CHAPTER TWO

The Strategic Debate and the Provincial Elections (1936-37)

The Presidency of the Congress passed on to Jawaharlal Nehru from Rajendra Prasad at the Lucknow session of the Indian National Congress held in April 1936. Rajendra Prasad had successfully resurrected and galvanized the Congress from relative hibernation, caused by the stern repressive measures launched against it during the Civil Disobedience Movement. He had been able to vindicate the confidence that Gandhiji and the Congress had reposed in him for leading the organization in a really critical period. Historians have characterized the period as one of 'political paralysis'. This was also the juncture when the Congress had to decide about what course the National Movement should take in the immediate future. Three distinct perspectives had by now appeared in the horizon with regard to the possible course of the movement. These were: firstly, the constructive work as suggested by Gandhiji; second, the revival of the constitutional method and participation in the elections; and the last but not the least, the radical one based on an alternative strategy advocated by Nehru and the Socialists, which was a different line from the others. The election of Jawaharlal Nehru now as President of the Congress was an acknowledgement of the fact that the Congress leadership was opening itself up to fresh and radical ideas, which were becoming ascendant all over the world as well as among the Indian youth.

Differing Perceptions with the Left

Jawaharlal Nehru’s leftist views were well known by this time and many in the Congress were averse to them. At the time of his election, while he was in Europe his candidature had aroused oppositions on a ‘minor’ issue, which seemed symptomatic of the responses of many in the Congress to his leftist views. It was argued that as per the convention of the Congress, a President could not belong to the Province where the Congress session was to be held. The situation was saved only by the timely intervention of Gandhiji. In Rajendra Prasad’s own words:

A minor difficulty arose at the time of the election as there was a convention not to elect anyone as President who belonged to the province in which the Congress session was to be held. The next session was to be held in the U.P. and Jawaharlal was not only of that province but its principal Congress worker. But Gandhiji intervened to say that the Congress constitution did not forbid such an election, after which we found no difficulty in naming Nehru President.

Jawaharlal Nehru’s leaning towards socialism had become more pronounced after his visit to Europe where he had come into contact with leftist stalwarts like Ben Bradley and Palme Dutt. He had already developed a deep admiration for the achievements of the Soviet Union and was consequently emotionally attracted towards Marxism. But he did not want “India to be drilled and forced into a certain position, because the costs of such

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drilling are too great; it is not worthwhile; it is not desirable from many points of view".\(^5\)

Civil liberties were of absolute value to him.\(^6\) He was also not a Marxist in the normal sense of the word. He accepted the Marxist interpretation of history and its vision of a classless society, but he certainly did not believe in revolutionary dictatorship. “Conditioned under Gandhi, he hated violence even if he did not in theory reject it, and stood for democratic and peaceful though not for constitutional means.”\(^7\) He stated thus in his Presidential Address:

I am convinced that the only key, the solution of the world’s problem and of India’s problems, lies in socialism, and when I use this word I do so not in a vague humanitarian way but in the scientific, economic sense.... I see no way of ending the poverty, the vast unemployment, the degradation and the subjection of the Indian people except through socialism. That involves vast and revolutionary changes in our political and social structure, the ending of vested interests in land and industry, as well as the feudal and autocratic Indian states systems. That means the ending of private property, except in a restricted sense, and the replacement of the present profit system by a higher ideal of cooperative service. It means ultimately a change in our instincts and habits and desires. In short, it means a new civilization, radically different from the present capitalist order.... I do not


\(^6\) According to Prof S. Gopal “he hoped that some variation of the political and economic systems prevalent in Russia would extend to India, but he was not prepared to have this by coercive methods. *Ibid*., p.202

\(^7\) *Ibid*. 

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know how or when this new order will come to India.... Socialism is thus for me, not merely an economic doctrine which I favour; it is a vital creed which I hold with all my head and heart. I work for Indian independence because the nationalist in me cannot tolerate alien domination; I work for it even more because for me it is the inevitable step to social and economic changes. I should like the Congress to become a socialist organization and to join hands with the other forces in the world which are working for the new civilization.  

Rajendra Prasad knew about Jawaharlal Nehru's sympathy for socialism and he acknowledged it explicitly with grace and with no ill will or prejudice of any sort: After his visit to Europe his views became more firm and pronounced. The Socialist Party had already come into existence in India and Nehru, though not a formal member, had views which often tallied with those of that party. Most of us had as little understanding of socialism as faith in it.

Though the differences between the approaches and understanding of the two were quite obvious and visible, these differences did not relate to the understanding of the fundamentals of the Indian National Movement. To Rajendra Prasad the concept of socialism represented a new thought, a new idea that had begun to influence some people.

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in the country and was influencing more and more their everyday consideration of facts and events, and thereby their outlook and conduct. He explicitly confessed that like Nehru and others he had no "benefit of a study of the theory and principles underlying Socialism." Nonetheless, quite interestingly, he had an amazing grasp and understanding of its broad parameters. In his own words:

I may state as a layman that this new thought requires us to realize that it is not enough for us to attain freedom from political subjection imposed by the foreigner, that no freedom is possible or worth having for the vast masses of our population unless it can assure to them their fare share of comforts, conveniences and amenities of life and that cannot be assured if the present order of things in our society is allowed to continue.\(^\text{10}\)

The concept of socialism, in Rajendra Prasad's understanding, represented a double urge: "an urge for freedom from political subjugation" from a colonial rule as well as an urge for reordering the social life "in such away as to bring about a more just and humane distribution of goods of the earth among all." In his view, the latter urge was the predominant urge, which abolished the "artificial boundaries between country and country, between race and race and between nation and nation". It also visualized laying "its foundation of its super structure on the basis of common good of all the people of the world." He further elaborated this:

In another sense, the first urge has the dominant voice in as much as it is realized that in India the problem is complicated by the foreign rule which is essentially based on exploitation and the power which helps and upholds this exploitation has first to be destroyed or seized for bringing about the new order of things. Congressmen and women are thus sometimes torn between the two – but it is safe to assert that there is a general agreement that while we may not shut our eyes to the future without peril, for the present our efforts should be concentrated on winning Independence.\(^{11}\)

The issue of socialism, for Rajendra Prasad, was not at all a matter of anxiety and concern. He held colonialism to be the primary enemy, because it was based on exploitation the people and the entire country, and hence had to be destroyed in the first place. Not surprisingly, therefore, he laid emphasis on winning India’s independence first. This however did not mean that he was oblivious of the other socio-economic problems India was beset with at that time and which required to be solved. To quote him:

Whatever views may be held about socialism and whether they are born of an honest conviction that the order of the society envisaged by it are not good and beneficial in a comprehensive sense for this country or whether they are born of ignorance, prejudice or self interest, there is no denying by any one that the

\(^{11}\) Ibid.
poverty and squalor, the misery and sufferings of the vast masses of our people are crying for remedy and shall brook no ignoring. Wrong and suffering are often tolerated out of ignorance, indolence or helplessness. But they become intolerable when one becomes sensitive to them (sic) when one begins to feel one’s inherent strength and when one begins to exert against them. That consciousness and that determination is being created whether by the situation in which we are, or by conscious human efforts directed in that direction. All intelligent, sensitive people in the country feel that something big has to be done to win not only freedom from foreign subjection but also to resolve this ever-present conflict between plenty and poverty, between luxury and squalor, between suffering due to want and disease due to surfeit.\(^{12}\)

There is no doubt that there were similarities of perceptions of both Rajendra Prasad and Jawaharlal Nehru regarding social and economic inequality prevailing in India. However, their prescriptive solutions were dissimilar. Rajendra Prasad, unlike Nehru, was very confident about the possibilities of solutions from within a Gandhian framework. To him a class struggle was anathema, whereas Nehru had been tirelessly talking about its need.\(^{13}\)

\(^{12}\) \textit{Ibid.}\n
As regards ways and methods to solve India’s socio-economic problems, Rajendra Prasad differed with the socialists quite fundamentally. “We must try to find a solution in reconciliation rather than in conflict, in adjustment rather than in destruction, in transition rather than in revolution, in self-expression rather than in other-suppression, in one word, in non-violence rather than in violence.” In this he was clear that the diagnosis of problem was very important to indicate the ways to solve problems. He would argue that problems can be solved without conflict only if “our people apprehend and comprehend the problem and seek its solution with stout hearts and undimmed vision. The heart can become weak as much by external disorder as by internal pressure. The vision becomes dimmed as much by a fog as by a dazzling light.” But he at the same time displayed the confidence that the leadership in its wisdom and intellect would work towards these goals. To quote him:

We may not hope to find a suitable solution if we are befogged by our past prejudices and present passions or are dazzled by the glamour of what we see around us. It requires courage of the highest order and intellect with the clearest vision to achieve this. That is the problem facing us and the country. I have a kind of instinctive faith that we shall find the solution without the bloodshed and the misery which have disfigured the march of events in other countries and without the reactions and retrogressions which have become so common in the world.

14 *The Searchlight*, 22 December 1936.
Rajendra Prasad rejected the communist and radical left alternatives and, instead, offered his own perspective, which was essentially Gandhian in conception and based on non-violent principles:

If those who are acquainted with problem and its solution, as found in the west, will consider it worthwhile to seek the solution in India through non-violence and non-violence alone, I have no doubt that with their knowledge and experience the way will become clearer and clearer as they proceed, and many difficulties which seem unsurmountable will gradually disappear. They may not altogether ignore the past. If a study of modern thought and conditions is necessary, a study of the attempted solutions in the past, particularly in this country, may not be altogether profitless.  

Nevertheless, these differences did not relate to fundamentals as regards the liberation of the country from British colonialism. These were not sufficient and urgent enough to be taken care of and cause split in the Congress. Further Jawaharlal Nehru also, with his implicit faith in Gandhiji and love for the country, had, as he said, “no desire to force the issue in the Congress and thereby create difficulties in the way of our struggle for independence”.  

Rajendra Prasad affirmed this very frankly: “The differences were not so much on the Congress programme or procedure as in our attitudes. Even if both of us agreed on a given matter, we usually had two different ways of tackling it.”

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17 Ibid.  
18 KK Datta, Rajendra Prasad, op. cit., P.146.  
19 Rajendra Prasad, Autobiography, p. 417. This is also reflected by a speech of Rajendra Prasad which he gave in the course of his thanks giving, on behalf of the Working committee, to the Reception Committee of the Faizpur session of the Congress when he said that he was looking forward to the day, when
Differing Perceptions on Office Acceptance

The issue of office acceptance was another major area where divergent opinions had developed within the Congress by 1936. Despite the fact that in 1934 when the Congress met in Bombay for its annual session, the Congress had rejected the British Government’s reform proposals and had postponed the decision regarding acceptance of office under the new Reform Act till the elections were over. There were strong groups known as the ‘anti-office group’, which included some no-changers such as Pattabhi Sitaramayya, Congressmen from Bengal and the Punjab, Jawaharlal Nehru and the left wing Congressmen and also the socialists, who were not in favour of office acceptance. Nehru was convinced of the futility of office acceptance. He said he was “convinced that for the Congress to favour the acceptance of office, or even to hesitate and waver about it, would be a vital error”.20 He thought that it would be like a pit from which “it would be difficult for us to come out”.21 Nehru thought that there were issues of principles involved in this idea of office acceptance. The latter to him was of secondary importance.22 He articulated the issue of principle by saying “Behind it lies, somewhat hidden the question of independence itself and whether we seek revolutionary changes in India or are working for petty reforms under the aegis of British imperialism. We go back again in thought to the clash of ideas which preceded the changes in the Congress in

Jawaharlal Nehru would be not only the President of the Congress, but of the whole country. *IAR*, Vol. II, 1936, p. 237.
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1920. He also argued that it went against 'practical statesmanship' as well as 'the traditions of the Congress and the mentality' that it sought 'to develop in the people'. The socialists too were vocal opponents to this idea.

The pro-office group consisted of Constitutionalists such as K.M. Munshi, Satyamurti and others. Although the Congress had rejected the reforms as such, it had taken no decision on how exactly the rejection was to be expressed. "After all, the reforms were not going to be abrogated or withdrawn", reasoned Rajendra Prasad, "just because the Congress had rejected them". Therefore, the pertinent question was "whether or not the Congress should take part in the elections to be held according to the new constitution and whether or not it should boycott them completely as it did in 1920. On the other hand, supposing it took part in the elections, and secured a majority in a province, should it form a ministry or should it create a deadlock and make the working of the Constitution impossible?"

This appears to be the reason why the Congress Working Committee, though in favour of contesting the elections, did not commit itself at that stage to any decision about office acceptance before the elections were over. Rajendra Prasad moved the resolution, on behalf of the Working Committee to this effect in the open session of the Congress at Lucknow. In reply to the debates that followed, Rajendra Prasad emotionally urged for the adoption of the Working Committee's resolution postponing the decision:

I do not believe people are down and out, or that the hunger for Swaraj is less. The only deficiency is that the people are taking time. Let us keep courage and office or no office, let us go ahead.

\[24\] Ibid.
\[26\] Ibid.
The flame of Swaraj will never be extinguished until freedom is achieved. I believe that all Congressmen; both of the pro-office and anti-office view, have the same urge for freedom.²⁷

Rajendra Prasad’s resolution on behalf of the Working Committee seeking the decision on keeping in abeyance the issue of office acceptance was carried through unanimously. Both the groups conceded that it was not desirable to decide the issue before the actual elections were over. Both thought it tactically advisable to “wait and see whether Congressmen were returned in a majority anywhere”.²⁸

It would be important to take a note of the fact here, as mentioned earlier, that Rajendra Prasad had always been skeptical about the efficacy of any shift towards constitutional methods on the part of the Congress. He made this position very clear in a letter he wrote to Dalvi, belonging to the liberal group. He poured his ideas regarding the office acceptance thus:

As you have noticed there are two schools of thoughts. Any decision in favour of office acceptance will be such a big departure from the policy that has been pursued by the Congress for the last fifteen years that it would not be right for the Working Committee or even for the AJCC to come to it.... We realize that while the Congressmen and advanced liberals are

²⁷ K K Datta, Rajendra Prasad, p.147. The leftist bloc was totally opposed the idea of the office acceptance. " your immediate task will be two-fold, wrote Subhas Bose to Nehru, one — (1) to prevent office acceptance by all possible means and (2) to enlarge and broaden the composition of the Cabinet. If you can do that, you will save the Congress from demoralization and bring it out of rut. Bigger problems may wait till tomorrow but the Congress has to be saved from demoralisation at once", Subhas Chandra Bose to Nehru, 4 March 1936, Jawaharlal Nehru, ed, A Bunch of old Letters: Written mostly to Jawaharlal Nehru and some written by him, Bombay, 1958, p. 166.
more or less in argument as regards the merits or rather the
demerits of the new constitution, the way in which they would like to bring about the destruction is not likely to be the same.
Even those Congressmen who advocate acceptance of office indicate no intention to work the constitution. They say they will use their positions and opportunity for implementing the Congress resolutions of rejecting the Reforms. The fundamental difference between a positive attitude of rejection and a passive attitude of non-acceptance makes any programme of combined action very difficult....

I am personally anxious to bring about a rapprochement among all the progressive forces. Could we not ask the liberals ... to devise some method whereby they may combine with us in making this constitution invalid and thus force the hands of the British Government to revise it. Whether the Congress decides for or against offices this will be the basic idea and I would ask you to look at it from that point of view and suggest ways and means. I am not suggesting anything in nature of direct action. The ways and means must be in reference to action within the Legislatures. If we could get the Congress and liberals to join in this, the liberals may leave direct action to the Congress without involving themselves in it, if and when the Congress resorts to it,
Rajendra Prasad anticipated that once provincial autonomy was inaugurated and
the Congress accepted office, it might pose a variety of problems for the struggle in the
future by way of giving birth to all kinds of caste and communal considerations.
However, the possibility of the Congress being stuck in the routine matters of
administration could be avoided by using the Constitution the way it wanted. It could still
be revolutionary and rigidly implement the Congress programme. The Congressmen in
authority controlling the status apparatus would raise the morale of the people. 30 He was
convinced that the acceptance of office by the Congress would prevent the reactionary
forces from a takeover and would save the mass base of the Congress. “People today
want small good things done for them, they would not like complete deadlock.” 31

His acceptance of the parliamentary programme appears to be strategic only
because he did not consider the constitution of 1935 as adequate. For him the matter of
office acceptance was only a tactical one, which had arisen because of the introduction of
the 1935 Constitution.

I am one of those who believe that a party engaged in a mass
revolutionary movement should not accept positions of honour,
responsibility, and profit until it has succeeded in capturing

29 Rajendra Prasad to Dalvi, 25 August 1935, AIJCC Papers, F. NO. G 43 KW(i).
30 All India Congress Parliamentary Board Manifesto, Rajendra Prasad Papers, F.No. 1/36, Collection-2.
31 Ibid. Also see Rajendra Prasad, Autobiography, 242-51. K.M. Munshi held a similar perception. He
thought that by acceptance of the office the spirit of resistance would not be lost and it would be kept alive
through an uncompromising administration. The establishment of the Congress in the seat of power would
remove the mystique of state and make it more organic, humane as well as approachable. This would be
more easily possible by a political party, which worked both through public activity as well as
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power. The reasons are that such acceptance creates personal jealousies among the members, raises hopes among the masses which the party is not able to fulfil and thus reaction against it sets in. This has been the experience of workers in other countries which has been confirmed by the very limited experience we have gained in this country in the course of our struggle when we have captured Municipal and District Boards and also partly when we have simply entered Legislatures. 32

As early as 1934, he knew that if the Congress went in for the Council entry, next would follow the issue of acceptance. He was, therefore, of the opinion that if the Congressmen entered Legislatures, they should do whatever they could for the constructive programme instead of creating deadlocks. Gandhiji too shared a similar view: “To enter the Councils with a view to obstructing and creating deadlocks after the oath of allegiance is like entering the house as a tolerated guest and trying to pull it to pieces.... It may be politics, it may be good tactics, it may be necessary and inevitable but it is not dharma.” 33 He strongly believed that entry into Council would create illusions and differences, whereas Non-cooperation would awaken the constructive strength of the people. “In spite of this conviction out of deference to friends and co-workers we have not only acquiesced in but have given a whole hearted and full-throated

32 Rajendra Prasad to Ansari, 26 December 1934, _AICC Papers_, F. No. G-43 (Kw I,II)/1934.
33 Mahratta, in _Rajendra Prasad Papers_, F. No. III/35. Rajaji also held a somewhat similar opinion: “no futile wrecking should be attempted but as much benefit should be wrung out of the Councils as possible for strengthening the prestige and position of the Congress.” Rajagopalachari to Prasad, 24 February 1936, _Rajendra Prasad Papers_, F. No. VIII/36.
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support to the Council programme." 34 He was sure that any sectarian position on his part would only weaken the Congress and the National Movement and, therefore, was willing to accept the middle path in this regard. "I assume that that the Parliamentary programme is going to be a more or less permanent feature of the Congress programme and even may have to be extended in scope and extent". 35

He remained aware that Parliamentary programme would pose problems, as it would arouse jealousies and competition among the Congressmen for the positions in the Assembly and the Councils, which was detrimental to the goals of the Congress. Doing away with this was necessary in order to strengthen the Congress and further the struggle and, therefore, he suggested a concept of harmonizing by equalization, as far as possible, of the position of the legislators with that of the ordinary workers. To quote him:

We cannot afford to neglect or to treat with indifference thousands of workers who during the Civil Disobedience Movement suffered and ruined themselves physically and economically.... I believe that the best course to avoid jealousies is to harmonise by equalization, as far as possible, the position of the legislators with that of the ordinary workers. It is not suggested that an absolute equality is possible – but it should be made clear that the positions in the Assembly and the Councils are sought for service and sacrifice and people going there as much under discipline as the humblest worker in the Congress ranks. Service, sacrifice and discipline are and ought to be our

34 Rajendra Prasad to Ansari, 26 December 1934, AICC Papers, F. No. G-43 (Kw I,III)/1934.
35 Ibid.
watchword whether we are engaged in sweeping and cleaning a Harijan village or are seated on a ministerial gadi exercising what may appear to be extensive powers. In other words, our legislators ought to be volunteers. From this it follows that the Parliamentary Board, or if necessary the Working Committee, should undertake to support and maintain them, if necessary, during the period of legislative sessions and at other times when they are engaged in active work. It will have effect of creating an esprit de corps among the members themselves and establish a kind of kinship with the humble workers which will be helpful in our work.36

Despite the fact that Rajendra Prasad was opposed to the idea of Parliamentary politics yet he accepted it and came out with his concerns so that the real struggle did not get derailed. It was because he always believed that the struggle with the British was paramount and the rest could be ignored for the time being. He wrote to Nehru to discuss the differences between them on methods and ideas, so that the movement could move forward until any radical break completely disrupted the way it had been going along. In one of the most pointed yet poignant letters to Nehru, Rajendra Prasad displayed the inner most dynamic of the leadership within the Congress in these words:

The chances are that you will be elected President of the next Congress. I know that there is a certain difference between your

36 He further substantiated this idea by giving the example of the members of the Servants of India Society. “Such a step is not without precedent in India. We know that the members of the Servants of India Society make no pecuniary profit from any position they may hold. Their allowances and salaries attaching to any post they may hold go to the Society which makes suitable arrangements for them. Ibid.”
outlook and that of men like Vallbhbhai, Jamnalalji and myself and it is even of a fundamental character. But I suppose that has been there all these years and yet we have worked together. Now that Bapu has in a sense withdrawn himself and advises only when asked, it is possible that these differences may become more marked. But I believe unless a radical change comes to be made in the programme and methods of our work it will be possible for all of us to continue to work together. You are undoubtedly dissatisfied with the present condition of things. Not one amongst us here is satisfied with them. But the difficulties are inherent in the situation and it seems to us that it is not possible to force the pace or cause any wholesale change. In all big struggles we have to come across such situation and however we may chafe and fume, we have to lie low and work and wait for better times. We are passing through one of such crises.37

He further elaborated his ideas to Nehru and argued that in the entire strategy of the Congress, the mass struggle was the most crucial basis, which cannot be abandoned in any case. By following this neither the spirit of freedom was crushed nor was there anything like a spirit of resignation and helpless submission.

I do not believe that any one has gone back the pre-non-cooperation mentality. I do not think we have gone back to 1923-

28. We are in 1928-29 mentality and I have no doubt that better days will soon come. We have been carrying on to the best of our lights and ability and no one can do more. In any case you have certainly a free hand to shape things as you would like and to appoint any Working Committee of your choice, and you may rest assured that none of us will create any difficulty and even where we may not help we will never obstruct.\textsuperscript{38}

For Rajendra Prasad the issue of office acceptance, as argued earlier, related to strategy, which demanded laying down of a positive programme for dealing with the situation by the introduction of the Constitution. That might be different one also as no one was going blindly to stick to it, if a better programme could be evolved. “We have not made matters more complicated than they are and you can certainly write on a slate not disfigured by us.” Defending the position of the Working Committee, he further clarified that the charge that the Working Committee had only been thinking only in the terms of the offices was devoid of any validity.

It has been wrongly and unfairly assumed that the working Committee has been thinking of nothing except offices under the New Constitution. We have not as a matter of fact given to the matter any importance. On the other hand it is others who have been trying to force our hands to come to a decision.... As it strikes me, it is not right to put it as if it were a question of acceptance or non acceptance of office. So far as I can judge no

\textsuperscript{38} \textit{Ibid.}
one wants to accept offices for their own sake. No one wants to
work the Constitution as the Government would like it to be
worked. The question for us is altogether different. What are we
to do with this Constitution? Are we to ignore it altogether and
go our way? Is it possible to do so? Are we to capture it and use
it as we would like to use it and to the extent it lends itself to be
used in that way? Are we to fight it from within or from without
and in what way? It is really a question of laying down a positive
programme for dealing with the situation created by the
introduction of this Constitution in the light of the circumstances
as they exist. It is not a question to be answered a priori on the
basis of preconceived notions of a so-called pro-changer or no-
changer, cooperator or obstructionists... we have to consider and
decide the question irrespective of everything except the good of
the country and the effect of our decision on the great objective
we have in view.\footnote{Ibid., pp.156-7. Bhulabhai Desai was of the opinion that if the Congress did not accept the office the pro
British Ministries would continue the operation of all repressive laws and measures including ordinances
and crush or at all events suppress the Congress organization and consequently masses would be alienated
from the Congress. See M.C. Setalvad, Bhulabhai Desai, New Delhi, 1968, pp. 168-9. Similar view was
held by Satyamurti: “Acceptance of office is a wrong term. It is no acceptance of office but capture of
power from the enemy. Congress leaders want to prevent reactionaries occupying the positions of power.
They do not accept the Act, instead want to destroy it. We want to prevent the government of India Act
from functioning and we want to use it partially to our people and mostly to prevent the mischief of
others.” See AICC Papers, F.No. G-25-G-26-1936.}
Rajendra Prasad’s approach to the office acceptance was thus characterized by purely tactical considerations. He was sure and convinced that there was no necessity of rushing to a decision on this matter. Referring to Nehru’s view that the Congress should decide not to accept office under the new Constitution, he emphatically stated:

We think that the time has not yet arrived to decide the question and we are not prepared to rule out office acceptance all together and under all circumstances at this stage. We can conceive of circumstances in which office acceptance may become necessary for the very object we both have in mind.

Rajendra Prasad was thus not very keen on participation in the government. Though aware about a strong current of opinion in its favour, he remained noncommittal on the issue. This was precisely because the whole issue demanded a readjustment of the objective situation with the Congress objective of building a mass movement. It had nothing to do with his dislike or the apprehension about the left and the socialist group and their revolutionary programme. The provincial opinion seemed strongly in favour of both Council entry and office acceptance. In the Parliamentary board meeting in February 1936, almost all the members of the board expressed in favour of contesting elections. A majority again also said that their provinces wanted the office acceptance.

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40 Gandhi also held a similar view when he wrote to Nehru and said that it was a matter of tactics. See Gandhi to Nehru, 17 October 1935, CWMG, Vol. LXII, pp. 39-40.
41 Rajendra Prasad’s speech at the Lucknow Session of the AICC, April 1936, Rajendra Prasad Papers, F. No. VI/1936.
42 Vinita Damodaran, Broken Promises, op. cit., p.27.
43 Kripalani to Prasad, 15 December 1936, Rajendra Prasad Papers, F. No. III/36.
Differing Perceptions on International Issues

International concerns too shaped the ideas of the leadership. When Italy invaded Ethiopia and the atmosphere of war was clouding Europe and there was a kind of paralysis in European decision making with League of Nations looking on helplessly, Indian leadership took a strong pro-Ethiopia stand. The Powers adopted a policy of non-intervention, inspired by England and France, and though later the League of Nations applied economic sanctions against the invading nation, this had no effect on the aggressor. The Socialists, including Jawaharlal Nehru, wanted the Congress to take a position and adopt a resolution sympathizing with Ethiopia and refusing India’s help to Britain in future wars because of her attitude to the victim of aggression. Though Rajendra Prasad was reasonably sympathetic to the Ethiopian cause, yet he did not agree with their position because he considered it a premature move on the part of the Congress to express an opinion on an international issue. Making a very clear cut argument he wrote that there could be “no difference of opinion as far as extending the sympathy to an oppressed country was concerned and although nothing was farther from my mind than that we should help Britain in case of war, I thought it premature for the Congress to express an opinion on international issues. I was, therefore, against going beyond an expression of sympathy for Ethiopia”. 44

The Broader Unity within the Ideological Divide

Divergence of opinions were welcome and it never led to a situation like the 1920s when the Swaraj Party and the No-changers had parted company at the time of the Gaya Congress. This is also evident when Rajendra Prasad reminisces in his autobiography: “It

44 Rajendra Prasad, Autobiography, p.419.
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is difficult to say today on what specific issues there was difference of opinion between
the two groups in the Congress. In fact a spirit of consensus and mutual respect
pervaded the Working Committee. This spirit was again reflected in the resolution
Rajendra Prasad moved, on behalf the Working Committee regarding people's
movements in princely states. So far the Congress had followed a policy of non-
interference in matters of the princely states on the premise that the people of those states
should take initiatives on their own. The policy of non-interference had in fact been
advocated by Gandhiji himself who hailed from the Princely state of Kathiawad.
Rajendra Prasad commented:

Gandhiji thought that if the Congress started interfering in the
internal affairs of the States, their people will lose the initiative
to agitate for themselves and stand on their own feet. He wanted
that the agitation for democratic institutions should sprout from
the soil itself and not be transplanted from outside. With all his
sympathy for the States' peoples' aspirations, he was not in
favour of the Congress extending its activities to the States.

The Working Committee, therefore, decided not to effect any change in this
regard. Rajendra Prasad consequently moved the resolution of the Working Committee to
the effect that while the Congress had full sympathy with the people, they must carry on
the main struggle in their states. The resolution was carried through without division.

45 Ibid.
47 KK Datta, op. cit., p.147.
Nevertheless, subtle divisions existed and were only discernable in the Working Committee where the rightist majority shared Rajendra Prasad’s views. However, the differences did not relate to fundamentals and there was no reason for the two sections to part company. In fact, there were no two clear-cut groups in the Congress. In fact, none thought or acted in terms of a group and the differences had not crystallized to an extent as to lead anyone to think of parting ways. As far as the real programme of the Congress was concerned, there were no fundamental differences. In the words of Rajendra Prasad:

We the older generation, had great admiration for Jawaharlal’s sincerity, integrity, capability, profound thinking and sacrifices in the country’s cause. To break away from him was unthinkable. Likewise, he knew that we perhaps commanded greater influence with provincial workers and shared our keenness to pull together. Perhaps, both we and Jawaharlal’s supporters thought that each was complementary to the other and that, however strong the differences might be, any split in the Congress would not be approved by the people.48

After the Lucknow session of the Congress, Nehru had initially some difficulty in constituting the Working Committee, as he wanted to infuse new blood into it. However, Rajendra Prasad and other the so-called Right-Wingers were not very happy with his idea, as they wanted an effective control inside the Working Committee. “We were not opposed to this but, should we also continue in the Committee, we felt that it should be so

formed as to ensure an effective voice for us”, reminisced Rajendra Prasad. A clash occurred in June 1936 when Rajendra Prasad sent a letter of resignation on behalf of six members of the Working Committee, including Sardar Patel and others.

We feel that the preaching and emphasising of socialism by the President and other socialist members of the Working Committee while the Congress has not adopted it, is prejudicial to the best interests of the country and to the success of the national struggle for freedom which we all hold to be the first and paramount concern of the country. You also feel and have even expressed that the Working Committee as it is constituted is not of your choice but forced on you and that you accepted it against your own better judgment. Our own impression of the events at Lucknow is contrary to yours. We are wholly unaware of the slightest pressure being put upon (you) by any of us. Anyway the position created by your declarations is highly unsatisfactory and we think we should give you the fullest latitude to work without feeling hampered in any way by the presence of colleagues in the Working Committee whom you regard as a drag. We feel on the other hand that the Congress should still follow the ideals, and the line of action and policy which it has been following since 1920 and which we consider to be the best suited to our country particularly in the present conditions and which have already shown great results. We are of the opinion that through your

49 Ibid.
speeches and those of other socialist colleagues and the acts of other socialists who have been emboldened by the speeches we have referred to the Congress organization has been weakened throughout the country without any compensating gain. The effect of your propaganda on the political work immediately before the nation, particularly the programme for election, has been very harmful.  

What appears interesting is the fact that the Working Committee members who resigned were not keen on alienating Nehru and parting company with the left bloc. Rather they had done so in order to pressurize the left in conceding to their viewpoint. It is not surprising therefore, that when Gandhiji intervened in the matter, which appeared to be a major crisis, they all withdrew their resignations. After “a long conversation with Mahatmaji and a prolonged consultation among ourselves” wrote Rajendra Prasad on behalf of all to Nehru, “we understand that you have felt much hurt by the course of action taken by us and particularly the tone of our letter has caused you much pain”. His language was extremely polite: “It was never our intention either to embarrass you or to hurt you and if you had suggested or indicated that it hurt you we would have without the least hesitation amended or altered the letter”. Though they withdrew their resignation “on a reconsideration of the whole situation”, they kept mounted the pace of the pressure already set in motion over Nehru:


51 Rajendra Prasad to Nehru, 1 July 1936, Jawaharlal Nehru (ed.), op. cit., p. 185.
We have felt that in all your utterances as published in the press you have been speaking not so much on the general Congress programme as on a topic which has not been accepted by the Congress and in doing so you have been acting more as the mouth-piece of the minority of our colleagues on the Working Committee as also on the Congress than as the mouthpiece of the majority which we expected you as the Congress President to do.

It may be, as you tell us, that only that portion of your speech is published which deals with socialism and the rest is not given prominence in the press as it is supposed to have less news value. We must however remember that that for one person who actually listens to your spoken word there are hundreds who read only the published report in the press and you may not ignore the effect on this larger audience of your speeches.

There is a regular continuous campaign against us treating us as persons whose time is over, who represent and stand for ideas that are worn out ant that have no present value, who are only obstructing the progress of the country and who deserve to be cast out of the position which they undeservedly hold. The very ideals, methods of work and tactics which we have learnt in the company with Gandhiji forbid any scramble for power in any organisation and we have felt that a great injustice has been and is being done to us, by others and we are not receiving the protection we are entitled to from you as our
colleague and as our President. When elaborate preparations are being made to oust us and declarations to effect are made in your presence and it is stated that your sympathies are with such groups as was done at the Trade Union Congress we feel that what is stated represents the feeling not only of those who speak in those terms but also to some extent your own opinion. This hurts us as we have not the least desire to stick to any position. We have been led step by step to think that as colleagues we do not enjoy your confidence to the extent we ought to and that you have no respect left for us or our views. We have naturally felt from all this that you regard us as a drag and it serves no useful purpose to occupy such a position.

Your speech at the Women’s meeting in Bombay touched many of us to the quick and we thought your feeling was that we had forced ourselves on you and that you had to accept the Working Committee against your better judgment. Had we understood this to be your feeling at Lucknow, things would certainly have taken a different course. 52

Though not interested in parting the company, the tone remained highly critical of Nehru’s conception of other things:

We also think that your handling of the situation in the country is doing damage to the constructive programme which we consider

52 Ibid., pp. 185-86.
to be an essential and vital part of the Congress programme.

We have also strongly felt that the ideals and the policy for which we have stood all these sixteen years and which we believe to be the only right ones for the country are being most assiduously undermined and that your own views and sympathies are with those who are engaged in that game. We have felt that our association gives a false impression and that we are in way contributing unwillingly and unconsciously to that process. It is this kind of activity which is gradually injuring the Congress organisation and the Congress prestige in the country, as the country as a whole still holds to those ideals and that policy. This results in a weakening of the Congress and encourages fissiparous tendencies among workers.

As we repeatedly told you all this impression has been created by in our minds not by any single act or speech but as a result of the totality of activities and we feel we owe it to you to tell all this in frankness so that you may be in full cognisance of what is passing in our minds and if you feel that anything needs to be done you may do it as you may deem best. We are sorry for having hurt your feelings and I only hope that this letter will help to smooth matters and not make them worse as nothing is further
from our mind. I am writing this as a result of consultation and
on behalf of all of us.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 186-87.}

A broad consensus had been maintained and a possible rupture avoided. Jawaharlal had also been subdued. Jawaharlal Nehru felt grateful to Gandhiji for all the trouble he took in smoothing over the matters and helping avoid a crisis:

I am grateful to you for all the trouble you took in smoothing over matters and helping to avoid a crisis. I was convinced then and I am convinced now that a break of the kind suggested would have had serious consequences for all our work, including the elections. And yet, where are we now and what does the future hold for us? I read again Rajendra Babu’s letter to me (the second one) and his formidable indictment of me. That indictment, though formidable, is not specific, except for my speech at a women’s meeting, which as a matter of fact, has nothing to do with any wider issue. The main thing is that my activities are harmful to the Congress cause. They are doing damage to the Congress and are lessening its chances of success at the elections. If I continue in this way there is likely to be further deterioration and my colleagues do not wish to take any chances in this vital matter.... My own impression before Lucknow, and to some extent even at Lucknow, was that it should not be difficult for all of us to pull together this year. It is evident now that I was mistaken, though there has been no lack of trying on either side. Perhaps the fault may lie with me; I am not aware of it; but one can seldom see the beam in...
one's own eye. The fact remains, and today there is no loyalty of the spirit which binds our group together. It is a mechanical group and on either side there is a dull resentment and a sense of suppression, and that, as every student of psychology knows, results in all manner of undesirable complexes, both individual and social.\textsuperscript{54}

By way of compromise Gandhiji advised Nehru to include in the Working Committee those Socialists he would have liked.\textsuperscript{55} He had expectations that Nehru would help evolve a consensus on the twin issues of Council entry and office acceptance.\textsuperscript{56} His perceptions about the Parliamentary programme had started crystallizing. Though he himself had taken no part in the debate so far, he had gradually come around to accepting the Parliamentary programme in view of the circumstances and of the fact that direct action was now practically ruled out.\textsuperscript{57} Subsequently the new Working Committee was formed consisting of men of two different ways of thinking.\textsuperscript{58} This could become possible because Nehru had no intentions of parting away. "But whether we agree or disagree, or whether we agree to differ", had declared Nehru in his presidential address, "there is a strong desire on our part to continue to cooperate together, laying stress on our

\textsuperscript{54} Nehru to Mahatma Gandhi, 5 July 1936, \textit{ibid.}, p. 188-89.
\textsuperscript{55} Rajendra Prasad, \textit{Autobiography}, op. cit., p.420.
\textsuperscript{56} While in London Nehru had condemned Government of India Act and though he had pointed out that he would accept Council entry to avoid disruption within the Congress, he had also laid stress that he would have no truck with office acceptance. Review of Nehru’s correspondence, 4 December 1935, in Home Political, cited in Vinita Damodaran, \textit{Broken Promises: Popular Protest, Indian Nationalism and the Congress Party in Bihar, 1935-1946}, Delhi, 1992, p. 27.
\textsuperscript{57} Gandhiji had pointed out, "The parliamentary programme is in the air. It has come to stay and rightly. But it cannot bring us independence. Its function is strictly limited though quite necessary. Its success will prevent the government from claiming that ordinance rule or any measure restricting our progress to the goal was sanctioned by popular representatives." Gandhi's speech at exhibition ground, Faizpur, 7 December 1936, \textit{CWMG}, Vol. LXIV, p. 193.
\textsuperscript{58} Nehru’s Working Committee after Lucknow included three Socialists, namely Jayprakash Narain, Narendra Dev and Achyut Patwardhan.
many points of agreement rather than on the differences” as that was the right course the Congress being a democratic organization. Differences did not die but at the same time, it did not cause split in the Congress and unity remained undisturbed. In the words of Rajendra Prasad:

The work of the Committee, however, was not impeded, though the Socialists’ ways gave us some anxiety. They opposed, directly or indirectly, some of the Congress policies laid down by Gandhiji since 1920 and we felt that they were out to undo all that the Mahatma had done — all that formed the basis of Congress work, and all that had taken the country forward so far. But as far as I know Nehru was not with the Socialists in this, because despite differences he implicitly accepted Gandhiji’s leadership and never wanted to weaken it. We saw we could carry on with Nehru whatever the differences but it was difficult to pull on with the others.

60 Nehru also was not keen on insisting the divide. In his presidential address he had declared: “Much as I wish for the advancement of socialism in this country, I have no desire to force the issue in the Congress and thereby create difficulties in the way of our struggle for independence. I shall cooperate gladly and with all the strength in me with all those who work for independence even though they do not agree with the socialist solution. But I shall do so stating my position frankly and hoping in course of time to convert the Congress and the country to it, for only thus can I see it achieving independence. It should surely be possible for all of us who believe in independence to join our ranks together even we might disagree on the social issue. The congress has been in the past a broad front representing various opinions joined together by that common bond. It must continue as such even though the difference of those opinions becomes more marked.” Ibid., pp. 181-82.
The Assembly Elections

Unity within the Congress was further reinforced by the forthcoming assembly elections of 1937. Despite strong reservations, the decision to contest elections saw a joint action by both the groups within the Congress. The Socialists had no choice except to acquiesce to it. However, their support for the Congress decision to contest elections was based on the premise that the party could be transformed from within. This was the first time that millions of Indians were getting an opportunity to take part in elections. To enlist the support of this huge electorate in favour of the Congress was not an easy task. It was decided to vigorously devote all the attention to the elections to the provincial Legislatures, being held under the new Constitution based on the Act of 1935. In these elections, the Congress wanted to put up 2,000 candidates as compared with only 100 candidates, which had to be elected to the Central Assembly in 1934. Selection of right type of candidates, pledges to follow faithfully Congress ideals, and instructions, and collection of funds for election work were the priority areas now. “The selection of candidates and collection of funds for fighting the election,” according to Rajendra Prasad, “therefore, were difficult jobs”.

The first task, in Rajendra Prasad’s perception, was to prepare an election manifesto of the Congress, which was, indeed, a complex matter, as the Congress had kept the issue of office acceptance in abeyance. The Congress had not yet decided on the question of accepting offices in the provinces. While some people wanted the Congress to do so and use whatever powers the new Constitution gave them in the service of the people, others wanted the Congress to create deadlocks and prevent the Constitution from

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63 Ibid., p. 60.
64 Ibid., p.426.
being worked. The manifesto, therefore had to adroitly avoid any commitment on these points and rely on a general programme based on the Fundamental Rights Resolution of the Karachi Congress.

In the manifesto, the Congress promised a reform of the system of land tenure and revenue and rent, and an equitable adjustment of the burden on agricultural land, grant of immediate relief to the smaller peasantry by a substantial reduction of agricultural rent and revenue now paid by them, and exempting uneconomic holdings from payment of rent and revenue. To the workers, it assured an improvement in their conditions by ensuring security of tenure, improvement of their standards of living and the right to organize labour unions. It also assured prohibition for the whole country. In other words, all the reforms, which a popular ministry was expected to carry out, were there in the manifesto. The message was that if Congressmen formed governments they would give effect to these promises and that if they did not, they would press for their implementation by those who did. Though this manifesto was meant for the whole country and stated the Congress aims in general, the Provincial Congress committees were also permitted to draw up their own respective manifestos suited to their circumstances. At the AICC meeting in Bombay the election manifesto was passed, but the question of office acceptance was again left in abeyance until after the elections.

65 See Election Manifesto, Indian National Congress Resolutions, 1936-37, pp.2-8.
67 The manifesto underlined that the new legislatures would be incapable of solving India’s problems because of the various safeguards and special powers. The Congress, however after entering it, would try to prevent its misuse by the British imperialism and to the disadvantage of the Indian people. See, Election Manifesto, op. cit.
Chapter Two

The selection of candidates was, indeed, a difficult task for the Congress Working Committee to tackle.\textsuperscript{68} It had no direct knowledge of the antececents of candidates. It had, therefore, to depend on the advice of the provincial Congress committees. However, there were splinter groups and factions in some provincial committees and hence admitted Rajendra Prasad, it was “likely that some candidates might be treated unfairly or some of those selected might not enjoy the confidence of the public.”\textsuperscript{69} Further, there were some Provincial Congress Committees, which wanted the A.I.C.C to take the final decision in the matters of selection of candidates. As this would have been unwieldy, a Parliamentary Board was set up with Sardar Patel as Chairman, and Rajendra Prasad and Maulana Azad as members. Its primary task was the selection of candidates. The P.C.C.s made the initial selections and passed on the list to the Parliamentary Board which when scrutinizing the list considered the appeals of those who were dissatisfied with the P.C.C.’s decision. The Board would then call for the relevant papers and, if necessary, visit the constituency in question to ascertain the wishes of the people and give its final decision. Factionalism was noted regarding the selection of candidates. Rajendra in his letter to Patel deplored this.\textsuperscript{70} He noted that in Saran, there were two factions among the Congressmen in the district and Mahamaya Prasad, the President of the Saran DCC, led one of the factions.\textsuperscript{71} In Bhagalpur, also factionalism was rampant: the President of the DCC and his clique wanted Upendranath for a rural seat and Banarasi Prasad for an urban

\textsuperscript{69} Rajendra Prasad, \textit{Autobiography}, p.427.
\textsuperscript{70} Rajendra Prasad to Patel, 17 November 1936, \textit{Rajendra Prasad Papers}, F. No. I/36, col. 3.
\textsuperscript{71} Ibid.
seat. The other faction wanted Mewalal Jha for the urban seat and was not favourably inclined towards Banarasi Prasad.\textsuperscript{72}

Rajendra Prasad observations in this regard are quite important here:

Difficult as this job was, it is indeed gratifying to record that only in very few cases were appeals received by the Board against the decisions of the P.C.C.s. Even in such cases, some sort of agreement was arrived at, acceptable to all the parties concerned. Very rarely did the Board feel obliged to give its verdict against some people or groups.

A candidate's submission to Congress discipline and acceptance of the Congress programme and a reasonable chance of his being elected were the two main considerations guiding the Parliamentary Board. There was a factor of some importance, namely, whether the candidate would be in a position to bear the election expenses himself. This was not an insignificant consideration. The cost of fighting the elections in 2,000 constituencies was bound to be very high even if we were to be frugal in our expenditure. Most often the quantum of a candidates expenses depended upon the capacity of his rivals; he would have to spend more than the average where his rivals happened to be wealthy men.

But consideration regarding expenses came only after the other two factors- acceptance of Congress discipline and chances

\textsuperscript{72} \textit{Ibid.}
of success. The services rendered by a candidate to the Congress and the people determined the first factor and his popularity in his constituency determined the other. Service of society or membership of a particular caste or tribe might be the reason for a candidate’s popularity. In regions where the Congress commanded little influence, other considerations determined the selection of a candidate. The views of the P.C.Cs. were most valuable on all these matters. Our greatest hurdle was when more than one good and genuine Congressman applied for a Congress ticket for the same constituency and none of them would withdraw. Our tests of popularity failed in such cases and we were compelled to favour one candidate and incur the displeasure of the others. 73

Rajendra Prasad derived a sense of satisfaction because “on the whole, the Parliamentary Board under Sardar Patel’s leadership was able to surmount all these difficulties.” He encountered variety of persons seeking nominations by the Congress. 74 He felt distressed and anguished because many Congress workers claimed such nominations as a reward for their work in the Congress and hoped that it would lead to some office in the Government. Candidate selection also encouraged factional groupings

74 Rajendra Prasad had been put in charge of organizing elections in Bihar, AICC papers, F. No. E1/1936.
and the formation of corrupt cliques. He himself noted several cases in which members had actually been nominated because they belonged to a particular caste:  

I cannot but record here the fact that many Congress workers have started assessing their services in terms of rewards in the form of membership of a legislative assembly, municipality or district board or at least a place of honour and power in a Congress committee. There is no doubt that in all these places there is scope for doing service and in some cases one’s capacity to serve is enhanced by such an opportunity. But how is one judge whether one is motivated by a desire for service or personal ambition. If a place is sought with a view to securing an opportunity for service, there can be nothing against it. But I am afraid one cannot be too sure as self-deception is not an uncommon occurrence. Our minds often hoodwink us by spreading a veneer of altruism to cover personal ambitions.  

Ambition had taken the place of modesty and office considered a means for personal advancement, lamented Rajendra Prasad. Ambition to hold a post of authority had replaced the urge to serve the country. He had so far held the opinion that the public workers should not hanker after power and office but should leave it to those who had the right to nominate to decide who the fittest person was. He had adhered to these principles and had never claimed any position of authority or influence. “All this”, he thought, “was

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75 Vinita Damodaran, Broken Promises, op.cit., p. 59.
76 Rajendra Prasad to Patel, 17 November 1936, Rajendra Prasad Papers, F. No. 1/36, col. 3.
77 Rajendra Prasad, Autobiography, p.431
contrary to Indian culture and more in consonance with western ideals, which have perhaps inevitably permeated our thinking.\textsuperscript{78} We must promote and strengthen, he thought, “the feeling of service and sacrifice and discourage and minimize the yearning for fruits of service”. He wanted the principal aim to “be service and not self-aggrandizement”.\textsuperscript{79}

Rajendra Prasad had become President of the Bihar Provincial Congress Committee again in 1936 for the second time. Hence, besides working with the Parliamentary Board, Rajendra Prasad had to do a lot of electioneering work in Bihar. Under his guidance, the Provincial Congress Committee made unanimous decisions in most of the cases, and nominations were completed quite smoothly. Even when Rajendra Prasad held a contrary view, he “bowed to the majority opinion”.\textsuperscript{80} In some cases, nominations were influenced by caste considerations. “It is a matter of shame”, wrote Rajendra Prasad with regret, “that in Bihar, the P.C.C. had to take caste labels into account in certain constituencies because the success of candidates there depended on such considerations”.\textsuperscript{81} For the sixteen seats reserved for Harijans in the Bihar Assembly, the Provincial Congress Committee put up candidates for all by consulting prominent Harijan workers. Most of them were returned unopposed and in some cases of contest, they were victorious. Further, the Congress Working Committee accepted most of the names of the members of the Kisan Sabha suggested by its leader, Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, and in some cases of difference were amicably settled.\textsuperscript{82}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{78} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., p.432. \\
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid, p.429. \\
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{82} Sahajanand Saraswati, however did not feel satisfied. In Muzaffarpur, over one such dispute where a Kisan Sabha worker, Kishori Prasanna Sinha, was dropped, Sahajanand threatened to resign from the}
Rajendra Prasad during the whole of 1936 devoted himself to visiting different areas in Bihar and holding contact programmes to further the prospects of Congress in the elections to be held next year. He was at Gaya on January 14, 1936. He went to Chatra in the Hazaribagh district to attend a political conference on 15 and 16 January 1936, along with Shri krishna Sinha, Anugraha Narayan Sinha, Ram Dayalu Singh and Mathura Prasad. "Judging from every aspect," noted Mathura Prasad in his diary, the Chatra Conference was a success. The Party returned to Gaya on January 17 and stayed for sometime at the Rajendra Ashram where Rajendra Prasad unfurled the national flag. On the morning of January 18, Rajendra Prasad, Anugraha Narayan Sinha and Mathura Prasad went from Gaya to Sherghati and Imamganj and returned there in the evening. After a trip to Calcutta on January 20 and 21, Rajendra Prasad returned to Patna in the morning of January 22. Halting for a few days from January 29 at Chhapra and Zeradei, Rajendra Prasad and Mathura Prasad returned to Patna on February 7 and attended a public meeting in the Congress ground, where the former delivered an inspiring speech. They then left for Baidyanathdham (Deoghar) on February 9, and at a function organized in the local Govardhan Hindi Sahitya Vidyalaya, Rajendra Prasad delivered a learned speech on Hindi literature. They visited there the Shaheed Ashram, the Ramakrishna Mission and the Brahmacharya Acharya. They also went to the neighbouring villages of Chanan, Katoria and Kusha. On February 11, the party moved to Bhagalpur, Sabour and Bihpur. On 12 February they were at Madhepura and Supaul. On 13 February, they came to Muzzaffarpur and left for Purulia and Ranchi. On 17, 18 and 19 February they were at

working committee. See Sahajanand Saraswati, Mera Jeevan Sangharsh, p. 481, and also Rajendra Prasad Papers, 1/36, Col. 3.

Details of these tours area available in the unpublished diary of Mathura Prasad, veteran Congress worker of Bihar and intimate associate of Rajendra Prasad, who accompanied the latter during these tours. Cited in K K Datta, op. cit., pp. 150-51.
Kiul, Jamalpur and Bhagalpur and returned to Patna on the morning of 20 February started from Zeradei next day and remained there until 25 February. Next day they went to Jamshedpur in a third-class compartment and left that place for Sawali on the night of 27 February to attend a conference organized by the Gandhi Seva Sangh. Gandhiji joined them at Wardha, and at Sawali, Rajendra Prasad delivered several speeches. Some other Congressmen from Bihar had also come there and the party stayed at Sawali until 6 March. On their journey back they halted at Swaraj Bhawan, Allahabad, on 10 and 11 March and returned to Patna next day. On the same day leaving for Samastipur, they toured the entire Darbhanga district until 15 March.

**The Faizpur Session of the Congress**

The next session of the Congress was held at Faizpur, a village in Khandesh, Maharashtra in December 1936, and Jawaharlal Nehru was re-elected President. The Congress reiterated its earlier position of rejection of the Government of India Act 1935, which it regarded as imposed on India against the declared will of the people of the country. It declared unequivocally that any cooperation with this constitution was a betrayal of India’s struggle for freedom and a strengthening of the hold of the British imperialism. The thought of provincial elections, which were few days ahead, remained uppermost in the minds of everybody. Many prominent workers were not able to attend the session because of their pre-occupation with the election campaigns in their respective areas. The session endorsed the election manifesto and called upon all the candidates standing on its behalf to carry on their election campaign strictly on its basis and after election, to

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conduct their work in the Legislatures in accordance with it.\textsuperscript{85} It also stated that the Congress members of the Legislatures should take earliest opportunity to put forward in the new assemblies a demand for a Constituent Assembly elected by the adult suffrage, which should be supported by a mass agitation outside to enforce the right of Indian people to self-determination.\textsuperscript{86} To accept or not to accept office came up again for discussion. Rajendra Prasad moved an important resolution that made the Congress position clear on these issues. It seems proper to quote the entire resolution here:

This Congress reiterates its entire rejection of the Government of India Act of 1935 and the constitution that has been imposed on India against the declared will of the people of the country. In the opinion of the Congress any co-operation with this constitution is a betrayal of India's struggle for freedom and a strengthening of the hold of British Imperialism and a further exploitation of the Indian masses who have already been reduced to direst poverty under imperialist domination. The Congress therefore repeats its resolve not to submit to this constitution or to co-operate with it, both inside and outside the Legislatures, so as to end it. The Congress does not and will not recognise the right of any external power or authority to dictate the political and economic structure of India, and every such attempt will be met by organised and uncompromising opposition of Indian people. The people can only recognise a constitutional structure which has

\textsuperscript{85} \textit{IAR}, Vol. II, 1936, p.205.

\textsuperscript{86} This was part of the first resolution moved by Rajendra Prasad on behalf of the Working Committee in the congress Subjects Committee. \textit{The Searchlight}, 27 December 1937. Also see \textit{IAR}, Vol. II, 1936.
been framed by them and which is based on the independence of India as a nation and which allows them full scope for development according to their hopes and desires.

The Congress stands for a genuine democratic State in India where political power has been transferred to the people as a whole and the Government is under their effective control. Such a State can only come into existence through a Constituent Assembly, elected by adult suffrage, and having the power to determine finally the Constitution of the country. To this end the Congress works in the country and organise the masses, and this objective must ever be kept in view by the representatives of the Congress in the Legislatures.

The Congress endorses the Election Manifesto of the A.I.C.C. and calls upon candidates, standing on its behalf, to carry on their election campaign strictly on its basis and after election, to conduct their work in the Legislatures in accordance with it. Congress members of the Legislatures should take the earliest opportunity to forward in the new Assemblies the demand for a Constituent Assembly, elected by adult suffrage, and this demand should be supported by a mass agitation outside to enforce the right of the Indian people to self-determination.

The question of acceptance or non-acceptance of office by the Congress members elected to the Legislatures under the new constitution will be decided by the A.I.C.C. soon after the
provincial assembly elections as is practicable. Immediately after
the elections the various Provincial Congress Committees will
take steps to consult their district and other local Committees and
send their own recommendations on this subject, so that the
A.I.C.C. may be assisted in deciding this issue by the opinion of
the mass of Congressmen and the country.  

While moving this resolution he very emphatically argued in favour of its
adoption:

We want a constitution which we ourselves have framed. The
new constitution has been framed with a view to safeguarding
and protecting the interests of England, and been thrust upon us.
The Congress, by its resolution, has declared that this
constitution is not acceptable to the people of India, and a
constitution acceptable to the people should be framed by the
people of India themselves. As far as offices is concerned, it
might not be necessary for us to decide the question at all, not
because we are doubtful. We are quite confident of securing a
majority in the elections. We are, however, not confident that
anything substantial in the direction of Swaraj can be achieved in
the councils. Our main object in entering the councils is to keep

out undesirable persons from these councils, as they are bound to use them to the detriment of the interests of the country.\textsuperscript{88}

When an amendment seeking to effect a change in his resolution to the effect that the power should be captured before the formation of the Constituent Assembly\textsuperscript{89} was made by the Communists represented by Dange, Rajendra Prasad took an exception to the whole proposition and said that Mr. Dange had showed a "method but he was not sure that its application to India would be possible, nor did he know when that method could be applied in India. The present decision regarding office was not a sign of indecisiveness. Under certain conditions not to take a decision was the wisest decision".\textsuperscript{90}

Rajendra Prasad apparently held the view that the office acceptance was not an end in itself and it had to be used as an occasion for furthering the cause of freedom struggle. "Our intention in entering the Legislatures", he asserted, "is not to work the new constitution but to take the advantage of all that which will help in the progress towards the achievement of Swaraj and prevent anything that might obstruct its attainment."\textsuperscript{91}

Jawaharlal Nehru was against forming ministries in the Provinces. However, most Congressmen were in favour of accepting office. Nevertheless, the final decision on the matter was left for the AICC to decide after the elections were over and the results known.\textsuperscript{92}

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{88} \textit{The Searchlight}, 27 December 1937.
\item \textsuperscript{89} Dange had moved an amendment to the effect that the state visualized in the resolution should come into existence through an uncompromising anti-imperialist struggle and seizure of power. He also argued that against one constitution, they could not impose another. They could not impose the slogan of Constituent Assembly on the slogan of constitution. Before the Constituent Assembly came, they should capture power and then the Constituent Assembly could frame the scheme that the country wanted. \textit{IAR}, Vol. II, 1936. Also \textit{The Searchlight}, 27 December 1937.
\item \textsuperscript{90} \textit{The Searchlight}, 27 December 1937
\item \textsuperscript{91} \textit{Ibid.}
\item \textsuperscript{92} Rajendra Prasad, \textit{Autobiography}, p. 433. Also in \textit{IAR}, Vol. II, 1936, \textit{op. cit.}
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
The Provincial Elections in Bihar

The elections in Bihar were scheduled between 22 and 27 January 1937, and therefore, once the Faizpur session of the Congress was over, election campaigns became the focal issue. In early January Jawaharlal Nehru visited Bihar to campaign for the Congress candidates there. His visit provided an impetus to the enthusiasm of Congressmen and their supporters for elections. Wherever he went a huge audience of men and women greeted him. Audiences felt overwhelmed by his inspiring speeches, which laid emphasis on the lofty ideals of the Congress and its programme to relieve the downtrodden people from the evils of foreign rule and other reactionary forces inside the country. There is no doubt," wrote the Collector of Shahabad to the Commissioner of Patna on 9 January 1937, "that these speeches of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru will give a considerable impetus to the Congress campaign." As it was not possible for Nehru to visit all parts of the Province, Rajendra Prasad, instead of accompanying him, went to those areas which Nehru could not visit. He drew up a wise itinerary. He could see that it was impossible for Nehru to visit every place and therefore he did not accompany him and rather drew up an itinerary for himself "to visit the areas not covered by him. Thus between us we were able to cover the whole province".

Besides Jawaharlal Nehru, other leaders, such as Pandit Govind Ballabh Pant and Acharya Kripalani also assisted Rajendra Prasad in the election campaigns of Bihar. Provincial leaders of Bihar, such as Sri Krishna Sinha and Anugraha Narayan Sinha,

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94 Ibid. Nehru's country-wide election tour acquired legendry proportions. He traveled nearly 80,000 kilometers in less than five months and addressed more than ten million people. Gandhiji did not address a single meeting though he was very much present in the minds of the voters. Bipan Chandra, et al., India's Struggle for Independence, p.322.
95 Rajendra Prasad, Autobiography, p. 434.
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during their campaign meetings, talked in general terms of the benefits of the Congress rule, while at the same time emphasized the need for a harmonious relationship between zamindars and tenants.\textsuperscript{96} The association of the Kisan Sabha with the Congress also led to an effective penetration of the campaign in to the most remote rural areas.\textsuperscript{97} The entire election campaign appears to have enabled the Congress establish itself among the mass of the population on a very wide scale in Bihar.\textsuperscript{98} These campaigns naturally had a favourable result for the Congress and it secured a sweeping victory there. It secured 75 per cent of the total votes cast and 65 per cent of the total seats in the Bihar Assembly. As regards the general urban constituencies, the Congress captured all five seats, while in general rural constituencies it was able to secure 68 out of 73 seats. In scheduled caste constituencies, it captured 14 out of 15 seats. It also secured two out of three of the labour seats and one landholder’s seat.\textsuperscript{99} The success of the Congress in Bihar was very much as expected. The election campaign of the Congress had enabled the Congress to establish contact with the masses on a very wide scale.\textsuperscript{100} The government officials had found the attendance at the polling booths unexpectedly good.\textsuperscript{101} Rajendra Prasad’s perceptions of a popular enthusiasm turned out to be correct and he rightly felt that their “optimism was more than justified”.\textsuperscript{102}

Once the elections were over in Bihar and the Congress had secured a majority Rajendra Prasad felt relieved and decided to go for campaigning in the United Provinces

\textsuperscript{96} Vinita Damodaran, \textit{Broken Promises}, op. cit., p.62.
\textsuperscript{97} \textit{Ibid}.
\textsuperscript{98} Vinita Damodaran writes that the extension of the franchise had brought about an increase in the representation of tenant interests in rural areas and of the lower middle classes and a small section of the industrial working population in urban areas. It is probable that the electoral propaganda reached far beyond these enfranchised sections and relayed some kind of Congress or nationalist message to almost all sections of society. \textit{Ibid.}, p. 61-62.
\textsuperscript{99} \textit{LJR}, Vol. 1, 1937, p. 168 (h)-168 (f).
\textsuperscript{100} Lata Singh, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 113.
\textsuperscript{101} \textit{FR} (1), February 1937.
\textsuperscript{102} Rajendra Prasad, \textit{Autobiography}, p. 434.
in favour of the Congress candidates. He remained in United Provinces for some time and visited several places of Oudh, Dhampur, and the far-flung areas of Tarai. So far no Congress leader had ever gone to the Tarai, as it was not easily accessible. He however made it a point to undertake a visit of this area as well and propagate the Congress message there. Though he could visit only one place there and address a large gathering, yet it had such a powerful influence that it resulted in Congress victory in that constituency.\textsuperscript{103} He then proceeded to the Central Provinces, where he campaigned in districts of Jabalpur and Bilaspur. He continued his election campaigns by proceeding to Maharashtra and Karnataka. He toured Maharashtra for several days but success, he admitted, “was not very outstanding”.\textsuperscript{104} In Karnataka, also there were one or two “unexpected defeats” for it. Andhra was the last province now visited by him where he could tour only in the Bellary district.\textsuperscript{105}

Rajendra Prasad’s optimism proved to be true for other provinces as well. The Congress secured a massive mandate at the polls despite the narrow franchise. It secured an absolute majority in six Provinces – Bihar, Orissa, United Provinces, the Central Province, Madras and Bombay. It won 716 out of 1161 seats it contested.\textsuperscript{106} The exceptions were Bengal, Assam, the NWFP, Punjab and Sind. Again the Congress was the single largest party in the first three i.e. Bengal, Assam and the NWFP.

The Working Committee of the Congress in its February-March meeting congratulated the nation on its wonderful response to the call of the Congress in the

\textsuperscript{103} Ibid., p. 435.
\textsuperscript{104} Regarding his Maharashtra campaign he remembered one incident because of which his scheduled meeting had to be cancelled. Rajendra Prasad had to address a gathering and for some reason he was delayed. In the mean time, a member of the rival party went there and told the gathering that Rajendra Prasad had been detained somewhere and that he would not be addressing the meeting any more. Rajendra Prasad, Autobiography, p. 435.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{106} Bipan Chandra, et al, op. cit., p. 322.
It said that it was a demonstration of "the adherence of the masses to the Congress policy, and their firm determination to combat the new Constitution and end it, and by means of a Constituent Assembly to establish an independent and democratic State and remove the many burdens under which all sections of our people suffer." It also reminded the newly elected legislators to remember and uphold "Congress ideals and principles, to be true to the faith of the people, and to labour unceasingly as soldiers of Swaraj for the freedom of the motherland and the emancipation of her suffering and exploited millions." Regard"

Regarding the oath of allegiance, it took the position that the taking of the oath, in order to enable the participation in work of the Legislatures, in no way lessened or varied the demand for independence. The primary allegiance of all Congressmen was to the Indian people, and the oath of allegiance did not affect that in any way, which was their primary duty and allegiance.

Despite the success at the Assembly elections, the Congress working Committee did not scale down the tone of the battle cry against British imperialism. It left the matter of the office acceptance to the AICC and in the meantime laid the prescriptive norms for its newly elected legislators and asked for their strict adherence to these. The Congress had entered the Legislatures not to cooperate with the new Constitution or the Government but "adheres to its general and basic policy of non-cooperation with the apparatus of British Imperialism except in so far as circumstances may require a variation." The objective of the Congress remained Purna Swaraj or complete independence leading to a democratic State, and the Indian people themselves through a Constituent Assembly, elected by adult suffrage, could create such a State. The Congress
legislators were asked not to assist or cooperate with any function or activity aimed at enhancing the power or prestige of British Imperialism in India. Displaying its belligerent intentions, the Working Committee further decided to renew the call of a nation-wide hartal on 1 April, the day the new Constitution was to be inaugurated, as decided by the Faizpur Congress. It expressed its trust that the entire nation "would respond to this call in full measure in order to demonstrate the will of the Indian people to resist the imposition of this Constitution."