1929, the 1935 Act remained entirely silent about Dominion Status. Linlithgow, Chairman of the Joint Parliamentary Committee and Viceroy from 1936, offered perhaps the best (though naturally private) estimate of the Act. He stated that the Act had been framed ‘because we thought that way the best way...of maintaining British influence in India. It is no part of our policy, I take it, to...gratuitously to hurry the handing over the controls to Indian hands at any pace faster than that at which we regard as best calculated, on a long view, to hold India to the Empire’ (Linlithgow to Zetland, 21 December 1939, quoted in R.J. Moore’s article in Congress and the Raj, p. 379)

The years 1935 and, particularly 1936, saw the emergence of a pattern in Indian politics which would be repeated often, both before and after Independence. Outwardly, all the signs were of a significant lurch to the Left: growing Socialist and Communist activity (despite the 1934 ban on the CPI), numerous labour and peasant struggles, the formation of several Left-led all-India mass organizations, and Congress Presidential addresses by Nehru at Lucknow and Faizpur (April and December 1936) which formally seemed to embody virtually all the radical aspirations and programmes of the Left. Yet in the end the Right within the Congress was able to skillfully and effectively ride and indeed utilize the storm, and by the summer of 1937 Congress ministries were being formed to work a significant part of the Constitution which everyone had been denouncing for years.
Labour and Kisan Movements

On the labour front, a slightly more favourable situation for trade union struggles was created by the partial lifting of the Depression from about 1934. Employment figures were rising (thus 14,247 new workers were taken in by jute mills in 1935, while in the following year the 54 hour week was reintroduced, ending the short-time imposed in 1931) but discontent was more acute than ever, since both white and I din capitalists tried to retain the wage-cuts they had enforced during the preceding years. Notable strikes included those affecting the Kesoram Cotton Mills in Calcutta and Ahmedabad textiles in 1935, the Bengal-Nagpur Railway in December 1936-February 1937, and a series of labour disputes in Calcutta jute and Kanpur textile mills during 1936 culminating in the next year in massive general strikes in both centres. Meanwhile the legacy of the 1929 and 1931 splits was being successfully overcome. In April 1935, the Red Trade Union Congress of the Communists rejoined the AITUC, controlled at this time by followers of M.N. Roy plus some Socialists, and a Joint Labour Board was set up a few months later to explore possibilities of united action with the moderate National Trade Union Federation, too. The Communists by 1936 under their new General Secretary, P.C. Joshi, had become warm advocates of a United Front strategy, and the implication of this new line, formulated by Dimitrov at the Seventh Comintern Congress in the summer of 1935, were spelt out for India in an article by R.P. Dutt and Ben Bradley in the British Communist Journal Labour Monthly in March 1936. This called for work within the Congress with the aim of converting it into an ‘anti-imperialist people’s front’. Trade Unions and peasant organizations should be given collective affiliation to the Congress, elections should be fought on a radical programme, but office entry firmly repudiated, and the principal positive slogan should be a Constituent Assembly elected by universal suffrage. Nehru in fact had suggested such a demand already in 1930, and Dutt and Bradley had met him at Lausanne shortly before writing this article. The Lucknow Presidential Address repeated a month later the two concrete demands of collective affiliation and Constituent Assembly.

The new spirit of unity among Left-nationalists, Socialists and Communists found expression also through the formation of
the All India Kisan Sabha during the Lucknow and Faizpur Congress sessions. The initiative at first had come from Andhra, where N.G. Ranga, leader since 1933-34 of the Provincial Ryot’s Association and a separate Zamin Ryot’s Association for zamin-dari tenants, had been trying from 1935 both to extend the Kisan movement to the other three linguistic regions of Madras Presidency, as well as to draw in sections of agricultural labourers. A South Indian Federation of Peasants and Agricultural Labour, started in April 1935 with Ranga as General Secretary and E.M.S. Namboodripad as a Joint Secretary, suggested in its conference of October 1935 the immediate formation of an All India Kisan body. The Socialists took up the idea at their Meerut Conference in January 1936, and though Bihar (the other main base of the early Kisan movement) seems to have been unenthusiastic at first about what was feared would be a rather formal unity, Sahajanand Saraswati eventually agreed to preside over the first session of the All India Kisan Sabha in Lucknow in April 1936. Another notable pioneer was Indulal Yajnik, the disillusioned Gandhian veteran from Gujarat who became Editor of the Kisan Bulletin. As was probably inevitable, the Kisan Sabha focussed mainly on the grievances of peasants with some (and at times considerable) land vis-a-vis zamindars, traders, money-lenders, and the Government. The Kisan Manifesto of August 1936 demanded abolition of zamindari, a graduated tax on agricultural incomes in excess of Rs 500 in place of the present land revenue, and cancellation of debts. It included also a minimum charter of demands: 50% cut in revenue and rent, full occupancy rights to all tenants, abolition of begar, scaling-down of debts and interest-rates, and restoration of customary forest rights. The problems of class-differences within the peasantry, and of tensions between landholding peasants and landless labourers, would remain to plague the Kisan Sabha (and the entire Left) throughout both in theory and practice. But the Kisan Manifesto did suggest transfer of uncultivated government and zamindari lands to peasants with less than five acres and to the landless, who would hopefully get organized into cooperatives; there was no demand, however, for any general ceiling on landholding. Sahajanand in an early issue of the Kisan Bulletin wanted an enquiry into agricultural wages, and visualized improvement in agrarian labour conditions ‘by negotiating
with the peasants, and by assisting their organized strike against zamindars and planters’—an interesting, but not unnatural, distinction.

The early activities of the Kisan Sabhas included the holding of spectacular peasant marches, the celebration of an All India Kisan Day (1 September 1936; when a hundred village meetings were reported from the single district of Guntur in Andhra), and numerous local struggles. The Bihar Kisan Sabha, for instance, began a big movement at Barhiaiya Tal, in Monghyr District, from November 1936 against zamindar attempts to evict occupancy tenants and convert their lands into bakasht. The All-India Conferences gave a great fillip to the formation of new provincial bodies. Bengal delegates returning from Lucknow, for instance, took the initiative in contacting already active scattered local activists to constitute the Bengal Provincial Kisan Sabha at a conference in Bankura district in March 1937.

The most formidable and oppressive strongholds of feudalism lay in the princely States, and, as we have seen, these had already witnessed numerous spontaneous local peasant outbreaks—the most recent incidents being in Sikar thikana (jagir) of Jaipur, against revenue—enhancement in the midst of Depression, and at Lohanu in Punjab where an agitation against a tax on camels had led to firing in 1935. The All-India States Peoples Conference, however, had so far been a very moderate and elitist body, confined to drawing up petitions and issuing pamphlets, while the Congress still stuck to a strict policy of non-interference. As late as 1934, Gandhi had reiterated the ‘helplessness’ of the Congress, and had expressed the hope that princes could be persuaded to behave as good ‘trustees’ for their subjects. Bhulabhai Desai, the strongly Right-wing leader of the Congress Assembly Party, even gave an assurance while visiting Mysore in 1935 that princes would have the sole right of determining relations with any future Federation. 1936 marked the clear beginning of a change. Nehru’s address to the fifth session of the States Peoples’ Conference urged the need for mass contacts in place of mere petitions, and the session for the first time drew up a programme of agrarian demands: a one-third cut in land revenue, scaling-down of debts, and an enquiry into peasant grievances in the context of the ‘tragedies of Kashmir, Alwar, Sikar (Jaipur) and Loharu.’ Next year, the formation of Congress
ministries would set off a veritable upsurge in large parts of princely India.

**Leftism in Literature**

The foundation, again in 1936, of the All India Students Federation and the Progressive Writers’ Association indicated the growing Left influence on educated youth and intelligentsia. Unlike Non-Cooperation, Civil Disobedience did not leave a strong impression on the literary world, which was marked by growing disillusionment with Gandhian rigidities and a search for more radical ways. Premchand’s last and greatest novel, *Godan* (1936), is a stark and unrelieved picture of peasant misery, totally lacking the Gandhian idealism and optimism of *Rangbhumi* (1925); at the same time, the essay, *Mahajani Sabhyata*, written just before his death, combined a bitter critique of the capitalist profit motive with appreciation of the Soviet experiment. In Andhra, a vogue for realistic novels about toilers was started after the translation in 1932 of Gorky’s *Mother*, and the rising poet Sri Sri, the first to use spoken Telegu in verse, was inspired by Bhagat Singh’s martyrdom to compose the famous *Mare Prapancham* (‘Another world, another world, another world is calling’) which ended with an evocation of the red flag. The Bombay labour movement influenced Modkholkar and Mama Warerkar’s Marathi stories about textile strikes. In Bengal, where the urban intelligentsia had never been particularly attracted by Gandhi, Rabindranath remained aloof from Civil Disobedience and positively hostile to terrorism (as shown by his novel *Char-Adhya*, 1934), but his *Letters from Russia* (1930) were warmly though not uncritically appreciative. The Calcutta high-brow literary monthly *Parichay* (founded in 1931), to give another example, combined indifference towards contemporary Gandhian nationalist and even peasant movements with considerable interest in international developments, the world-wide struggle against fascism, and Marxist theory and practice.

The initiative for starting an All India forum for Left leaning writers was taken by a group of Urdu-speaking intellectuals headed by Sajjad Zahir, who drew up a manifesto in 1935 while still studying in London which urged the necessity ‘to bring the arts into the closest touch with the people’ through focussing on ‘the problems of hunger and poverty, social backwardness and
political subjugation'. Premchand presided over the first session of the Progressive Writers Association in Lucknow in April 1936, and Rabindranath in 1938 sent a warm and unusually self-critical message regretting his own relative isolation from the masses. As an all-India movement, the P.W.A. attained its greatest strength in the world of Urdu, no doubt in part because of its inter-regional (though also largely urban and at times somewhat elitist) span, and its leading figures included Hasrat Mohani (the radical politician who was also a distinguished composer of ghazals), Josh Malihabadi, Firaq Gorakhpuri and Krishan Chander. Though the united-front approach of the Association's Leftist organizers sometimes involved elements of opportunism and quest for big names, there were also some interesting efforts at genuine mass contact like the very successful conference of peasant poets at Faridabad (near Delhi) in the summer of 1938, or Kaifi Azmi's 'revolutionary mushairas' among Bombay workers. Such things foreshadowed the major Communist efforts at revitalization of folk culture through the Indian Peoples' Theatre Association in the 1940s.

**Lucknow and Faizpur**

Nehru became Congress President (as in 1929 at Gandhi's insistence) soon after his return from Europe, and his addresses at Lucknow and Faizpur (April-December 1936) at first sight seemed to indicate the climax of the Left influence over the national movement during those years. While disclaiming any intention of forcing his socialist ideas on the Congress, Nehru at Lucknow explicitly stated that he was using the term socialism—'the only key to the solution of the world's problems and of India's problems'—'not in a vague humanitarian way but in the scientific, economic sense'. He hailed the Soviet Union, despite its faults, as a 'new civilization', and declared that 'we who labour for a free India...ininitely take our stand with the progressive forces of the world which are ranged against Fascism and Imperialism'. The two sessions were persuaded by Nehru to pass resolutions condemning Italian and Japanese aggression and expressing solidarity with Abyssinia, China and Republican Spain, all symbolizing the new international perspective which was one of Jawaharlal's most notable contributions to our freedom movement. Internally, he advocated fighting
elections on a radical programme, refusal to take office, and a
central slogan of a Constituent Assembly based on universal
suffrage, which, he warned at Lucknow, could come about only
in 'a semi-revolutionary situation'. The Congress, Nehru hoped,
could be converted into a real anti-imperialist 'joint popular
front', and he suggested as a first step 'corporate membership'
of trade unions and Kisan Sabhas. Nehru also explicitly criticized
as 'authoritarian' the trend in Congress organization which
Gandhi had insisted upon at the previous, Bombay, session
(October 1934): reduction in the number of delegates, a khadi
qualification for office-bearers, and tighter control by the Presi-
dent and the Working Committee nominated by him. Nehru's
Working Committee after Lucknow included three Socialists
(Jayaprakash, Narendra Dev, Achyut Patwardhan), and the
socio-economic clauses of the Congress Election Manifesto
(August 1936) and the provisional Agrarian Programme adopted
at Faizpur, while mainly reiterating the Karachi resolution, did
go some way towards incorporating the minimum demands of
the Kisan Manifesto of the A.I.K.S.: reductions in revenue and
rent, agricultural income tax, fixity of tenure, scaling down of
debts, end of forced labour, recognition of forest rights and of
peasant unions. Nehru emerged as the most energetic and success-
ful campaigner for the Congress in the 1937 elections, thus begin-
nning a career as his party's most effective vote-catcher which
would last for almost three decades.

Right Consolidation and Business Pressures

Yet closer scrutiny reveals the Left advance during 1935-37 to
be somewhat illusory and verbal, at least in so far as crucial
decision-making was concerned. It is true that Liberal or com-
munalist Right-wing groups outside the Congress, lacking the
prestige of a heroic though unsuccessful national struggle, seemed
to be getting increasingly discredited. Despite the confusion
caused by the Communal Award issue, Malaviya and Aney's
Congress Nationalist Party did badly in the 1934 elections losing
all eight Legislative Assembly seats to the Congress in U.P., for
instance—whereas a similar breakaway group (under, Malaviya
and Lajpat) had captured six seats to the Swarajists two in 1926.
Jinnah's desperate efforts before the 1937 elections to revive the
Muslim League through a single All-India Muslim Parliament
Board was also not too successful. He failed to rope in the two major agriculturist-based regional parties in Punjab and Bengal, the Unionists and the Krishak Praja, and the Muslim League could capture only 109 out of 482 Muslim reserved seats in the Provincial Assembly elections of 1937.

But the really important development was the consolidation of a Right-wing within the Congress, based on a rapprochement between advocates of conventional Assembly-politics and Gandhian constructive workers, and backed, as we have seen, by considerable business pressures and patronage from about 1934 onwards. Through skilful manoeuvres, combining pressure with (largely verbal) concessions, the Right was able to preserve its hegemony over the national movement throughout this period. The partial opening to the Left in the form of radical Presidential addresses, programmatic declarations, and election speeches was in fact indispensable in the context of the Civil Disobedience mass awakening and the five-fold expansion of the electorate.

The Thakurdas Papers give illuminating details about the ways in which Indian businessmen tackled the phenomenon of Congress Leftism, as symbolized in these years above all by Nehru. H.P. Mody’s move in August 1935 to start a new, openly capitalist-backed, moderate party unless Congress ceased its ‘flirtations with extreme socialist elements’ cut little ice with more far-seeing and tactful fellow-businessmen like Thakurdas or Birla who found judicious cultivation of Congress leaders like Bhulabhai Desai or Vallabhbhai Patel a much better strategy. Nehru’s Lucknow address did initially frighten 21 leading Bombay businessmen (including both anti-Congress elements like H.P. Mody and nationalists like Walchand Hirachand and A.O. Shroff) into issuing an angry manifesto in May 1936 denouncing socialism as a threat to all property, religion and personal liberty. Birla, however, sharply rebuked Walchand and Thakurdas for gross tactlessness—‘it looks very crude for a man with property to say that he is opposed to expropriation . . . ’. That should be left to ‘those who have given up property’, and ‘if we can only strengthen their hands, we can help everyone’. (Birla to Walchand Hirachand, 26 May 1936, Thakurdas Papers, F.N. 177). Birla in fact had been remarkably happy about Lucknow: ‘Mahatmaji kept his promise . . . he saw that no new commitments were made. Jawaharlalji’s speech in a way was thrown into the wastepaper
basket ... Jawaharlalji seems to be like a typical English democrat ... out for giving expression to his ideology, but he realises that action is impossible and so does not press for it ... things are moving in the right direction' (Birla to Thakurdas, 20 April 1936). The differences among the capitalists were only tactical, for Thakurdas in his reply of 23 April stated that 'I never had any doubt about the bona fides of J., only I feel that a good deal of nursing will have to be done to keep J. on the right rails all through.'

The Congress leadership had always contained elements like Bhulabhai Desai or B.C. Roy, men unenthusiastic about even Gandhian forms of mass struggle and much more at home in the world of municipal or Assembly politicking. What was new in the mid-1930s was the big increase in their strength through a remarkable shift in the attitudes of men like Vallabhbhai Patel, Rajendra Prasad, or Rajagopalachari, the No-changers of the 1920s with considerable stature as rural constructive workers and mass leaders. A partial explanation in some cases might well be the opportunism of middle age replacing youthful ardour. More important was the fact that the twin Gandhian strategies of constructive work and peaceful controlled mass satyagraha seemed to be failing. Civil disobedience, it had been revealed after 1932, had little or no chance if faced with a really determined and ruthless government, while the All-India Village Industries Association floated by Gandhi in 1934-35 proved a virtual non-starter: a Bihar official in December 1935 described it as a 'very damp squib'. Gandhi himself was probably prepared to concentrate on slow rural work and upliftment on a long-term basis. He formally retired from the Congress at the end of 1934, and his Secretary Mahadev Desai reported to Birla on 20 August 1936: 'Bapu is getting more and more absorbed in his village work ... The fact is that he is turning his mind off from the Congress and all other outside activities and reverting it entirely on the village and its problems.' (In the Shadow of the Mahatma, p. 204). But relatively few even among his close associates had that amount of patience or idealism, while all-including Gandhi—felt acutely threatened by the new Left challenge, posing for the first time a country-wide alternative mass strategy which was considered unacceptable primarily for class reasons.

The months after Lucknow clearly revealed the foresight of
Birla Jawaharlal and the three Socialist Working Committee members (out of 14) became increasingly prisoners of the Right, without effective power, yet hindered by their office from frank criticism of the way the Congress was going. Nehru's socialist speeches were made the pretext for a resignation threat on 29 June 1936 by 7 Working Committee members headed by Rajendra Prasad, Rajagopalachari, Patel and Kripalani, who drafted their protest letter from Gandhi's headquarters at Wardha. Gandhi then patched up the quarrel, but it is clear that it was Nehru who as usual had made the concessions—Gandhi in fact rebuked him sharply for 'intolerance', and pointedly reminded him that 'you are not in power yet. To put you in office was an attempt to find you in power quicker than you would otherwise have been' (letters dated 8 and 15 July, Nehru *Bunch of Old Letters*, pp. 198, 204). At Lucknow itself, the scheme for corporate membership of labour and peasant associations had been diluted beyond recognition, despite Socialist opposition, by the mere setting-up of a Mass Contact Committee in which Jayaprakash would be more than counterbalanced by Rajendra Prasad and Jairamdas Daulatram; not surprisingly, the Committee had not yet finalized its report at Faizpur. The agrarian programme was repeatedly stalled by delaying tactics adopted by the PCCs. The Faizpur draft blurred all the sharp edges of the Kisan Manifesto of the A.I.K.S. (e.g., 'substantial reductions' in rent, revenue and debt burdens, instead of 50% cuts and a 6% ceiling on interest), and demands for abolition of zamindari and redistribution of uncultivated government or landlord land were dropped altogether. When Patel came down heavily on N.G. Ranga for trying to get Andhra Congress election candidates sign a pledge supporting minimum demands of the *kisan* as a precondition for Kisan Sabha support, Nehru failed totally to support Ranga, brushing aside the whole thing as a 'misunderstanding', and advising him to 'drop the controversy'—and Ranga, too, released the Congress candidates from the Kisan pledge (*Indian Annual Register*, July-December 1936, p. 286). On the crucial political issue of office-entry, the Right ultimately got its way by repeatedly postponing the issue, at Lucknow and again at Faizpur. Once elections had been won, pressure for Ministry-making would soon prove irresistible, despite all the bold radical rhetoric of the Congress President and the entire Left. Again Birla had
been an accurate prophet: 'The election which will take place will be controlled by 'Vallabhbhai Group', and if Lord Linlithgow handles the situation properly, there is every likelihood of the Congressmen coming into office.' (Birla to Thakurdas, 20 April 1936)
Chapter VII

Political Movements and War
1937-1945

1937-1939: The Congress-Ministries

Elections and Ministry-Making

The Congress did extremely well in the 1937 elections, winning 711 out of 1585 provincial assembly seats, with absolute majorities in five provinces out of eleven (Madras, Bihar, Orissa, C.P. and U.P.) and a near-majority in Bombay (86 out of 175). Official backing failed to save from utter rout loyalist landlord-based groups like the Nawab of Chhatari’s National Agriculturist Party in U.P. and the Justice Party in Madras. Even the poor showing in the Muslim constituencies (the Congress contested only 58 out of 482 reserved seats, and won 26) was somewhat counterbalanced by the evident failure of the Muslim League to make good its claim to be the sole representative of the Muslims. The League failed to win a single seat in the N.W.F.P. and could capture only 2 out of 84 reserved constituencies in the Punjab and 3 out of 33 in Sind. The Congress also won most scheduled caste seats, except in Bombay where Ambedkar’s Independent Labour Party captured 13 out of 15 seats reserved for Harijans.

For millions of Indians, particularly in the Hindu-majority general constituencies, the ‘vote for Gandhiji and the yellow box’ signified appreciation of patriotic self-sacrifice, plus some hopes of socio-economic change. The Congress Election Manifesto and the Faizpur Agrarian Programme had, after all, marked a considerable advance over previous statements of party policy even while falling much short of Left aspirations. At the same time, elections on a wider (but by no means universal) franchise demanded both more money and considerable cultivation of links with local dominant groups, businessmen in towns and landlords and dominant peasant groups in the country-side. Birla contributed Rs five lakhs for the Congress Central Parliamentary Board headed by Patel, while R.K. Dalmia provided
Rs 27,000 out of Rs 37,000 raised by the Bihar PCC. Since such amounts were evidently inadequate (election costs came to at least Rs 2000 per seat), most candidates were expected to provide their own finance—which meant in practice a clear preference for propertied men. In Bihar, for instance, numerous Kisan Sabha militants were deprived of nomination under local landlord pressure, and the Congress leader A.N. Sinha admitted that most of his party’s candidates came from the zamindari class. (Tomlinson, *Indian National Congress and the Raj*, pp. 82-5). As throughout this entire period, simultaneous but contradictory pressures on the Congress in a ‘Right’ as well as a ‘Left’ direction thus were inherent in the total situation.

Electoral success strengthened and soon made irresistible pressures for ministry-formation by the Congress. The AICC session of March 1937 accepted a resolution moved by Rajendra Prasad and Patel on ‘conditional acceptance’ of office, the condition being that the leader of the Congress assembly party of a province ‘is satisfied and is able to state publicly that the Governor will not use his special powers.’ Jayaprakash’s Left amendment demanding total rejection of office was defeated by 135 votes against 78, and Birla hailed the decision as ‘a great triumph for the right wing of the Congress’ in a letter to Viceroy Linlithgow’s private secretary. (*In the Shadow of the Mahatma*, p. 214). Though Linlithgow refused to give any public assurance that the Governor’s powers would not be used, Gandhi had made up his mind by July 1937, and Mahadev Desai informed Birla on 16 July that it must be said ‘to the credit of Jawahar that it did not prove difficult to persuade him’. The Working Committee had permitted office-acceptance a week earlier on the rather specious plea that though British assurances were not satisfactory, the situation ‘warrants the belief that it will not be easy for the governors to use their special powers.’ Congress ministries took office in U.P., Bihar, Orissa, C.P., Bombay, and Madras, and a few months later also in the N.W.F.P. In September 1938, a Congress ministry was established in Assam through somewhat sordid assembly manoeuvres and floor-crossings in which, interestingly enough, the Left President of the Congress, Subhas Bose, played a prominent role.

So over the major part of the country, the persecuted of yesterday had become ministers, the new assemblies met to the strains
of the *Bande Mataram*, and the national flag for which so many had faced *lathis* and bullets flew proudly over public buildings. Congress ministries initially gave a major stimulus to all sections of the anti-imperialist movement. Congress membership shot up from half a million in 1936 to 3.1 million in 1937 and 4.5 million in 1938, Left-leaning student, labour and *kisan* movements and organizations forged ahead, and the installation of popular ministries soon stimulated a massive anti-autocratic and anti-feudal upsurge in a large number of princely states. The more negative and contradictory sides of the assumption of ministerial responsibility, however, were also not slow to manifest themselves. There were the inevitable paradoxes of a party committed to Purna Swaraj and bitterly critical of the 1935 Constitution working within its framework, with powers limited by official reservations and safeguards as well as by restricted financial resources, and having to implement decisions through a civil service and a police with which its relations had so long been extremely hostile. Though the Working Committee at Gandhi's insistence imposed a ceiling of Rs 500 per month on ministerial salaries, the sudden access to power and patronage bred the usual evils of opportunistic place-hunting and factional squabbles. An AICC Inspector's report on the state of the party in Bihar confessed in 1938 that 'nothing in particular has been done except elections to local bodies being contested by the Congress in certain districts (quoted in Tomlinson, Ibid, p. 87). In the Central Provinces in July 1938, N.B. Khare was pushed out from premiership by Ravi Shankar Shukla backed by D.P. Mishra, and though this was given the colour of a regional conflict of Hindi-speaking Raipur and Jabalpur versus the Marathi districts of which Khare had been the leader, factional considerations were probably much more important (Mishra had backed Khare against Shukla only the year before). But the most serious problem was the balancing of diverse interests of communities and classes. Despite its national and multi-class ideals, the Congress as a ruling party found it almost impossible to go on pleasing Hindus and Muslims, landlords and peasants, or businessmen and workers at the same time. A steady shift to the Right, occasionally veiled by 'Left' rhetoric, increasingly characterized the functioning of the Congress ministries as well as of the party High Command between 1937 and 1939.
Congress and Bureaucracy

The Right shift helps to explain the otherwise surprising absence of major conflict with officialdom, till the outbreak of war in September 1939 created a totally new situation. The one crisis was in February 1938, when the ministries of Govindballav Pant in U.P. and Srikrishna Sinha in Bihar briefly resigned because the Governors had refused to allow immediate release of all political prisoners. Prisoners' release had become a major national issue following a hunger-strike in Andaman jail in July 1937, the Congress had been bitterly attacking the non-Congress Fazlul Huq ministry of Bengal for doing nothing about the large number of detenues in that province, and some kind of gesture was obviously needed to silence the Left on the eve of the Haripura Congress session. The resignations were withdrawn a few days after the session had ended, with the Governors retaining the principle of individual rather than immediate and total release.

The Congress ministries began by repealing the emergency powers inherited from 1932. By October 1937, however, Rajagopalachari was prosecuting for seditious speeches in Madras and repressive measures were increasingly used in all Congress provinces against communal riots and Left-led labour and peasant movements alike. In September 1938, the AICC gave a virtual blank cheque of support to 'measures that may be undertaken by the Congress Government for the defence of life and property', and condemned 'people, including Congressmen . . . found in the name of civil liberty to advocate murder, arson, looting and class war by violent means . . .'. The imperialist historian Coupland found 'little to distinguish' Congress ministries in their last year from the other government or from pre-1937 bureaucracies in so far as maintenance of order was concerned. He was ready to give Congress a patronizing pat on the back. '... the Congress Governments can be said to have stood the test imposed on them in the field of law and order.' (R. Coupland, The Constitutional Problem in India, Part II, p. 135)

The Communal Problem

Coupland combined such praise with a bitter attack on the alleged 'totalitarianism' of the Congress High Command, which, he argued, had 'completely undermined the federal principle, and,
together with a number of pro-Hindu measures of Congress ministries, led to a decisive alienation of the Muslims. (Ibid, p. 99). This in fact was the standard Muslim League critique, put forward for instance by Jinnah at the Patna session of the League (December 1938) when he denounced ‘Congress Fascism’. Others besides League spokesmen have also attributed fundamental importance in the process of Muslim alienation to certain Congress attitudes and policies between 1937 and 1939: Azad, for instance (in his India Wins Freedom, 1959), as well as British writers on the Partition years like Penderel Moon and H.V. Hodson.

Since the great post-1937 League revival was centred in the United Provinces, Congress rejection of a coalition in that province has often been interpreted as peculiarly decisive. Congress-League relations in U.P. during the elections had been quite friendly, as both were fighting Chhatari’s National Agriculturist Party. On an all-India plane, too, the League Election Manifesto had adopted a critical stance towards the 1935 Act quite similar to that of the Congress, and had visualized cooperation on the basis of the Lucknow Pact (1916) principles. After the elections, however, the Congress with its absolute majority in U.P. spurned the coalition offer by Khaliquzzaman (a League leader who as late as 1934 had also been a member of the Congress Parliamentary Board). Talks with Nehru and Azad broke down partly over choice of ministers, but more because the Congress insisted in July 1937 on a total absorption of the Muslim League assembly party. In mid-1937, such an insistence was not unnatural or perhaps even unjustified. The League in U.P. as Khaliquzzaman frankly admits, was very much bound up ‘with zamindari and the services, military and civil’ (Pathway to Pakistan, p. 173). Its all-India Election Manifesto had denounced ‘any movement that aims at expropriation of private property’, and Khaliquzzaman at the October 1937 Lucknow session of the League ruled out land reforms even while pleading for improvement of conditions of Muslim peasants. Nehru and Congress Leftists like Narendra Dev or K.M. Ashraf consequently feared that a coalition on any terms falling short of a total surrender by the League would render impossible any radical socio-economic reforms, and they preferred to try to win over Muslims through a ‘mass contact’ drive for which Ashraf was given responsibility The Congress in addition
had a big majority in U.P. (134 out of 228), enjoyed the support of the Deoband ulama group which dominated the Jamiat-ul-Ulema-i-Hind, and was being backed in northern India also by the Ahrar Party formed a few years back by ex-Khilafatists in the Punjab. An Ahrar Conference in May 1937 denounced Jinnah as an 'out-of-date politician . . . making a fetish of constitutionalism', and the League as 'a coterie of a few knights, Khan Bahadurs, and Nawabs.'

From its Lucknow session onwards the League made a determined and ultimately successful effort to build up a more populist image. It accepted complete independence with effective minority safeguards as its creed, denounced the Congress for creating 'class bitterness and communal war', recruited 100,000 new members in the U.P. within a few months, and was able to obtain the (as yet largely formal) adherence of the premiers of Punjab and Bengal, the Unionist Sikander Hayat Khan and the Krishak Praja leader Fazlul Huq. 'All students of Indian politics know that it was from the U.P. that the League was reorganized' (Khaliquzzaman p. xiii). It may be argued, however, that what proved disastrous was not the rejection of a coalition, but the failure to develop and implement, in the U.P. as well as elsewhere, genuine socially radical measures. Muslim 'mass contact' remained largely on paper, and secularist and radical rhetoric in the end merely alarmed Muslim vested interests without winning over the Muslim masses.

Ministry-formation in Bengal was associated with somewhat similar—and perhaps less justifiable—developments. Under pressure from relatively radical elements like Abul Mansur Ahmad, Shamsuddin Ahmad and Nausher Ali, Fazlul Huq's Krishak Praja Party in April 1936 had adopted an election programme calling for abolition of zamindari without compensation, immediate rent reduction, and compulsory primary education. Pre-election negotiations with Jinnah broke down partly on the zamindari abolition issue, and the K.P.P. proved a tough electoral opponent of the League, with Fazlul Huq winning the prestigious Patuakhali seat against Khwaja Nazimuddin. The Congress leadership in Bengal, however, had seldom espoused agrarian reform even for purposes of rhetoric, perhaps partly because unlike in U.P. zamindars tended to be overwhelmingly Hindus while Avadh talukdars had a strong Muslim component. Coalition
talks with the K.P.P. broke down, with the Congress insisting on immediate release of prisoners while Abul Mansur Ahmed argued that priority should be given in the ministry’s programme to tenancy reforms as the prisoners’ issue might very well lead to a Governor’s veto and consequent resignation. Fazlul Huq was thus more-or-less pushed into an alliance with the League.

Throughout the twenty-seven months of Congress rule in provinces, the League kept up an intense propaganda barrage, climaxing with the Pirpur Report (late-1938), the Shareef Report on Bihar (March 1939), and Fazlul Huq’s *Muslim Sufferings under Congress Rule*, December 1939). The charges included failure to prevent communal riots, local bans on Bakr-Id cow-slaughter, singing the Bande Mataram with its ‘idolatrous’ passages on public occasions, and encouragement of Hindi and Hindustani in the Devanagri script at the cost of Urdu. Much in all this was clearly exaggerated, and it is significant that the League rejected a Congress offer of an enquiry into the charges by Chief Justice Maurice Gwyer. League leaders before the ‘Pakistan Resolution’ of March 1940 were disgruntled politicians without a clear programme, for the old demands of separate electorates, provincial autonomy, full provincial status for N.W.F.P. and Sind, and Muslim political predominance in Punjab and Bengal had all been more-or-less accepted by the British and the Congress alike. Jinnah in his talks with Bose in May 1938 therefore insisted on recognition of the League as sole representative of Muslims—a totally unjustified claim at any time before the mid-1940s, for the League, though strong among Muslim minorities in U.P., Bombay and Madras, was still fairly weak in Bengal, negligible in the N.W.F.P. and Punjab, and had failed to form a government even in Sind (where a Congress-backed ministry under Allah Baksh had been installed in March 1938). Khaliquzzaman admits with frankness that Congress rejection of Jinnah’s position was ‘a piece of good luck for us’, for ‘If Congress had accepted the position at the time when the demand was made by the League, I wonder what positive demands we could then have made.’ (Khaliquzzaman, p. 192)

Coming to specific charges, that of High Command ‘totalitarianism makes curious reading, for an all-India party could hardly be blamed for trying to consolidate its organization, and Jinnah himself would be spending much of his energies during the
decade 1937-47 trying to assert his control over provincial Muslim leaders. Communal riots were frequent in Congress provinces, but not significantly more so than elsewhere—60 in 8 Congress states between October 1937 and September 1939, as against 25 in 3 non-Congress provinces (Coupland, p. 131). The Congress Working Committee in October 1937 decided to drop the closing stanzas of Bande Mataram, recognizing 'the validity of the objection raised by Muslim friends to certain parts of the song'. If the League attacked the Wardha basic education scheme as too Hinduized, the Hindu Mahasabha denounced it for including Urdu in the curriculum, and the distinguished Muslim intellectual Zakir Hussain was prominent both in the Wardha scheme as well as in preparing Urdu textbooks for Bombay schools which the League condemned as anti-Islamic.

Yet Nehru admitted to Rajendra Prasad on 18 October 1939 that 'there is no doubt that we have been unable to check the growth of communalism and anti-Congress feeling among the Muslim masses'. (Uma Kaura, p. 123). In the one Muslim-majority province under Congress rule, the N.W.F.P., Khan Saheb's ministry began to lose support among Muslim peasants for failing to take adequate measures to reduce rural indebtedness in face of opposition from Hindu and Sikh traders and moneylenders. (A.K. Gupta, NWFP Legislature and Freedom Struggle, 1932-47, p. 93). In much of northern and central India, Congress-led rural populism was often associated with Hinduism and the use of Hindi, for Muslims tended to be more urbanized and literate and Urdu had been the language of upper-class culture. If top Congress leaders in the late-1930s now insisted more than ever before on the need for secularism, their attitudes were by no means universally shared, or sincerely implemented, lower down in the party hierarchy or even by all Congress ministers. Azad, for instance, complained in 1937 that C.P. Congressmen could not join the League, but were often to be found active in the Hindu Mahasabha, and it was only in December 1938 that the Working Committee declared Mahasabha membership to be a disqualification for remaining in the Congress. The Hindu Mahasabha was gaining strength during these years, and its new president, the Maharashtrian ex-revolutionary V.D. Savarkar, declared at the Nagpur session (December, 1938) that 'We Hindus are a Nation by ourselves... Hindu nationalists
should not at all be apologetic to being called Hindu communists'. Most ominous of all was the growth of para-military communist bodies: Inayatullah Khan Mashriqi's Khaksars, founded among Punjab Muslims in 1931, and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh of K.B. Hedgewar. Patronized initially by the old Tilakite Mahasabha leader, B.S. Moonje, the RSS spread in the 1930s from its Nagpur base to U.P., Punjab, and other parts of the country. By 1940, when Golwalkar took over the leadership, it numbered 100,000 trained and highly disciplined cadres pledged to an ideology of uncompromising communalism.

Hindsight derived from the later experience of the Partition days perhaps exaggerates the significance of communal issues to contemporaries in the late-1930s. Certainly most Congressmen did not yet regard the League as a very serious challenge and were busy trying to utilize the existence of Congress ministries in diverse and often contradictory ways: as opportunities for personal gain, for the implementation of sincerely held Gandhian ideals, in the development of plans for national economic advance in collaboration with Indian business leaders and in efforts to improve the conditions of the down-trodden.

**Gandhian Reforms**

An education conference at Wardha in October 1937 endorsed Gandhi's proposals for 'basic education' through the vernacular medium, linked with manual productive work. Schools along these lines were set up in the Congress provinces with some government help. While embodying interesting ideals of simplicity, reduction of differences between mental and manual labour, and schools becoming self-sufficient through sale of their own manufactures, basic education never really became a viable alternative to conventional schools or colleges, and the link with cottage crafts was felt by many to be an unrealistic and archaic Gandhian fad. Gandhi also insisted on prohibition, though this had not been mentioned in the election manifesto. Despite heavy financial losses, Congress ministries were prodded by the High Command to take quick steps in the direction of total prohibition, particularly in Bombay and Madras. Madras also went in for some temple-entry legislation, but otherwise not much seems to have been done for the other major Gandhian concern of Harijan welfare. Ambedkar by the late-1930s had become almost
as bitter a critic of the Congress as the League, and even joined Jinnah in celebrating the resignation of Congress ministries in October 1939 as a ‘day of deliverance’.

For growing numbers of Congressmen, many of Gandhi’s ideas seemed increasingly unpractical and irrelevant, more particularly his theoretical hostility to big industry. A very significant feature of the years of Congress rule in provinces was the foundation of what Claude Markovitz has called ‘a durable alliance’ between Indian business and the Congress party.

*Capitalists and Congress*

This was not a process free of contradictions or variations over regions and time. While Birla declared himself to be ‘simply overwhelmed with joy’ upon hearing the news of Congress acceptance of office, industrialists based on Congress-ruled provinces (rather than Calcutta) were initially rather nervous that popular ministries would be more open to trade union pressures. A Congress Labour Committee in October 1937 did formulate an ambitious programme of welfare legislation, and the U.P. ministry insisted on recognition of the Mazdur Sabha which led a series of formidable strikes in Kanpur textiles during 1937 and 1938. J.P. Srivastava, a U.P. magnate who later joined the Viceroy’s Executive Council, later told Wavell that ‘after the Congress... assumption of office in U.P. in 1937, the leading industrialists—all I think Hindu—got together and decided to finance Jinnah and the Muslim League and also the Mahasabha, as the extreme Communal parties to oppose Congress who they feared might threaten their financial profits—a truly illuminating admission (Wavell, *The Viceroy’s Journal*, entry for 30 November 1944, p. 402). A second potential source of conflict lay in finance. The Bombay Government in February 1939 imposed an urban property tax and a sales tax on cloth to meet the deficit caused by the Gandhian ‘fad’ of prohibition. New Delhi also made some gestures to conciliate Indian capitalists, when it accepted an Assembly resolution terminating the Ottawa and the supplementary Indo-British trade agreement of 1935, and invited Birla, Thakurdas and Kasturbhai Lalbhai to act as its ‘unofficial advisers’ in the tortuous negotiations about a new trade pact with Britain which continued from August 1936 to March 1939. The crux of these negotiations was a bargain through which more Indian
exports would go to England in return for lower import duties against Lancashire. The Government of India had a stake of its own in expansion of Indian exports, for this would facilitate the outflow of remittances, while Bombay on its part was now firmly in control of the home market for textiles and so was not entirely unwilling to make some concessions regarding import duties. (Basudev Chatterji, Ch. VII).

Despite such problems, signs of a firmer understanding between Indian capitalists and decisive sections of the Congress leadership became evident from about mid-1938 onwards. Businessmen benefited from the swadeshi-oriented stores purchase policy of Congress ministries, and close relations with capitalists were developing particularly in Bombay. The Thakurdas Papers, for instance, show Patel directly helping Walchand Hirachand to take over the Bombay Steam Navigation Company from Killick Nixon (Markovitz, p. 222). Maintenance of cotton import duties was a prestige point with nationalists, and the unofficial advisers quit under Congress pressure in September 1938—unlike 1933, no significant section of Indian capitalists could now afford to alienate a party ruling in eight out of eleven provinces. The March 1939 Indo-British trade agreement concluded by New Delhi on its own established a sliding scale of cotton import duties proportionate to British off-take of Indian raw cotton and textile imports into India. All business M.L.A.s joined the Congress in voting against the pact, which had to be passed through the Viceroy’s certificate procedure.

More fundamental economic developments were leading to significant modification in both business and Congress attitudes and permitting a closer alliance. The establishment behind Indian tariff walls of subsidiaries of giant British (and now also sometimes American) firms was a major threat. Lever Brothers, for instance, had displaced Godrej by 1937 as the major manufacturer of soap, Imperial Tobacco had started its Vazir Sultan subsidiary, and chemicals, engineering, and rubber were particularly affected by what the Harijan in a series of articles during 1938 denounced as ‘the menace of India Limited’. The FICCI took up the issue in April 1939, and the Bombay Congress leader N.V. Gadgil moved a resolution on the issue in the Central Assembly the same month.

Meanwhile another industrial depression had set in from 1937,
with over-production in sugar (effectively tackled by the U.P. and Bihar ministries by pressurizing manufacturers into forming a syndicate), a crisis in cement, and stagnation in textiles. The limits of growth through import-substitution in consumer goods industries were being reached, given the fact that a big expansion in the rural home market required structural changes like thorough-going land reforms which the Congress as well as the Indian bourgeoisie considered socially unacceptable. Intermediate and capital goods development required heavy initial investment, technical know-how, and readiness to accept low initial profits. The logical alternatives therefore were either encouragement of investments of the 'India Limited' type (and foreign capital was not really interested in low-profit capital goods), or efforts to promote basic industries through state initiative, investment and planning. While British officials like Finance Member Grigg had become notorious for their rigidly laissez-faire attitudes so far as industrial development and public investments were concerned, M. Visvesvaraya, the ex-Dewan of Mysore, had called for state planning already in 1934. As later developments have repeatedly shown, the more far-sighted sections of the bourgeoisie in an under-developed country would be quite ready to accept a measure of state regulation, planning, public investments in basic industries to create a favourable infra-structure for their own growth, and even 'socialist' rhetoric—so long as socialism did not mean wholesale nationalization along revolutionary lines. Subhas Bose's initiative in starting a National Planning Committee in October 1938 under Nehru was thus quite eagerly accepted by Indian businessmen. Birla, Lala Shri Ram, and Visvesvaraya were invited to the Congress industries ministers' conference which set up the N.P.C., business representatives were important members of the 29 sub-committees constituted by the latter, and Nehru on his part conceded the need to accept 'to a large extent the present structure, at any rate as a jumping-off ground.' (letter to K.T. Shah, 13 May 1939, Markovitz, p. 236) The use of phrases like 'socialistic planned structure', or a long-term goal of state ownership or control over key industries, consequently did not worry overmuch Indian capitalists, who judged the Congress more by the quite unsocialistic performance of its ministries. Thus there were signs in 1938-39 of a novel and very significant realignment. Indian capitalists, while retaining
close ties with elements in the Gandhian ‘Right’ like Patel and Rajaji, had also started cultivating sections of the Congress ‘Left’ Nehru’s vision of a modern industrialized India, after all, fitted in much better with bourgeois aspirations than the Gandhian evocation of rural simplicity and handicrafts, and there were enough indication already that the former’s socialist flourishes were eminently manageable.

**Congress and Labour**

Rapprochement with the bourgeoisie naturally involved shifts in attitudes towards labour. The formation of popular ministries initially stimulated labour organization and militancy. Trade union membership went up by 50% in 1938 as compared to 1937, and labour unity was strengthened by the coming together of the AITUC and the moderate N.F.T.U.—the two held a joint session in Nagpur in April 1938. The major industrial disputes of these years included the great general strike in Bengal jute mills (March-May 1937), a series of stoppages in Kanpur cotton mills, textile strikes in Amritsar, Ahmedabad and particularly in Madras province (where the number of workers involved during 1938 exceeded that in Bombay), the strike in Martin Burn’s Kulti and Hirapur iron and steel works in 1938, and the bitter six month-long struggle in the Digboi oil works in Assam (April-October 1939). Despite some Congress efforts to rally the working class (as when Nehru and Bose appealed to workers to ‘unite, organize, and join hands with the Congress’ at a big labour rally in Calcutta in October 1937, or a Hindustan Majdur Sabha was set up in 1938 by leaders like Patel, Rajendra Prasad and J.B. Kripalani), the bulk of the trade union movement remained under either Liberal or Leftist (mostly Communist) leadership. The Ahmedabad textile strike of November 1937 revealed some Communist penetration into even that old Gandhian stronghold.

The Working Committee expressed solidarity with Bengal jute workers (April 1937), and denounced repressive measures taken by the Fazlul Huq ministry in Bengal and Sikandar Hayat Khan’s Unionists in the Punjab. But an early, relatively pro-labour stance taken by Congress ministries soon came under formidable capitalist pressures. Birla complained of rampant ‘indiscipline’ in Congress provinces (letter to Mahadev Desai, 4 September 1937, *In the Shadow of the Mahatma*, p. 227), and there were
threats of a flight of capital from Congress-ruled Bombay and U.P. to the princely states where labour laws hardly existed. Congress desire to placate the bourgeoisie and curb labour unrest in the strongest base of the Communists was reflected in the very drastic provisions of the Bombay Trades Dispute Act (November 1938), which Governor Lumley described as 'admirable'. Rushed through in two months without select committee discussions, the Act imposed compulsory arbitration, six months jail for illegal strikes (but no corresponding penalties for lockouts), and new trade union registration rules making things very difficult for unions not recognized by the management. With the exception of the Ahmedabad Gandhian labour leaders (Gulzarilal Nanda and Khandubhai Desai), the entire trade union movement opposed the Act, along with most non-Congress parties (including the Muslim League). 80,000 attended a protest rally in Bombay on 6 November addressed by Dange, Indulal Yajnik and Ambedkar, and next day there was a partially successful general strike throughout the province. During the Digboi strike of 1939 against the British-owned Assam Oil Company, formal expressions of Congress sympathy were more than counterbalanced by the failure of the N.C. Bardoloi ministry to implement a pro-labour award by an ICS official, and in October the Congress ministry allowed free use of the newly introduced wartime Defence of India rules to smash the strike. It is interesting that apart from some criticism of the registration clause, Nehru found the Bombay Act 'on the whole... a good one' (Markovits, p. 218), while the Leftist President of the Congress, Subhas Bose, made some private protests to Patel but refused to make it an issue for any public break. (Bose to Nehru, 29 March 1939, A Bunch of Old Letters, p. 341)

Congress and Kisans

The Congress with its not unjustified claims to be primarily a kisan party was bound to undertake a measure of agrarian reform. Debt burdens were sought to be reduced in most Congress provinces through fixation of interest rates, statutory tenants of Avadh were raised to the level of hereditary occupancy raiyats, enhancements restricted and rents somewhat reduced in U.P. and Bihar bakhast lands from which occupy raiyats had been evicted during the 'Depression partly restored in the
latter province' and *khoti* sub-tenants of *raiyatwari* landholders given some rights in Bombay. Forest *satyagraha* found partial fulfilment in the abolition of grazing fees in Bombay and their reduction in Madras. Yet Coupland found the chief merit of Congress agrarian legislation to be that 'its treatment of the landlords was not intolerably severe . . . Congress policy might almost be called conservative.' (pp. 140, 138). Of the two proposals he described as really radical, the Prakasam committee recommendations in Madras suggesting *raiyat* ownership and rent-reduction to the level of 1802 in *zamindari* areas were quickly shelved, while an Orissa act fixing *zamindari* rents at a level only 12½% above revenues in adjoining *raiyatwari* areas was vetoed by the Governor—and the Congress did not make of this an issue demanding resignation. Congress legislation fell well short of even the moderate proposals of the Faizpur session, and the resolutions of the U.P. and Bihar PCCs in 1936 and 1937 advocating abolition of *zamindari* were forgotten once the party was in power. Faced with a threat of 'civil disobedience' from *zamindars* in September 1937, the Bihar ministry considerably watered down its tenancy bill, and Azad and Rajendra Prasad negotiated a secret agreement with landlords in Patna three months later. At a subsequent landholder's conference, a delegate praised the Bihar government as 'very reasonable . . . some concessions were secured by zamindars in Bihar which no other government would have allowed' (W. Hauser, *The Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha*, unpublished thesis, Chicago 1961, pp. 121, 129). The pattern in fact was not dissimilar from that in the non-Congress provinces. The Fazlul Haq ministry restricted rent-enhancements and interest rates, but passed on the question of *zamindari* abolition to the Floud Commission, whose recommendation of state take-over with compensation (1940) would be implemented only after independence. Unionist moves in the Punjab to tighten up the 1900 Land Alienation Act were denounced as 'black bills' by the Hindu Mahasabha leaders and even by the local Congress till the High Command intervened.

Behind the limited agrarian reforms of 1937-39 lay the pressure of a massive peasant movement. *Kisan Sabha* membership shot up to half a million in 1938, with Bihar alone claiming 250,000, followed by Punjab (73,000), U.P. (60,000) Andhra (53,000), and Bengal (34,000). Spectacular *kisan* marches had become very
common, and Bihar kisans for instance marched right into the Assembly house and occupied its seats for some time in the first session under the Congress ministry—much to the horror of G.D. Birla, who complained that 'the rank and file seems to be confusing freedom with indiscipline' (In the Shadow of the Mahatma, p. 228). There were numerous local struggles: as examples may be cited the movement against canal water rates in Burdwan district in Bengal (1937); the movement of Hajong tribals under Moni Singh in the Garo Hills of north Mymensingh (East Bengal), in 1937-38, which was able to get produce-rent (tanka) reduced from one-half to one-fourth of the harvest; the Barhaia Tal agitation in Monghyr (Bihar) demanding restoration of bakasht lands which went on from 1936 to 1939 under the leadership of Karyananda Sharma, the future Communist leader; the anti-zamindari movements in Kalipatnam and Munagala in the Krishna district of Andhra (1938-39), where too Communists were prominent; anti-water tax agitations in Lyallpur (Punjab) and Sukur (Sind) and campaigns against revenue enhancement in Amritsar and Lahore, all during 1938-39; and powerful peasant movements in the coastal districts of Orissa. In Bihar rent-collection seemed on the point of collapse between autumn 1938 and mid-1939, and armed police pickets were often required to protect landlord harvests. Villages here resounded to Sahajanand's militant slogan: Laga lege kaise/Danda hamara zindabad How will you collect rent/Long live our lathis). Within the broad front represented by the A.I.K.S. Socialists and Communists were becoming increasingly prominent—a trend symbolized by the adoption of the red flag as banner by the Kisan Sabha in October 1937. Sahajananda himself was moving rapidly to the Left, through disillusionment with the performance of Congress ministries and contacts with the C.S.P. While still using the garb of a sanyasi, he is said to have declared in 1937 that 'as religious robes had long exploited the country now he would exploit those robes on behalf of the peasants. (Hauser, p. 86). The very successful Comilla Conference of the A.I.K.S. (May 1938), held in the heart of Muslim East Bengal in the teeth of opposition from the League as well as from some Congressmen, denounced Gandhian 'class collaboration', proclaimed 'agrarian revolution' to be the ultimate aim, and heard
a passionate defence by Sahajananda of the *danda* in self-defence against *zamindar* attacks.

Despite occasional calls for unity with landless labourers (as at the Gaya Conference of April 1939), the Kisan Sabha remained essentially the organization of peasants with some land as small holders or tenants. Bhumihars prominence in the leadership and even the ranks of the Bihar unit, not Harijan or tribal agricultural labourers, and the Bengal Provincial Kisan Sabha memorandum to the F lou d Commission concentrated on abolition of *zamindari* and failed to raise any specific demands for *bargadars* (sharecroppers). In Andhra, the initial Kisan Sabha (as well as Communist) base was among the fairly prosperous Kamma peasants of the Krishna-Godavari delta, while in the Punjab kisan movements concentrated almost entirely on the issues of revenue enhancement and irrigation taxes.

Congress ministers and leaders adopted an increasingly hostile attitude towards Kisan Sabha militancy. District Committees in Champaran, Saran, and Monghyr banned Congressmen from attending Sahajananda’s meetings in late-1937, police pickets and Section 144 were freely used in Congress-ruled Bihar, U.P. Orissa and Madras, much was made of Sahajananda’s advocacy of the *danda* as going against the creed of the non-violence, and the September 1938 AICC denunciation of ‘class war’ was made specifically in the context of Kisan Sabha agitations. All this happened while first Nehru and then Bose formally headed the Congress party. Coupland remarks that agrarian tensions were less acute in U.P. than in neighbouring Bihar in part because of the ‘valuable support’ given to the ministry ‘in the matter of rent payment... by Pandit Nehru’ (p. 127). On 23 April 1938, for instance, Nehru advised Allahabad *kisans* not to obstruct the smooth working of the Congress ministry. Congress President Subhas Bose did not make an issue of the September 1938 resolution (moved by Bhulabhai Desai and powerfully backed by Gandhi); he would break with Gandhi next year, but only over the question of his own re-election as President.

*States Peoples Movement*

The most significant advance made by the national movement between 1937 and 1939 was in the princely states: the bulwarks of autocracy and rampant feudal exploitation which British
Federation plans had increasingly exposed as key supports for imperialism in its efforts to keep India divided and subjugated. As in so many other phases of the national movement, the real initiative came from below rather than from top leaders or organizations. The All-India States People’s Conference had become more active under its secretary Balwantra Mehta, but it remained essentially an occasional gathering of middle class politicians, concerned with questions of civil rights and responsible government, and seldom raising specific peasant or tribal issues. Nor did it demand as yet any wholesale integration of states, merely suggesting (at its Ludhiana session in 1939, where Nehru presided) that very small non-viable states could be merged into neighbouring provinces. The Congress Right-wing on its part tried hard to stick to the old policy of non-intervention, and Gandhi himself at first showed exceptional rigidity on this point, openly expressing his displeasure over an AICC resolution in October 1937 which had appealed ‘to the people of Indian states and British India to give all support and encouragement’ to the popular struggle in Mysore. A compromise resolution at the Haripura session (February 1938) for the first time declared the Purna Swaraj ideal to cover the states as much as British India, but insisted that ‘for the present’ the Congress could give only its ‘moral support and sympathy’ to states peoples movements, which should not be conducted in the name of the Congress. Gandhi indicated a few months later that he would be satisfied if the princes granted a measure of civil liberties and independent courts, and reduced their privy purses—not even responsible government was demanded, far less integration. (R L. Handa, *History of Freedom Struggle in Princely States*, New Delhi 1968, pp. 116-17).

In early 1939, in the context of the rapid advance of popular movements virtually throughout princely India, Gandhi decided to try out his specific techniques of controlled mass struggle for the first time in a native state. He allowed his close adjutant, the business magnate Jammalal Bajaj, to lead a satyagraha in Jaipur, and, together with Vallabhbhai Patel, began a personal intervention in the movement in Rajkot which had been started by the local Praja Parishad under U.N. Dhebar. Virawala, the very unpopular Dewan of Rajkot, had imposed numerous monopolies disliked by local traders and stopped summoning an
advisory elected council set up earlier, while nearly half the revenues of the state were swallowed up by the privy purse of its ruler. The choice of Rajkot by Gandhi is very significant: a tiny state surrounded by the firm Gandhian base of Gujarat, almost half its population lived in the capital and so there was little danger of agrarian radicalism swamping strictly non-violent satyagraha. Kasturba Gandhi and Manibehn Patel courted arrest in February 1939, and Gandhi himself went to Rajkot and started a fast on 3 March—just on the eve of the Tripuri Congress, where his leadership was being seriously challenged by the re-election of Bose. The Rajkot intervention, however, proved to be one of Gandhi’s failures, for the British Political Department instigated Virawala to withdraw the concessions he had offered at one stage, as well as to skilfully encourage Muslim and untouchable demands for more seats in the proposed Reform Committee. Gandhi bowed himself out of the Rajkot affair in May 1939, declaring that his own fast had been of a coercive nature and therefore not sufficiently non-violent.

Meanwhile far more impressive and significant movements had developed in many other parts of princely India, most notably in Mysore, the Orissan states, Hyderabad and Travancore (as well as in parts of Rajputana and the Punjab states of Patiala, Kalsia, Kapurthala and Sirmoor).

Gandhian controls remained fairly firm in Mysore, where K.T. Bhashyam’s State Congress, initially based on Brahman urban professional groups, extended its support through merger in October 1937 with the Peoples Federation of Non-Brahman rural landholders led by K.C. Reddy and H.C. Dasappa. A first round of agitation from October 1937 for legalization of the Congress and responsible government culminated on 11 April 1938 in a blood-bath at Viduraswatha village in Kolar district where 30 were killed by firing on a crowd of 10,000. In the following month Patel concluded a truce with Dewan Mirza Ismail which legalized the Congress, but failure to implement promises of significant constitutional reform led to another round of civil disobedience from September 1939. Effective Congress leadership of controlled mass movements built up a strength for the party in the Karnataka region which was rather unusual in south India, as post-1947 politics have often shown.

In the much more backward interior states of Orissa, issues
like forced labour, taxes on forest produce, extortion of 'gifts' on festive occasions or tenancy rights inevitably were as much if not more important than demands for political reform. The C.S.P. leader Nabakrushna Chaudhuri led a satyagraha in Dhenkanal in December 1938, powerful movements developed in Nilgiri, Nayagarh, Talcher and Ranpur, and there were numerous violent incidents, with tribals fighting back with bows and arrows the armed power of the princes. Thousands emigrated from Talcher to camp at Angul and Kosala in Congress-ruled Orissa, and on 5 January 1939 the British Political Agent in Ranpur, Major Barzelgette, was stoned to death after he had fired on a crowd in front of the royal palace. Gandhi did his best to get the Orissan movements called off in return for some token political reforms in Dhenkanal and Talcher, and the question became a bone of contention between the Orissa Gandhians (led by Gopabandhu Chaudhuri) and the Socialists and Communists who were leading the Kisan Sabha in the province.

In the biggest princely state of all, Hyderabad, a small Muslim elite held 90% of government jobs, and Urdu was maintained as the sole official language and medium of instruction in a state which was 50% Telegu, 25% Marathi, and 11% Kannada-speaking. There was a total absence of elementary civil and political rights, and extremely crude forms of feudal exploitation, like vetti, or forced labour and compulsory payments in kind, prevailed in the Telengana region. Popular awakening initially took the form of middle-class language-based cultural associations—the Andhra Mahasabha in Telengana and the Maharashtra Parishad in Marathwada—petitioning for mild political reforms. The Congress policy of non-intervention gave an opportunity to Hindu-communalist forces, the Arya Samaj and the Hindu Mahasabha, to campaign against the tyranny of the Nizam and the Ittahad-ul-Mussalmaan even while the Mahasabha was denouncing Congress interference under the 'plausible slogan of responsible government' in states under Hindu princes (Nagpur session, December 1938). The Arya leader Pandit Narendraji started a purely Hindu satyagraha in Hyderabad city and the Marathwada region (adjoining the Marathi speaking districts of C.P., a stronghold of Hindu communalists) in October 1938, with the demand for more jobs for Hindus. At about the same time, a State Congress had been founded on a secular basis by Swami Rama-
nanda Tirtha and Govinddass Shroff from Marathwada, Ravi Narayan Reddi from Telengana and a few Muslims like Sirajul Hasan Tirmizi from Hyderabad city. The State Congress began a parallel and more effective satyagraha from 24 October 1938, demanding its own legalization and responsible government, while a powerful ‘Vande Mataram’ movement developed among Osmania students, who left the University when the Nizam banned the singing of that patriotic hymn. The Congress movement, however, was called off at Gandhi’s insistence in December 1938, ostensibly on the ground that it could get mixed up with the Hindu communalist agitation—‘we could not understand the propriety of this decision’ confessed Ramananda Tirtha later on. (Memoirs of Hyderabad Freedom Struggle, Bombay, 1967, p. 107). Soon ‘the cream of Andhra workers who had given the lead’ (Ibid, p. 87) under Ravi Narayan Reddi went over to the Communists. A Nizam State Committee of the C.P.I. was established secretly in 1939, guided initially by the already-strong movement in coastal Andhra. Using the broad front of the Andhra Mahasabha, the Communists penetrated into the Telengana countryside with amazing rapidity, building up within a few years the base that would sustain from 1946 to 1951 the greatest peasant guerrilla war seen in India so far.

In Travancore and Cochin, as in the adjoining Malayalee district of Malabar, the national movement was built up very largely under Leftist leadership and guidance. A.K. Gopalan has described in his autobiography how in the mid-and late-1930s activists like Krishna Pillai, E.M.S. Namboodripad and himself founded the C.S.P., converted the Congress for the first time into a real mass organization, and simultaneously moved towards Communism (In the Cause of the People, Madras, 1973). Namboodripad eventually became secretary of the Kerala PCC, which remained under Leftist control till the nearly 1940s. In August 1938, the Travancore State Congress started a powerful agitation against the autocracy of Dewan C.P. Ramaswami Iyer. Despite brutal repression (including 12 cases of firing in two months), students joined the satyagraha in large numbers, and jathas marched into Travancore from many parts of Kerala (including one led by A.K. Gopalan), thus greatly contributing to the developing sense of regional-linguistic unity. Particularly impressive was the role of the working class. Alleppey coir workers led by
Krishna Pillai went on strike in October 1938, demanding not only wage-increase and union recognition but release of political prisoners and responsible government based on universal franchise. The Dewan was forced to call off repressive measures against the Congress satyagraha in order to isolate the militant Allepey workers. As elsewhere, the role of Gandhi and the Congress High Command was confined to advising withdrawal of the satyagraha once a few token concessions had been obtained.

The Left in the Congress

Labour and kisan organization and the upsurge in the princely states comprised issues around which a broad Left alternative could emerge within the Congress as a challenge to the increasingly conservative stance of the ministries and the majority in the High Command. The Left in this period included the Socialists, the followers of M.N. Roy (who remained quite important still in trade unions), and the illegal C.P.I. which worked through the C.S.P. and in fact provided many of its most effective mass leaders (Krishna Pillai, Namboodripad and Gopalan in Kerala, Jeevannandan in Tamilnadu, Sundarayya in Andhra, Sohan Singh Josh in the Punjab). They obtained an uncertain and largely verbal support from the two Congress Presidents of these years, Nehru and Bose—support which was still felt to be valuable. There were some internal tensions, particularly the growing alarm felt by Socialists like Jayaprakash Narayan, Minoo Masani or N.G. Ranga at the rapid penetration of the rather amorphous party they led by dedicated and disciplined Communist cadres—a justified fear, for in 1939-40 the C.P.I. walked away with the entire Kerala unit and much of the Tamilnadu and Andhra membership. A measure of broad unity could still be preserved, till 1939 and in some ways till 1942. All sections of the Left agreed that remaining within the Congress was justified, and indeed, despite some inevitable compromises, it did seem to be bringing in rich dividends. Apart from the clear predominance established in trade unions and Kisan Sabhas, it was significant that students in regions like Bengal now tended to be attracted to one or other variety of the Left (terrorism had at last died out, and Gandhism had little appeal). The Bengal unit of the Communist-led All India Students Federation spread from Calcutta into mufassil colleges and schools through the prisoners’ release campaign of
1937-1945

1937-38, followed up by movements for elected students unions, an adult literacy drive which was combined with anti-imperialist propaganda, and solidarity demonstrations with Spain and China. A pattern of student radicalism was being set which would last for at least a generation. (G. Chattopadhyay, *Swadhinata-Sangrame Banglar Chatra-samaj*, Calcutta, 1980).

The entire Left tried, without noticeable success, to persuade the Congress leadership to adopt a more sympathetic stance towards trade unions and Kisan Sabhas and to give open support to the States People’s Movements. While the Congress periodically reiterated its opposition to British Federation plans based on Viceregal reserved powers and a central legislature with states members nominated by princes, it rejected Left demands for mass action on the issue, being apparently content with the provincial ministries for the time being.

In private letters Nehru repeatedly expressed strong misgivings about the conservative functioning of Congress ministries, even calling them ‘counter-revolutionary’ and ‘merely carrying on the tradition (with minor variations) of the previous governments’. (Nehru to G.B. Pant, 25 November 1937, *A Bunch of Old Letters*, p. 263). But actions are more significant than words (and particularly private doubts), and here, as we have repeatedly see, both Nehru and Bose woefully failed to stem the drift to the Right.

On international issues, in sharp contrast, the Left clearly set the tone, thanks in large part to the consistent support and leadership it received here from Jawaharlal Nehru. Jawaharlal in fact increasingly sought in internationalist gestures a kind of surrogate for effective Left action at home—‘I have felt out of place and a misfit. This was one reason . . . why I decided to go to Europe’ (Letter to Gandhi, 28 April 1938, *A Bunch of Old Letters*, p. 284). In the context of gathering war clouds, nationalist and Leftist opinion in general agreed that there was no question of any unconditional support this time to a British foreign policy characterized in the late-1930s by Chamberlain’s appeasement of fascist aggression in Abyssinia, Spain, Austria, Czechoslovakia and China. ‘Na ek pai, na ek bhai’ (not a pic, not a man), was the slogan being raised already in the Punjab by Socialists and Communists in 1938—without very much impact, however, on army recruitment, for military salaries and pensions formed a
principal basis for the relative prosperity of the Punjab peasantry. With Britain clearly abetting the aggressors and egging on Germany against the Soviet Union, there was no contradiction as yet between anti-British nationalism and anti-fascist internationalism. The entire Congress repeatedly denounced fascist aggression, Nehru went to Spain in 1938 to express his solidarity with the International Brigade defending Madrid, and the Congress responded to Chu Teh’s appeal for help by sending a medical mission to China (one of whose members, Dr Kotnis, died a martyr to the cause of India-China friendship and anti-imperialist solidarity, working with the Communist Eighth Route Army guerrillas). Rabindranath too, repeatedly called for support to Republican Spain and denounced Japanese aggression in China. The shadows of fascism and impending world war gave a new tone to some of his poems in this period, which both in content as well as in the stark austerity of their style constituted a remarkable departure for a man in his late-seventies.

The Tripuri Crisis

Consensus on international issues which demanded little more in practice as yet than solidarity gestures, however, could be no substitute for radicalism on more immediately vital domestic problems, and here matters reached crisis point in early 1939 on the eve of the Tripuri session with Bose’s decision to stand for re-election as President. Though the proposal initially came from eight C.S.P. leaders (all of them, incidentally, with Communist connections), and though Bose tried to link his candidature with a radical call for a ‘National Demand’ for Swaraj in the form of a time-bound ultimatum to the British, it is difficult to avoid the impression that the issue was to a considerable extent personal. The Working Committee appointed by Bose after Haripura had not included a single Leftist apart from Jawaharlal (unlike Nehru’s nominations in 1936), and he had done nothing to prevent the development of an increasingly hostile stance by the High Command and ministries towards labour and kisan militancy. The entire Left still rallied around Bose in his electoral confrontation with Sitaramayya, whom Gandhi explicitly declared to be his nominee after a third candidate, Maulana Azad, had withdrawn. Subhas was elected on 29 January 1939 by 1580 votes against 1377, with massive majorities in Bengal and Punjab and
substantial leads in Kerala, Karnataka, Tamilnadu, U.P. and Assam. The contest was very close in Maharashtra and Mahakoshal (C.P. Hindustani), and only Gujarat, Bihar, Orissa and Andhra voted more or less solidly for Sitaramayya.

Immensely superior tactics and Left lack of unity enabled Gandhi and the Congress Right to snatch victory from the jaws of an apparently decisive defeat. Gandhi immediately made the issue a matter of his own personal prestige by declaring Sitaramayya’s defeat to be ‘more mine than his’ (31 January). On 22 February 13 out of the 15 members of the old Working Committee resigned, on the ground that Subhas had publicly criticized them; they included, after the usual wobbling and on a somewhat different pretext, Nehru. The Tripuri session (8-12 March) found Bose temporarily almost incapacitated by illness, and Gandhi back from a fast in Rajkot which had won some concessions for the time being. The Right pressed home their offensive through the famous resolution moved by Govindballav Pant expressing confidence in the old Working Committee, reiterating faith in the Gandhian policies followed during the last 20 years, and asking Bose to nominate his new executive ‘in accordance with the wishes of Gandhiji’. The resolution was carried by 218 to 133 votes in the Subjects Committee, and by an overwhelming majority through show of hands in the open session. Nehru’s support was not unexpected: apart from his ultimate loyalty to Gandhi, his personal equation with Bose had never been happy. But Socialists, Royists, and Communists (except for some Bengal members like Bankim Mukherji) also failed to oppose the Pant resolution out of a desire to avoid a complete split. Jayaprakash even moved, and Nehru and the Communist Bhardwaj supported, the extremely diluted National Demand resolution which dropped Bose’s idea of a time-bound ultimatum and merely called for preparations for a struggle to achieve a Constituent Assembly through strengthening the Congress.

The choice had been a difficult one for the Left, for Bose’s previous record had not been one which could inspire a confidence unqualified enough to risk a total break. It may be argued that the more fundamental mistake from the Left point of view lay in the failure both before and after Tripuri to resist more effectively the increasingly anti-labour and anti-kisan policies of
the Congress ministries. This was the result of a conception of a united front which in practice at times came to be identified with a desire to retain unity with top Congress leaders at all costs. C.P.I. General Secretary P.C. Joshi, for instance, argued in the party organ *National Front* in April 1939 that ‘the greatest class struggle today is our national struggle’ of which Congress was the ‘main organ’—and so Congress-*kisan* unity had to be preserved.

Bose, who had already declared on 3 February that he considered his electoral victory meaningless if he failed to ‘win the confidence of India’s greatest man’, tried for two months after Tripuri to set up an agreed Working Committee. The basic weakness of his position, particularly in the context of disunity within the Left, was made clear when he failed to take up Gandhi’s challenge—‘you are free to choose your own committee’—at the Calcutta session of the AICC on 29 April. He preferred to resign, and was replaced by the staunch Gandhian Right-winger Rajendra Prasad. On 3 May, Bose announced the formation of his Forward Bloc, initially with the idea of working within the Congress and also of uniting the various Left groups—for which purpose the Forward Bloc started a Left Consolidation Committee in June 1929. This received Communist support but both the Royists and Socialists leaders like Jayaprakash gave first priority to Congress unity and were critical of the formation of the Forward Bloc, which became in the end just another splinter group within the already fragmented Left. Subhas was now more popular in Bengal than ever, as the regional hero who had been given a raw deal, and he had his pockets of personal influence elsewhere, particularly in Bihar, Punjab, Bombay and Tamilnadu. The High Command, however, was quite determined to finish him as a force within the Congress, and when Bose called for an all-India protest day on 9 July against a recent AICC resolution (moved by Patcl) banning civil disobedience by Congressmen without previous permission from PCCs, disciplinary action was quickly taken against him. On 11 August the AICC removed Bose from the post of President of the Bengal PCC and debarred him from holding any Congress office for three years. An *ad hoc* committee was later set up to run the Bengal Congress, including Azad and Gandhians like P.C. Ghosh but also two members
(B.C. Roy and Kirsanskar Roy) of the 'big five' of Calcutta magnates who had once been Bose's main financial backers.

While Bose was firmly ousted, a total break with the Left would hardly have been wise from the High Command point of view. By late-1939, continuation of Congress ministries was proving to be somewhat counter-productive in terms of internal tensions and loss of party image. The ministries increasingly faced the problem of alienation of workers, kisans and all Left elements within the party, while not really pleasing landlords or business groups (who resented things like the Bombay urban property tax, which were inevitable, given the tight financial constraints under which provincial autonomy operated). Patel hinted in July 1939 that the ministries might have to resign unless the provinces received a greater share of the income tax. With the coming of war in September, there was the further danger that Congress ministers might have to use the new emergency powers against anti-war demonstrations by their own partymen. The resignation of Congress ministries on 29-30 October 1939 was thus logical and inevitable, even though the occasion was provided by Linlithgow's tactless obstinacy.

1939-1942: WAR AND INDIAN POLITICS—THE FIRST PHASE

Bureaucratic Counter-Offensive

On 3 September 1939, the Viceroy unilaterally associated India with Britain's declaration of war on Germany, without bothering to consult the provincial ministries or any Indian leader. Congress hostility to fascist aggression had been incomparably more forthright and consistent than Britain's own record so far. Yet Linlithgow rejected numerous offers of full cooperation in the war effort provided some minimum conditions were met: a promise of a post-war constituent assembly to determine the political structure of a free India, and the immediate formation of something like a genuine responsible government in the centre. Such conditions, the Congress argued with considerable justice, were essential if Indian opinion was to be really mobilized for a war which in 1939 (and down to the Japanese attack of December 1941) was still a very distant one, for otherwise the Allied propaganda that the conflict was one between democracy and the principle of self-determination of nations against tyranny and aggression was bound to seem extremely hollow. Linlithgow's
statement of 17 October 1939 merely repeated old offers of Dominion Status in an indefinite and presumably distant future, promised post-war 'consultations with representatives of the several communities' to modify the 1935 Act (and not any democratically-elected constituent assembly), and the settings-up for the present of a purely consultative group of Indian politicians and princely representatives with no real executive power whatsoever. Privately the Viceroy repeatedly declared his intention to 'lie back for the present' and avoid 'running after the Congress' (Linlithgow to Secretary of State, Zetland, 3 and 13 February 1940).

Linlithgow's attitude was not an aberration, but part of a general British policy to take advantage of the war to regain for the white-dominated central government and bureaucracy the ground lost to the Congress from 1937 or earlier. Even before war had been declared, an amendment to the 1935 Act had been rushed through the British Parliament giving New Delhi emergency powers in respect of provincial subjects. A Defence of India Ordinance restricting civil liberties came into force the day war was declared, and by May 1940 the Government had prepared a top-secret draft Revolutionary Movements Ordinance aimed at a crippling pre-emptive strike at the Congress at the first opportunity. As in 1931, an important section of British officialdom was eager to provoke the Congress into a confrontation at a time when the government had sweeping powers, could call upon (from early 1942 onwards) growing numbers of British and other Allied troops stationed in India, and could hope for an unusual amount of world-wide liberal and even Left-wing sympathy (after the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941) in suppressing a movement which could be portrayed as objectively helping Japan and Germany.

British Indian reactionary policies received powerful support and encouragement from Winston Churchill, who took over as head of a national coalition in May 1940 as the German blitzkrieg smashed through the western front, swept the British into the sea at Dunkirk, and overran France in a matter of weeks. Churchill, the new Secretary of State Amery once whispered to Wavell at a Cabinet meeting, knew as much about the Indian problem as George III did of the American colonies (Wavell, Viceroy's Journal, p. 21). 'I have not become the King's First
Minister in order to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire’, Churchill would declare in November 1942. Churchill’s premiership more than counterbalanced the entry into the Cabinet of Labour leaders like Attlee and Cripps who had promised Nehru and Krishna Menon at a private meeting on June 1939 at Cripps’ country house of Filkins that the next Labour Government would agree to a complete transfer of power to a constituent assembly based on universal franchise, subject to an Indo-British treaty protecting British obligations and interests in India for a transitional period (P.S. Gupta, Imperialism and British Labour, pp. 257-9). In August 1940, while the ‘battle of Britain raged over the skies of an isolated island, Amery and even Linlithgow were prepared for some concessions to win Indian support, but their proposals were whittled down drastically by Churchill. Linlithgow’s ‘August Offer’ (8 August 1940) consequently was little more than a repetition of his 17 October 1939 statement: Dominion Status in the unspecified future, a post-war body to devise a constitution (but evidently subject still to ultimate British parliamentary sanction, and no mention was made of its being elected by universal franchise), immediate expansion of the Viceroy’s Executive to include some more Indians, and a War Advisory Council. In July 1941, the Viceroy’s Executive was enlarged to give Indians a majority for the first time (8 out of 12, but whites remained in charge of defence, finance and home) and a National Defence Council was set up with purely advisory functions. For the rest, no further initiative was taken, till the disasters in South-East Asia compelled the dramatic Cripps Mission of March-April 1942—and this too, as we shall see, would be effectively torpedoed by the Churchill-Linlithgow combine.

_League and Pakistan_

Encouragement of Muslim League claims formed an increasingly important part of war-time imperialist strategy. The 17 October 1939 statement referred to the need to consult representatives of the ‘several communities’ and the August offer made it clear that the British would not transfer responsibilities ‘to any system of government whose authority is directly denied by large and powerful elements in India’s national life.’ This in effect conceded one of Jinnah’s central demands since the outbreak
of the war: not only was the League the sole spokesman for India's Muslims, there must also be a kind of League veto on future constitutional changes.

British instigation was not entirely absent in the final stages of the evolution of the Pakistan slogan which was adopted by the Lahore session of the Muslim League in March 1940. The genesis of this demand has sometimes been traced back to Iqbal's reference to the need for a 'North West Indian Muslim state' in his presidential address to the Muslim League in 1930, but the context of his speech makes it clear that the great Urdu poet and patriot was really visualizing not partition, but a reorganization of Muslim-majority areas in N.W. India into an autonomous unit within a single weak Indian federation. Choudhry Rehmat Ali's group of Punjabi Muslim students in Cambridge have a much better claim to be regarded as the original proponents of the idea. In two pamphlets, written in 1933 and 1935, Rehmat Ali demanded a separate national status for a new entity for which he coined the name Pakstan (from Punjab, Afghan province, Kashmir, Sind and Baluchistan). No one took this very seriously at the time, least of all the League and other Muslim delegates to the Round Table Conference who dismissed the idea as a student's pipe-dream. But the League after 1937, as we have seen, urgently needed some kind of a positive platform, while the Federal clauses of the 1935 Act showed less and less signs of ever coming near implementation and were in any case felt by Muslim leaders to envisage an unacceptably strong and Hindu-dominated central government. A number of alternative proposals were consequently put forward during 1938-39, and in March 1939 the League set up a subcommittee to examine the various schemes. While the Aligarh scheme of Zafrul Hasan and Husain Qadri suggested four independent states of Pakistan, Bengal, Hyderabad and Hindustan, most other plans stopped well short of complete partition, and wanted formation of distinct autonomous Muslim blocs within a loose Indian confederation. The Punjab Unionist premier Sikandar Hayat Khan, for instance, suggested a kind of three-tier structure with autonomous provinces grouped into seven regions having their own regional legislatures, together constituting a loose confederation with the centre having charge only over matters like defence, external affairs, customs and currency—an anticipation of the Cabinet
Mission plan of 1946. Considerable British encouragement and prodding lay behind this sudden search for alternatives. Khaliquzzaman tells us that Secretary of State, Zetland had given a sympathetic hearing on 20 March 1939 to redefinition of Rehmat Ali's scheme, suggesting two Muslim Federations, one in the North West and the other in the East (covering Bengal and Assam). (Pathway to Pakistan, pp. 205-7). The recently-opened Linlithgow and Zetland papers make the British role even more evident. The Viceroy, for instance, told Jinnah on 6 February 1940, six weeks before the Lahore resolution, that British sympathy should not be expected 'for a party whose policy was one of sheer negation'—'If he and his friends wanted to secure that the Muslim case should not go by default in the UK, it was really essential that they should formulate their plan in the near future'. (quoted in Uma Kaura, p. 149)

The famous resolution of 23 March 1940, drafted by Sikandar Hayat Khan, moved (after considerable modifications) by Fazlul Huq, and seconded by Khaliquzzaman, demanded 'that geographically contiguous units are demarcated into regions which should be so constituted, with such territorial readjustments as may be necessary, that the areas in which the Muslims are numerically in a majority as in the north-western and eastern zones of India should be grouped to constitute 'Independent States', in which the constituent units shall be autonomous and sovereign.' The remarkably clumsy wording left ample—and probably deliberate—scope for vagueness, ambiguity and equivocation. Neither Pakistan nor Partition were explicitly mentioned, and in the early 1940s some Muslim politicians even argued at times that the Hindu press and politicians had started the Pakistan bogey by misinterpreting the resolution in order to block legitimate but more modest Muslim demands. 'Territorial readjustments' were not defined and 'Independent States' (within quotes) seemed to imply separation but could possibly mean no more than full autonomy within a loose federation. The use of the plural and the stress on the sovereignty of the units became very important after Partition, for they provided the theoretical basis for the Awami Leaguc agitation (started under Fazlul Huq) against a Punjabi-dominated unitary conception of Pakistan which eventually led to the breakaway of Bangladesh.
In a much-quoted Punjab Assembly speech on 11 March 1941, Sikander Hayat Khan, leader of a Unionist bloc which included some Sikhs and Hindu Jats like Chhotu Ram, declared that he was opposed to a Pakistan which would mean 'Muslim Raj here and Hindu Raj elsewhere... If Pakistan means unalloyed Muslim Raj in the Punjab then I will have nothing to do with it'. (V.P. Menon, *Transfer of Power in India*, p. 463). He reiterated his plea for a loose confederation, and claimed that his original resolution at Lahore had included references 'to the centre and coordination of the activities of the various units'. Few Muslim leaders in fact initially took Pakistan very seriously or literally, and even for Jinnah probably it began as a bargaining counter, useful to block possible British constitutional concessions to the Congress and gain additional favours for the Muslims. Yet Sikandar's speech admitted that though 'a vast majority of educated Muslims... do not believe in any of these schemes' (of Partition), its very vagueness and fluidity was increasingly making Pakistan 'a convenient slogan to sway the Muslim masses' (Ibid, p. 453). Unionist evocation of Punjab communal unity was associated with a general defence of the social and political *status quo* and open alignment with the British: Sikandar's successor, Khizar Hayat Khan, would be the one Indian politician to win the unqualified admiration of Wavell. In Punjab as well as in Bengal, a populist, demagogic communalism could consequently develop for a few years around the slogan of Pakistan, with an independent Muslim state being presented as a panacea to all problems. This still lay some years in the future, however. For the moment, Pakistan was useful for the British to maintain a constitutional deadlock in India, but while encouraging Jinnah within limits, they had no intention of surrendering to all his demands. League claims for Muslim non-official advisors in the provinces under Section 93, more seats in the expanded Executive Council, and parity with the Congress in it in case the latter decided to join in the future, were all rejected. Jinnah consequently in the end turned down the August offer, and next year compelled Sikander Hayat Khan and Fazlul Huq to decline membership of the new National Defence Council.

*Trends within the Congress*

Down to the winter of 1941-42, alignments within the Congress
broadly followed the pattern set in the late-1930s. Gandhi and the Right-wing dominated High Command counselled restraint, tried repeatedly for some kind of agreement with the British, and later unwillingly sanctioned a movement characterized above all by its remarkably low-key and limited nature; the entire Left urged militant anti-War and anti-government actions. Though 'Congressmen seem to be expecting a big move', there was no immediate prospect of civil disobedience, Gandhi hastened to point out soon after the Congress ministries had resigned. Gandhi himself expressed occasional doubts as to whether his principles of ahimsa allowed direct support to war (he quixotically advised recourse to non-violent resistance even to Poland, France and Britain!), but the Working Committee repeatedly made it clear (as on 17 June 1940) that it was fully prepared to back the war effort if only the British gave some concessions on the two key demands of a post-war independence pledge and an immediate 'National Government' at the centre.

British obstinacy and Left pressures for action, however, eventually compelled some gestures towards a more militant policy. The Ramgarh Congress (March 1940) talked of civil disobedience 'as soon as the Congress organisation is considered fit enough for the purpose'—but left the timing and form of movement entirely to the personal discretion of Gandhi. After the August offer disappointment, Gandhi at last sanctioned civil disobedience, but of a peculiarly limited and deliberately ineffective kind. The sole issue was freedom of speech—more specifically, the right to make public anti-war pronouncements. Individual Congressmen (at first only those nominated by Gandhi himself, starting with Vinoba Bhave on 17 October and Jawaharlal on 31 October, later on a more general scale) would court arrest by making anti-war speeches. At its height in June 1941, about 20,000 had gone to jail, but the movement had petered out by the autumn of 1941, with most prisoners released. This was far and away the weakest and least effective of all the Gandhian national campaigns, and stands in the sharpest possible contrast to what would happen a year later, in August 1942. The aims clearly were not any serious embarrassment to the British, but merely to register the Congress presence and hostility to a war waged without consulting Indians, while at the same time giving Linlithgow no opportunity for a major crackdown. That the British would have
been only too eager to use their wartime powers is indicated by
the fantastic sentence of four years' rigorous imprisonment ini-
tially given to Nehru. In a conversation with Birla in January
1941, Gandhi made clear his desire 'to minimize any embar-
rmant that may be caused by his movement' (there would be no
satyagraha, for instance, during Christmas, on Sundays, or
before 9 A.M. !) and expressed at the same time his concern about
'the mentality of our young men... Communism appeals to
youth, unfortunately.' (Thakurdas Papers, F.N. 177). As often
before, the desire to sidetrack potentially more militant pressures
seems to have been partly responsible for the twists and turns of
Gandhian strategy.

With the exception of the M.N. Roy group which felt that the
War was anti-fascist and therefore demanded unconditional
support, the entire Left strained for militant anti-War struggles
down to the end of 1941. Subhas Bose had no doubts at all that
Britain's difficulties should be made into India's opportunity, and
he presided over an Anti-Compromise Conference held alongside
the Ramgarh session which bitterly denounced Gandhian moder-
ation. Socialists were in an increasingly militant mood, with Jaya-
prakash Narayan for instance thinking in terms of armed struggle
while in jail in 1941. Though Socialist-Communist relations had
already worsened due to the C.P.I. capture of many of the best
C.S.P. leaders and units, there was no major political difference
till late-1941 so far as the attitude to war was concerned. The
about-turn in Comintern policy after the Nazi-Soviet Pact of
August 1939 was a serious embarrassment for Communists in
Europe, but an asset for their comrades in India, allowing an
easy synchronization of 'internationalist' support to Soviet
policies with nationalist hostility to Britain's war—a situation
which would be exactly reversed after Hitler's invasion of Russia
on 22 June 1941.

Yet the Left as a whole was unable to sustain any significant
movement in face of sharply intensified British repression. Subhas
Bose led a successful satyagraha in Calcutta in July 1940 demand-
ing the removal of the Holwell monument (a memorial to the
British victims of the alleged Black Hole). Muslim students for
once participated in large numbers in a movement linked with
the honour of Siraj-ud-daullah the last independent Muslim ruler
of Bengal, but Hindu-Muslim unity apart, the whole thing
obviously had very limited significance. Bose escaped from home internment in January 1941, and used the Communist underground network in his flight through Afghanistan and Russia to Germany. He had embarked on the last and most dramatic phase of his patriotic career, but the decision to rely primarily on help from Britain's enemies was also in a sense a confession of the weakness of internal forces, and marked a kind of return to the methods of the revolutionary terrorists during the First World War. The Mysore State Congress (associated with the Socialist-dominated Karnataka PCC) staged a powerful three month-long satyagraha from September 1939, winning significant peasant support: of the 2801 arrested 641 were agriculturists as against only 23 lawyers. (James Manor, Political Change in an Indian State, Delhi, 1977, p. 124). The other Left-controlled PCC, that of Kerala, organized a successful anti-repression day on 15 September 1940 marked by police firing at Tellicherry, Mattanur and Morazha. In March 1941, a peasant-landlord clash in North Malabar led to four kisan teenagers being sentenced to death—the 'Kayyur martyrs' who acquired countrywide fame. In Puranpur in north Bihar and the Thakurgaon sub-division of Dinajpur (north Bengal), Communist-led kisan movements acquired a new militancy, and spread down from middle peasants to tribal or semi-tribals sharecroppers (Santals and Rajbansis) for the first time. But such scattered and localized militancy was obviously quite far removed from any country-wide challenge to British rule.

Economic Consequences

The relative weakness of the national movement between 1939 and 1941 probably also had certain economic roots. A war which was still a distant affair brought, on the balance, gains rather than losses for substantial sections of the population. The rise in agricultural prices was not as yet very sharp, and came as a relief for the bulk of the peasantry after a long decade of depression. As during the First World War, Indian industrial development received a major stimulus from war demand, cutting-off of imports, and forced reliance on indigenous products, even though the British still did their best to discourage Indian efforts (by Walchand Hirachand and Diwan Mirza Ismail of Mysore, for instance) to start production of automobiles, ships and air-
craft. Employment in factories went up by 31% between 1939 and 1942, whereas it had increased from 1,361,000 to 1,751,000 only between 1922 and 1939 (Wadia and Merchant, Our Economic Problem, 6th ed, Bombay, 1959, p. 335). Labour unrest which could have seriously threatened the war effort was kept in check in the big cities by substantial dearness allowances and supply of essential goods at subsidized rates. For Indian businessmen and traders in general, war meant an opportunity for fantastically quick profits, particularly so long as it remained distant and did not involve the threat of destruction of property through aerial bombardment or evacuation. Khaliquzzaman makes the interesting point that the Muslim League was pressed towards greater co-operation with the British by business magnates as well as by ‘our Muslim taluqdars and zamindars... interested in smaller contracts for the supply of wood, charcoal and other small commodities. They could hardly be expected to forego the chance of a lifetime’. (Pathway to Pakistan, p. 243). It is surely not illegitimate to suspect the existence of similar pressures on the Congress, too.

The New Phase of the War

Two world developments in the latter half of 1941 transformed the Indian situation: Hitler’s invasion of Russia, and the dramatic Japanese drive through South-East Asia from December 1941 which in four months swept the British out of Malaya, Singapore and Burma and threatened to bring its empire in India to a sudden end.

The German invasion of Russia confronted Indian Communists with an agonizing choice. While British policies in India remained as repressive and reactionary as ever, Britain was now the ally of the world’s only socialist state engaged in a life-and-death struggle for survival. After six months of hesitation and internal debate, the C.P.I. in January 1942 lined up with the rest of the international Communist movement in calling for full support to the anti-fascist ‘people’s war’ even while reiterating the standard Congress demands for an independence pledge and immediate national government (which were now considered as valuable but no longer indispensable preconditions for support). Concern and sympathy for Russia was by no means confined to Communists. Rabindranath on his deathbed in August 1941
asked for news from Russia, and expressed his faith that the Soviets alone would be able to halt the 'monsters'. Nehru with his deep internationalist and anti-fascist commitment and admiration for embattled Russia and China sought desperately for a compromise enabling Indian support to war during the Cripps Mission negotiations, talked publicly in terms of the need to organize guerrilla resistance to Japanese invaders, and initially had very great reservations about the Quit India line. Such a global perspective, however, could hardly be expected from the vast majority of Indian patriots, whether Congress Right-wingers, Gandhians, Socialists, or followers of Bose, many of whom increasingly felt that Britain was going down in defeat and the time had come for a bold strike for freedom.

_Cripps Mission_

As the war daily came nearer India (Singapore fell on 15 February 1942, Rangoon on 8 March, the Andaman islands on 23 March), the British at long last felt obliged to make some gestures to win over Indian public opinion. Roosevelt raised the question of Indian political reform in his talks with Churchill in Washington in December 1941, on 2 January Indian Liberal leaders like Sapru and Jayakar appealed for immediate Dominion Status and expansion of the Viceroy's Executive into a National Government, and in February Chiang Kai-shek during his visit to India publicly expressed sympathy for 'India's aspirations for freedom'. All this provided an opening for relatively pro-Indian groups in Britain: Labour members of the War Cabinet like Cripps and Attlee, and the Quaker-dominated India Conciliation Group under Agatha Harrison set up during Gandhi's 1931 visit with which Nehru had developed friendly connections in 1938. Cripps had visited India privately in December 1939, and had decided after talks with the rising U.P. League leader Liaquat Ali Khan that some modifications were needed in the Filkins formula of June 1938. 'There emerges a picture of a rather loose federation... with the right of provinces to withdraw if they wish'—the germ of the 'provincial option' idea which would form the basis of the Cripps plan two years later (R.J. Moore, _Churchill, Cripps and India 1939-45_, Oxford, 1979, p. 12).

In the first week of March, 1942, Cripps was able to
persuade the War Cabinet to agree to a draft declaration promising post-war Dominion Status with right of secession, a 'constitution-making body' elected by provincial legislatures, with individual provinces being given the right not to join it, and with States being invited to appoint representatives. Paragraph (e) invited 'immediate and effective participation of the leaders of the principal sections of the Indian people in the counsels of their country' on urgent issues but insisted that the British during the war would have to retain 'the control and direction of the defence of India'. The declaration was not published immediately, but Cripps went out to India on 23 March to negotiate on its basis with Indian leaders. Linlithgow threatened to resign, but Churchill explained that: 'It would be impossible, owing to unfortunate rumours and publicity, and the general American outlook, to stand on a purely negative attitude and the Cripps Mission is indispensable to prove our honesty of purpose... If it is rejected by the Indian parties... our sincerity will be proved to the world...'. (Churchill to Linlithgow, 10 March 1942, N. Mansergh (ed), Transfer of Power, Vol. I, London 1970, pp. 394-5).

The Cripps Mission was plagued throughout, and ultimately torpedoed, by numerous ambiguities and misunderstandings. 'He is of course bound by the draft declaration which is our utmost limit', Churchill had assured Linlithgow, but Cripps seems to have gone considerably beyond that in his talks with Nehru and Azad, driven by his own desire for a settlement and a not unfavourable initial Congress response. The Congress was naturally very critical of the clauses regarding nomination of states representatives by rulers and the provincial option (which Amery on 2 March privately admitted to be 'the first public admission of the possibility of Pakistan', Ibid., pp. 282-3), and Gandhi deliberately kept very much in the background throughout Cripps' stay in India. But the official Congress negotiators, Nehru and Congress President Azad, focussed the talks throughout on the provisions for immediate changes indicated in paragraph (e). They were apparently told by Cripps that the new Executive would approximate to cabinet government, not formally (as the 1935 Act could not be changed in wartime) but in practice through conventions—just as the Governor's special powers had not really hindered the Congress ministries from effectively ruling
the provinces during 1937-39. In his cable to Churchill on 4 April, Cripps made a reference to the ‘new arrangement whereby the Executive Council will approximate to a Cabinet . . . ’ (Ibid., p. 636).

The discussion consequently centred around control over defence, and here too an agreement seemed in sight on 9 April, thanks to the mediation efforts of Colonel Johnson, Roosevelt’s personal representative who had come to New Delhi to discuss military problems. A compromise formula had been worked out by which an Indian would be in charge of the Defence Department while the British Commander-in-Chief would retain control over field operations and head a War Department whose functions were specified. But by this time Linlithgow and C-in-C Wavell were seriously worried that Cripps was conceding far too much real power to the Congress and, together with Churchill, they were able to block the settlement at the last moment. A War Cabinet telegram to Cripps on 9 April sharply pulled him up for not adequately consulting Linlithgow and Wavell and giving Johnson too much scope it further deplored ‘allusions to a National Government’, and emphasized the need ‘to bring the whole matter back to Cabinet’s plan which you went out to urge’. (Ibid., pp. 707-8). The Congress negotiators the same evening found Cripps singing a completely different tune and the talks broke down abruptly.

Nehru had desperately sought a settlement, largely because of his desire to mobilize genuine and effective Indian support in the anti-fascist war, while most Working Committee members and Gandhi himself had been apathetic or cynical. He was now placed in an extremely false position, and things were not helped by Cripps roundly and most unfairly blaming the Congress for the failure, no doubt partly to save his political career. The Congress side of the matter was summed up by Nehru’s terse cable to Krishna Menon on 13 April: ‘Cripps made clear early stages he envisaged national cabinet with Viceroy as constitutional head like King subject reservation defence. Discussion therefore centered around defence . . . Ultimately Cripps stated . . . no national cabinet with joint responsibility possible nor could assurances be given about use Viceroy’s powers intervention veto. This entirely different picture from what Cripps originally suggested. Impossible call this national government or evoke enthu-
siasm people . . .' (R.J. Moore, pp. 129-30). It is difficult not to suspect an element of bluff and double-dealing here so far as the British were concerned, though opinions may well differ as to whether Cripps himself was a 'willing or unconscious agent in this game. For Churchill, certainly, 'it mattered not so much that something should be done as that some attempt should be seen to be made' (Tomlinson, The Indian National Congress and the Raj, p. 156), and he warmly congratulated Cripps' efforts on 11 April, as proving 'how great was the British desire to reach a settlement . . . The effect throughout Britain and in the United States has been wholly beneficial.' (Mansergh, Vol. I, p. 739).

While responsibility for the failure of the Cripps Mission thus rests squarely on the British, it remains true that the bulk of the Congress leadership and ranks were probably unenthusiastic about it from the beginning. Things in fact were now rapidly moving towards the total confrontation of the Quit India movement.

1942-1945: QUIT INDIA, FAMINE, AND THE LAST PHASE OF WAR

Roots of Rebellion

The summer of 1942 found Gandhi in a strange and uniquely militant mood. Leave India to God or to anarchy, he repeatedly urged the British—'this orderly disciplined anarchy should go, and if as a result there is complete lawlessness I would risk it.' (Linlithgow to Amery, reporting Gandhi's press interview of 16 May, Mansergh, Vol. II, p. 96). If the British withdraw, 'the Japanese would be bound to reconsider their plans' (Harijan article, 3 May), and in any case Indians should be left to tackle that problem in their own way. Though the need for non-violence was always reiterated, the famous 'Quit India' resolution passed by the Bombay session of the AICC on 8 August 1942 followed up its call for 'mass struggle on non-violent lines on the widest possible scale', 'inevitably' under Gandhi, with the significant rider that if the Congress leadership was removed by arrest, 'every Indian who desires freedom and strives for it must be his own guide . . .'. 'Let every Indian consider himself to be a free man . . . Mere jailgoing would not do', Gandhi declared in his passionate 'Do or die' speech the same day. '... if a general
strike becomes a dire necessity, I shall not flinch’, was yet another most uncharacteristic remark, made by Gandhi in an interview on 6 August. Gandhi, it may be noted in parenthesis, was prepared for once to counteract political strikes, precisely at a moment when the Communists were bound to keep aloof from them—in very sharp contrast to his attitudes in previous periods of Left-led labour militancy in 1928-29 or the late-1930s and early’ 40s. The Wardha Working Committee resolution of 14 July had also introduced an unusual note of social radicalism: ‘the princes, “jagirdars”, “zamindars” and propertied and monied classes derive their wealth and property from the workers in the fields and factories and elsewhere, to whom eventually power and authority must belong.’ (Mansergh, Vol. II, p. 388).

The new turn upset all older alignments within the Congress. At the crucial Working Committee session of 27 April-1 May after the collapse of the Cripps Mission, Gandhi’s hard-line was backed by a combination of Right-wingers like Patel, Rajendra Prasad and Kripalani and Socialists (Achyut Patwardhan and Narendra Dev), while Nehru found himself in the strange company of the arch-moderates, Rajagopalachari and Bhulabhai Desai. Rajaji from early 1942 had been urging the need for some understanding with the Muslim League through recognition of the right of Muslim majority provinces to secede through plebiscites after independence had been obtained, and—in yet another strange realignment—the Communists took up a somewhat similar stand at the Bombay AICC pleading for a joint front with the League on the basis of the right of secession to any ‘more or less homogeneous section’ of the population. (Dr. K.M. Ashraf and S.G. Sardesai’s amendments to the 8 August resolution). Eventually Nehru swallowed his doubts, as so often before, and moved the Quit India resolution, which only the Communist members of the AICC opposed (Bhulabhai and Rajaji had resigned in July).

During and after the Quit India upsurge, the British in documents like Tottenham’s *Congress Responsibility for the Disturbances* (February 1943) repeatedly attributed the Congress change of line to secret pro-Axis sympathies. Painting the whole outburst as a deliberate ‘fifth-columnist’ conspiracy was obviously the best way of winning world anti-fascist opinion for brutal repression of an undoubtedly massive popular rebellion. This smear-camp-
aign deliberately ignored both the consistent anti-fascist international stance of the Congress throughout the 1930s (while the British were selling Spain, Austria and Czechoslovakia to the fascists), as well as numerous reiterations of sympathy for Russia and China and support for the Allied cause in the Allahabad, Wardha and Bombay resolutions of 1 May, 14 July and 8 August. 'I do not want to be the instrument of Russia's defeat nor of China's', Gandhi declared even in his 'Do or die' speech, and, in a private conversation in May (reported in a letter by a Communist to P.C. Joshi, and intercepted by the police), he had clearly stated his disagreement with those who felt that the Japanese could be 'liberators'. 'In fact, I believe that Subhas Bose will have to be resisted by us'. (1-B Note, 26 May, Mansergh, Vol. II, pp. 127-32). Yet there was a real difference (which in the case of the Communists became a chasm after August 1942) between a minority (including Nehru) who found the thought of a world with the Soviet Union destroyed and Hitler and Tojo victorious literally unendurable, and the bulk of the Indian patriots, provoked beyond endurance by British obstinacy and misrule, who considered it wiser to calculate India's national interest in the event of an Allied defeat. Gandhi's original draft for the Allahabad Working Committee session of April had contained the sentences 'If India were freed her first step would probably be to negotiate with Japan...India bears no enmity towards Japan'. These passages were omitted at Nehru's insistence. Jawaharlal possibly hit the nail on the head when he argued during the session that 'It is Gandhiji's feeling that Japan and Germany will win. This feeling unconsciously governs his decision.' (Congress Responsibility for the Disturbances, Appendix I). We must remember that an Allied defeat seemed very much on the cards in mid-1942, before the tide was turned at Stalingrad.

Yet calculations by Congress leaders can provide only a very partial explanation for the elemental and largely spontaneous popular outburst after the leaders had been removed by arrest in the early morning of 9 August. It needs to be emphasized that even the 'Quit India' resolution was remarkably vague about the details of the coming movement. Far from ruling out further negotiations, the whole thing may conceivably have been an exercise in brinkmanship and a bargaining counter which was
followed by an explosion only because the British had decided on a policy of wholesale repression. Despite strenuous efforts, the British failed to establish their case that the Congress before 9 August had really planned violent rebellion. The confidential circular of the Andhra PCC dated 29 July 1942 which was quoted in the Tottenham report, for instance, merely urged Congressmen to ‘be ready, organise at once, be alert, but by no means act... till Mahatmaji decides’. The six-stage programme outlined in the circular emphasized mainly traditional Gandhian items like salt, boycott of courts, schools and government services, picketing of foreign cloth and liquor, and no-tax in ‘practically the last stage’ (together with no-rent, but only ‘if the zamindar will not join the movement’). It did talk of ‘arranging labour strikes’, and mentioned as ‘not prohibited but not encouraged’ the stopping of trains ‘by pulling chains only’, travelling without tickets, and the cutting of telephone and telegraph wires. Even this somewhat extreme document fell very much short of the massive and violent attack on communications and all symbols of state authority which occurred in many parts of India after 9 August.

The element of British provocation is, therefore, absolutely clear. Right from the outbreak of the war, as we have seen, the bureaucracy had been planning a wholesale crackdown on the Congress on the pattern of 1932, rejecting all compromise efforts and obviously wanting a confrontation. But the British, too, got very much more than they had bargained for: instead of civil disobedience on the 1932 scale, which could be crushed with relative ease these developed from 9 August onwards what Linlithgow privately described on 31 August as ‘by far the most serious rebellion since that of 1857, the gravity and extent of which we have so far concealed from the world for reasons of military security’ (telegram to Churchill, Mansergh Vol. II, p. 853). What we have to understand are the deeper factors underlying the new popular mood of August 1942, which Gandhi certainly sensed and reflected incomparably better than the Communists with their theoretically not unjustifiable people’s war line.

The rout in South-East Asia following the victory of an Asian power not only shattered white prestige, it also revealed once again the gross racism of the rulers of India. The Europeans in Malaya, Singapore and Burma commandeered all forms of trans-
port in their ignominious flight and left the Indian immigrants there to make their own way by trekking in atrocious conditions through forests and mountains. The resultant was a compound of anti-white fury and an expectation that British rule was ending—the typical popular mood which characterized August 1942. It is probably not accidental that east U.P. and west and north Bihar—the region where the ‘August Rebellion’ attained its maximum popular intensity—was also traditionally one of the principal catchment areas for Indian migrant labour going to South East Asia and other parts of the world. Azamgarh district, for instance, used to receive Rs 30 lakhs annually from foreign money orders. (R.H. Niblett, Congress Rebellion in Azamgarh, Allahabad, 1957, p. 2). Evacuees wandering back home after the British had woefully failed to help them, and train loads of wounded soldiers returning from the Burmese front, combined to spread the mood of anger, hostility towards what to the vast majority of Indians was an alien and meaningless war bringing only suffering, and expectation of an apocalyptic end to foreign rule. The majority of British, American and Australian soldiers stationed in India certainly did not behave as idealist crusaders in a ‘peoples war’. Cases of racial ill-treatment, particularly of rape multiplied, and the Congress repeatedly protested against molestation of women by foreign soldiers. Meanwhile prices were shooting up (a 60-point rise in foodgrains, for instance, in eastern U.P. between April and August 1942) and there were shortages particularly in rice (where Burmese imports had stopped) and salt. The British, who were running a most efficient war economy at home based on sternly egalitarian rationing, made little serious effort in their colony to check a rampant black-market, and profiteering in food would directly lead to the terrible famine of 1943 in Bengal. The synchronization of rising prices and shortages with the coming of a large number of Allied troops led to not unfounded fears that the food reserves of the country were being depleted to feed the army. Bureaucratic mismanagement of the war reached its climax in the Bengal order to seize all country boats and destroy them. The British in mid-1942 had little confidence in their own ability to defend Bengal and Assam in case of a full-scale Japanese invasion, and were preparing to withdraw to the Chota Nagpur plateau defence line. ‘Scorched earth’ was being effectively used
in Russia, where the Soviets fighting a genuine patriotic peoples' war even blew up the Dnieper dam, their Five Year Plan's pride; the attempt to impose such methods on a subject country by bureaucratic fiat was a colossal blunder and provocation. Even house to house communication required boats in many parts of Bengal during the monsoon—'To deprive people in East Bengal of boats is like cutting off vital limbs.' (Gandhi in Harijan, 3 May 1942).

We have seen that there were sections of the Indian people who had benefited from the war in its first phase, particularly industrialists, traders, and businessmen in general profiting from war contracts. Such gains continued throughout the war—the bulk of the contractors and blackmarketeers were after all Indians—but for a brief period in 1942 other considerations seem also to have weighed considerably in the calculations of a significant section of the Indian business community. The Governor of the Central Provinces wrote to Linlithgow on 25 May 1942 that Indian business had been very pro-war two years earlier but 'the losses incurred in Malaya and Burma have stricken the Banias and Marwaris to the soul...a war which yields no profits, in the circumstances of the Excess Profits Tax, and which is accompanied by the sacrifices experienced at Singapore and Rangoon, is not at all to their tastes....It is fairly clear that the capitalist elements in the Congress Working Committee will go to almost any length to safeguard themselves and their property from the ill effects of a possible Japanese invasion.' (Mansergh, Vol. II, pp. 117-19). There has been no research so far on this subject, but it is not impossible that sections of Indian business for a brief while tended to give some covert support to a movement (even if violent) which might quickly push out the British, followed presumably by a separate peace, when faced with the alternative of evacuation and loss of property through scorched earth, bombing, or actual war. Certainly Jamshedpur and Ahmedabad were to be remarkably philosophical about the strikes that crippled both industrial centres during August-September 1942. Once the movement had been defeated, and the Japanese offensive clearly halted on the Assam border, calculations naturally changed, and Indian business happily went back to its more normal pursuits of speculation and profiting through 'support' to the British war effort.
Detailed studies of the ‘August Rebellion’ are as yet relatively scanty, as compared to Non-Cooperation or Civil Disobedience. Yet we may attempt a similar arrangement of data, with an analysis of the all-India pattern and social composition followed by regional studies.

The All-India Pattern

The early-morning round-up of Congress leaders on 9 August unleashed an unprecedented and countrywide -wave of mass fury. As in earlier movements, the removal of established leaders left younger and more militant cadres to their own initiative, and gave greater scope to pressures from below. Amery’s slander that the Congress had planned attacks on communications and sabotage boomeranged with a vengeance, for many (like K.G. Mashruwala, for instance, who brought out two very militant issues of Harijan after Mahadev Desai had been arrested) believed that this really had been the Working Committee’s plan. At a later stage, a number of ‘instructions’ were issued by various underground groups, all in the name of an AICC the vast majority of whose members were behind bars.

Three broad phases can be distinguished in the Quit India movement. The first, massive and violent but quickly suppressed, was predominantly urban, and included hartals, strikes, and clashes with the police and army in most cities. Bombay, as so often before, was the main storm-centre from 9 to 14 August, Calcutta witnessed hartals from 10 to 17 August, there were violent clashes with heavy casualties in Delhi, and in Patna control over the city was virtually lost for two days after a famous confrontation in front of the Secretariat on 11 August. The violence in Delhi was ‘largely due to millhands on strike’ (Linlithgow to Amery, 12 August), and the next day the Viceroy reported strikes in ‘Lucknow, Cawnpore, Bombay, Nagpur and Ahmedabad’. (Mansergh, Vol. II, pp. 669, 682-3). The Tata Steel plant was totally closed down for 13 days from 20 August in a strike in which the sole labour slogan was that ‘they will not resume work until a national government has been formed’ (Linlithgow to Amery, 21 August, Ibid., pp. 777). At Ahmedabad the textile strike lasted, for three and a half months and a Nationalist chronicler later described the city as the ‘Stalingrad of India’ (Govind Sahai, ‘42 Rebellion, Delhi, 1947, p. 128). The
urban middle class was extremely prominent in this first phase, spearheaded by students.

From about the middle of August, however, the focus shifted to the countryside, with militant students fanning out from centres like Benaras, Patna and Cuttack, destroying communications on a massive scale, and leading a veritable peasant rebellion against white authority strongly reminiscent in some ways of 1857. Northern and western Bihar and eastern U.P., Midnapur in Bengal, and pockets in Maharashtra, Karnatak and Orissa were the major centres of this second phase, which saw the installation of a number of local ‘National Governments’, which were usually shortlived.

Weakened by brutal repression (no less than 57 army battalions were being used, the Indian Government informed the Secretary of State on 12 September, Mansergh. Vol. II, pp. 952-3), the movement from about the end of September entered its longest but also least formidable phase. This was characterized by terrorist activity by educated youth directed against communications and police and army installations, occasionally rising to the level of guerrilla war (such as the one along the north Bihar-Nepal border, led by Jayaprakash Narain). Part-time peasant squads engaged in farming by day and sabotage activities by right (the so-called ‘Karnatak method’), and in some pockets secret parallel ‘national governments’ functioned, (most notably at Tamulk in Midnapur, Satara in Maharashtra and Talcher in Orissa). Extremely impressive and heroic by any standards, such activities, however, were no longer very much of a threat either to British rule or to the war plans of the Allies. Petty ‘national governments’ tucked away in a corner of the rather isolated district of Midnapur, for instance, did not seriously bother Calcutta or upset communications with the Arakan and Assam fronts—which is no doubt one reason why the ‘Tamulk Jatiya Sarkar’ could survive till September 1944.

Official statistics give some indication both of the extent of the upsurge, as well as of the intense repression which was unleashed to crush the movement. By the end of 1943, 91,836 people had been arrested, with the highest figures coming from Bombay Presidency (24,416), U.P. (16,796) and Bihar (16,202). 208 police outposts, 332 railway stations and 945 post offices had been destroyed or severely damaged, and there had been 664 bomb explosions. Bihar headed the list of police stations stormed by mass
action (72 out 208), but recorded only 8 bomb incidents as compared to 447 in Bombay—a clear indication of greater popular participation in Bihar and more organized terrorist activity in Bombay. 1060 had been killed by police or army firing (almost certainly a gross underestimate), while 63 policemen had died fighting the upsurge and 216 had defected, no less than 205 of them in Bihar. *(Home Political, 3/52/1943, quoted in Y.B. Mathur, *Quit India Movement*, Delhi, 1979, pp. 190-92).* As for official atrocities, a Congress source listed 74 cases of rape in Tamluk sub-division, including 46 in a single village on 9 January 1943 *(Satis Samanta, et al., *August Revolution and Two Years’ National Government in Midnapur*, Calcutta, 1946, p. 40).* R.H. Niblett, district magistrate of Azamgarh (east U.P.) who was removed for being too mild, has recorded in his fascinating diary numerous instances of a ‘quite unnecessary ... *terreur blanche*’ (white terror), with the British unleashing an ‘incendiary police’ to ‘set fire to villages for several miles’. Niblett speaks of ‘bouts of official hysteria, with ‘reprisals the rule of the day’, and collective fines as a kind of ‘official dacoity’. He recalls how he tried in vain to warn his men ‘to remember you are neither out on *shikar*, nor on an errand of destruction’. *(R.H. Niblett, pp. 26, 40, 44, 49).*

Free use was made of public flogging, as well as of refined methods of torture like inserting a ruler inside the rectum. Once again, the only real comparison is with 1857—with the difference that the British now commanded all the resources of modern military science, while the people were almost entirely unarmed. As early as 15 August, Linlithgow had ordered the use of ‘machine-gunning from air’ against crowds disrupting communications around Patna, and aeroplanes were used also in Bhagalpur and Monghyr in Bihar, Nadia and Tamluk in Bengal, and Talcher in Orissa.

**Social Composition**

A cross-section of the movement in social terms reveals, as we have seen, an early but rather short-lived and limited role of labour. Already by 14 August, Linlithgow was reporting that the ‘mill element is dropping out’, and Govind Sahai recalls that in Bombay city ‘very little part was played by the labour in general and by textile labour in particular .... *(Mansergh, Vol. II, p. 691; Govind Sahai, p. 89)*. The Calcutta industrial belt was
also largely quiet, and in both places Communist opposition to
the movement probably played a considerable role in restraining
the workers. Apart from Jamshedpur and Ahmedabad, labour
participation remained considerable for several months in smaller
centres like Ahmdnagar and Poona, where there had been little
Communist activity and Gandhian influence had contributed to
'cordial relations between labour and capital'—'millowners did
not resent the absence of their workers'. (Govind Sahai p. 110).
Bangalore, where the Congress leader K.T. Bhushyam had been
active for years in the trade-union field, saw brief strikes by about
30,000 workers. (James Manor, pp, 136-46). No detailed study
has been made so far of the extent of business participation, but
this is noted as having been considerable in Bombay by Sahai
(p. 88). It is interesting that in December 1942 an illegal Socialist
leaflet, The Freedom Struggle Front, warned that 'a virginal
horror of outraging the class issues', should not 'stand in the
way of seeking and taking' the financial help of 'the rich mill-
owner or banker'. Stories are current also about considerable
cover upper-class and even Indian high official support to secret
nationalist activities in 1942. Such support enabled activists (most
of whom, unlike the terrorists or the C.P.I., totally lacked under-
ground experience) to set up a fairly effective illegal apparatus,
including even a secret radio station under Usha Mehta for three
months in Bombay.

Unlike in the Civil Disobedience days, middle class students
were very much in the forefront in 1942, whether in urban
clashes, as organizers of sabotage, or inspirers of peasant rebe-
llion. What made the August movement so formidable, however,
was the massive upsurge of the peasantry in certain areas, leading
officials to make curious discoveries like an entire Bihar region
(Saran) being 'notoriously a criminal district', or of students
finding 'very willing allies in the widespread criminal population
of the Bihar villages'. (Bihar Governor Stewart to Linlithgow,
attempt at a statistical analysis of the 'crowd' in the east U.P.
west Bihar region (by Max Harcourt, in Congress and the Raj),
however, indicates that far from being a movement of habitual
'criminals' or rootless 'hooligans', 1942 (like earlier nationalist
upsurges) was essentially an upsurge of peasant smallholders.
Upper and middle castes predominated in the figures of those
arrested (17% Brahman, 27.5% Rajput and Bhumihar—as against 7.4% untouchable and 4.2% tribal in a sample of 1214), while in another sample of 242 there were 36.5% kisans 0.8% zamindars and 3.5% agricultural labourers. The samples, unfortunately, are small, the categories vague and ill-defined, and the whole paper rendered somewhat suspect by some startling errors (like describing Niblett’s account as one of Ballia instead of Azamgarh); an enormous field of research obviously remains open here.

While 1942 clearly surpassed all previous Congress-led movements in its level of anti-British militancy, the very extent of anti-foreign sentiments, as in 1857, possibly reduced internal class tensions and social radicalism. The Freedom Struggle Front rather apologetically argued that ‘the class war may have to come, but that is not yet, not till after the riddance of foreign exploitation’, and secret instructions issued in the name of the AICC or ‘Gandhi Baba’ repeatedly confined no-rent only to cases where zamindars were loyalists. (Congress Responsibility for the Disturbances, Appendices V, VI, VII, VIII and XIII). ‘The characteristic feature of this movement was that private property was not attacked’ (Govind Sahai, p. 96) and even no-revenue was not as ubiquitous as in 1930-34. ‘Strange to say, there was no particular difficulty about getting in the revenues’, and ‘only two or three instances of records being seized from patwaris and burnt’, recalls Niblett about Azamgarh. ‘There was only one attack on private property’ in the district and that on the estate of an absentee white zamindar, while elsewhere ‘even seed-stores were not plundered’. (Niblett, pp. 29-31, 17). Niblett’s vivid account makes clear that the crowds besieged thanas spurred by the belief that ‘Swaraj had now been attained’ (Ibid., p. 13); once that faith had been rudely shattered by British repression, the peasant upsurge tended to quickly melt away i.e. the absence of concrete programmes geared to their more immediate needs. Attempts by underground leaders to revive the movement through improved technical methods alone (Jayaprakash’s call for a proper revolutionary guerrilla army in his To All Fighters For Freedom, or the pamphlet ABC of Dislocation, seized by the police at Nasik), could not ultimately change the situation. It is interesting that, as we shall see, ‘national governments’ proved most long-lived in areas like Tamluk, Talcher or Satara where local circumstances
seem to have forced somewhat more concrete and radical socio-economic policies on the militants.

Regional Variations

Regional studies of 1942 are all but non-existent, but a few general points about variations in the extent and nature of the movement may still be attempted. Punjab and even the Congress province of N.W.F.P. were unusually quiet, with only two cases of police firing and about 2500 arrests each. Politics in the Punjab was already set hard in the communal mould, Hindu, Muslim or Sikh, while wartime army employment and rising grain-prices kept quiet a peasantry which had developed a prosperous kulak-type upper stratum. Congress weakness in the N.W.F.P. reflected the continuing trend towards loss of Muslim support. Muslims almost everywhere kept aloof from 1942, though they remained neutral rather than actively hostile or pro-British—there were no major communal incidents during the movement. The movement was relatively weak also in Madras Presidency, except for scattered pockets like Guntur and West Godavari in coastal Andhra and Coimbatore and Ramnad in Tamilnadu. Rajaji’s opposition may have been a significant factor in Tamilnadu, while Communist hostility helped to keep the agitation at a low key in Kerala. Despite appeals to states people by underground Congress and socialist leaders (like for instance in the AICC’s Twelve-Point Programme—Congress Responsibility for the Disturbances, Appendix V), the movement in the princely states generally fell well below the intensity attained in 1938-39. Among the big states, only Mysore was seriously affected, the agitation here following the same three-stage pattern already noted at the all-Indian level: urban demonstrations and strikes in Bangalore, village movements (particularly in Hassan and Shimoga districts), and sabotage activities by secret student groups.

The four main storm-centres of Bihar-east U.P., Midnapur, Orissa, and Maharashtra-Karnatak present a totally different picture of really formidable mass rebellion. Both intensity and extent were greatest in Bihar—the province which in the 1930s had become the principal base of the Kisan Sabha, and where the bulk of the Kisan Sabha cadres had swung to the side of the socialists despite the new pro-war stance of the Communists and of Sahajanand. Patna for a time was cut off from all districts
except Gaya save by air, and nearly 80% of police stations were captured or had to be temporarily evacuated in the ten districts of north and central Bihar. There was considerable tribal participation too, for a Congress source estimated the number of killed to be highest in Hazaribag district (533 out of 1761, followed by Saran—517 and Bhagalpur—447, Govind Sahai, p. 135). The tide of rebellion quickly swept from Bhojpuri-speaking west Bihar into the economically and culturally similar Benares division of U.P. All ten police stations were captured in Ballia, and brief national governments were set up both here (under the local Congress leader Chitu Pandey) and in neighbouring Ghazipur. Niblatt has left a fascinating description of the siege of Madhuban police sitation in Azamgarh on 15-17 August—crowds of 5000 marching on the *thana* with *lathis* and spears, but also with 'plough-shares, hammers, saws and spades... in the distance their lathis and spears looked like a *sarpat* jungle on the move'. A veritable levy *en masse* of the rural population, in fact, though two *zamindars* secretly provided supplies to the beleagured garrison (Niblett, pp. 13-18). It took several weeks and a really massive use of army and police to restore order and normal communications in the 16 seriously-affected districts of eastern U.P. and Bihar, and even then sporadic guerrilla activities went on till 1944, with a number of local parallel governments loosely connected with the Nepal frontier-based provisional government of Jai prakash Narayan and Rammanohar Lohia.

The best available account of a rebel 'national government' comes from Tamluk sub-division of Midnapur, the chroniclers being local Congress leaders like Satis Samanta, the first *Sarbadhinayak* of the Tamluk Jatiya Sarkar. Tamluk and the neighbouring sub-division of Contai were old Gandhian bases, with a tradition of sustained constructive work. As compared to Bihar and east U.P., 1942 here was less elemental and violent, but perhaps better organized, and sustained, and special circumstances (the need to resist the British 'denial' or scorched earth policy of destroying boats and bicycles and to provide relief after the terrible cyclone of 16 October 1942, followed in the next year by famine) forced a somewhat more radical economic policy. The Congress from mid-1942 had campaigned on the slogans of resistance to the denial policy and stopping grain exports from the region, and the first clash in Tamluk sub-division occurred