

Power, Hegemony and Politics: Leadership Struggle in Congress in the 1930s

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Abstract

The decade of the 1930s provided a near perfect backdrop for a leftist surge in Indian national politics whose trajectory so far had been mapped under the political leadership of Gandhi. It had its moments of excitement, glory and disappointments. Although ample opportunities presented themselves to the Left to decisively influence the nationalist struggle during this period, it failed in its endeavour to play a historical role, beaten by a smarter, tactful, opportunist ‘Old guard’, the ‘right-wing’ leadership of the Indian National Congress, who, as events indicated in the later years, left behind all scruples to cling to political power.

(Key words used: Left-wing (LW), Right-wing (RW), Congress Socialist Party (CSP), Gandhi, Subhas Bose, Jayaprakash Narayan).

The tame end of the civil disobedience movement (1932–33) in its later phase in the face of massive political repression hastened a discernible attitudinal shift in the minds of ‘distraught’ Congressmen. Many of them were young and ardent nationalists who pursued variants of Marxist ideology with a mind to radicalise Congress policies and programmes so that freedom acquires a ‘fuller meaning’. It also included ‘left-inclined’ nationalist leaders, such as Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose, who played critical roles in the pursuance of the ‘left’ vision within the Congress. A conscious effort thus began during this period towards exploring possibilities of infusing a socialist content into Congress programmes, and correspondingly, transform the composition of the leadership of the national movement.

As the civil disobedience movement ground to a halt, men with considerable stature as rural constructive workers, such as Vallabhbhai Patel, Rajendra Prasad and Rajagopalachari among others, were attracted towards swarajist politics of legislature entry. There were also those such as Bhulabhai Desai, B. C. Roy and a number

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of others who were unenthusiastic even about Gandhian forms of mass struggle; more comfortable in the world of municipal or assembly politics. Blessed by Gandhi, a conference of the swarajists held on May 2–3, 1934, gave an idea of their projected party.

Businessmen like Thakurdas and Birla ‘cultivated’ Congress leaders like Bhulabhai Desai and Vallabhabhai Patel. ‘I should like you to keep yourself in touch with Bhulabhai’, Birla advised Thakurdas on 12 April, 1934. ‘If the Swaraj Party is to be successful . . . 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 should help Gandhiji as far as possible and work with a common object’.¹

This statement was an early indication about the intentions of the Congress RW, inasmuch as their preparation for the ‘control’ of Congress leadership in the following years.

Yet the first political stirrings of left activism became visible with the emergence of ‘Congress socialists’, in May 1934, the same month as the ‘new’ Swaraj Party was formed. Known as the ‘Nasik jail group’, it was actively guided by a ‘confirmed’ Marxist, Jayaprakash Narayan, and included Achyut Patwardhan, Yusuf Mehrally, Minoo Masani and Ashok Mehta. They held a conference at Patna, prior to the AICC session ‘to prevent an outright drift to constitutionalism and to put a more dynamic programme before the country’ In October 1934, at a conference in Bombay, the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) was formed. The objective of the CSP was keen to remain as a ‘distinct Socialist ginger group working within the Congress but trying to push it leftwards’. The group had an ideological composition ranging from a ‘vague and mixed up radical nationalism to fairly firm advocacy of Marxian scientific socialism’ thereby providing a ‘broad framework of reference for left forces to operate freely’.² The CSP observed that ‘. . . for a subject nation political independence is an inevitable stage on the way to socialism’; ‘that the present stage of Indian struggle is that of the bourgeois democratic revolution’; and that ‘it would be suicidal policy to cut ourselves off from the national movement that the Congress undoubtedly represents.’ Further, the ‘shortcomings of Congress as an anti-imperialist body’ was to be overcome by making

¹ Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India 1885–1947* (New Delhi: Macmillan, 1983), p. 331.

² Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India*, p. 332; Narendra Deva, *Socialism and National Revolution* (Bombay: Padma Publications 1946), p. xiii.; Asoka Mehta, *Sheaves from Forgotten Fields, PSP Silver Jubilee Conference Souvenir* (Delhi, 1959), pp. 18, 63; 56–7.

'ceaseless efforts to give it a socialist direction'—the adoption of leadership of a revolutionary socialism 'thesis' two years later at the Meerut conference of the CSP in January 19–20 1936. Speaking at the CSP Conference at Bombay in 1934, Narendra Deva further justified the creation of the CSP in sociological terms: The Congressmen's 'social basis being very narrow they really feel stronger by entertaining the belief that they are acting in interests of society as a whole. 'Congress', he felt, needed 'to promote an alliance between the lower middle class and the masses'. The CSP felt that it was the 'political vehicle' through which Congress leaders could secure a wider appeal to the masses that would inevitably lead to the radicalization of Congress programmes and policies.

Mainly at the insistence of Jayaprakash Narayan the CSP formulated a complex ideological and organisational venture to involve the Communist Party of India (CPI) banned by the British government for a period of eight years in July 1934, the Royists and to a lesser extent the Bengal Labour Party, Kirti Kisan Party and the Bengal Communist Party³ to make a concerted effort to pose a radical socio-political alternative to Congress programmes.

The close relation between the CSP and the CPI, the two significant partners in LW became apparent by autumn 1934. They reached a joint action agreement in the trade unions, notably, the All India CSP, All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), National Trade Union Federation, and Red Trade Union Congress. It is worth a note as to why the CSP's 'socialist unity' experiment proffered an active role to CPI? Was it due to the fact that CSP, especially Jayaprakash Narayan, viewed that the communists with their 'ready' party machinery would galvanise masses in the countryside effectively that could fulfil the social and political objectives of the CSP; and that it could pose a direct challenge to the RW without delay. Considering the apparent contradictions in perception and tactics between the CSP and the CPI, the latter guided almost totally by the Comintern line, mulled over by an influential leader like Jayaprakash Narayan, it was clear that the relationship between two partners of the LW would be contentious.

With the formation of the CSP the political battle between the two blocs began. The CSP stance was to decidedly oppose a brand

³ Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India*, p. 333; David Laushey, *Bengal Terrorism and the Marxist Left: Aspects of Regional Nationalism in India 1905–42* (Calcutta, 1975), p. 118; Christopher Jaffrelot, *India's Silent Revolution* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003), pp. 256–7; Narendra Deva, *Socialism and National Revolution*, pp. 4:5:9.

of swarajist politics that would peter out into an 'outright drift to constitutionalism' at a time when a more vibrant form of political activity seemed possible. A proof of CSP's dislike for the 'swarajists' was evident with Masani registering the 'socialist' viewpoint at the Ranchi conference of the swarajists. Indeed the 'new brand' of swarajist politics criticised by the CSP for its lack of dynamism was a direct fallout of the disinclination of the Congress leadership to push ahead with a more 'comprehensive' ideology of programme and action. The heat of the new leftist challenge now appeared to threaten the Congress political 'caucus' led by RW and 'moderates' like Gandhi. The strong presence of leading industrialists, never comfortable with 'radical' politics, in a common front against a growing challenge from the Left played an important part in the formation of the Congress 'right'.

The reaction of the RW towards the CSP was sharp. Patel immediately after his release from detention branded the socialist ideology 'as nonsense and that it would not be allowed to work'. Sitaramayya's apparent dislike of the CSP, describing its founders as 'scum' in a letter to Patel on 21 September 1934, more or less conveyed the sentiments of the Congress RW. Earlier the Congress Working Committee (WC) in June 1934 dominated by the RW condemned the 'loose talk about property confiscation and class war as opposed to non violence'. In August 1934 Gandhi stated that Acharya Narendra Dev's call for a general strike of workers and peasants would be too 'intoxicating and dangerous'. Expressing his 'reservations' about the new party, CSP, Jawaharlal Nehru wrote, 'so far as I have gathered, its general policy was agreeable to me, but it seemed a curious and mixed assemblage', and 'even if I had been completely free, I would not have suddenly joined it' The other emerging left-nationalist, Subhas Chandra Bose, more or less conveyed similar observations, lauding its (CSP) efforts to generate a 'radical tendency' in the national movement. Nehru's personal opinion about the CSP did not assume importance for its leadership but his 'partial commitment to Marxian socialist ideas', of blending nationalist objectives with radical programmes for social regeneration and economic progress gave enough reason to the CSP-led LW to rally under his Presidentship at Lucknow (1936) and Faizpur (1937). Gandhi was not particularly alarmed by Nehru's fascination with Marxism. 'His (Jawaharlal Nehru) communist views need not frighten anyone', said Gandhi. In a letter written to Narendra Dev on 2 August 1934, Gandhi confessed his preference for Jawaharlal Nehru in unmistakable terms, 'as the

natural wearer of the Congress crown of thorns when I and other elderly men and women retire',⁴ a point he repeated for Patel's benefit shortly thereafter. On a personal note Nehru was distraught at the way the civil disobedience movement was 'handled' by Gandhi. Yet he avoided a direct breach of faith from Gandhi. A month after the civil disobedience movement was officially called off (July 1934) Nehru wrote a letter to Gandhi on 14 August 1934, expressing the failure of the civil disobedience movement 'as the biggest shock, under which he felt absolutely alone . . . It was a spiritual defeat which is the most terrible of all'. And further, the unfortunate 'prominence of those who had . . . cooperated with anti-revolutionary elements'. Nehru further stated the need to discover the 'revolutionary' middle class that had always provided the backbone of the national movement. It was during this period that he was showing support for organizations such as the CSP to make Congress realistically a broad-based organization. Gandhi's response was prompt, asking Nehru if he could be allowed to propose his (Nehru) name for the 'crown of thorns', and take with him 'such old colleagues as would go with (him) 'wholeheartedly.' Gandhi assured Nehru that 'they will not resist you, even though they may not be able to follow you.' In Europe, in 1935, Nehru stated that he would 'not obstruct council entry', but would not agree to 'office acceptance', and talked of the need to 'bring Gandhi back' to carry forward the legacy of the civil disobedience movement. Back from Europe Nehru became the President of the Congress at Lucknow, in April 1936. Gandhi's support for Nehru as the unquestioned leader of Congress of the future gave clear indication to the RW to end political speculation and doubts over Nehru's candidature; as it confirmed that Gandhi as the 'dictator' of Congress nationalism could influence his 'protégé' to temper his intended objectives within well founded parameters of Congress politics. To the CSP it was now a question of how far it could, under Nehru's Presidentship, 'radicalise' and implement social and economic policies of the Congress. Birla's personal opinion about Jawaharlal Nehru assumes prominence here. Writing to Thakurdas, he remarked: 'Jawaharlalji seems to be like a typical English democrat . . . out for giving expression to his ideology,

⁴ Gandhi's confidence in Nehru's leadership was vindicated by the events leading to the acceptance of Dominion status by Nehru, the advocate of independence, at the Calcutta session of the INC held in December 1928. Gandhi had suggested to Nehru on that occasion that he ' . . . (had) made revolution while others have shouted revolutions. When . . . you really are serious . . . come to me and I shall then show you how a revolution is made'.

but he realises that action is impossible and so he does not press for it . . . things are moving in the right direction.' Thakurdas' reply was a confirmation. 'I never had any doubt about the bonafides 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'.⁵ Despite a fair assessment of Nehru, the RW was circumspect about Nehru's political intentions as President of the INC in successive sessions.

Echoing the sentiments of 'Marxists' all over the country at Lucknow, April 1936, Nehru said: 'I see no way of ending poverty, the vast unemployment, the degradation and the subjugation of the Indian people except through socialism'. Declaring that office acceptance⁶ ran contrary to the Congress stand, Nehru clearly expressed the 'marked differences' in the outlook of the 'socialist' President and majority of the 'old' Congress political leadership. Nehru also stated that while 'revolutionary leadership had always emerged from the middle class intellectuals . . . there were persons having alliance with the upper groups . . . distract(ing) the leadership . . . holding back when a forward move was called for'. Interestingly, Nehru desired not a change in leadership, that is, 'alternative leadership', but a leadership that drew inspiration from the masses.

At Lucknow two resolutions were accommodated in the existing scheme of things— 'Mass contact', that is, the demand for 'functional representation' to be provided in the Congress constitution for the 'organizations of peasants', accelerated by the formation of the All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) and workers, and 'Agrarian Programme' including a 'Draft Election Manifesto' of the Congress emphasizing the economic problems and the radical measures to be proposed by Congress. N. G. Ranga, while differing from other prominent members of the CSP, considered that an 'alliance based upon functional representation between the Congress and AIKS' would be a great boon. Considering that a third of the documents were given to a

⁵ Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India*, pp. 332, 333, 345–6; Jawaharlal Nehru, *An Autobiography* (Reprint New Delhi, 1980), pp. 563–4; Subhas Bose, *The Indian Struggle: 1920–34*. (Calcutta, 1948), pp. 371–2; B. B. Misra, *The Indian Political Parties*, (Delhi: OUP, 1976), pp. 307, 9, 10.

⁶ Nehru's Presidential speech at Lucknow 1936 vindicated the stand taken by the socialists to reject the Government of India Act 1935. The demand was for Constituent Assembly based on universal franchise. An 'imposed' constitution that does not recognise either economic or political future of the people or the sovereignty of the people cannot be accepted.

Source: I. A. R., 1936, Vol. I, p. 249.

discussion of the 'economic question' it was considered a 'victory' for the Left.

Almost immediately after the Lucknow Congress Kripalani dealt the first salvo at the Left, characterizing them as 'self-constituted leaders of the revolutionary script who want to instill this spirit in all and sundry, not excluding members of the Working Committee'.⁷ A comment that was rather meekly protested by the CSP and the Congress President. Thereafter, Nehru found that even some of his minor proposals were being 'viewed with suspicion' by his old colleagues. Anticipating a schism in the Congress Working Committee (CWC) Jawaharlal Nehru wrote on 3 May 1936 of an 'impending tug-of-war in India between rival ideologies'. He further stated that some of his colleagues 'have not taken the trouble to think and study and have remained vaguely where they were'. At the Wardha CWC meeting held in June 1936, seven members of the 'old guard' submitted their resignations protesting against Nehru's ideological alignment with socialists as a mark of disapproval of the latter's continuous campaign against the 'old' leadership. The Gandhians amongst them made no bones about the fact that Nehru's advocacy of socialism would adversely affect Congress election prospects. The 'split' however was short-lived, but when it came the LW, particularly CSP was nervous about its consequences. Nehru wrote a long letter to Gandhi. He outlined that there was indeed 'no conflict' in his approach and in anything the Congress was doing. Gandhi wrote back, '... you complain of them having called that your activities were harmful... That is not to say you were harmful... They know that you cannot be dispensed with. And so they wanted to give way.'

At the Faizpur Conference (1937) a broad 'anti-imperialist' front between the LW and the Congress was mooted to ensure that Congress stayed on course towards a path of 'uncompromising struggle'. Office acceptance under the new constitution (1935) was strongly opposed by the LW. But while rejecting the Constitution as unsatisfactory the Congress in its official resolutions, however, remained silent on the question of office acceptance. The Congress indeed rejected the 'federal scheme' of the Act of 1935 and decided after considerable hesitation to take part in the provincial elections. The LW fell in line suggesting that elections would link up legislative activities within the councils with mass movement outside, but not before Jayaprakash

⁷ The Working Committee consisted of 3 socialists and 11 members of the 'Old Guard'.

Narayan tabled a 'Left Amendment' demanding total rejection of office which was defeated by 138 votes to 78. The defeat of the 'Left Amendment' was hailed as a 'victory' by Birla for the RW of Congress in a letter written to Lord Linlithgow's Private Secretary. 'Without having any illusion of bettering existing laws', the LW argued the need to 'explain to the voters' the unrepresentative character of the Act of 1935 and further that the Congress was the 'only anti-imperialist body' contesting the elections and 'to it we must give our votes.' Election strategy⁸ was finalized by the CSP, intended to assist the Congress to take part in provincial elections, and a 'tactical measure' to approach large numbers of people, both Hindus and Muslims, apprising them of revolutionary tactics was adopted. Collective affiliation, another 'tactical' manoeuvre adopted at Faizpur (1937) through LW support, after a heated political debate, was expected to give substantial leverage to LW in the affairs of the Congress; that would help them to radicalise the Congress rank and file for exerting continuous pressure on the Congress leadership.

Enthused by the 'growing success' of the LW, Jayaprakash Narayan said at the Faizpur Congress that the '... Right is still the stronger wing. But Faizpur put an end to its aggression and I have little doubt that henceforth the Left will steadily grow till it comes to dominate the Congress'. And so apparently was the reaction of the Royists. Roy, released in November 1936, wrote that the Faizpur session was a turning point in the history of the Congress 'because of its inclusion in its resolutions of revolutionary ideas'.

Yet as events proved later, Faizpur Congress was rather the beginning of the aggression of the Right, not the end. Nehru's Presidential address at Faizpur (unlike Lucknow) fell distinctly short of offering the LW lead for nationalist-revolutionary struggle in India. Neither did he seek to align 'socialist' struggle to the national struggle.

⁸ The CSP's call for a strike side by side with the election campaign on April 1, 1937, endorsed by Jawaharlal Nehru through a 'Presidential Circular' urging trade unions, merchants associations, peasant unions, students associations to join the strike, and further 'that the strike should be complete and militant'. The call for a strike was 'well received' in large parts of the country but was not enthusiastically responded to in Bombay, the main centre of Indian business. Lukewarm attitude of Congress leaders also contributed to it. The British government also did not attach importance to the proposed strike as the INC was not part of it.

Source: Government of India, Home Department, File-F.N. 4/6/37-Poll, 1937, Circular by Jawaharlal Nehru, the President of Indian National Congress; Government of India, Home Department, File - F. N. 4/6/37-Poll, 1937, Mr. Hands' note to R. M. Maxwell on March 6, 1937, Times of India, April 3, 1937.

The Mass Contact Committee set up at the Lucknow Congress to report at the next Congress session (at Faizpur) 'predictably failed' to make concrete recommendations, bogged down in arguments over the CSP's proposal for 'collective representation'. The Congress political leadership adopted the tactics of delaying a decision and avoiding discussion on the question of collective affiliation by circulating a questionnaire prepared by the Mass Contact Sub-Committee of the Congress to district committees with instructions to send their answers to the respective provincial committees. The questionnaire suggested

...that Congress will be strengthened by giving special representation on Congress Committees to certain sections of the nation (workers and peasants) on their class basis. It is contended on the other hand that this will weaken the Congress and it will emphasise class antagonism in a national organisation.

The questionnaire framed was a clever manipulation of the intended objectives of 'collective affiliation'. The Congress RW had yet again succeeded in dissipating a potential political threat from the LW.

The process of ascertaining opinion invariably involved delay and by the third week of August 1937, when the Draft Election Manifesto was being considered at Bombay, election fever had caught on with the Congress relegating considerations of other organisational innovations to a secondary place. Even by the second week of August the Ahmedabad District Congress Committee presided over by Sardar Patel and the Bihar Provincial Congress Committee under Rajendra Prasad rejected the 'Collective Affiliation doctrine'.⁹ The Gujarat Provincial Congress Committee categorically stated that it would 'accentuate class struggle and raise a class war as is presumably intended by the section (LW) making this suggestion'. The Uttar Pradesh Provincial Congress Committee under Nehru along with Narendra Dev and Kidwai gave conditional acceptance whereby the total number of delegates from one province should not have more than 25% of representatives from trade unions, AIKS, and other class organisations. The related question of changes in the Congress constitution, another CSP proposal, also could not be

⁹ The Faizpur thesis says that the 'transformation' of the Congress into a 'wide national front against imperialism' through collective affiliation was bound to change the entire structure and leadership of the Congress which will be 'composed of the strongly welded alliance of the various anti-imperialist classes, organised and unorganised consolidation of socialist forces'.

Source: P. L. Lakhanpal, *History of the Congress Socialist Party* (Lahore, 1946), p. 148.

decided upon at Faizpur.¹⁰ Birla had correctly prophesied that election would indeed take place, controlled by the 'Vallabhbhai group' and 'if Lord Linlithgow handles the situation properly there is every likelihood of Congressmen coming to office'. Office acceptance would be conditional, subject to the satisfaction of the leader of the Congress assembly party of a province that the Governor would not use his special power.¹¹

The sweeping electoral success of the Congress in 6 out of 11 provinces of British India 'enhanced the prestige' of the Left forces. It was generally believed that the magnitude of Congress victory could have been even better had the election campaign been organised with greater courage and vision. Election analysis by Dr Ashraf and the CPI attributed the sweeping success of the Congress candidates to the incorporation in the manifesto of 'economic appeals to the peasantry' which though not made on clear 'class lines', turned the election in agricultural districts into 'landlord versus peasantry' confrontations. The CSP felt that an economic orientation to the anti-imperialist programme would bring the masses in greater numbers to the Congress fold.¹² With the subsequent formation of ministries, mass contact and collective affiliation questions were permanently shelved.

In July 1937, the 'Congress Socialist', the official journal of the CSP commenting on the Working Committee's decision to accept offices wrote: 'We desire to maintain unity in the Congress ranks' underlying the commitment of the LW not to weaken the national liberation movement. However, the journal further observed: '...unity that

¹⁰ Paul. F. Power (ed.), *The Meaning of Gandhi* (USA: The University of Hawaii Press, 1971), p. 2; Jawaharlal Nehru, *India and the World*, Presidential Address at the Lucknow Congress, 1936, pp. 77–8; R. Sisson and S. Wolpert (eds), *Congress and Indian Nationalism: The Pre-Independence Phase* (Delhi: OUP 1988), p. 142; Report, Third Conference of the All India Congress Socialist Party (AICSP) (Faizpur, 1936), p. 146; Jayaprakash Narayan, 'Notes on the Faizpur Congress', in *Towards Struggle* (Bombay, 1946), p. 193; M. N. Roy, 'The Confession of a Monopolist', in *Our Problem* (Calcutta, 1938), p. 66; N. N. Rajkumar, *Indian Political Parties* (Delhi, 1948), p. 62; General Secretary's Report, AICSP, p. 51; Asoka Mehta, *Forgotten Fields*, p. 67; N. N. Mitra, IAR, 1936, Vol. I, p. 31; Jayaprakash Narayan Papers – T.L No. 214/1935–52, IAR, Vol. II, 1936, p. 36; *The Hindu*, Delhi, July 15, 1936; Editorial, *Congress Socialist*, Vol. II, No. 27, July 10, 1939, p. 5, N. N. Mitra, IAR, 1936, p. 36.

¹¹ Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India*, pp. 348–50.

¹² House of Commons, *Parliamentary Debates*, Official Report, Fifth Series, Session 1936–37, Vol. 321. Col. 809–10, March 8, 1937; *Congress Socialist*, Vol. II, No. 4, January 30, 1937, p. 5; Ben Bradley, 'The Indian Elections', *The Labour Monthly*, Vol. 19, No. 4, April 1937, pp. 237, 239.

does not develop our struggle would not be worth preserving'. CSP had realized that in reality its commitment to the 'unity' of national struggle had strengthened the RW; and that it was necessary to follow another course of political action. The LW would act as a 'democratic' opposition to Congress ministries, to carry out sustained political activity to bring forth authenticity to its radical social and economic policies. In the aftermath of the provincial elections, activities were to be concentrated in two directions: strong and persistent criticism of ministers and Congress political leadership, and 'field' activities, such as organisation of *Kisan morchas* (peasant protest rallies), Kisan conferences, labour rallies etc. During the latter half of 1937, the CSP maintained their criticism of 'repression of the left', compromise with vested interests, 'constitutionalist' mentality pervading the leadership of the INC, and non-fulfilment of election pledges. The CPI did not differ radically from the CSP though they concentrated entirely on field activities. Mass pressure and mass support from outside was to be rallied for exerting pressure on Congress governments' programme implementation. Greater stress was to be laid on measures related to peasantry, civil liberties and the worker's right to strike and picket. Roy differed, arguing the need to transform 'offices' to serve a 'revolutionary' purpose. He suggested activation of Congress primary committees, enrolment of new members etc.

However, LW-inspired political struggle critical of the functioning of the Congress ministries faced three major crises. First, the question of 'civil liberty' raised a furore with the arrest of Batlivala and K. Pillai, member of AICC and a leader of Kerala CSP respectively; second, the 'search' for CSP leader E. M. S. Namboodripad and promulgation of section 144 in Sholapur on 5 October 1937; and third, the 'Red Flag' used by the LW in kisan demonstrations and Congress meetings which became a big point of friction between the 'two wings' of the Congress.

'Red flag' and mass political participation that became synonymous with political activity of the LW in Congress administered provinces clearly indicated the steady influence of the CPI within the LW. At the Lucknow Congress the AIKS was founded by the CSP with the intention of mobilizing the vast reservoir of humanity, the Indian peasantry, who lived under extreme human privation in the countryside. The CSP-led LW intended to use the AIKS to bring mass pressure on Congress ministries to introduce radical economic policies to alleviate the condition of the peasantry to complement the national liberation struggle of the INC; and thereby, to substantially broaden the political base of the Congress.

The revolutionary/transformatory character of the peasantry was crucial to the success of the LW. By the May 1938 AIKS session at Comilla membership had risen to 600,000. But while huge peasant demonstration at Cuttuck in September 1937; impressive peasant marches, rallies and conferences throughout 1938–39 that took place in large parts of the country, especially Berar, Maharashtra, Andhra, Tamil Nadu and Bengal; and peasant marches involving nearly 1,50,000 kisans, especially in Bihar and U.P, notable in August 1937, and November 1939, had come to produce ‘revolutionary effects’, ‘the communists seized upon this opportunity’ to turn this ‘creative weapon’ against, what CSP leader N. G. Ranga noted, ‘our’ Congress ministries. Did it not indicate that ‘our’ Congress ministries were not ‘theirs’, that is, the ‘communists’?

Acharya Narendra Deva, President of the fourth session of the AIKS, Gaya, April 1939, by which time membership had risen by almost 20 lakhs, made an obvious reference to virtual downgrading of Congress ministers in the eyes of the people by means of *lathi* (stick) wielding marching peasants ‘due to communist prodding’. Narendra Deva advised caution to his communist colleagues ‘to restrain their desire to gain predominance over the Congress’ while accepting the fact that ‘the peasant organization had been practically shattered in the last three years (1936–39)’. The CPI’s methods of ‘left sectarianism’, of ‘militarizing’ AIKS by using CSP’s ‘left unity’ platform distorted CSP’s official stand on Congress and the nature of political struggle. CPI’s manipulation of ‘LW politics’ was also observed in connection with the Left-inspired Kanpur strike that forced the Congress government in Uttar Pradesh to promulgate section 144 and set up an Enquiry Committee. Despite repeated requests by Congress authorities, urging workers to wait till the Enquiry report was made public, the labour agitation went on, provoking Jawaharlal Nehru to comment in scarcely concealed disgust. He said: ‘[the] workers and their leaders knew very well that the Congress ministers are friendly to them and wish to help them in every way. They will injure their cause by embarrassing them [the Congress ministries] and withholding their cooperation from them’. Thereafter, Jawaharlal Nehru in whom the CSP found a supporter of peasant and labour cause was no longer keen to associate with the genuine economic and political objectives of the LW.

At a meeting in Delhi, September 1938, a resolution on civil liberty was introduced by Bhulabhai Desai of the RW charging the CSP, CPI and left-nationalists with propagating falsehood, advocating murder,

arson, looting and 'class war'. The resolution was evocative of a spate of political incidents that continued to disrupt Congress-administered provinces.

During this period the first sign of fissures in the LW was evidenced. In September 1938, M. R. Masani, the CSP leader, got hold of a secret document of the CPI entitled 'A Plan of Action' which was published under the name 'Communist Plot against the Congress Socialist Party'. This document asked the communists to make 'systematic efforts...to recruit the advanced elements of the CSP who begin to accept our line into our own organisation'. The document also asserted that communist party members were in a majority in the provinces of Andhra, Tamil Nadu, Orissa, Bengal and Punjab, and that out of these, Andhra, Tamil Nadu and Madras were 'entirely under our (CPI) own influence'. Four leading executive members of the CSP executive, Masani, Patwardhan, Lohia and Ashok Mehta resigned in 1939 citing 'fundamental differences' between CSP and CPI. Jayaprakash continued to explore possibilities of a merger of the 'two parties' on a 'common ideological basis', provided the CPI gave up the Comintern affiliation. The CPI refused. Despite strong protests by CSP members demanding the expulsion of communists as well as members of other parties (such as the Royists), Jayaprakash's call was for a 'homogenous party' that was accepted by the National Executive of CSP. He violated the decision of the executive by allowing eight communists to be included in the Allahabad Committee of the United Province branch of the CSP.

It also came to the knowledge of the CSP political leadership that Roy had secretly instructed his followers to resign from the CSP in such a 'public manner and at such suitable intervals' so as to give the impression that the CSP was gradually breaking up. A national executive of the CSP was convened in which M. R. Masani called for 'immediate expulsion' of Royists. But the national executive, prevailed over by Jayaprakash Narayan, only issued a note of warning. The 'notice' failed, as Royists at 'suitable intervals' resigned from the CSP, especially between April 1937 and August 1937. Directing his criticism against the Royists Jayaprakash Narayan said: '... every miserable little party [felt] that it alone was the real Marxist party and that every other party had therefore to be exploited, captured or destroyed. The Roy group was also a votary of this inflated creed ...'. A CSP executive circular further contended that 'Roy was attempting to organise a secret party that will work within the Congress under his

leadership—split the CSP and ‘siphon off the more radical elements into their secret party’.¹³

In the midst of the political disarray in which the LW found itself by mid-1938, the CSP chose to move towards a less rigorous ideological unity with the other left-nationalist, Subhas Chandra Bose, President of the INC at Haripura, 1938.

At Lucknow and Faizpur Nehru’s election as President of the Congress had heightened the political expectation of the LW to push ahead with a ‘radical alternative’ to prevailing Congress social and economic programmes. Under difficult circumstances Bose’s Presidentship at Haripura offered a hopeful recovery to the CSP from political oblivion; to retain an ideological ‘foothold’ in the Congress which, practically speaking, was functioning under the overall dominance of the RW. If Nehru’s choice as President at Lucknow surprised a substantial cross section of the Congress non-left leadership, Bose as President at Haripura, nominated by Gandhi, was resented with strong political reservations by the RW leadership. The non-left leadership was aware of the political forces Bose represented. Between 1927 and 1935, until his deportation by the British, Bose’s public opposition to Gandhian forms of struggle was disliked by Gandhi, and in retrospect was a distinct threat to the RW leadership. Yet Gandhi’s decision to elevate two young Congress leaders on to the forefront of nationalist politics was guided by a veritable balance guided partly by a personal opinion of equating the two left-nationalist on an even keel, and partly by political considerations of the growing popularity of radical politics among the masses. Gandhi’s anathema to a tenor of politics that he personally considered as incomprehensible is evident in a statement he made in 1934 after resigning from Congress. He said that there was ‘a growing and vital difference of outlook between [him] and many Congressmen’. But Gandhi made a

¹³ Editorial, *Congress Socialist*, Vol II, No. 27, July 10, 1939, p. 5; ‘CSP’s Reply to the Royists’, *Congress Socialist*, August 28, 1937, pp. 7–8; Jayaprakash Narayan *Socialist Unity and the Congress Socialist Party* (Bombay, 1941), pp. 5–6. M. N. Roy, ‘The Congress in Office’, in *Our Problems* (Calcutta, 1938), p. 100; *Congress Socialist*, Vol II, No. 4, October 9, 1937, p. 15; *Congress Socialist*, Vol II, No. 38, September 25, 1937, p. 13; Sada Nand Talwar, *Under the Banyan Tree: The Communist Movement in India (1920–64)*, (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1985), p. 189; H. C. Mukherjee, *Congress and the Masses* (Calcutta, 1945), pp. 128–9, 135; ‘Kisan Supplement’, *Congress Socialist*, Vol I, No. 18, April 25, 1936, pp. 19, 22, N. G. Ranga, *Revolutionary Peasants* (New Delhi, 1949), p. 69; ‘The Kisans Organize’, *Congress Socialist*, Vol. I, No. 5, January 18, 1936, p. 5, N. G. Ranga, *Kisan Handbook* (Madras n.d.), pp. 7–18, 27, 31, N. G. Ranga, *Revolutionary Peasants*, p. 70, Narendra Deva, *National Revolution*, p. 54.

comeback, as on previous occasions, in 1936, in an attempt to achieve a 'compromise with the [radical] forces' that were to be reckoned with. Bose's nomination for Presidentship at Haripura was indeed the tail end of the political compromise the RW leadership were prepared to concede to the 'leftist bloc' within the Congress.

Subhas Chandra Bose was definitely not a leftist who believed in the validity of communist principles. His knowledge of the classical works of Marxism, for instance, Lenin, was fragmentary. The publication of Bose's book 'The Indian Struggle' in 1934 proposing a synthesis of communism and fascism alienated the Indian communists from Bose who felt that his stand was not only wrong but also dangerous. Bose subsequently revised his earlier version of the idea after he met the veteran communist R. P. Dutt. Subhas Bose was more at ease extolling the virtues of De Valera, and especially, Kemal Pasha,¹⁴ for whom he had great regard as a revolutionary, not merely on the battlefields of Anatolia but also in the field of national reconstruction bestowed with 'a unique combination of manifold qualities of head and heart'.¹⁵ Bose's predicament about India's short and long term interests was based on personal insights. It was by no means a 'hard nosed' assessment of international politics. For instance, 'as long as he anticipated a settlement with Britain he was ready for compromise consistent in his idea of India's self esteem and dignity'. Or that the USSR was 'one among other allies' under certain circumstances. However, he concluded that if the Axis powers lost, the British would 'stay for a hundred years'. On that premise he proceeded to work for the 'final struggle for India's liberation'.

Bose had definite political principles that could lead India to freedom, such as, organise peasants and workers on 'some sort of a socialist (programme)', adapted to Indian conditions, eradicate obscurantist practices, organise youth into 'Volunteer Corps' under strict discipline, organise and associate women with the 'new' programme, boycott British goods, launch a countrywide propaganda to propagate the 'new cult' and for organising a new party.¹⁶ As Congress President, once, he had gone on record suggesting a 'forced march' for the backward people.

¹⁴ Hiren Mukherjee, *Struggle for Freedom*, p. 204; Hari Hara Das, *Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose: The Great War for Political Emancipation* (New Delhi: National Publishing House, 2000), p. 144.

¹⁵ *Crossroads: The Works of Subhas Chandra Bose (1938-40)*, compiled by the Netaji Research Bureau (Calcutta, 1962), p. 79.

¹⁶ Ganpat Rai, *Famous Speeches and Letters of Subhas Bose* (Lahore, 1946), pp. 114-15.

The debate over the success of Gandhian methods of mass struggle left Bose as it did others, confused.¹⁷ His first meeting with Gandhi in 1921 at the height of non-cooperation movement ‘was an immediate failure’ and it ‘set the tenor for future relations between the two’. Bose had once stated that he had ‘not decided against non-violence’; that it could not be the ‘central point of entire social activity’; and that, it was ‘one of the proposed forms subject to experiments’. It was a vital difference between Bose and Gandhi. Bose was disappointed with Gandhi/Gandhian leadership of the Congress. For instance, at the Lahore Congress session of 1930 a resolution put forward by the two left nationalists—Nehru, who talked of ‘full independence’, and Bose, who outlined the need to set up ‘a parallel government organization of workers, peasants, and youths’ was defeated. But Bose became a victim of Congress politics when Gandhi omitted him and other LW leaders from the CWC for the Karachi session, 1931; and subsequently won over Nehru to his side, and arguing that ‘the committee should be of one mind and must be passed in its entirety’. Bose wrote: ‘the Mahatma could henceforth proceed with his own plan without fear of opposition within his cabinet’. Bose was critical of the way the Gandhi–Irwin Pact of 1931 was signed. He said: ‘... it is exceedingly unsatisfactory and highly disappointing. What pains me most is the consideration that at the time this pact was drawn up we actually had more strength than would appear from the contents of the document’.¹⁸ Further, in a letter written to Narendra Deva from Vienna, 1933, with the backdrop of the ‘failure’ of the civil disobedience movement Bose, while stressing the need for a ‘new party’ within the Congress composed of radical elements, took a ‘dig’ at Gandhian techniques of mass struggle categorically stating that the ‘principle of maximum suffering for ourselves and minimum suffering for our opponents could not lead to success’.¹⁹

Despite their ideological differences the CPI supported Bose; and along with the CSP became partners in Bose’s ‘Left Consolidation Committee’.²⁰ The Presidential speech at Haripura (1938) gave a

¹⁷ Hiren Mukherjee, *Recalling India’s Struggle for Freedom* (Delhi: Seema Publications, 1983), p. 201.

¹⁸ Ganpat Rai, *Famous Speeches*, pp. 115–16; Hari Hara Das, *Political Emancipation*, pp. 78–9, 144; Pradip Bose, *Subhas Bose and India Today: Another Tryst with Destiny* (New Delhi: Deep and Deep Publishers, 1999), p. 162.

¹⁹ Hiren Mukherjee, *Struggle for Freedom*, p. 202; Pradip Bose, *Subhas Bose and India Today*, p. 168.

²⁰ Hiren Mukherjee, *Struggle for Freedom*, p. 206.

fair measure to the RW of the forces Bose was representing. Bose was categorical in stating that 'there [was] a lack of clarity in the minds of many Congressmen as to the role of the Congress in the history of the national struggle'; resonating an address he made to the All India Bharat Naujawan Sabha at Karachi on 27 May 1931. It was a critical view of the role of the non-left leadership of the Congress.

Further, he noted, that 'organisations such as the kisan sabhas and trade unions could not be abolished... by ignoring or condemning them. ... They exist as objective facts... there is historical necessity behind them... we have to reconcile to their existence'. Third, and significantly, he talked of consolidation of 'leftist elements' 'into one party', a 'leftist bloc... only if it is socialist in character. The role of the CSP to head a LW group within the Congress was stressed. By September 1938, with the Second World War hovering over Europe, Bose was contemplating a 'national struggle, which would synchronise with the coming war in Europe... a move that was resented by Gandhites who did not want their 'ministerial and parliamentary work' disturbed and 'who were at that time opposed to any national struggle'.

Bose extensively toured the country, but despite setting a new socio-political agenda through his speeches, chose to act 'as Congress President with studied moderation, permitting himself to be guided, in the matter of the exercise by Congress representatives of a certain amount of state power in many Indian provinces by powerful organisation-men...'²¹

A minor irritant to Bose's Presidentship in 1938 came in the form of the opposition of Patel to Masani being nominated in place of Patwardhan as CWC member. Patel, 'against whom Bose had in both personal and political terms made a bone to pick', alleged that Masani was in close consort with K. F. Nariman's 'indisciplined activities' within Congress; a charge that could not be confirmed. However Jayaprakash Narayan and Bose agreed with Gandhi to not request a change in the 15 CWC members. The stated displeasure of the 'Old Guard' to Bose was now evident.

With an eye on furthering the prospects of a radical national programme, the CPI and the CSP were more than equivocal in insisting upon his re-election at the next Congress session, at

²¹ Subhas Chandra Bose, *Through Congress Eyes* (Allahabad: Kitabstan, 1938), pp. 18,43; Hari Hara Das, *Political Emancipation*, p. 149; Hiren Mukherjee, *Struggle for Freedom*, p. 207.

Tripuri. Bolstered by popular response Subhas decided to stand for presidentship again.

Congress had for all practical purposes dissociated itself from its own brand of swarajist legislative politics that had come to dominate the organisation in the middle years of the 1920s. But a semblance of it, albeit a slight variation, was all along being followed by the Congress leadership; a controlled middle-class parameter of 'safe' politics. The comforting prospect of 'safe' politics that found support among a diverse social class of Congress leaders, such as industrialists, the landowning class, Gandhians, and a section of the educated intelligentsia, was being subjected to severe review by radical left-wing politics. The Congress was now in no mood to extend the political life of the LW under the leadership of Subhas Bose.

Bose aware of the inbuilt tension that characterized the relationship between the two opposing blocs was talking of cooperation. On 17 January 1939 he said: '... the first thing that we need is that all Congressmen should speak with one voice and think with one will'. His uncompromising opposition to the 'federal scheme', that was passed as a 'Main Resolution' in Congress at Haripura, and preparation for a fight with the government to win swaraj 'inside eighteen months' was based on his analysis of what might be the British government's strategy to counter it following his prediction of a 'brewing crisis among European nations' during this period.²² The outlook of the Congress leaders at this time was being governed by two ideas: 'to avoid a bloody revolution... and... mass civil disobedience on a scale hitherto not attempted...' and to have a 'homogenous' Congress Working Committee (CWC) in order to avoid artificial combinations between the Left and the Right, a logical conclusion to Gandhi's 1938 directive to the Congress leadership. It was quite apparent that Bose's desire to push through with his 'National Demand' in the form of an ultimatum to the British government would run into difficulties considering that the existing parameters of Congress politics²³ would be simply unresponsive to the demands of a more radical outlook.

For the better part of a decade the two ideological camps were locked in a tussle for supremacy within the Congress. Now on its last

²² Pradip Bose, *Subhas Bose and India Today*, p. 162; Subhas Bose, *The Indian Struggle (1920-42)*, (Reprint, Calcutta, 1964), pp. 145-6; J. S. Bright (ed.), *Important Speeches and Writings of Subhas Bose* (Lahore, 1946), pp. 80-1, 258-9.

²³ M. K. Gandhi, 'The Congress Ministries', *Harijan*, Vol V, No. 23, July 17, 1937; M. K. Gandhi, 'That Unfortunate Walkout', *Harijan*, Vol IV, No. 36, October 15, 1938; Bright, *Important Speeches*, pp. 258-9.

leg a bitter end seemed imminent. A fortnight before the presidential elections Subhas had spoken in no uncertain terms that he had not received any suggestion or advice from a single delegate asking (him) to withdraw from the contest. On the contrary, he expressed surprise that he had 'been nominated as a candidate from several provinces without (his) knowledge or consent and (he) had been receiving requests from socialists and non-socialists in different parts of the country urging (him) not to retire, ... that he should be allowed to serve in office for another term'. Bose however hastened to add that he could be wrong in overestimating himself but that 'could be only verified when voting (took) place on the 29th January and not earlier'. And further, '(he) shall be failing in (his) duty if he shirked any responsibility which may be cast on (him)'. Bose added that if, however, as a result of the 'appeal made by eminent leaders like Maulana Azad', whose withdrawal from presidentship at Tripuri at the last moment owing to a combination of weak health and dislike for publicity precipitated the crisis prompting the Congress leadership to prop up Sitaramayya, '... the majority of delegates vote against my re-election, I shall loyally abide by their verdict and shall continue to serve the Congress and the country as an ordinary soldier ...'.²⁴

As the Presidential elections approached, the two sides in a series of tensely written public statements traded charges, holding the other responsible for the impasse. Subhas Bose though backed by Left forces was virtually fighting a lone hand against the RW. By adding that a presidential contest could and should serve as an occasion to determine the measure of support given by the countrymen 'to rival ideas ideologies, problems and programme's' Subhas placed himself virtually in opposition to the entire Congress leadership. A joint statement signed by Vallabhai Patel, Rajendra Prasad, Jairamdas Daulatram, J. B. Kripalani, Jamnalal Bajaj, Shankerrao Deo and Bhulabhai Desai, all members of the CWC of 1938 said the following,

Subhas Babu has set a new precedent ... The wisdom of the course adopted by him can be known only by experience. We have grave doubts about it. We could have waited for a greater consolidation of Congress ranks, greater toleration and greater respect for one another's opinion before making the Congress Presidential election a matter of contest.²⁵

²⁴ Sisir Kumar Bose and Sugata Bose, *Netaji: Collected Works*, Volume 10, *Congress President: Speeches, Articles and Letters* (January 1938–May 1939) (Delhi, 1995), pp. 67–8.

²⁵ *Crossroads*, p. 87; Bose and Bose, *Netaji: Collected Works*, p. 69.

The erstwhile WC members took strong objection to Bose's talk of 'ideologies, policies and programmes' which they considered 'unnecessary' to the consolidation of the choice of Congress President, and further added that the policies and programmes of the Congress are framed by the WC. For the benefit of Bose it was further clarified in unmistakable terms the position of the President as that of a Chairman, 'who ... represents and symbolises as under a constitutional monarchy, the unity and solidarity of the nation'. And finally, 'Dr Pattabhi is quite fitted for the post...' Subhas reacted sharply, blaming the WC members for unfairly 'taking sides in an organised manner...'. Subhas expressed surprise at Patel's telegram to Sarat Chandra Bose on 24 January 1939 which stated that it was only under 'exceptional circumstances'²⁶ that a President could be re-elected. Subhas cited several instances when an incumbent holding the highest office has been elected more than once. His brother Sarat however felt otherwise, and conveyed his view to Patel through a telegram the same day that 'the coming year would be more critical and exceptional from every viewpoint'. Presidential elections, Subhas felt, were never unanimous. If ever it was, it was as became the practice in the mid-thirties when leftist candidates became Presidents with support from both Left and Right wings. Bose added that 'under the new Congress constitution of 1934 which, as he pointed out to his more illustrious colleagues, had elevated the position of the President considerably. The President could now nominate his WC'. He was definitely 'not a figurehead and a tool in the hands of the WC'. Bose alleged that some influential leaders of the Congress RW had aired in private and in public that they favour a compromise with the British government over the federal scheme,²⁷ '... during the coming year'. He went even further to suggest that the 'prospective list of ministers for the "Federation" cabinet had been already drawn up'. Consequently a desire to prop up 'a rightist candidate at any cost'. It therefore became imperative under the present circumstances to have a President who will be anti-federalist to the 'core of his heart'. Rajendra Prasad launched a frontal attack: '... why damn others for their imaginary views when his own views are not crystallised enough to discard "ifs" ...'. Prasad in fact was suggesting the inconsistencies in Bose's stand. He claimed that Bose had opined that 'if' there is a struggle we shall offer opposition to contest the elections to the

²⁶ Bose and Bose, *Netaji: Collected Works*, p. 70; *Crossroads*, p. 88.

²⁷ *Crossroads*, p. 88, Bose and Bose, *Netaji: Collected Works*, pp. 71–2.

Federal Legislature even 'if' the Congress policy would be to offer an uncompromising attitude towards Federation; an assumption that political struggle is not inevitable. The second 'if' leaves room for anticipating that the Congress attitude may not after all be one of uncompromising opposition to the British-sponsored Federation scheme. Did not Subhas 'impute motives', Prasad stated. Certainly, the political statement made by Bose appeared vague but was it not the RW that had gone on record to suggest that there should be 'greater toleration and greater respect' for one another.²⁸

Patel's response was a guarded one. Aware of the unclear stance of his colleagues he sought to set things right. 'I know of no member (of the CWC) who wants the "Federation" scheme' of the government, and then went on to say that no single member, not even the President for the time being of the Congress can decide on such issues. 'It is the Congress alone that decides and therefore the WC collectively when Congress is not in session'. Then why did the RW launch a campaign against Bose? If the federal question was not a major issue as Patel's statement indicated, what else could it be? Opposition against Subhas Bose's candidature mainly arose from the fact that he was an immensely popular leader who had enthused all, especially the youths urging them to take an active part in India's freedom struggle. The 'old guard' could hardly conceive of a situation whereby they could be overwhelmed by a young radical brigade. Understandably, his re-election would be harmful to the country's cause, read RW's cause. Jawaharlal Nehru's statement was more cautious and diplomatic urging Subhas not to contest the elections on the grounds that 'his (as well as his own) capacity for effective work would be hampered by holding the office at this stage'.

But the damage had already been done. Bose alleged that the WC is really controlled by a group within it and that the other members are there on sufferance. That 'moral pressure' was being brought to bear upon delegates and the 'RW was going all out to have anybody else than my humble self'.

Bose was re-elected President (1580 votes to 1377 votes) on socialist and left-wing support which tipped the balance in his favour. The defeat of Sitaramayya, backed by Gandhi rankled the RW leadership of the Congress. Gandhi said bluntly: 'I was decidedly against his re-election... the defeat is more mine than his' (Sitaramayya), '... I am

²⁸ Bose and Bose, *Netaji: Collected Works*, pp. 84, 78; *Crossroads*, p. 89.

nothing if I do not represent definite principles and policy', and finally, 'I rejoice in this defeat'.²⁹ Bose's re-election consequently decided the course of action or rather inaction that would characterise Gandhi's involvement in the subsequent days and months. Gandhi made it clear to the 'minority' within the Congress that '... if they cannot keep pace with it, they must come out of the Congress not in a spirit of ill-will but with the deliberate attempt at rendering effective service. They must abstain where they cannot cooperate'. '... They must not obstruct'. Gandhi's 'directive' sent mixed signals to the two opposing fronts. For Subhas who alone represented the aspirations of radical forces for the moment, the comments acted as a point of demarcation between the two 'blocs' in the Congress. For the Right it gave them space to manoeuvre. With Gandhi's 'inactivity' at this crucial juncture the RW felt free to launch tirades against the LW.

Subhas after his re-election in an effort to start on a right note stated that no occasion now or in future would warrant the so called 'minority party' to non-cooperate with the so called 'majority party'. But it was not to be. Almost immediately thereafter twelve members of the WC resigned headed by Patel, Azad and Prasad. Nehru, though he did not resign, issued a statement from Almora on 26 January 1939 which led everybody to believe that he had also resigned. Nehru had suggested to Bose shortly after his re-election at Tripuri that 'we should forget persons and remember only principles and causes'; to which Bose replied that 'you want us to forget only when certain persons (Bose) are concerned, and not others'. 'When it is a case of Bose... you run down personalities and lionize principles'. Nehru had begun the process of distancing himself from Bose to avoid the displeasure of Gandhi. Bose recounted later in a letter written to his wife Emilie Schenkl that 'Pandit Nehru was indifferent'. Another letter written to Amiya Nath Bose stated clearly that 'had he (Nehru) been with us or even his neutrality would have given us a majority'. Bose, then, clearly was conscious of a need for a majority, contradicting his earlier statements made immediately after his re-election. Bose continues to write that 'his (Nehru's) open propaganda against me has done me more harm than the activities of the twelve stalwarts. What a pity?'

One would in the light of past events predict the 'venerable patriarch' to intervene, to stave off an impending crisis. Gandhi

²⁹ Bose and Bose, *Netaji: Collected Works*, pp. 78, 80, 83, 85–6; N. N. Mitra, IAR, Vol. 1, 1939, pp. 319–20.

was essentially dealing with a man who was passionately committed to India's freedom. A bit hasty, one who betrayed a sense of tactlessness, offering 'clear-cut' solutions to India's political and socio-economic problems. Gandhi's subsequent statements in general and correspondence with Bose through telegrams and letters bore unmistakable traces of an attitude he seemed to have developed in the aftermath of the Tripuri Presidential election—of one that considered Subhas as an 'annoying interference' in his scheme of things. Though not literally, but in some measure it lingered on thereafter. Gandhi's disinterest evidenced in asking Bose to do the 'unimaginable' left Bose with few choices at a time when he longed for a more cooperative attitude from Gandhi. But Gandhi chose to be guided by 'events', occupied with issues which were relatively minor; corruption and entry of bogus members with the Congress, and the 'Rajkot affair', which Bose called a 'flea bite',³⁰ urging a comprehensive plan for simultaneous struggle throughout the country to the present crisis brewing within the Congress. Perhaps it was Gandhi's own way of letting the Congress know of other pressing problems which required 'immediate attention'. Such instances gave evidence of Gandhi's dissociation from the political crisis that was beginning to take ominous proportions within the Congress. At ease with carrying out constructive work through devoted selfless service and transforming genuine social and economic concerns of the masses into programmes of political action for the Congress Gandhi achieved a rarity of sorts, a mass leader who while continuing to shape the contours of Congress politics remained the quintessential organisational man prepared to let chosen Congressmen take centre stage. Gandhi's apparent disinterest at Bose's re-election could not hide his disappointment at the political overrule of his style of politics by the forces Bose had come to represent. His continuing indifference to the Tripuri episode gave additional leverage to the RW.

The second salvo was dealt to the entire Left contingent in the form of the 'Pant Resolution'. The resolution requesting the President to 'nominate the WC for the ensuing year in accordance with the wishes of Gandhi' was moved by Govind Ballabh Pant.³¹ The Pant resolution

³⁰ Bose and Bose, *Netaji: Collected Works*, pp. 87–89; Sisir Bose and Sugata Bose, *The Essential Writings of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose* (Delhi: OUP, 1997) pp. 237–9; Bose and Bose, *Netaji: Collected Works*, Vol 7, p. 208; *Crossroads*, p. 113; Bright, *Important Speeches*, p. 159.

³¹ N. N. Mitra, IAR, Vol I, 1939, p. 334.

(PR) was 'clearly unconstitutional and ultra vires', as Subhas indicated. It militated against Article XV of the Congress constitution which conferred certain powers on the President in appointing the WC. It is quite clear that the resolution was designed to put political pressure on Subhas to comply with the wishes of the RW. It became evident that the 'offended Congress leaders' would leave the Congress if the resolution was rejected.³² In view of the impending difficulties and obstacles which he had to contend with Bose reminded Gandhi of an 'advice' tendered at Wardha, 15 February 1939, urging him [Bose] to assert. Would he still advise him to be so? Bose also recounted in the same correspondence that disagreement with his programme meant that either he 'efface' himself or stand up for his 'honest conviction'. To which Gandhi had suggested voluntary acceptance of his (Gandhi's) view point instead of self-effacement which would in reality mean self-suppression.³³

It was during this period that Subhas was afflicted with a strange illness that confined him to bed for a number of days. Days that were extremely crucial to Bose. A face-to-face meeting with Gandhi at this juncture would possibly have retrieved a deteriorating situation unfolding within the INC. But his immobility meant that correspondence had to continue through mail. Strangely though Gandhi could not find time to meet Subhas. Praying for Subhas' good health and desire to personally nurse him remained confined to telegrams and letters.

There was not the slightest hint that the Pant resolution did not have the personal backing of Gandhi. But as Subhas wrote back to Gandhi it was being widely reported that a 'telephonic conversation had taken place between Tripuri and Rajkot'. The air was thick with the rumour that the resolution had Gandhi's fullest support. For those canvassing for the PR it had immense 'vote catching value'. Bose expressed surprise at the delay in sending the details of the resolution to Gandhi as he found out from the letter he received from Gandhi which further confirmed that the telephonic conversation could not be taken as a benchmark for Gandhi's support. Notwithstanding Gandhi's stature in the Congress and the moral dilemma Bose would suffer should he fail to 'comply' with the resolution irrespective of the discriminatory

³² Bright, *Important Speeches*, p. 248; N. N. Mitra, IAR, Vol. I, 1939, p. 334.

³³ Bright, *Important Speeches*, p. 248.

clauses Subhas admitted that he himself 'allowed the resolution to be moved and discussed'. How could he go back on it?³⁴

Before the voting on the PR took place Bose had tried to get it amended, as he later conveyed to Gandhi in one of his letters. An amended resolution with 'slight changes' not one vote would have been cast against the resolution and Gandhi's prestige would have remained intact. But as it turned out, the resolution was intended 'to avenge the result of the Presidential elections'.³⁵ It contained some unwarranted comments of the RW who charged the LW of casting aspersions on them. R. N. Bharadwaj of the CPI, a member of the AICC speaking on the resolution made an attempt to placate the Congress and Subhas. 'We are prepared to accept the clause relating to the WC being formed with the approval of Gandhi but our request is that the clause relating to "aspersions" should be omitted'.³⁶

The stance taken by the CPI was ambiguous. In spite of their previous agreement with CSP leadership to maintain neutrality, one section led by N. Dutt Mazumdar was reported to have actually voted against the resolution. The CPI officially maintained that despite 'criticism of Gandhism' Gandhi was the 'greatest mobilizing power' for the anti-imperialist movement. It was necessary to support Gandhi, to 'weld Gandhism with new nationalism', to resurrect and replenish the militant anti-imperialist phase of Gandhian leadership during 1919–20. CSP's apparent neutrality over the PR which it carried through in the voting was a disappointment to Subhas. He said in no uncertain terms that '... when I talk of our side I exclude the official CSP. We discovered for the first time at Tripuri what a small following the official CSP had. Because of its vascillating policy the rank and file and numerous provincial branches have revolted'. And stated further that 'a section of the CSP will move with us in future'.³⁷

Jayaprakash Narayan however clarified that

'the socialists remained neutral because both Pant and Bose had assured them that the former's resolution did not mean a vote against the latter, they felt that to oppose the resolution was to face the eventuality of a split in the Congress'.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 252, 257.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 257.

³⁶ N. N. Mitra, IAR, Vol I, 1939, p. 333.

³⁷ P. L. Lakhanpal, Congress Socialist Party (Appendix), p. III; Madhu Limaye, *Communist Party: Facts and Fiction* (Hyderabad, 1951), p. 33; Bright, *Important Speeches*, pp. 255–6.

And further, reiterating a stated position of the CSP Jayaprakash Narayan said

‘We voted for Mr. Subhas Chandra Bose because we preferred him to... Dr. Pattabhi. We never expected it would lead to a schism in the Congress. Our party does not and will not participate in this (P.R.) quarrel’.

M. N. Roy took a different line. He moved an amendment expressing confidence in the President and appealing to Gandhi and all the leaders of the Congress to extend cooperation to Bose. Roy was advocating a composite leadership in the first place, but if the Congress leadership refused cooperation then he would favour an alternative leadership.³⁸

Personally the resolution did nothing to enhance Gandhi’s prestige, influence and authority, as Subhas wrote to him later: ‘... 45 votes were cast against ‘you’ in the Subjects Committee and in the Open Session. Despite CSP’s neutrality, information gathered from “independent sources” indicated “at least 800 votes, if not more, out of about 2,200 were cast against you”. It is clear that if the CSP had voted as they did in the Subjects Committee the resolution would have been defeated. But the PR was passed. It was a ‘phyrrhic victory’ for Gandhi, as Subhas would say, ‘neither a victory for the Old Guard nor a defeat for him’.³⁹

With the resolution passed the problem of forming a new WC assumed significance. In a letter dated 25 March 1939, addressed to Gandhi, Subhas sent a number of queries related to the possible composition of the new WC, an issue that he believed held the key to a successful unity between the two ‘rival blocks’ within the Congress. Bose further stated in the letter that he would be earnestly waiting for his ‘*upadesh*’ (advice) on this matter. The queries essentially veered around the contention as to whether the ‘committee’ should be homogenous or draw sustenance from different parties or groups within the Congress. If the committee is homogenous in character which Subhas had opposed, then obviously, as he stated, ‘people like me on one side and Sardar Patel and others on the other could not be on the same committee’. If different parties and groups be represented on the WC what would be their numerical representation? Subhas suggested that the two ‘blocs’ within the Congress were ‘more or less equally balanced’. To maintain equanimity he would suggest names

³⁸ Sada Nand Talwar, *Under the Banyan Tree*, p. 193; B. B. Sarkar, *Nationalism and Marxism: Quest for People and Power* (New Delhi: Kalinga Publications, 1990), p. 115.

³⁹ Bright, *Important Speeches*, pp. 257–8, 268.

of seven members and Patel would do likewise. The general secretary should be a man of President's choice 'if he is to function properly'. The treasurer's name may be suggested by Sardar Patel. Thereafter Subhas' stand noticeably hardened. In his next letter to Gandhi he posed two alternatives before him. '... either to accommodate our views with regard to the composition of the WC or to insist on your views in entirety. In the case of the latter we may come to the parting of ways'. The inert political atmosphere that had set in within the Congress was having an effect on Subhas. The indications were quite clear when he wrote in the same letter that he did not have the 'slightest desire to stick to office'. But he could not be hounded out, as he disclosed further, that pressure was mounting on him to resign because he was ill. Subhas retorted back saying 'no President had resigned while in prison, for instance? He was 'resisting' because his resignation would mean a parting of ways between the two groups, a 'new phase in Congress politics' which he wanted to avoid.⁴⁰

Gandhi's responses to Bose's queries went largely unanswered as Subhas grappled to come to terms with an increasingly vengeful RW. While being critical of the PR, he suggested that Subhas should give it his own interpretation and act accordingly without the slightest hesitation. That is, form his own cabinet in accordance with his wishes, formulate his own programme and put it before the AICC for approval, an approval which Gandhi could not guarantee. Since 'members would exercise their own judgement'. Further, Gandhi wrote to Subhas that if 'you' 'do not get the vote lead the opposition till you have converted the majority'.⁴¹ Subhas' expectations were belied. Such advice tendered by Gandhi did not count much as ground realities were far more complex. His repeated pleas to Gandhi to 'come forward and directly and openly conduct the affairs of the Congress' met with negative response.⁴² To Gandhi 'Rajkot' could not be postponed. Subhas could neither expect Gandhi to be relieved of his duty 'for ten more days'. Days that were extremely crucial for Subhas.⁴³

Irreconcilable differences had made it difficult for what Gandhi termed 'a meeting of the foes'. 'The gulf is too wide, suspicions too deep'. 'I see no way of closing the ranks'. And finally in exasperation

⁴⁰ Bright, *Important Speeches*, pp. 246–7, 269, 252, 255.

⁴¹ Bose and Bose, *Netaji: Collected Works*, Vol. 7, p. 144; *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Volume LXIX (March 1, 1939–July 15, 1939), (New Delhi, 1977), p. 126.

⁴² Bright, *Important Speeches*, p. 268.

⁴³ Bright, *Important Speeches*, p. 271.

he declared: 'the only way seems to me is to recognise the differences and let each group work in its own manner'.⁴⁴

It could not be so. It was a recipe for disaster.

Bose had all along been suggesting that in view of the 'critical times at home and abroad' a composite cabinet was the need of the hour. CPI which was ambivalent in their attitude towards the PR soon retraced their steps guided by the Comintern's 7th Congress stand of an '... anti-imperialist people's front ...' and demanded, not the exclusive leadership of one wing, but a united leadership under Gandhi. Gandhi's opposition hinged on the premise that a 'composite' cabinet was simply out of the question since it violated the moral conscience of an individual amounting to self-suppression which he could not permit. Gandhi's moral intonation to the whole argument was presumably guided by a known fact—Subhas' stated displeasure for the Old Guard. Practical considerations, however, convinced Bose that a composite cabinet would better serve Congress unity. It is worth noting that in his later correspondence with Gandhi Subhas hardly mentioned his political and economic emancipation programme. Could not Gandhi's adamant stand on the 'moral question' take a back seat for the moment, in the greater interest of the Congress and the nation? After all, were not practical compromise and accommodation inherent parts of '*satyagraha*' (a movement based on truth)? On the other hand, Gandhi suggested that he could stand 'guarantee' for a 'homogenous cabinet'. It was a strangely unworkable situation.

Failing in his efforts Bose tendered his resignation on 29 April at the AICC meeting at Calcutta, citing his failure to implement 'Mahatmaji's advice' and urged him to take over the responsibility vested in him at Tripuri, informally through the controversial Pant Resolution, and nominate the WC. Jawaharlal Nehru thought the Congress leadership's uncompromising opposition to Subhas was unjustified. Nehru wrote: '... he was earnestly striving for a united functioning of the Congress, ... accepting the Tripuri decisions but opposition which seemed to me wholly unjustified, came and led to his resignation'.⁴⁵ Throughout the period when unsavoury incidents were unfolding in the Congress, Nehru's 'absence' from the 'scene' weakened the resolve of the 'fragmented' left bloc. It was during this period that the two left-nationalists became critical of one another. Bose contended that Nehru considered him 'more as a speaker than a

⁴⁴ *Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, p. 125.

⁴⁵ Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Unity of India* (London, 1948), pp. 160–1.

directing President'; and declared that 'he (Nehru) has no connections with the left'. Reacting to his comments Bose appealed to Nehru to 'shake off his present vacillation and give a bold and correct lead to all the radical and progressive forces in the country'. Further, Bose dwelling on the Tripuri crisis made a direct attack on Nehru saying: 'what my political opponents (RW leadership) urge, you concede, while you are almost blind to what could be said against them'.

The Tripuri episode, as one Bombay friend recounted to Subhas, '... was a case of one sick man lying in bed fighting 12 stalwarts of the Old Guard, Jawaharlal Nehru, though not with the same intensity, 7 Provincial Ministers, who were canvassing for the Old Guard, who felt that Bose's re-election was concomitant to power slipping out of their hands and lastly, the name, influence and prestige of Gandhi'. Bose recalled that the RW were fearful that their 'work of 20 years was undone in the course of a day', that is, by his re-election at Tripuri. Subhas further stated that 'since Deshbandhu's time nobody had given them such a defeat'. However, as Gandhi came to the 'rescue' of the Old Guard opinion amongst the 'centrist', such as, Rafi Ahmad Kidwai, Sri Prakash, Jawaharlal Nehru and other members of the Independence for India League wavered. They were prepared to support the 'left' but 'not prepared to kick out Gandhi', as they said.⁴⁶

In the aftermath of the 'Tripuri episode' Jayaprakash Narayan conceded the failure of the LW. He remarked: '... while a new leadership has arisen, the predominant leadership is still in the hands of the Old Guard... They represent the most influential (force) in the country. And further, neither the Kisan Sabhas nor the Trade Union Congress... can hope to fight imperialism'; it rests 'unquestionably... to the Congress'. Jayaprakash Narayan concluded that the CSP 'should submit to Gandhi's conditions and lend him full cooperation, since it was Gandhi alone who could launch a struggle'.

Shortly after his resignation Bose founded the Forward Bloc (FB) on 3 May 1939, a separate left group within the Congress, an attempt to bring all left-wing groups into a single organisation without forcing them to merge their distinct political identities to meet, what he called, 'Right consolidation'. The Forward Bloc's aim was to 'unite totally radical and anti-imperialist elements within the Congress'. It was not, as Bose stated, 'his majesty's opposition'; as the present Congress leadership had, in Bose's view, come to signify. The 'bloc'

⁴⁶ *Crossroads*, pp. 112, 114; Hari Hara Das, *Political Emancipation*, p. 153; Bose and Bose, *Essential Writings*, pp. 240, 242.

stood for something 'positive and dynamic'; that was 'fighting alien imperialism and Indian counter-revolution'. The RW attacked the 'new party' as one that would lead to disunity and cause a split; while Jayaprakash Narayan (CSP) and P. C. Joshi (CPI) regarded the bloc as 'exclusive and sectarian', and not completely an anti-right bloc. Yet at a conference in Bombay, June 1939, a Left Consolidation Committee was formed in which three representatives from Forward Bloc, CSP, CPI, League⁴⁷ of Radical Congressmen (created during the Tripuri session), and two prominent leaders of AIKS, Sahajananda and Ranga, began to evolve a common line of political action. Though the 'Committee' acted unitedly they were not successful in defeating two resolutions of the Congress now under control of the RW. One, prohibiting Congressmen from offering or organising satyagraha 'in any form' in the Administered Provinces of India without the previous sanction of the Provincial Congress Committee (PCC). The other, putting restriction on the 'public discussion' of Congress ministries by the PCCs. As a mark of protest the Left Consolidation Committee decided to observe 9 July 1939, as a day of protest against the resolutions. Rajendra Prasad, the new President, following Subhas' resignation, had already forewarned the leftists of disciplinary action should they carry through with their demonstrations. The threat of disciplinary action brought about breaches in the Left Consolidation Committee. M. N. Roy, who had stated earlier that 'there will be an impressive manifestation of protest' changed stance, characterizing the defying of the ban by Bose and CPI as an 'ill-conceived and foolhardy action'. In August, disciplinary action was taken against Subhas. The WC at Wardha, 9–12 August 1939, 'disqualified' him as President of Bengal PCC for three years. In September 1939 the Second World War began. In October 1939, the CSP freed itself from the discipline of the 'Committee'. The apparent withdrawal of the CSP from the 'Committee' was due to its unacceptability with the perception of a 'joint command' being formed by the FB to carry on anti-war activities. The CSP was of the view that since 'sufficient political unanimity' among left groups was not possible it was necessary that a 'common programme of war . . . (was) to be

⁴⁷ The 'League' primarily consisted of Congressmen who accepted the Royist line in Indian politics, more particularly, the political stance M. N. Roy took at Tripuri. Opposition to 'Gandhian ideology' which was antagonistic to the political programme, and revolutionary urge of Indian masses was the main objective of the League. Authoritarian leadership within the Congress was decried, though the League formally accepted the Congress (national liberation) political programme.

carried out by all groups in cooperation of one another', reserving the right of each group to act individually, and not jointly. The CSP's proposal was accepted but it chose to withdraw from the 'Committee'. In December 1939, the Forward Bloc suddenly found that in the official CPI party journal the Forward Bloc was being characterised as a 'counter-revolutionary organization', and shortly thereafter, Subhas Bose was called a 'left demagogue'. The Forward Bloc subsequently severed connections with the CPI. The CPI made a virulent attack on the CSP, and soon after, an early 1940 document of the party 'celebrated the demise of the CSP'. They were also called 'henchmen of Gandhi'. Jayaprakash Narayan and Narendra Deva agreed that the CPI's attack on the CSP with the advent of the second world war was an instance calculated to deny any other party the leadership of an impending revolution, as interpreted by the CPI. The failure of the 'consolidation committee' and infighting once again demonstrated the inability of left parties to remain united in the face of a developing crisis.⁴⁸ However, the consolidation of non-left leadership and Gandhians within the Congress continued. In December 1939, a CWC meeting was held at Wardha that passed a resolution titled 'Political Situation', endorsed by Gandhi, calling for an '... independence pledge ... so framed as to help preparation (for struggle) already on foot'. The old 'Congress Pledge' had a new paragraph on *khadi* (hand-spun cotton cloth) and *charkha*, (spinning wheel) urging Congressmen to pursue it with purpose. The CSP was critical and felt that the 'Gandhian construction programme', which it had since its inception opposed, could not at this stage prepare a national organization like Congress for political freedom. It would be a strangely unworkable plan. Jayaprakash Narayan commented that 'it (the resolution) showed the helplessness of the national leadership'. Gandhi replied to these criticisms in 'Harijan' by demanding full allegiance to his programme if CSP wished to have him as their

⁴⁸ Gene Overstreet and Marshall Windmiller, *Communism in India* (Berkeley, 1959), p. 168; Bipan Chandra, *India's Struggle for Independence: 1857-1947*, (New Delhi, 1988), p. 447; *Independent India*, Vol. 2, No. 26, April 2, 1939, p. 216; B. B. Sarkar, *Nationalism and Marxism*, pp. 167-8; Sisir Bose and Sugata Bose, *The Alternative Leadership: Subhas Chandra Bose* (Speeches, Articles, Statements and Letters, June 1939-41), *Netaji Collected Works* (New Delhi, OUP 1999), pp. 68-9; Sada Nand Talwar, *Under the Banyan Tree*, p. 198; *Independent India*, July 9, 1939, Vol. III, No. 28, p. 435; *Independent India*, July 16, 1939, Vol. 29, p. 450; Jayaprakash Narayan, *Socialist Unity and the Congress Socialist Party*, pp. 30-1; B. B. Sarkar, *Nationalism and Marxism*, pp. 173-5, 176; Subhas Bose, *Indian Struggle*, p. 87; *Independent India*, Vol. 3, No. 27, July 2, 1939, p. 433; N. N. Mitra, *IAR*, Vol. II, 1939, p. 213.

leader in the national struggle. He rejected the alternative CSP plan of students leaving schools and colleges and workers downing tools in factories.

Despite a political setback with the dissociation of the CSP, who as alleged by Bose 'joined forces with Gandhites to frustrate FB'S work', and the CPI, which considered the Anti-Compromise Conference at Ramgarh, March 1940, held parallel to the Congress session at the same venue, as 'neither national nor a struggle...' Bose went ahead with the 'Conference' with the FB, Bengal Labour Party and other smaller affiliates participating in it. At the Conference Bose stated that '... will India still remain under the thumb of the rightists or ... swing to the left once for all'. At the Ramgarh Congress session Gandhi openly challenged the LW stating that 'it is not those who shout civil disobedience can launch civil disobedience... I feel you (LW) are not prepared'. He added, '... with me there is no alternative than non-violence... I will not have anyone under me who does not believe in the charkha; I shall go ahead only when I am satisfied that you have faith in charkha'. Gandhi's speech at Ramgarh had an effect on the FB's immediate objective of political struggle. A direct call was made by FB on 6 April 1940, to 'begin or intensify local (not national) struggle' in various parts of the country. This 'event' once again confirmed the unchallenged position of Gandhi as the 'dictator' of the Indian national movement.

On 9 October 1939, the AICC adopted a resolution endorsing the WC statement at Wardha on 14 September 1939 on cooperation with the British in their war efforts in Europe to defeat the forces of Fascism and Nazism which were considered by the INC as grave threats to the world; and that they must be defeated. INC's conditional support was based on the fact that the British must approve concrete political measures to secure India her future of a 'free nation'. The CSP was critical of the compromising attitude of the Congress. It issued two 'War Circulars' on 6 September 1939 showing its keenness to utilize the war situation for the intensification of the national struggle. The CSP felt that the war was an imperialist war, whether it was Britain, Germany, or even, Russia; and further, support for British war efforts would not necessarily lead to a process of granting freedom to India. It was not a 'people's war', an obvious reference to CPI's support for Russia, since a people's war was fought by subject people for national liberation, or, when they rose in revolt against the national bourgeoisie. Secured of Congress' cooperation in the war effort, between March 1940 and April 1940, the colonial government

arrested top leaders of FB, CPI, and CSP snuffing out any likelihood of an assertion of left-wing forces in the country.

In an article written in the 'Forward Bloc', the official mouthpiece of the organisation dated 13.4.40, Subhas Bose summed up his impression about the national struggle. He lamented that '... Hindus and Muslims [were] drifting apart'. The Congress right-wing was '... attacking the Forward Bloc and All India Kisan Sabha...' who on their part were '... endeavouring to carrying on without the help of the Congress High Command'. The Congress High Command betrayed a '... attitude of doubt and vascillation which was proving contagious and demoralising...'. The Muslim League was more concerned with communal rather than national problems. And further wrote: '... India is in a morass today'. '... In the absence of a dynamic leadership people as a whole seemed to have lost their dynamism'.

It was during this period that Jayaprakash Narayan, who by this time had 're-oriented his entire thinking', wrote a long 'secret letter' to Bose from jail outlining his political views that substantially mirrored Bose's political ideology. He wrote that the Congress 'no longer (remained) an instrument of revolutionary action and that it was necessary ... to prepare an independent basis for such action'. He further added that the

'united offensive of the Indian people against imperialism is at an end; that a section of the upper strata and middle class are deserting the struggle; and that a democratic revolution would devolve on the workers, peasants and lower middle class'.

Jayaprakash Narayan also perceived that the 'CSP's framework had become too inadequate for (this) task'; and the CPI 'could not merge its identity in another socialist party'. The experience of the CPI's 'capture the union politics' within CSP was a reminder that 'its professed allegiance to any front should be observed with caution' since it would get 'an opportunity of entering the other party and capturing it'.

Bose made one last attempt to rekindle his troubled relationship with Gandhi. He wrote a letter to Gandhi on 23.12.40 requesting the FB's desire to 'participate in individual civil disobedience despite its restricted scope and form'; a thought he shared with his brother, Sarat, a couple of months before writing to Gandhi expressing bitter disappointment with Gandhi/Gandhian leadership, wondering whether 'the British bureaucracy or Gandhi's hierarchy was a menace to India's political future'. Gandhi wrote back on 29.12.40 stating

that there were ‘fundamental differences between (them)’, that their ‘destination may appear but only appear to be same’. Gandhi was clearly suggesting that they pursued divergent goals.

Subhas Bose, thereafter, set out to outline his future course of action. In an article, ‘Why I left India’, he wrote, ‘... My object in leaving India was to supplement from outside the struggle, material and military whatever may have been its shortfalls going on at home. To morally convince the countrymen that victory will be ours...’.⁴⁹

The decade of the 1930s provided a political opportunity for the consolidation of left radicalism within the Congress. Yet the ‘left bloc’ capitulated to the concerted opposition of the Congress ‘Old Guard’. It ceased to function, or even exist, ideologically, as a critique of the RW Congress leadership, which, while successfully appropriating the radical politics of the LW, emerged to give definite political direction to the course of nationalist politics. A careful analysis of the factors that contributed to the defeat of ‘left’ politics during that period needs to be explored.

The genesis of the ‘anti-radical’ politics in the Congress lay in the differentiated social composition of the non-left political leadership—the liberals, swarajists, the industrial class, the petty-bourgeoisie semi-feudal class allied to the industrial lobby, such as the merchants and traders, Gandhists, modernists and a host of leaders who held different ideological perceptions—but all united by their opposition to radical politics of the Left. Gandhi’s remarkable leadership of the Congress ensured their acquiescence to Congress nationalism, which, by the 1930s, in addition to the goal of political independence, was treading a parallel vision of a modern, industrialized India. The Congress ‘Old Guard’, at least since mid-1930s, dominated by the modernists and the industrial class, needed Gandhi’s leadership, that was unquestioned by even a large section of Left leaders of a variety of ideological hues, and not his social and political visions perceived as ‘anti-modern’, based on anti-industrial rhetoric, debunked even by his protégé Jawaharlal Nehru, an advocate of industrialization of the economy. Gandhi was ‘required’ to mobilize a ‘passionate, ignorant, poverty-stricken peasantry whose trust had to be gained that was crucial to the crystallization of Congress nationalism. ‘Mass politics’

⁴⁹ Ganpat Rai, *Famous Speeches*, pp. 215–16. B. B. Sarkar, *Nationalism and Marxism*, pp. 174–7, 172; B. B. Misra, *Political Parties*, pp. 250–1; Bose and Bose, *The Alternative Leadership*, pp. 159, 163, 165–6, 153–5.

and not 'direct action' as the 'left bloc' in the Congress decidedly opted would be the appropriate stage to realize the goal of political freedom.

Gandhi's method of arousing mass consciousness was based on 'campaigns', his own unique style of popular politics, that could transform a largely organizational apparatus of the Congress into a vibrant body of political activity. His method of mass mobilization did not have the slightest influence of the non-left leadership, but which, nevertheless, suited the political interests of the Old Guard in directing the course of national struggle. 'Direct action', that threatened to substantially alter the contents of Congress politics, could prove to be incomprehensible with the political goal. Second, it was believed that such 'un-Congress', rather un-Gandhian politics was sectoral/sectarian, and therefore could not be allowed to determine the course of national struggle. Such 'alternative politics', as the LW pursued within the Congress had to, if at all, conform to the established paradigm of Congress nationalism.

The Left unity experiment's chief political objectives of radicalizing Congress policies and infusing socialism by providing an alternative broad-based platform for Congress' organizational programmes appeared, in retrospect, as an expansive, vaguely defined paradigm of political activity for constituent left groups to function.

The CSP, the chief architect of the 'unity experiment' was an institutional adjunct of the Congress that emerged to 'meet reaction, and marshal popular forces; to break down the isolation between the "national" and the "socialist" movement bringing the former increasingly under socialist leadership'. It was a product of the 'ferment of ideas in the world' that gave legitimacy to Marxism as a form of politics, as much as a political consequence to the disappointing pace of nationalist politics during that period. Much of the criticism that is leveled against the CSP can be attributed to political naivety that it displayed in the early years. At the time of its inception the CSP's 'intellectual-turned-political leaders' had not reached definite ideological conclusions regarding the aims and objectives of the party. CSP leaders professed varying strands of Marxism—Patwardhan had 'supposed(ly) close Gandhian inclinations, Lohia, 'thought, spoke and argued within the closed logic of Marxism, Narendra Deva belonged to the school of social democrats; Masani, 'a Trotskyite' by choice, and Jayaprakash Narayan, a 'confirmed' Marxist, despite Jayaprakash Narayan's claim that the 'party under (stood) how to apply Marxism in India'. Such diverse ideological standpoints in 'applying Marxism' necessarily required,

first, a genuine agreement among CSP leaders as to how its political programmes should be interpreted and subsequently implemented, and second, thereafter, set the political agenda for constituent left partners. Since the CSP failed in this endeavour it remained CSP's priority to remain a forum of progressive political forces 'obsessed with Left consolidation' to spearhead the 'nationalist left and remain the vanguard of anti-imperialist army' without a clearly defined ideology that could outline objectively defined goals. The crucial role of Jayaprakash Narayan in realizing the potential of the left alternative of the CSP cannot be underplayed. As one CSP leader had remarked, 'the CSP was the brain-child of Jayaprakash Narayan, we let him do what he wanted to do with it'. The statement clearly indicated Jayaprakash Narayan as the alter ego of the CSP's left radicalism within the Congress. Jayaprakash Narayan categorically stated that 'despite different groups of socialists with their (difference) in methods and tactics there was one type of socialism that had succeeded, that was Marxism'. A perception that was based on a simplistic assessment of Stalin's Russia and USSR constitution as the bedrock of democratic society in the world. He noted further, 'that the CPI had first introduced socialist ideas into Indian politics'. This thought eclipsed everything else from the purview of the CSP. The CSP was then definitely 'under the spell of Marxism yearning for a kinship with the CPI in the 1930s'. It set the pace for left consolidation, which in essence, meant unity with the CPI, the major alliance partner.

The organizational encore with the CPI proved disastrous for the CSP, having far-reaching organizational and political consequences. The CPI that followed the directives of the 7th Comintern at that time had no genuine sympathy for the CSP, but was 'keen to merge it as an integral part of their international line to switch over from "left sectarianism" (6th Comintern) to the strategy of "front-populaire" (7th Comintern) like their counterparts in Italy, Germany, France etc. The CSP leadership, mainly on Jayaprakash Narayan's insistence, who was trying to fathom a difficult mean between the CSP's objectives and the radical politics of the CPI, 'opened the doors of the national executive of the party wide open to the CPI'. Central, as well as, state level communists became office bearers of the CSP. In due course the CPI captured important posts of the Kisan Sabha in certain provinces, wrecking its organization, even as the leadership of the peasants went into the hands of the CPI. It was a testimony to the fact that while the CPI sought a united anti-colonial movement under the Congress, operating as a constituent partner

of the left bloc within the Congress, it pursued, to the detriment of the LW, 'parallel-sectoral mobilization' of workers and peasants, still adhering, though informally, to the 6th Comintern. Even the 'united leadership strategy' under Gandhi, in the years leading into the second world war, was a consequence of their increasing concern for the USSR. Thus the CPI interpreted the domestic/international political situation independently, according to its own perception, and acted decisively, irrespective of the consequences for the solidarity of the LW in Congress. By advocating and ceaselessly working for unity with the communists, in spite of their latent hostility to the national movement during the period of 'left unity', the CSP was instrumental in 'blurring the lines of demarcation and division between a socialism allied to nationalism and working "inward" and a socialism professing faith in (an) . . . internationalism and looking "outward" to the Comintern for inspiration'.

The other left alliance partner, M. N. Roy and the Royists, proved to be an equally difficult political relationship for the CSP. The Royists joined the left bloc in November 1936, and thereafter, started distancing themselves from 'left solidarity', a fact that was exploited by the RW as a counterpoise against CSP in local elections. Unlike the CPI whose 'militant' political actions weakened the credentials of the LW, the Royists under M. N. Roy questioned, and fundamentally differed on methodological aspects—such as, viewing a lacuna in the CSP's emphasis on 'freedom struggle' and 'socialism'; disagreeing with the socialist programme of radicalizing Congress through collective affiliation of trade unions and kisan sabhas; and further, that socialism could only be carried out by a 'revolutionary party of the proletariat', and that the Indian peasantry could not be organized for revolution.⁵⁰ Such liberty to observe widely differing positions on crucial issues confirmed, one, that the CSP's 'left unity' was, in essence, a 'forum' for left parties and groups, not to merge into a cohesive ideological

⁵⁰ Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* (Delhi: OUP, 1986) p. 152; Narendra Deva, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, Achyut Patwardhan, Ashok Mehta, *Draft Thesis for the Fourth Conference of the CSP* (Bombay: State Peoples Press, 1938) p. 2; Madhu Limaye, *Evolution of Socialist Policy* (Hyderabad: Chetana Prakashan Ltd, 1952) pp. 1,7,6,3; Jayaprakash Narayan, *Congress Socialist Tract No. 1, Gandhiji's Leadership and the Congress Socialist Party* (Bombay: AICSP, State Peoples Press, 1939); Pradip Bose, *Subhas Bose and India Today*, p. 166; M. N. Roy, 'Socialism and Indian Struggle for Freedom', a lecture delivered at Nagpur under the auspices of the Students Federation in 1938 included in his book *Gandhism, Nationalism, Socialism*, p. 124; Madhu Dandavate, *Evolution of Socialist Policies and Perspectives: 1934–84* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1986) pp. 3,4;

political bloc, but to retain their distinct political identity. Two, that during the entire course of the left experiment the CSP was principally opposed to the idea of forming a 'socialist party' within, or outside the Congress that it felt could have compromised the national struggle, but which in reality could have probably stemmed the diversity and contradiction in left unity.

As part of a larger strategy of popularizing socialist ideas in the political struggle for freedom the CSP cultivated a close relationship with two left nationalists—Nehru and Bose; both enthusiastically spreading the socialist message to the masses without being quite clear about its contents. Yet the CSP held different opinions about the two left nationalist leaders who led the LW within the Congress. Nehru was valued as a potential socialist ally by the CSP, holding an unchallenged position as the future political leader in the Congress hierarchy. His socialist credentials were believed by the CSP expectedly to carry the message of socialism to the masses, as well as giving a strong socialist content to the Congress programme. In the case of Bose the CSP was struck by his consistent stance of radical nationalism. Bose, enthused by the potential for a political struggle offered clear-cut solutions to solve India's problems, which entailed organizational, ideological and attitudinal transformation in the Congress leadership. The CSP was keen not to give political support to such a 'left alternative' that it felt could divert from the Congress political struggle. It opted to remain faithful to the 'unity' of Congress leadership. The less than cooperative attitude demonstrated by the CSP at Tripuri, and its subsequent dissociation from Bose's 'Left Consolidation' in FB is a testimony to the fact.