CHAPTER III

MOBILISATION, RESISTANCE AND POPULAR INITIATIVES: PEASANT AND TRIBAL MOVEMENTS, 1935-39

I. THE PATTERN OF PEASANT/TRIBAL MOBILISATION

The period following CDM witnessed a major thrust to the organisation of peasants and the tribals of British Orissa as well as of princely states. The Satyagrahis, once released from the jail by 1933, not only addressed themselves to the campaign of constructive activities but strove to organise the peasantry and the tribals. Besides, a sizeable section of the youth who had steeled themselves in the salt politics came under the impact of broad left ideological sway of Nehru, Socialists and Communists and Bose. Thus, the released Congress activists as well as these radical youth fanned into villages and helped form kisan committees. They also organised peasant meetings and prepared drafts regarding peasant demands. However, the organisation of peasantry was mainly confined to the coastal tracts in 1933. As observed earlier, after his release, Mahatab not only put special emphasis on anti-untouchability and other Gandhian constructive activities but equally wrote to Nehru, saying that he along with his friends had taken a vow not to participate in law-making institutions unless and until the grievances of the peasantry were redressed and their exploitation by the landlords and the capitalists was fought out. Mahatab organised the peasants in Balasore to secure remission of rents around the end of 1933. The flood of 1933 which ravaged Orissa provided an immediate


2. HPD, FNR, 1st half of September 1933.
spur to the radical nationalists and the socialists to take activities concerning the organisation of peasantry in the coastal tracts of Cuttack, Puri, Balasore.

We come across a reference to the cutting of timber from the reserved forests of Patia estate by the tenants. The tenants of Patia who came under the rule of the new landlord, viz. the Raja of Kanika around 1933, resented the denial of the permission to take fuel from the Raja's forest - a privilege, which they claimed, they had enjoyed during the ex-Raja of Patia. On the other hand, the new landlord rejected the claim of the tenants saying that the settlement records did not offer to the tenants any right to free fuel and timber. The Raja also applied for police force to guard the reserved forest. However, the Raja agreed to pay in cash for any kind of Bethi which the tenants did for the previous Raja for the privilege of free fuel and timber from forests; but, additionally, he would charge tolls for timber cutting. As noted earlier in the context of CDM, a trend of jungle cutting/forest satyagraha emerged in certain pockets during the prolonged course of CDM. Thus, the case in Patia reflected the popular response to the overall movement of Civil Obedience.

In February 1934, a peasant conference was organised in Cuttack under the initiatives of the Utkal Congress Socialist League. In the conference, various aspects of tenancy laws were discussed by Godabarisha Mishra. He advised the peasants to appeal to the Government to seek remission of rent in the event of crop failure instead of getting into conflict with the landlords directly.

The initiative for Utkal Kishan Sangha took shape with

3. HPD, Kanika and Patia Raj affairs, F.No.183 of 1933, ACC-400.

the organisation of a Kisan Conference at Cuttack during June 1935. The Conference was presided over by the Secretary of U.P. Kisan Sangha, Mohanlal Goutam (also the Joint Secretary of All India Socialist Party). The conference was attended by 200 people including 60 peasants. Goutam, blaming the intermediate landlordism as the root cause for the miseries of the tenants, pointed out that the institution of intermediate landlordism dated back to East India Company and it did not exist during Sher Saha's time. He clearly spelt out the need to abolish the zamindari system. The conference adopted 13 resolutions concerning the condition of the peasants. The major demands were: (a) writing off arrears of rent; (b) persons having uneconomic holding to be exempted from paying rent; (c) revenue reduction by 50%; (d) reduction of water cess; (e) complete liquidation of agricultural debts of the poor. Goutam also announced formally the launching of the Utkal Kisan Sangha. Prominent socialists such as Naba Krushna Choudhry, Malati Devi had been instrumental in the organisation of the conference.5

By 1936, the organisation of peasantry had acquired a remarkable thrust. For example, the tenants in Khallikote and Athagada Estates of Ganjam demanded remission of rent (to the tune of 0.5.4 in the rupee), in view of depression in the prices of the produce of the land, on the basis of the amended Section 39A of Madras Estates Land Act.6 The tenants particularly in villages like Pondithalgam, Konkai, Phasidhi, Singadapalli, Voidalpur, Bakutgam, Pituapalli, Sullobondha in the estates had, in fact, been resenting the fresh settlement by which the rents had been hiked nearly 50 to 100%. They had also withheld the payment of nearly 50%
of the due rent of the estate by March, 1936. The Estate, in contrast, pressed for the payment of rent and in certain cases, resorted to coercive methods. In response, the peasants petitioned the Estate and offered to relinquish their holdings. Further, the tenants also resisted the attempts by the estate officials to collect rent. The peasants were organised by the local leaders such as Jujisti Panda of Koirasi, Kellai Santra and Gouranga Pala of Kondijam, Brahmachari Swain of Bagalpur and Natabara Porai of Jodialpur. The local leadership also got in touch with the PCC leaders like Godabarisha Mishra and M.G. Patnaik, an advocate of Berhampur. Funds were raised by the peasants to meet the expenditure concerning their struggle. They organised several meetings (27 April: Pandithagam; 8 May: Firka-palli; 18 May: Nuagodo) to discuss various issues and chalk out their course of action. On 9 May, the estate officials who approached Pandithgam village for rent collection were severely assaulted.

Around July 1936, one Babaji Bhimsen Das of Rahama (Cuttack) organised the peasants of Tirtol area on the issue of "illegal" realisation of fees from people by the subordinate officials of sub-registrar office in every deed of sale. 7 A signature campaign of the peasants against the issue was taken up and the matter was reported to the higher authorities, undeterred by the threats given to Bhimsen by the officials as well as local police and goons. The issue was finally brought to the notice of the Sub-Registrar, who suggested a 'compromise' over the issue. The illegal gratification was scaled down to 4 annas per each sale deed instead of one rupee and 14 annas. The Sub-registrar also in assurance not to stand against "the kisan and Congress movement". An encouraged Babaji Bhimsen went to Nabakrushna Choudhry: "public opinion had been effectively channelised

over the issue; peasants had been encouraged due to a successful redressal of their grievances on their own initiative.

The All India Kisan Sabha held at Lucknow in April 1936 was attended by the PCC leaders such as Mahatab, Nabakrushna Choudhry, Surendranath Dwivedi, Lingaraj Mishra and Bhagirathi Mohapatra. Nehru's visit to Orissa from 10 November to 12 November was another crucial development in the context of peasant movement in Orissa. He addressed 21 meetings in the three districts of Cuttack, Puri and Ganjam. The meetings were organised mostly in rural pockets. In all the meetings, Nehru talked about the organisation of kisans, and made merciless attacks on Zamindari system, justifying its abolition. He defined Swaraj as a form of Government in which the people would have all the power and all action would be taken in consultation with the people. Nehru's tour in Orissa encouraged the socialists and also gave a push to the peasant movement by stirring the popular perception of a new order of society in the shape of socialism.

In the wake of Nehru's visit to Orissa, the second session of Utkal Provincial Kisan Conference was organised in Puri during 15 November 1936. Swami Sahajananda of Bihar presided over the proceedings of the conference. The Conference was attended by 3,000 peasants. Resolution such as abolition of Zamindari system, transfer of land to the tiller and organisation of peasants defence committees to resist the oppression of zamindars were passed in the conference. A proposal to boycott the Government in case it declared war was also endorsed to. The very next day, a group of peasants approached the S.D.O. of Puri and demanded the removal


9. WWCC, ACC No.33, pp.35-37.
of salt tax and strengthening of embankments as well as stopping of the oppressions of local zamindars. The conference no doubt, had given a spur to the perception of the peasants. We have another evidence to suggest that the visit of Nehru hastened the activities of the socialists/communists. For instance, a Peasants Conference seems to have been organised in Calcutta on 29 November 1936. A pamphlet titled 'Oriya Peasants Conference' which was circulated among the Oriya workers of Calcutta industries stated the objective of the conference as

"to strengthen, invigorate and help in revolutionising the fast developing peasant movement of Orissa by their active co-operation and generally to link up the working class movement in Calcutta and elsewhere the peasant movement at home, the Oriya speaking peasants now working in different industries of Calcutta and its suburbs have decided to meet in a conference at Albert Hall on 29 November 1936 and to press for their immediate class demands."

The pamphlet was issued under the signature of Sarat Chandra Patnaik, Gurucharan Patnaik and Aparti Charan Naik.

It is in the context of increasing activities around mobilisation of peasantry, by both PCC leaders and Kisan Sabha activists that the Rajas Maharajas and the landed elements got together and floated different political parties in their bid to counter peasant militancy. The ensuing election of 1937 provided them the immediacy for such groupings. Thus the All Orissa National Party was mooted around July 1935. The constitution of the party spelt out its objective as the attainment of Swaraj through constitutional means, - this however, to be attained without a fight against British colonialism. It promised to "respect and preserve the legitimate rights and interests of all classes

10. *HPD, FNR, 18.11.36.*

11. Interview with late Sarat Chandra Patnaik, Cuttack. I am thankful to him for giving me a copy of the pamphlet. Late Mr. Patnaik was the Chairman of the 'Reception Committee' of the conference. In fact, he emphasised that the (he being an avowed communist) 'Communists' in Orissa had already started organising the peasants around their immediate class issues around 1936 which the 'Congress' tended to underplay.

of the people in the province" and "promote friendly relations between landlords and tenants" and to support "the equitable adjustment of rent and revenue in view of the falling prices". So also, the United Party got formed around 1936.13 The impulse behind such groupings was to restore 'order' in society which had been threatened by 'chaos' due to the politics of the PCC and Kisan Sangha.

In the context of the mobilisation of the peasantry during 1936-37, new literature developed which sought to impart a new vision in peasant consciousness. For instance, one booklet named Chasabhāi14 (Ryot Brothers) published around 1936 was proscribed when it brought out its second edition in 1937. Authored by one Gangadhar Mishra of Puri the poem in the booklet mainly addressed the peasants of Orissa, bemoaning their deplorable condition. Essentially a critique of feudal oppression, the poem also located the miseries of the peasants in the existing colonial structure. The poem, exhorted the peasants:

"Once the peasants unity based on Provincial Kisan Sangha is attained, a new vigour will emerge, the oppressive forest laws which prevents the collection of fuel, required by the peasants, bethi, zulum of the Zamindar... will end, the (new) Government will look into the oppressions of the moneylender, the burden of the loan will be eased; the new laws will be based on popular opinion; and then only commence the Rama Rajya."

Another booklet penned by the same author titled Dardi-dra Nian15 (Flame of poverty) gave a graphic description of the condition of the peasantry. It detailed how the peasantry, the backbone of the country, was sucked by the rich moneylenders, Zamindars, pleaders, mukhtears, who lived happily while the former groaned under the load of poverty without having the bare necessities of life. The poem called upon the peasants to unite, rise and stand against the

13. **WWCC, ACC-33.**


15. Gangadhar Mishra, Davindra Nian (Oriya booklet1), ACC-651.
oppressive system of the rich. It incited people to rebel against the existing system of Government and to fight for the system prevalent in Russia."

The PCC met under the presidency of Harihar Das in March 1936 and passed a resolution to organise the peasantry and work for the removal of untouchability.16 Under Mahatab's initiative a peasant conference was organised in May 1936. In the conference, peasants were exhorted not to pay Salami to Zamindars. Mahatab was, then, the President of Provincial Kisan Sangha. The conference also advocated the need for the formation of agricultural marketing organisations and debt-reconciliation banks.17 On 14 August, the Utkal Provincial Kisan Sangha18 appointed a sub-committee consisting of Mahatab, Nabakrushna Choudhury, Raj Krishna Bose, Lingaraj Mishra, and Malati Choudhury to enquire into the grievances of the peasants and submit their report to the PCC. The 'All India Kisan Day'19 was celebrated in many parts of the province on 1 September 1936. Resolutions were passed advocating the reduction of rent, amendments of Tenancy Act and relief to cultivators from indebtedness as well as Harijan upliftment and provision of compulsory education for children of the peasants, in peasant meetings in different areas on that occasion. A report of the Puri DCC on Congress activities during 1936 pointed out that the activities of Congress workers were dominantly confined to holding of peasant meetings as well as organising the peasant movement and enrolling Congress members. In fact, the


18. Ibid.

19. Ibid.
Puri District *Krushak Sangha* had been formed in 1936.\(^\text{20}\)

The PCC in the course of the mobilisation of peasantry, increasingly acquired a broad left ideological orientation. In the process, the Kisan Sabha and the PCC as well as their respective leaders got closely identified in the pre-1937 phase. It is in this context that the election manifesto of the PCC was released, which was by any standards a radical one. The manifesto contained the following demands:\(^\text{21}\) (a) abolition of permanent settlement affecting Kanika, Par-lakhemundi and a number of smaller landlords in Parlakhemun-di, smaller landlords in Ganjam and Cuttack and the very important *zamindari* of Jeypore; (b) Remission of arrears of rent and land revenue; (c) reduction of all rents and water rates by half; (d) graduation of rent on the line of income-tax; families with an income of less than Rs.250/- a year to be excused altogether; (e) amendment of Tenancy Act in various respects to the detriment of landlords; (f) forests to be thrown open to neighbouring villages; (g) securing a living wage for labourers; (h) death duty on property over Rs.20,000/- and succession duty as well; (i) free primary education; (j) relaxation of the salt law; (k) religious endowments to be diverted to the upkeep of schools and dispensaries. It is worth-observing that under the overall pressure exerted through *Krushak Sangha* activities, PCC was made to incorporate demands like abolition of *zamindaris* in certain estates and complete remission of rents and taxes for all whose annual income did not exceed Rs.250/- and a debt moratorium for five years by releasing a supplementary election manifesto.\(^\text{22}\)

\(^{20}\) *WWCC*, ACC-36, Orissa Police Abstract Intelligence (OPAI), Vol.II, 24.3.37, No.12, p.45.


\(^{22}\) Ibid.
II. THE ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN

It is in this backdrop, the electoral campaign of PCC picked up, around June 1936, though formally launched in 13 September 1936. The peasant meetings mostly in the rural areas sought to be used as platforms for PCC's election propaganda. In these meetings, the necessity for forging both anti-colonial and anti-feudal struggles was highlighted. In contrast, the two principal non-Congress parties such as All Orissa National Party and United Party harped on the point that: "Congress is out to wreck the Constitution (1935 Act) and thus can't do any good to the people in the Assembly". The candidates of these parties sought to "bribe the voters in the form of cash and promises to the voters". The campaign by the nationalist press against these tactics was also very sharp.

In contrast, PCC's electoral campaign was steered through mass meetings and the press campaign. For example, The Samaja, The Asha, The Utkal Dipika and the Lokamata carried the Congress message to the peripheries of the province. Besides, PCC's election propaganda was also carried on through Sankirtan parties and the release of leaflets. The PCC candidates in Jeypore estate promised to the people the abolition and reduction of many customary feudal levies such as (a) abolition of plough tax (a tax of 4 to 12 annas which every ryot pays for getting wood from the forests for his plough); (b) payment against bethi work by the ryots for the estate; (c) to weed out corruption of

23. The Samaja, Dt.2.1.37, 7.1.37.

24. Ibid.

25. HPD, Annual Report of Revenue Commissioner on Newspapers, 6.2.37, ACC-618.

the estates' subordinate officials - who most often exploited the tribals/ryots. These promises caught the immediate imagination of the tribals. Thus, PCC's campaign generated high hopes among the tribals in Koraput.

III. POST-ELECTION PHASE: PEASANT/TRIBAL MOBILISATION AND NATURE OF POPULAR PROTEST

In the election of 1937, PCC swept the polls by winning 36 out of 37 seats (contested); registering 80% of votes in the constituencies it won. The opposition and the independents shared 10 seats each. 32 of the defeated candidates of opposition lost their deposits. The report on Orissa Kisan Sabha submitted by Malati Choudhury to All India pointed out that out of 36 elected Congress members to the Assembly 7 belonged to the Utkal Krusha Sangha. There was an immediate reaction of the zamindars, vis-a-vis the peasants. Attempts were made in certain pockets to "collect from the peasants the amount spent in the elections by the zamindars". In certain places, some zamindars "forced the tenants to pay Sunia Bheti in a month's time". In certain areas of Puri, tenants were even "socially ostracised by the Zamindars". This kind of development sharply focused on the need to have peasant associations in every zamindari.

We will here, try to examine the nature and extent of peasant mobilisation in the post-election phase of 1937.

In March, the Utkal Congress Socialist Party met under the presidency of Sudhir Ghosh and decided to pressurise the Congress to accept the following demands, in case the latter accepted office. The demands relating to peasants were specifically: (a) 50% reduction of rent and revenue;

27. The Samaja, 30.1.37, 1.2.37.
30. The Utkal Dipika, 18.2.37; Lokamata, 10.2.37.
(b) abolition of landlordism without compensation; (c) cancellation of all debts of peasants and working class; (d) codification and amendment of tenancy laws in such a way as to make the tillers of the soil the sole proprietors of the land.31

Mahatab, presiding over a peasant conference32 (Bhubaneswar, 20 March), emphasised the need for upliftment of the peasant through village reconstruction work. This was followed by a discussion among a group of local activists such as Raghunath Mohapatra and Digambar Srichandan at Bhubaneswar on the same day, in which it was resolved to organise Krushak Sangha consisting of 5 members in each Union and to supply newspapers to each village to educate peasants and undertake activities on village reconstruction. In the peasant meeting (Badiragpur, Balasore, 28 March), it was emphasised that peasants unity was a must so as to resist the oppressions of the zamindars. The Congress membership enrolment drive was stressed upon by asking persons 18 years of age to be Congress members.33

In April, a meeting was held at Krishna Prasad (Parikuda estate) to discuss about the popular grievances against the Raja.34 The PCC leaders and prominent socialists like Mohan Das, Prananath Patnaik, Jagabandhu Sinha (MLA) and Lingaraj Mishra addressed the peasants. The peasants were asked not to reconcile to the 'illegal exactions' of the Raja and were instead advised to report them in the proper courts. A committee was formed to probe into the allegations of the peasants. After conducting the enquiry, the

Committee highlighted many of the issues and sought for their redressal by the Raja. Some of the important issues were: (a) levying of fines on persons going out to Bengal or Rangoon to earn their livelihood and returning to the estate everytime; (b) false allegations against the tenants with encroachment on Anabadi lands, forcing them to pay fines known as decimal Chanda without giving any receipts for the same; (c) subsequent to the death of any member of a joint-family, threats were held out to the survivors of dispossesssion of their share of the property, thereby realising heavy amount as Nawarish fee or inestate tax; (d) charging of 6 annas in the rupee as mutation fee on any transaction of land, as against the prescribed 4 annas allowed under rule; (e) imposition of illegal fines on both parties involved in local disputes; (f) realisation of fines from persons cutting down trees/bamboos from the raiyati lands; (g) impounding of cattle by the Raja even when they grazed in fallow/pasture lands, causing no damage to any standing crop and their freeing after exacting heavy fines from the owners. A local kisan activist Ram Chandra Patnaik distributed leaflets which contained a poem focusing on the oppression of the Raja. The mobilisation of the peasantry along these lines ultimately made them petition the colonial authorities against Raja's exploitation. In response, the S.D.O. conducted an enquiry. The report of enquiry while admitting that the Raja had been in the habit of realising various kinds of unauthorised taxes, ruled out any drastic action against the Raja out of fear that that would give a fillip to the peasant movement. However, the report warned the Raja "to understand his tenants, to help them in their difficulties and to enlist their affection... in particular to try and see the signs of time". The report instructed the Raja to stop realisation of inestate tax and Bengal/Rangoon tax and to forbid his Amlas to realise illegal exactions.
On 16 June, the tenants approached the Raja and requested him to give up the exactions of Salami realised annually and not to "get Kabuliyats executed afresh annually from those tenants whom he had allowed to cultivate his Nijhas lands". This was refused by the Raja following which the tenants held out threats against the Raja.

In August, Girija Bhusan Dutta (MLA) toured extensively the rural pockets of Anugul in May/June (1937) and attacked the system of bethi prevalent in Anugul in the form of making people work for Government sponsored activities. He exhorted the peasants to withhold labour from the Government sponsored construction of village roads, co-operative grain golas, etc.\(^{35}\) He was of the opinion that Anugul being a partially excluded area, the Governor was responsible for the whole cost of such work and Government should meet the cost by curtailment of expenditure an army or civil services. He undertook a consistent campaign for the repeal of the notorious Anugul Laws Regulation, which legitimised the practice of bethi. Biswanath Das also advocated a reduction in the rate of interest charged by the Co-operative Bank.

In a meeting at Poktunga (Anugul), Dutta stressed the need to form Kisan Sabha units in every village so as to step up the rent-reduction campaign, along with the demand for the abolition of Anugul regulation. This campaign in Anugul resulted in peasants refusing rent and at times disrupting 'court processes'.\(^{36}\) In Kendrapara, Patkura and Tirtol (Cuttack) peasants were organised under the leadership of Jadumani Mangaraj, Loknath Mishra and Dadhibaman Das/Srihari Biswal respectively. The tenants of Pandua estate of Tirtol

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35. *HPD, FNR, Cuttack, 10.4.37, 25.5.37/10.6.37, ACC-625; Board of Revenue Records, Report of Anugul S.D.O. to Cuttack Collector, 7.6.37, Sl.No.162; HPD, FNR, Cuttack, 10.4.37, ACC-625.*

after resolving in a meeting to approach the authorities, submitted a petition demanding remission of rent and suspension of realisation of dues of Co-operative Societies. So also in the peasant meeting at Agahat, Choudwar (7 April), Rajkrushna Bose severely condemned the demand of Salami and fees from the peasants on festivals and other occasions by the zamindar of Dalijora estate. The action of the Mandal estate in clamping prosecution against tenants on charges of timber cutting was also condemned.37

The Cuttack District Krushak Conference was held at Anakhia, Gobindapur on 30 April. Malati Choudhury presided over the meeting. She made it very clear that Utkal Krishak Sangha must always remain a 'separate body' and should on no account be subordinated to the Congress, which she pointed out was basically composed of "landed elements and capitalists". She was critical of Nilakantha Das, who advocated the policy of merging the Kisan Sangha with Congress. In her speech, she observed that if at any time, a revolutionary change was to be introduced, the initiative must come from "peasants with hungry stomach". She, too, emphasised the need to build strong class organisations. The other speaker, Goura Chandra Das in contrast, held that Congress and Kisan Sabha stood for one another though these were two different organisations. He went on to add that miseries of the peasants would not be redressed without a change in the present system of administration and therefore, peasants should side with the Congress. The meeting passed a resolution which stated that peasants must continue their class struggle unitedly with other oppressed classes and try to strengthen the Congress to enable it to continue the struggle for 'political freedom'.38

37. *HPD, FNR, Cuttack*, 24.5.37.
In Ghumsur (Koraput) 300 peasants coming from 30 villages got together in a meeting under the leadership of Nilakantha Patra and Radha Krushna Biswas Ray (MLA). The meeting condemned the exactions of Jeypore Estate officials. The Collector of Koraput was asked to take note of "feudal levies like belhi, gadam, mamall and rasad" and take steps to prevent them. The meeting also condemned the action of the estate, which had issued notices of suits for arrears of rent against the ryots who had refused to do bethi and begar.39

The Puri District Peasant Conference, held at Balanga on 17 April, was attended by nearly 2,000 peasants who came from different rural pockets of the district. The conference was opened with chasi gita (songs of the peasants) which focused on the plight of the peasantry. The conference put forward advocated demands like (a) remission of land revenue at the rate of Re.0-8-0 per rupee, (b) stopping of illegal exactions. The peasants were exhorted not to pay rent to zamindars/mahajan without obtaining rent receipts and to boycott zamindar's kutchery for arbitration of any disputes in the village. So also, peasants were asked to organise primary Krushak Sangha in every village.40

The tenants of Kanika estate got organisationally structured with the formation of Praja Satwa Rakhya Sangha (association for the protection of tenants rights). The Sangha collected funds to fight suits levelled by the Raja against the tenants. Here, Chakradhar Behera (Congress MLA) spearheaded the movement.41 Towards the end of April, encouraged by Kisan meetings in the interiors of Srijanga, Rasalpur, and Kaida, nearly 50 tenants from the estate of

39. The Samaja, 30.4.37.
40. HPD, FNR, Puri, 24.4.37, ACC-629.
41. HPD, FNR, Balasore, 24.4.37, 9.5.37, ACC-630.
Radha Prasanna Das, met the Collector and alleged that the zamindar had refused to give them rent-receipts. They demanded a solution to the issue by the Collector. In fact, there was a virtual identification of Congress activity with those of Krushak Sangha activities in the whole district of Balasore and Krushak Sangha meetings got organised from Congress platforms. The Congress leadership in these meetings stressed on the fact that Krushak movement was by no means divorced from Congress Party's programme. In Sambalpur, extensive campaign was taken up for the Krushak Conference of 9/10 May under the initiatives of L.N. Mishra, B.N. Joshi and Nityananda Bohidar. They appealed to the peasants in the rural areas to enrol as Congress members. Reviewing the trend of Kisan Sabha activities, the Chief Secretary Mansfield observed that: "Congress has completely absorbed the Kisan movement, controlling all its activities". Thus, PCC sought to forge linkage with the peasantry and broadened its social basis in many new areas of the province. It also remained critical of the claims by Krushak Sanghas to be considered as separate units away from the Congress.

By May, we come across several instances of Congress sponsored enquiry committees to probe the oppression of the landlords, officials and police. In certain cases, individual Congress members also conducted such enquiries. For instance, an enquiry committee were formed in Rajnagar and Pattamundai. In the former case, the circle officer of Kanika and in the latter the manager of Utikan harassed the tenants for their pro-Congress attitude. Similarly, Jaduma-

42. Ibid., 9.5.37.
43. Ibid., 21.5.37.
44. HPD, FNR, SBP, 8.4.37/24.4.37.
ni Mangaraj petitioned the Ministry regarding the violence perpetrated by the officials of Aul estate on the peasants at Derabis hat where they had gathered for a 'Krushak Sabha' meeting. Upon Mangaraj's petition, an enquiry was conducted by the authorities.46 In Chandaka estate, a 12 member enquiry committee was formed to list peasant grievances and report the same to the 'council' of the estate.47 This trend was also evident in Jeypore estate. For instance, R.K. Biswas Roy (MLA) toured the district to enquire into popular grievances of tribals concerning use of forests. The tour of Biswas Ray in fact encouraged the tribals who took to the activities of tree-felling from the reserved forests. Again, nearly 5,000 tribals under the leadership of Biswas Ray met the Collector and complained about the "auctioning of fishing rights in tanks and the produce of mango groves on communal land". The other illegalities of bethi, rasad, abwab and plough tax were also focused. There was also protest against the corruption of the subordination officials of the estate. In response, the Maharaja of Jeypore undertook a tour in Rayagada, Bissemcuttack and Kalyansinghpur and offered a minor concession to the tenants in the shape of "postponement of dates of kists."48

In Khaira, allegations were made against local police for obstructing the organisation of a Congress meeting. The police had threatened the tenants not to attend the meeting and a local Congress activist had been slapped with a police case for "organising the meeting". An enquiry committee

46. HPD, Petition by J. Mangaraj (26.5.37) to Law and Order Minister. Also, the report of enquiry (ACC-835). Board of Revenue Records, Letter of Mansfield (Chief Secy) to D.M., 29.5.37, Sl.No.163.

47. HPD, OPAI, Vol.II, 3.6.37, No.21, p.82.

48. The Samaja, 1.6.37; HPD, Collector's Report, Koraput, 8.5.37/9.6.37, ACC-678.
sponsored by Balasore DCC and comprising Nanda Kishore Das (MLA), Madhusudan Mohanty and Krishna Prasad Mohanty was formed to probe the allegation.49

The peasants of Jarada (Anugul) severely resented the action by the *chaparasi* of the S.D.O. when the latter 'rebuked and insulted' the tenants for bringing 5 cartloads of woods instead of 8 cartloads required under S.D.O.'s *parwana*.50 They also protested against the compulsion used by the officials to make them supply cartload of wood at the 'Government rate' of 3 annas in contrast to the market rate of 12 annas. The privilege enjoyed by the officials thus came to be questioned at popular plane. The nationalist newspaper like the Samaja demanded an enquiry into the practice of *bethi* in Anugul. As noted earlier, G.B. Dutt had taken up the campaign questioning the legitimacy of "Anugul Laws". When *bethi* was procured in connection with Governor's visit to Anugul, Dutt demanded the immediate payment of the outstanding wages to the people and made it an issue. Due to his massive efforts, seven branches of Krushak Sanghas came to function in Anugul Sub-division. Surendranath Dwivedi (Secretary, All Utkal Krushak Sangha) undertook a campaign in these centres explaining the objectives of *Krushak Sangha*.

In Puri, a peasants association called "Loka Sabha"51 (Peoples Association) was formed which intended to "appeal to zamindars for redressal of the just grievances of the peasants". Mrs. Sarla Devi, Lingaraj Mishra and Sadhu Charan Das took up the initiative in organising the Sabha. In a meeting of the Sabha (Delanga hat of May) the minimum demands of *Krushak Sangha* were declared to be the demands of

49. *HPD*, OPAI, Vol.II, 27.5.37, No.19, p.73, ACC-622.


the "Loka Sabha" also. On 22 May, a village level peasant meeting held at Gramdihi (Chandaka) set up a 12 member committee to formulate the grievances of the peasants for submission to the Council.52

After almost a month-long mobilisation of peasants in Sambalpur, a Kisan Conference was inaugurated on 10 May in Jharsuguda.53 The conference advocated the remission of rent, relaxation of forest restrictions, abolition of abwabs and a cut in the salaries of officials and police. Mahatab, Biswanath Das, L.N. Mishra, Bodhram Dube, Prahalad Rai Lath, B.M. Joshi and Rabishankar Shukla (from Raipur) addressed the peasants. The conference was conspicuous by the participation of low caste Gandas.

In May, the Ganjam Ryots Association elected Biswanath Das as President to study the conditions of the peasants in most parts of the Ganjam zamindaris.54 The Pattamundai Peasants Conference (14 May), presided over by the socialist Nabakrushna Choudhury was attended by 3,000 peasants.55 Nilakantha Das in a meeting (Mukundapur, Balasore, 18 May) blamed colonialism for the poverty of the people and also attacked landlords for their illegal exactions on tenants.56 In a peasant meeting at Fuljharia (Balasore), Nanda Kishore Das attacked the Congress Zamindars who were "still realising illegal taxes from the tenants in spite of their profession". This was in a way a veiled attack on Mahatab.57

52. Ibid., 3.6.37.
53. HPD, FNR, SBP, 8.5.37/23.5.37, ACC-627.
54. HPD, Report of Chief Secretary, 29.5.37, ACC-631.
55. WWCC, ACC-37, OPAI, Vol.II, No.19, 17.5.37, p.75.
56. HPD, OPAI, Vol.II, No.20, 24.5.37, p.77; HPD, DM to C.S., 23.6.37, ACC-712.
57. HPD, FNR, Balasore, 9.6.37, ACC-630.
In the context of peasant movement, the month of June 1937 was crucial in so far as the difference of perception between the PCC and Krushak Sangha vis-a-vis peasant questions assumed a sharper focus. We can examine this aspect by looking into the proceedings of Puri District Political Conference (5/6 June) and Banpur Peasants Conference (15 June). In the District political conference held at Chandanpur, Malati Devi (socialist) advocated a separate identity for Krushak Sangha while working within the framework of broad anti-imperialist front of the Congress. In contrast, Nilakantha Das (representing the moderate nationalist/right wing trend of PCC) talked of "watchful supervision" of the peasant movement under Congress banner and rejected any claim for separate organisation of Krushakas away from Congress. The DM's report on the position of Nilakantha Das observed: "the party of Nilakantha Das which contains some landholders is apprehensive that if the Krushak Sangha was not kept under their watchful supervision, the peasant movement might get out of control to the detriment of all the property owning classes." The differences led to the boycott of the Conference by the Socialists. 58

The Banpur Peasants Conference 59 (15 June) was attended by 1500 peasants. Presided over by Mahatab, the conference was addressed by Rajkrushna Bose, Lingaraj Mishra and Godabarisha Mishra. Bose explained the objective of the peasant movement as "of helping the Congress in the attainment of swaraj". Appealing to the audience to form peasant association in every village, he justified the formation of separate peasant organisation away from Congress stating that the former was exclusively confined to guard peasants interests and to redress their sufferings whereas the latter was

58. *HPD*, FNR, Puri, 9.5.37, ACC-629; and *HPD*, OPAI, Vol.II, 10.6.37, No.22, p.86.

basically an all-class organisation which meant to achieve political freedom of the country. Mahatab also stressed on the need for separate identity for peasant organisation as it would "enlighten the peasants about their demands". He ruled out the possibility that the cause of Congress would be hampered by such separate organisation. He vehemently criticised the attempts by the section of Congress leadership like (Nilakantha Das and others) to merge the Krushak Sangha under Congress banner and described such attempts as dictated by vested interests to enjoy certain privileges.

The attempt by the Police Sub-Inspector and a Jamadar in Balasore to rape the daughter of one Phali Jena (18 August), sparked off strong resistance by the people of the locality.

The police was severely assaulted. The local Congress activists took up the issue vigorously. A case was lodged by Phali Jena against the concerned sub-inspector. This resulted in a departmental enquiry. Dissatisfied with this, Phali filed a petition before the Government with the conviction that every matter be reported to the "Government" directly and the latter would send it to the district authority for impartial enquiry and report. Thus, in popular perception "Congress Government" emerged as the "saviour" which dispensed impartial justice. Following the incident, the anti-police feelings ran high in the district. Mahatab, who intervened over the issue, observed in a press release:

"...It is imperative that they (the police) should become servants of public and not their masters.... The hope is entertained that the mentality of police officers would change as a result of especially the Congress accepting Ministry but the present police rule of Balasore gives little indication of the regard for Departmental rules.... But the people should be fearless. They should see if they have got any power under the constitutional reforms. There would be no oppression if the people be brave."  

The PCC leadership as well as the local leaders organised various meetings focusing on the incident. On public de-


mand, an enquiry into the incident was conducted by the I.G. police. The popular mood against police was so hostile that the leadership had to explain to the people on the meetings that "henceforth the police would behave like servants of public and the people should also co-operate with them in detecting crimes and maintaining peace and order". 62

In Kanika estate, under the initiative of Chakradhar Behera (MLA), in May, the tenants forcibly rescued the cattle impounded by Raja's servants. Subscriptions were raised from the tenants to fight out civil suits lodged by the Raja against the tenants. The tenants also protested against the Raja's attempt to encroach on public land by making it reserved land of the estate. The relation between the tenants and the Raja's party got strained and both parties imposed social boycott, litigation and excommunication on each other. Further, the decision of the Congress to accept office emboldened the resolve of the tenants. 63

The Kisan meetings held in the rural areas of Balikuda (Cuttack), Parikuda estate and Paitra (Puri district), and Olang (Balasore) during June, exhorted the peasants to resist zamindars' oppression and to demand remission of rent. They also asked peasants to enlist themselves as Congress activists. 64 In the meeting of Chhatrapur Ryots Association (Berhampur: 16 June), Dibakar Patnaik advised the peasants to "help the Congress to get Swaraj". He also explained that Congress Party was identical with Ryots party and was always working for the benefit of the latter. Biswanath Das talked of remission of land tax as had been done in Madras. Peasants were advised to "form taluk and firka association" and were promised that "Congress would

63. HPD, PNR, BIS, 9.5.37, ACC-630.
help them" in this regard.

IV. CONGRESS MINISTRY AND THE VOICE OF POPULAR PROTEST

The PCC under the leadership of Biswanath Das decided to form Ministry. The Ministry took office on 19 July after the resignation of the Interim Ministry (installed on 1st April) under the Raja of Parlakhemundi. This shift in political development considerably heightened the popular belief in the emancipation of peasantry in terms of rent reduction, increase in the rights of the peasants and a cut in the powers and privileges enjoyed by zamindars and landed arisocracy. This perception further derived legitimacy when Biswanath Das in a public meeting at Puri assured the gathering that Ministry would strive its best to realise its pro-peasant commitment.

In the changed context, the emboldened leadership strove hard to organise the peasantry and the tribals. For instance, we have a reference to the suggestion for appointing 'Gandhi Gumasthas' for every 25 villages to whom the villagers could report their grievances in Jeypore estate. In Sukinda estate, prominent local activist Phani Pal organised the 'Munda Ho' tribals. On one occasion, five tribals assaulted one Ratan Munda, who provided straw and bamboo to the Sukinda proprietor in return for forest produce. They demanded 'Rs.16/-' from Ratan Munda but released him when he paid only 'Rs.2/-' to Phani Pal. Girija Bhusan Dutta in a meeting (Baurpal hat, Anugul, 13 July) asked the people to

65. Ibid., 24.6.37.
66. WWCC, ACC No.34, p.71.
67. WWCC, ACC No.34, p.74.
68. HPD, F.No.7/37, Dt.10.7.37, ACC-628.
69. HPD, DM's Report, 10.7.37, ACC-786.
take "wood from the forest tree" and to shed fears of 'police and chaukidars'. He also pointed out that 'police and chaukidars' were paid by the tenants. On 10 July, a group of harijans of Kangula and Poktunga "invaded the courtyard of the Jagannath temple" at Bantla (Purnagarh: Anugul). These people "waved Congress flags, sang nationalist songs" and attempted to march inside the temple premises disregarding the police cordon arranged in connection with the car-festival. However, they were held away from the police cordon. This indicates the assertion of 'low castes' to participate in the 'high caste' religion - a notion immediately springing up in the context of Congress Ministry. In other words, the ushering in of a 'New Age' where caste taboos were challenged coincided with the installation of Congress Ministry. In Kanika estate, peasant resistance since the election, led to every village getting divided into Raja and tenants party. Similarly, in meetings organised in rural pockets of Ganjam during July, peasants were exhorted 'not to pay rent' to the zamindars.

With the formation of Congress Ministry, the position of Congress socialists was one of pressurising the Ministry to realise the commitment made to the peasants during the election. Malati Choudhury (Secretary, Provincial Krushak Sangha) in a press release explained the position:

> "Congress got this power as peasants in large numbers voted for it. As a matter of fact, the peasants and people in general have got this power. Now it is your (peasants) duty to see how this power can be made effective.... The police will work under the Congressmen whom they (Police) arrested and put into jail. They are no longer Hakims, they are serv-


71. Ibid.


73. HPD, FNR, Ganjam of 9.7.37, ACC-626.

Reminding the Ministry, she added:

*Previously, ...claims have been made specially for reduction of rent, water rates, debts and amendment of tenancy laws to vest proprietary rights in the land.... Congress Ministers and Congress Party must carry out their programmes in the Legislative Assembly to realise such promises to the people. But nothing can be done if peasants do not represent their claims still more firmly. So, by holding meetings in every village claims should be put forward for the redress of the urgent wants and grievances. The present is the most opportune moment. There is no reason to fear the zamindars, Mahajans, moneylenders, police or officials now. Because, the strength of the Government or its machinery is no longer behind them. It has now come into the hands of people though not in full measure.... If the peasants protest, they will not have the coverage to oppress.*

She went on to advise the "peasants of different districts to take advantage of the opportunity by holding meetings and sending copies of the resolution to the Revenue Minister and office of the Provincial peasants association" and also asked the Ministry to take steps to explain the peasants in general about the doings of Ministry in the 'Assembly' and to make the peasants "conscious of their political and economic rights". She also appealed to the peasants to come to Cuttack in large numbers to lay their grievances before the Ministry and "demand redressal without delay" on the occasion of celebration of Kisan Day on 1st September.

In the immediate context of flood ravaging the coastal tract, the peasant meetings during the month of August invariably voiced the demands for remission of land revenue and relief to the flood victims. The tension between the Raja and the tenants in Kanika estate persisted. The District Magistrate as a result, undertook a tour of the estate and advised the Raja to negotiate with the tenants over the popular demands. But the Raja refused to do it. The Utkal Kisan Sangha geared up its preparations for the celebration of 'Kisan Day' on 1 September. The Socialists saw

75. *HPD, FNR, Puri, 24.8.37, ACC-629.*
76. *HPD, FNR, Cuttack, 14.7.37/14.8.37, ACC-631.*
in it an opportunity to demonstrate the strength of Krushak Sangha vis-a-vis the Congress Ministry. They planned to have a huge demonstration of peasants at Cuttack on that day. As Puri was ravaged badly by flood, peasants of Puri were advised not to join the demonstration in Cuttack but to organise the Kisan Day in their respective rural pockets. Gatikrushna Swain (Puri), Gour Chandra Das (Balasore) and Manjari Devi (Puri, wife of Pranath Patnaik) were kept in charge of sending peasants in large numbers to join the demonstration at Cuttack.

On 1st September, nearly 10 thousands peasants marched in a procession to Municipal Office compound carrying placards bearing inscriptions "abolition of Zamindari system" and "Reduction of rent by 50%" and presented their charter of demands to the Ministers. Gouranga Charan Das submitted an address containing the list of demands of peasants, such as abolition of Zamindari system, reduction of land revenue to half, amendment of Tenancy Laws and permanent relief from flood, as recommended by the provincial peasant conference, to the Chief Minister.

Kisan Day was also celebrated in many rural parts of the province with the usual set of Krushak Sangha resolutions being passed in the meetings. The Kisan meeting under the presidency of Basudeb Panda held at Eram (Balasore) on 1st September was attended by nearly 1,000 peasants. The meeting unanimously adopted certain resolutions for submission to the Minister of Law and Order. Few of the resolutions were: (a) material reduction in the present scale of land revenue to compensate the low price of food grains; (b) stopping of payment of mutation fees and salami and amend-


78. HPD, FNR, 18.8.37; HPD, OPAI, Vol.II, No.34, 10.9.37, ACC-622.
ment of Tenancy Act in favour of the tenants; (c) no zamindar should realise any subscription; (d) permanent remedy against floods by the government; (e) village touts to be kept under check; (f) no moneylender should get a decree for any amount in which the interest would be more than the capital and in executing decrees, no household articles such as utensils should be attached and sold; (g) in cases, in which the interest paid to the co-operative bank has overlapped the capital, the debtor should be exempted from the payment of outstanding dues; (h) 'Debottar Law' should be amended so as to compel the priests and mohunts to make proper use of deboltar property. The meeting at Baliapal (Balasore) also highlighted the demands of above nature.79

In the context of Congress assuming office, the trend of refusal of rent assumed sharper focus around September, in many parts of the province. In a meeting at Patrapur (Ganjam), Govinda Chandra Mishra (Secretary, Ganjam DCC) advised the peasants to "withhold payment of rent" in view of the new settlement effected in Surangi and Jarada estates. He in fact, toured the zamindari tracts and mobilised the peasants against the new settlement. In one instance, the tenants assaulted the Revenue Inspector of Jarada estate. In connection with the issue the official report pointed out that under the 'cloak of Congress propaganda', campaign for refusal of rent was being encouraged.80

The continuous campaign for the scrapping of Anugul Laws Regulation resulted in a discussion over the issue in the Assembly and Government promised to ensure payments against the rendering of compulsory labour in Anugul.81 Similarly, under the pressure of anti-Raja mobilisation the Raja in

79. HPD, OPAI, No.34, 10.9.37 (UN No.37).
80. HPD, Ganjam, 23.9.37.
81. HPD, FNR, Cuttack, 30.9.37, ACC-631.
Kanika adopted a conciliatory approach and announced certain concessions to his tenants on 1 October. The concessions included: 82 (a) reduction of process fee in mutation cases from -/8/- to -/4/-; (b) reduction in the price of printed forms -/2/- to -/1/-; (c) free use of waste lands by tenants for making threshing floors with the permission of the Estate; (d) free use of jungle produce on the eastern side of river Matai; (e) construction of level crossing on estate roads for the convenience of the villagers and their cattle with the permission of the Raja; (f) remission of 25% rent lying in arrears prior to 1930; (g) recognition of the right of tenants on trees on their holdings and the right of excavating tanks on their lands without permission; (h) resettlement of Nijhchas lands purchased by the estate in certificate sales with original tenants on payment of salami and subject to enhancement of rent at -/1/- per rupee. A meeting of 1,000 tenants organised in Chandabali to review the package offered by the Raja as well as to greet the leader of the tenants, Chakradhar Behera however, dubbed the concessions granted by the Raja as inadequate. Chakradhar Behera advised the peasants "not to be carried away by the concessions of the Raja but to wait till substantial concessions, of material advantage" flowed from the Assembly. 83 Meanwhile, the Raja of Kanika had resigned from his membership in the Legislative Assembly following criticism mounted against his Zamindari in the Assembly. 84

In Kotpad (Koraput), the tribals opposed the attempt to form 'Kotpad Union' by the Government. There had been a

82. HPD, F.No.183/1937, Report of D.M. (Balasore), 25.11.37 and S.P.'s weekly Confidential Diary, 22.10.37, ACC-797.
83. Ibid., Report of S.P., 10.11.37, ACC-797.
84. The Desakatha, 30.9.37.
campaign against the move right since July on the ground that such an institution meant 'new taxation'. In September, "Congressmen" assaulted a member of the Kotpad Union Board. This was followed by an "assault against the police" who were deputed to investigate the above case. In fact, the DCC leadership including Biswas Ray took a keen interest in the anti-police campaign. 85 An interesting feature, noticed in different peasant meetings, was that the peasants were advised to give up "ill feelings" towards the police. For instance, in a peasant meeting at Darpan estate (25 September), it was pointed out that, "the police, the magistracy, education and revenue are now under the tenants control and that the police will no longer harrass them and should they (tenants) ill-treat the police, Congress would send them to jail". Besides, the police, C.I.D. reporter at the commencement of the meeting was garlanded. Similar feelings were expressed towards police in a Tirtol peasant meeting. The audience was advised to give up "ill feelings" towards the police as "police were their friends, brothers". 86 Complaints and assault against police remained a significant trend in 1937. The incidents at Dudpal, Balasore town, and Kotpad, as pointed out earlier in a way, largely occurred in the overall context of the Congress Ministry coming to power. Besides, the Congress sponsored enquiry committees to probe into police excesses and the campaign by the leadership as well as the press against the police helped to generate popular defiance of the so-called


86. *HPD*, FNR, Cuttack, 13.10.37, ACC-631.

authority. It is in this context that the leadership of both PCC and Krushak Sangha advised the peasants to give up violence against the police.\textsuperscript{87}

In a peasant meeting at Darpan estate (25 September) resolutions an abolition of zamindari system, forced labour, recognition of peasant rights over land, trees, forests and a system of payment by the co-sharers at the time of fixing separate records of rights were passed. The meeting also expressed no confidence against Madhupur Zamindar for his oppression on people, who had elected him.\textsuperscript{88} Laxmi Naryan Mishra in a peasant meeting at Bheuria (Padampur, Sambalpur) on 20 September exhorted the audience to press before the Ministers the following proposals which were approved by the meeting: (a) to appoint one Baban Sahu (a local Congress activist) as Honorary Magistrate in place of Raja of Borasambar who was harassing the people as the latter did not vote for the Raja in the last election; (b) to compel the Raja to allow tenants to collect fuel from the Raja's jungle.\textsuperscript{89} In yet another meeting at Padampur, L.N. Mishra stressed the abolition of Tehwari Chanda (subscription) demanded by the Raja.\textsuperscript{90} Ghanshyam Panigrahi in a peasant meeting at Remenda (Sambalpur) asked the audience to form Kisan Sabhas in every village and enrol as Congress members. Besides, resolutions relating to revenue reduction to 50%, tenants rights over land as enjoined for coastal districts by the Tenancy Act, 75% reduction of arrears of land revenue, peoples rights over forests, abolition of excise shops and placing Sambalpur at par with coastal districts adminis-
The leaders in Sambalpur regularly toured the interiors, holding peasant meetings as well as enrolling Congress members.\(^9\) The Kol (tribals) tenants of Sukinda cut down large numbers of sal trees in Sukinda estate forests to clear lands for cultivation. Phani Pal, who had been active here since August, provided the impulse for these actions of the kol tenants. Pal was subsequently fined Rs.100/- for his involvement and preaching among the Kols. The fine seems to have been raised through subscriptions collected from the Kols.\(^2\) The developments in Sukinda drew the attention of the Ministry and Biswanath Das promised to undertake a "probe into the grievances of the tenants personally". So also, others like Mahatab, Dwarika Nath Das and Sadhu Charan Das also intervened.\(^3\) In October, the peasants in the estates of Jarada and Khallikote (Ganjam) resisted the attempts at revenue collection. The resistance emerged in the context of the Legislative Bill to amend Estates Land Act. In a peasant meeting at Khallikote, Dibakar Patnaik observed: "Government servants who are really the servants of the people can be trampled down". He cited the example of United Provinces where a tenant killed a zamindar and then surrendered before the police.\(^4\) The Legislative Bill on the Estates though primarily meant for the Zamindari tracts, also fuelled popular hopes of the people in ryotwari areas. In connection with the Bill, Biswanath Das undertook a tour of Ganjam district (9-13 October) and explained to the peasants in meetings the objectives of the bill. Despite the opposition to the bill,

\(^9\) Ibid.

\(^2\) HPD, Abstract of OPAI, 14.10.37, No.38, ACC-UN No.37.

\(^3\) HPD, 25.10.37, FNR, Cuttack, ACC-786.

\(^4\) HPD, FNR, Ganjam, 11.10.37, 24.10.37, ACC-626.
which he expected from the zamindars, he assured the peasants that the bill would be through by December. Peasants in a meeting at Bodokhimedi, Chinna Khimedi estates complained to the P.M. regarding police excesses and certain feudal levies like bethi, supply of rations, etc. Das, conducting a 'searching enquiry' into such popular allegations instructed that the due payment for compulsory labour and supply of rations should be made. He also ordered enquiry into specific allegations against police and subordinate officials.95

In the Bargarh Political Conference (Bheuria, 11 October), B.M. Joshi who presided, observed that the "police and other Government officials who were harrassing the Congress people, were now the golams of the Congress."96 The conference was organised in Padampur area as a move against the zamindar of Borasambar in order to mobilise the tenants against the zamindar. The Bardoli example was cited (tenants killing the zamindar) to impress upon the tenants that the zamindar was a slave of the tenants. Moving a resolution, Kailash Chandra Dubey (brother of the Minister, Bodhram Dubey) remarked: "Ministers have promised that the zamindars of Borasambar should no longer be allowed to exercise the powers of a Magistrate". He went on to appeal to the audience that they should "strengthen Congress" so as to 'fight the zamindar'.97 In the peasant meetings at Badaghar, Ipping and Dabardhu (Bolgarh, Puri) during October, the leadership explained to the people the work being attempted by the Ministry in the Legislature.98 Besides, the

95. Ibid.

96. HPD, FNR, SBP, 23.10.37, ACC-627.

97. HPD, FNR, SBP, 23.10.37, ACC-627.

98. HPD, FNR, Puri, 9.10.37/24.10.37, ACC-629.
attention of the Ministry was drawn to the problem of floods in Puri. Along with these, local issues like zulum of the Parikuda Raja as well as formation of Congress Committees at rural level and enrolment of Congress members were also highlighted. The Puri District Kisan Sangha passed resolutions on 29 October, covering "appointment of a committee to probe into alleged zulum of zamindars and another committee to enquire into the 'undesirable conduct' of Ministers towards the flood-affected tenants of Gop and Khurda."  

In a meeting at Patkura villagers (11 October), it was decided to form village and central committees which should report against the police. Loknath Mishra (MLA) advised the peasants to move Government for the abolition of certificate powers granted to the zamindars and not to pay unreasonable dues to them. At Balipatna, certain 'Congress' activists destroyed a plantain garden of one Chakradhar Naik of Bodhakhandi in order to punish him for his refusal to become a Congress member. So also, in Sagbaria (Tirtole), a group of Krushak Sangha activists threatened one Bansidhar Das with ostracism when the latter refused to subscribe to the Sangh. The subscription in the village was being raised for the "formation of a Krushak Sammilani". In the Kisan meeting on 21 October at Sinjola hat (Balasore), peasants were advised to hand over 'thieves and bad characters' to the Congress and the police. In Jalleswar, certain Congress activists continued to withhold payment of Chaukidari

100. HPD, FNR, Puri, 10.11.37, ACC-629.
101. HPD, Extract of OPAI, 3.11.37, UN No.37.
103. HPD, Extract of OPAI, 14.10.37, No.38, UN No.37.
In November, Phani Pal exhorted the tenants in Sukinda not to be "afraid of imprisonment" and claimed that he had "practically removed the bethi system by suffering 5 days imprisonment". Around this time, Phani Pal also joined the Congress officially. The anti-Sukinda Raj campaign mostly carried under the leadership of Phani Pal picked up. In Baragadai and Gobardhanpur, the local Congress leaders instructed the villagers to stop payments of bethi and 'illegal exactions' to the Sukinda Estate. The popular discontent building up in Sukinda forced the D.M., Cuttack to undertake a tour of the estate in November. His report on Sukinda pointed out the sordid state of affairs existing there. The report observed:

"There are large number of Ho immigrants from Singhbhum and some from Mayurbhanja and Keonjhar for whom it is difficult to obtain new land for reclamation in their old homes. During the past 30 years, they have been obtaining clearing leases on payment of Salami in Sukinda and these leases have been granted without any plan and without any regular produce for the individual cases. Complaints have been made by many tenants that they have paid salami for such leases during the past 8 years and they have had no receipts for the same nor any permission for the settlement asked for... it is quite likely that in some cases somebody has taken money irregularly from the tenants".

The report blamed the tahsildars, mustadar and proprietor of the estate as responsible for the "bad management of administration and rent collection". The above state of affairs existing in Sukinda explains as to why Phani Pal's effort at tribal mobilisation found ready response. Both Phani Pal and Dwarikanath Das (MLA) had a strong appeal for the tribals of Sukinda. At times, the rumour spread that trees cut by the tribals would be burnt, but only upon the advice of the leaders Pal and Das!

In Padampur (Sambalpur), L.N. Mishra advised the ten-

104. HPD, FNR, Balasore, 10.11.37, ACC-630.
105. HPD, Extract of OPAI, 24.11.37, No.43, ACC-786.
106. HPD, Extract of FNR, Cuttack, 10.11.37, ACC-786.
107. HPD, Extract of OPAI, No.43, 24.11.37, ACC-786.
usual license from the Raja of Borasambar and offered to lead the tenants into the Zamindar's reserved forest. However, the offer was turned down by the tenants for "fear of criminal proceedings". He also advised the peasants not to pay rent, fee, and grazing tax. Jungle cutting as well as stealing of forest products remained a marked trend during October and November. In Jeypore estate, rent refusal by tribals during November had been a fairly clear trend and there was a perceptible fall in the collection of peskash and land less which amounted to arrears of two instalments totalling Rs.34000/-. The peasant meetings in the rural tracts of Balasore during November, while advocating reduction of rent, also emphasised removal of untouchability, cultivation of cotton, manufacture of salt and boycott of foreign goods and abolition of the dowry system. The District Kisan Sangha Conference in Puri formed a committee to enquire into the "undesirable conduct of the Congress Ministers" towards the tenants of the flood-affected area. So also in a peasant meeting at Bolgarh (11 November), Purna Chandra Mohanty exhorted the audience "to destroy the Government".

The meetings in the interior focussed on anti-landlord and anti-police issues along with debating the pros and cons of the tenancy legislations initiated by the Ministry. It is interesting in this respect to examine the proceedings of

108. HPD, OPAI, Vol.II, No.43, 24.11.37, ACC-864; and HPD, FNR, SBP, 23.11.37, ACC-627.

109. HPD, FNR, Koraput, 24.11.37, ACC-628.

110. HPD, FNR, Puri, 10.11.37, ACC-629.

111. Ibid.
Patia Peasants Conference. This conference (being first of its kind in the annals of Patia (Cuttack, 6 November)) was presided over by Bhagabati Charan Panigrahi (Secretary, CSP). Nearly, 5,000 peasants attended the conference. The prominent socialists like Sachi Routray, Baidyanath Rath, Prananath Patnaik (MLA), Gouranga Charan Das (Secretary, Cuttack District Peasants Association) spoke in the conference. In his speech, Baidyanath Rath pointed out that the purpose of socialists party was to oust the capitalist Congressmen from National Congress. He also observed that people in Orissa had derived no benefit from the capitalist Congress leaders such as Nilakantha Das or H.K. Mahatab and hence the socialists party had been formed 'inside the Congress' to 'do good to the masses'. Bhagabati Panigrahi, attributed the cause of peasants sufferings to the exploitation by the capitalist-imperialist combine, as well as peasants ignorance about their real strength due to lack of organisation. He cited the example of Russian revolution, in which the masses killed the Czar. Appealing to the peasants to get organised, he observed: "If peasants are united, they would rule the country one day. Swaraj does not mean change of heirs between Englishmen and India but it means a change between capitalists and the masses".

Sachi Routrai with his vitriolic against the Ministry observed:

"British Government who were a few days ago trying to crush the Congress, have made these Congressmen ministers. These were also accepted by Congressmen who are opportunists. They were tempted and trapped like mice. They thought that they have been given too much by the British Government. The real motive behind the move is that in order to make their position safe and safeguard their interest outside India, they have given the bait of Ministry to Indians to please them and to keep them in their clutches. The zamindars and the capitalists who were inside Congress were tempted to have become Ministers. The Ministers of Orissa belong to class of Zamindars, capitalists and exploiters".

In this connection, Ananta Patnaik observed that all the three ministers of Orissa were either moneylender or zamindars and hence, it was necessary that peasants, youth and

112. HPD, Report of S.P., Cuttack, Extract from OPAI, No.41, 10.11.37, ACC-748.
worker should join the Congress in large numbers and capture it. He however, pointed out that Congress was being domi­nated and controlled by capitalists or zamindars except some "honourable exceptions like Gandhi and Nehru". The confer­ence resented the failure of the Congress Ministry in not forming an enquiry committee to enquire into the general indebtedness of the peasants. The conference voiced the following demands:

(1) reduction of rent by 50%; (2) legislation prohibiting the sale of agricultural imple­ments of the peasants; (3) legislation for realisation of interest at one anna per rupee per annum; (4) compulsory primary education; (5) realisation of rent from peasants whose income is more than Rs.50/-; (6) regulation prohibiting realisation of mutation fee; (7) abolition of indirect tax; (8) full rights of the peasants over trees etc.; (9) abolition of zamindari system; (10) cancellation of Lakhraj-Baheli right of the Patia estate as it is detrimental to the socio-economic and political progress of the people; (11) legislation prohibiting realisation of rent for at least 3 years from the lands washed away by floods and total remission of rent for the land covered with sand; (12) free grazing in Khasmahal lands; (13) postponement of realisation of arrear of rent for 3 years and remission of total rent for the year. The conference terminated with the slogan of 'Chasi Muliara Jai' (victory to peasants/workers).

In yet another peasant conference, (Mahanga, 28 Novem­ber)113 Raj Krushna Bose (Parliamentary Secretary) advised the peasants to form committees and unions which could elect their representatives to the legislature to fight for them. Citing the example of Russia where masses murdered the Czar, he however, pointed out that it was not the "intention of Congress to instigate peasants to refuse rent to the land­lords". The other speaker Krushna Chandra Naik criticised the Ministers as capitalists who would do "nothing real to benefit the labouring classes". He went on to exhort the tenants to "loot their zamindars" if they failed to obtain what they wanted. The above developments at least suggest that a distinct trend of a socialist critique of the Minis­try surfaced around this time. The 'extreme socialist' leaders basically blamed the Ministry for 'inactivity' and 'lukewarm sympathy,114 for peasants' cause

113. HPD, FNR, Cuttack, 14.12.37, ACC-631.
114. HPD, FNR, Cuttack, 14.11.37.
Kolua and Patrapur villages. In the Bodokhimedi estate the zamindar failed in his attempt to lease out a few of his villages due to the anti-zamindar campaign undertaken by a Congress activist, Tumula Krishna Murti. Similarly, the Raja of Khallikote, Athagada and Birdi estates faced problems in his attempt to lease out villages due to the campaign against the estates. In fact, the collection of miscellaneous taxes was nil by December 1937, compared to Rs.5,000/- in the preceding year. This in fact, forced the Raja to lease out his villages on reduced rent. Dibakar Patnaik (MLA) advised the Zamindars of Bodokhemedi to effect an 'amicable settlement' with the tenants of those four villages where the crop remained unreaped. The tenants insisted on villages being leased out for half the rentals, collected in the year 1936. The peasant resistance in these estates, made the zamindars concede "some concessions" to the tenants. In this context, CM issued a statement that neither he nor his party was in favour of non-payment of legal dues to the zamindars. This had a 'positive impact' on the vexed issue of leasing out the villages by the zamindar of Surangi.

In a peasant conference at Jalleswar (North Balasore, 5 December) Rajkrushna Bose, stressed on the need for peasant

115. HPD, FNR, Ganjam, 24.12.37, ACC-626.
117. Ibid.
118. HPD, FNR, Cutack, 14.12.37.
organisation and observed that Congress had entered the legislature to utilise the opportunity for the benefit of the masses and to arouse mass consciousness and to defeat and expose the errors of the present administration. Since the British Government was able to continue its administration through the help of zamindars, moneylenders and village touts, their (the Congress) object was to crush the middlemen first. But he asked the peasants to work peacefully and constitutionally. The trend of jungle cutting also surfaced in Dharmasala and Barchana areas of Madhupur estate. In Darpan estate, tenants felt emboldened to cut fuel from the jungles without the payment of fees. A meeting at Madhupur estate, attended by 500 peasants protested severely against the oppressions of the tenants by the zamindar and his officials.

RESPONSE OF THE LANDED ELEMENTS:

We can at this briefly to examine the nature of reaction by the landlord section to the massive peasant mobilisation.

On 22 September, the Orissa Landholders Association attended by 300 zamindars from different parts of Orissa met at Cuttack. The conference condemned the tenancy bills introduced in the legislature by the Ministry as expropriatory. It was also decided to broaden the association with district branches throughout the province. This view that the zamindars should resort to satyagraha 'if necessary to save their interests' was also voiced in the conference. Another meeting at Puri (26 September under the initiative

119. HPD, FNR, Cuttack, 14.12.37, ACC-631.
121. HPD, FNR, Cuttack 14.12.37, ACC-631.
122. HPD, FNR, Cuttack, 13.10.37, ACC-631.
of Mahanta Gadadhar Ramanuj Das of Emar Math also highlighted the threat to the landlords posed by of the proposed legislation.\textsuperscript{123} Again in a meeting of zamindars (10 November, Bhadrak), it was decided to organise protest of all zamindars by organising a conference and representing their grievances to the Ministry over the proposed bill on Tenancy.\textsuperscript{124}

The landholders conference held at Cuttack\textsuperscript{125} (28/29 November) under the presidency of the Raja of Dharkote, resolved to make the landlords movement broadbased and sought to establish contact with similar organisations of zamindars and landholders of other provinces in its bid to strengthen the Orissa organisation of landlords. It also hoped to make their agitation a matter of all-India importance. Two organisers were specifically appointed to tour the districts like Koraput and Balasore to instigate the tenants to demand the concessions promised to the people by the Congress in their election manifesto and also to counter the "doctrine of 'Congress Socialism' by propaganda." So also, the venues for second and third session of landholders conference were selected as Puri and Balasore. Besides, the Raja of Darbhanga was asked to preside over the session at Puri. The conference of landlords at Puri advocated a resolution in favour of 50% remission of land revenue to ensure "good relations between landlords and tenants".\textsuperscript{126}

This line was specifically adopted by the Nationalist Party (the opposition party) under its leader Moulavi Lahtur Rahman (MLA) who advocated moves in the Assembly proposals

\textsuperscript{123} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{124} HPD, FNR, 10.11.37, ACC-630.
\textsuperscript{125} HPD, Misc. Report from C.I.D., F.No.292 of 1937, Dt.10.12.37, ACC-760.
\textsuperscript{126} HPD, FNR, Cuttack, (29.12.37), FNR, Puri (24.11.37).
such as 25% reduction of land revenue, total abolition of choukidari tax and abolition of mutation fee in Government estates. The logic was that if the resolutions were defeated by the majority Congress party in the Assembly, the Nationalist party would expose the impracticability of the Congress election manifesto.

V. 1938: THE PEAK OF POPULAR STRUGGLE:
CONTEXT AND PATTERN OF RESISTANCE

Cuttack:

The peasant association in Kujanga (formed towards end of 1936) named as '29 Village Sabha' stepped up its militant resistance around 1938. The Sabha essentially organised to conduct the election campaign of Congress, took to village welfare activities such as settling of disputes between tenants and building roads. Around September 1937, the Sabha under the 'Chief dictatorship' of Naryan Birbara Samanta, the local Congress activist, an active leader of the area during Salt Satyagraha, attempted to enforce its decisions on certain issues in the villages. For example, the Sabha pressurised the Mahajans to offer loans to the peasants when the latter refused to offer loans to peasants on the ground that old loans had not been repaid. In the context of crop-failure of 1936, paddy scarcity became acute in the area during August 1937. Around December 1937, the Sabha started to broad-base activities by enforcing certain rules such as (a) every villager employing a servant would contribute Re.1/- to the Sabha's fund; (b) each servant would continue Re.1/-; (c) in lieu of feasts at marriages and funerals, contributions would be made to the Sabha; (d) villagers whose contribution was made by others would pay Re.1/- per acre to the Sabha; (d) villagers who let out their cultivation on 'bhag' (share) would pay Re1/- per acre; (f) for every rupee of land revenue 6 pies would be paid to the

127. The Krushak, 27.1.38.
Sabha. The Sabha arranged to collect paddy from the tenants and sell it in Cuttack; charging a commission of 4 anna and 6 pies per bharana (10 maunds) from the owners towards the Sabha fund. Thus, the virtual strengthening of Sabha brought in the reaction of the Mahajans and around January 1938, a Mahajan Sabha got formed to counter the activities of the local Krushaka Sangha. The counter-propaganda of the Mahajan Sabha against the Sabha's activities led to the formation of an enquiry Committee consisting of Naba Krushna Choudhury and Gangadhar Das to probe into the complaints against the village sabha. But the committee dismissed the complaints against the sabha as malicious exaggeration, thereby giving a clean-chit to the Sabha's activities. The committee examined specific complaints against the Sabha in the form

(a) assault and looting of paddy and plantain (b) remission and reduction of debt demanded from the Mahajans and upon refusal resort to picketing and boycott of the Mahajans (c) assaulting the members of Mahajan Sabha, who attempted to meet the Raja of Burdwan (owner of Kujanga estate) to petition against the village Sabha and thus seek redressal of the atrocities by the Sabha (d) forcible seizure of hand notes, executed by the loanee from the Mahajan (e) assault against persons siding with Mahajan's cause (f) 'looting' of paddy from the Mahajans which was received by the Mahajan as repayment of loan by the villagers.

The objective of the Sabha dominantly as pointed out by the report of the enquiry committee, remained "to raise a common fund with which rent could be paid and Mahajan be paid off and paddy sold on a co-operative basis". However, the method of enforcement of Sabha's rules and decisions often took the form of vigorous boycott. Krushna Pradhan, an activist of the Mahajan Sabha was boycotted under the orders of one Bhagabat Pradhan (the President of the village sub-committee) and the boycott was withdrawn after a payment of

128. HPD, Confidential Report by the D.M., Cuttack on Agrarian situation in Tirtole, 29.3.38, ACC-1640.

129. The Krushak, 27.1.38.

130. HPD, Confidential Report by the DM on agrarian situation in Tirtol P.S., 29.3.38, ACC-1640.
Rs.200/- to the Sabha by Krushna'a uncle. Under the order of the Sabha, the accused was forcibly taken to Sabha's Committee meeting and in certain cases, the accused was assaulted.

The activities of Phani Pal got extended to other estates like Pachhikote and Madhupur beyond Sukinda around the beginning of 1938. The jungle cutting remained a noticeable trend in these pockets. So also, fish stealing from the anabadi tanks of the estate was also resorted to.\footnote{131} Pal, an ayurvedic doctor who toured the rural areas to popularise ayurvedic medicines in village meetings, ostensibly used such platforms to mobilise the peasants and tribals of the area. Pal was instrumental in the organisation of the Kisan Sabha with about 400 members at Chausathi-para (near Jenapur).\footnote{132} Pai's activities came to be fully supported by the socialist leadership. For example, Malati Devi, addressing a gathering of 4,000 peasants including the Kols of Sukinda (Pachhikote hat, 3 February) approved of the jungle-cutting activities of the Sukinda kols. She went on to observe that the Kisan Sangha was not responsible for the jungle-cutting, yet the Sangha was ready to back those who had done it since the cutting was "just".\footnote{133} In March, the kutchery house of the proprietor of Madhupur was set on fire, with the objective of burning down the papers which could have gone against the interests of the tenants.\footnote{134} In the peasant meetings in the Korai areas, tenants were asked to pay rent and chaukidari tax but to refuse illegal dues to landlords. So also, they were told that the zamindars

\footnote{131}{\textit{HPD}, Chief Secy to Minister (Home), 19.4.38, ACC-903.}  
\footnote{132}{\textit{HPD}, OPAI, No.3, 19.1.38, ACC-786.}  
\footnote{133}{\textit{HPD}, Report of S.P., Cuttack, 8.2.38, ACC-905.}  
\footnote{134}{\textit{HPD}, FNR, Cuttack, 1st half of March 1938, ACC-905.}
lacked rights over trees and fisheries. As a response to the campaign, the fish-stealing in Korai area picked up around March. For example, the villagers of Kaipada took away fish from a tank which had been leased out to a person by the proprietor. This incident followed a meeting in Kodama wherein the villagers of Kaipada had sought clarification from the speakers, Purna Chandra Singh and Nabin Behera as to whether they could take away fish from the anabadi tanks. The speakers, in return, had instructed them that they could do so even without the permission of the proprietor. Phani Pal also advised tenants to assault the Zamindar's men if they caught fish from anabadi tanks of the estate and encouraged the tenants to cultivate anabadi lands without the permission of the proprietor (meetings at Ragadi, Korai during March). He also mobilised tenants not to pay rent, which they had been paying for last 10 years, to the proprietor (Dharmasal area, during January). He also exhorted the tenants of Madhupur estate to rise against the proprietor of the estate, emulating the examples of Kols of Sukinda (Madhupur meeting, during March). In Sukinda estate, he advised the tenants (a) not to pay rent for the time being as arrears of rent would be remitted shortly, (b) not to pay any mutation fee which had already been abolished, (c) that tenants had got a share of Six anna share in the estate forest and that they might, if they wanted, without any permission and without royalty, fell and

135. HPD, FNR, Cuttack, 26 March 1938, ACC-1058; Also Refer, HPD, OPAI, Feb.-March, ACC-868.

136. HPD, Kisan Meeting at Kodama, 2.3.38, ACC-959.

137. HPD, FNR, Cuttack, 10.4.38.

138. HPD, Manager, Sukinda estate to S.D.O., Jajpur (ACC-903), Dt.1.4.38.
remove the timber, (d) that the Raja had no powers, no money to sue the tenants, so tenants need not be afraid of him, (e) that the tenants need not be afraid of jails. Pai's activities in Pachhikote encouraged peasants to demand greater share in the division of paddy, cultivated on proprietor's land on bhag system and to insist on rent receipts from the estate. The tenants of Pachhikote also boycotted the estate officials as well as others who refused to carry out the command of the Krushak Sangha. The tenants of Sukinda in May demanded the settlement of lands on which jungle was cut. The campaign by Krushak Sangha as well as popular response to it was so successful that the estate of Pachhikote reeled under the pressure of a heavy debt to the tune of Rs.150,000 around April 1938. Along with Pal, the local leadership of the area comprised of Purna Chandra Singh, Nabin Behera and Bhibisan Panda (Korai), Sashi Bhusan Das (Madhupur), Kulamani Acharya, Baldev Lal and Jaikrishna Patnaik (Jenapur). Besides, the socialist leaders Naba Krushna Choudhry, Malati Choudhry, Gouranga Das, Pranakrishna Padhary and Sarangadhar Das also backed the Krushak Sangha activities of these pockets. Pal was, however, imposed with an order under 144 Cr. P.C. on 6 April, prohibiting him to participate and make speeches in Sukinda, Korai and Dharmasal areas. He was also hospitalised following a brutal assault on him engineered by the Pachhikote estate.

140. Ibid.
141. HPD, FNR, Jan. to March, Cuttack, ACC-1058.
142. The A.B. Patrika, 9.4.38.
143. HPD, Report of S.P. on Agrarian Situation in Korai, 22.4.38, ACC-903.
towards Pal came to be severely criticised. Socialists were vocal in this regard. The attention of the Ministry was drawn to the issue and the action of Police S.I. in patronising the proprietor's atrocities condemned. The order by the S.D.O. Jajpur preventing Pal's politics in 'Sukinda, Korai, and Dharmasala' caused popular resentment. The Ministry opposed the order. In this connection, Nityananda Kanungo (Minister, Home) observed in an official note that the order of S.D.O. against Pal meant "a fundamental curtailment of civil liberties which is contrary to the settled policy of this Government." He went on to order the immediate "withdrawal of the notice without delay" as a mistake had been committed by issuing the order against Pal.

Thus an encouraged Pal again, advised the tenants to assault the zamindars in return for assault on them in a meeting at Kalkala (Barchana) on 28 April. However, finally Pal was arrested on 3 May on the pretext of his defaulting the payment of a fine of Rs.100/- in connection with a case against him pertaining to his activities in Sukinda in 1937. So also, the Krushak, the socialist mouthpiece which propagated pro-tenant cause and fuelled the peasant movement in the estates, came to be hauled up by the authorities. The Krushak Sangha meetings organised under socialist platforms condemned the false charges levelled by the police on Sangha activists. For example, Malati Devi in a meeting at (Patrajpur, Barchana 16 May) blamed the police and magistrate for helping the zamindars in instituting false cases to suppress the peasant movement. Demanding

144. *HPD, FNR, Cuttack, 10.4.38, ACC-1058.*
145. *HPD, N. Kanungo to Chief Secy, 13.4.38, ACC-903.*
146. *HPD, FNR, Cuttack, 2nd half of May 1938, ACC-1058.*
147. *HPD, FNR, Cuttack, 10.4.38, ACC-1058.*
148. *HPD, FNR, Cuttack, 11.6.38, ACC-1058.*
the withdrawal of 144 Cr. P.C. imposed on Pal, the meeting passed resolutions such as punishment of 6 months R.I. and fine of Rs.500/- against landlords collecting illegal dues and formation of an enquiry committee to probe into the oppression of zamindars in instituting false cases against tenants. The Utkal Provincial Kisan Sangha also protested strongly against the repression of the Krushak Sangha. On 2 May, the working committee of the Sangha urged the Government to conduct an impartial enquiry into popular allegations that "police and other officials were siding with zamindars and mahajans to check the Kisan movement on false grounds".149

The campaign of Kisan Sabha had in fact, scaled new heights as far as it emboldened the tenants vis-a-vis the landlords and Mahajans. For instance, when the proprietor of Madhupur estate leased a bi-weekly hat at Madhuban village to one Kalandi Rout and when the leasee attempted to collect the hat fees, the shopkeepers boycotted the hat by deserting it. They shifted to a new site 50 yards away from Madhupur estate under the jurisdiction of another estate holder, Motilal Pandit. This new hat came to be called Krushak hat and despite the ban of the S.D.O. on this new hat, the hat continued to be organised. When the landowners of the new hat was threatened with a case by the authorities, the socialist leaders like Malati Choudhry and Sargan-gadhar Das lent moral support by fully backing the stand of the villagers. Bichitrinanda Das and Birakishore Das (Advocate General) were engaged by this leaders on behalf of the new hat.150 But the peasants in Anugul under the advice of G.B. Dutta backed out on the idea of the boycott of the

149. HPD, FNR, Cuttack, 1st half of May 1938.
150. HPD, Report of S.P., Cuttack 19/21-6-38, 1/15/5-38, ACC-961.
hat in connection with their demand for abolition of the system of settlement of hat by auction. In fact, G.B. Dutta asked the people to "wait for the reconsideration of the question by the Government".\textsuperscript{151} In the face of repression by the authorities, the peasant movement in its militant version petered out by June in the hot beds of Krushak Sangha in Cuttack district.\textsuperscript{152}

We will here briefly try to locate the response of the non-socialist section of the PCC leadership to the overall peasant movement. Mahatab in a meeting (Salepur hat, 13 February) explained to the audience that the country had obtained only '4 anna swaraj' and by forming village Kisan Sanghas to support Congress, people should "now work for the remaining 12 annas". However, the meeting marked a lack of enthusiasm due to the "paucity of gains to the tenants embodied in Tenancy Bill".\textsuperscript{153} Again, Mahatab advised the tenants of Pachhikote hat (16 April) that unity among tenants was good; but combination and meetings against the proprietors was very bad. He advised the tenants to compromise their affairs with the proprietors and added that proprietors should also join the Krushak Sangha.\textsuperscript{154} Mahatab along with Bhagirathi Mahapatra took up the initiative to bring peace and unity between the landlords and tenants in the Kujanga area, following the intense phase of peasant resistance in the area. This effort resulted in withdrawal of many petitions filed by the parties over several cases pending in the court.\textsuperscript{155} So also, Nanda Kishore Das and Harihar Das (Deputy Speaker) in a meeting at Tentuliapada

\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{151} \textit{HPD, FNR, Cuttack, April, ACC-1058.}
\item \textsuperscript{152} \textit{HPD, FNR, Cuttack, 11.6.38, ACC-1058.}
\item \textsuperscript{153} \textit{HPD, FNR, Cuttack, February 1938, ACC-1058.}
\item \textsuperscript{154} \textit{HPD, FNR, Cuttack, April, 1938, ACC-1058.}
\item \textsuperscript{155} \textit{HPD, FNR, Cuttack, 11.6.38, ACC-1058.}
\end{enumerate}
which had remained an active pocket of peasant mobilisation under the banner of '29 Village Sabha' of Tirtol, appealed to the Zamindar for co-operation. 156

It is important in this respect to understand the State of PCC during this phase of intense peasant mobilisation. The crisis afflicting PCC was because of the fight for presidentship between two warring factions of Mahatab and Nilakantha Das.157 The latter with his more pro-landlord sympathies had been successful in exerting his clout in the DCCs of Puri and Ganjam. The crisis was resolved to some extent with Gopabandhu Choudhry (the committed Gandhite) being elected as the President of PCC in March. He retained an executive committee consisting of 4 members each from both Mahatab and Das's faction. However, the socialists demanded a larger share in the provincial working committee. The PCC's fifth annual session 158 was held after a gap of 9 years at Cuttack in 21-22 May. In his speech the Chairman of Reception Committee, Bhagirathi Mohapatra, referring to the formation of separate peasant organisation observed: "there is nothing to be afraid of it. It is necessary to form autonomous organisation if these supported the Congress cause. Any organisation based on non-violence would be helpful to the Congress". In his presidential note, Gopabandhu Chaudhry observed:

"now the movement had not been restricted to politics only but it had also the programme of eradicating the social, religious and economic evils. The movement is not only meant for severance of all connections with British but also to uproot the sources of all kinds of exploitation noticeable in the country".

The conference registered its resentment of the action of the Governor of Orissa in referring the Madras Estates Law Amendment Act to the Governor General and cautioned the

156. HPD, FNR, Cuttack, May 1938, ACC-1058.
158. HPD, Report of Special Branch (C.I.D.) on UPCC, 21-22 May, 1938, ACC-1679.
Governor not to repeal the mistake in case of Orissa Tenancy Amendment Bill. Seconding the resolution, Malati Devi advocated the stoppage of rent in case the bill was not passed. She also said that Congress ministers would resign and a no-tax movement on a countrywide basis be started in case of such an event. Nabakrushna Choudhry moved a resolution which stated that peasant organisations be recognised and minimum demands of peasants be fulfilled. The proceedings of the PCC's session clearly brought out the differing perceptions of the leadership vis-a-vis the peasant movement.

The views of the socialist leadership was still further spelt out in the meeting organised by the socialists in Cuttack during 3/4 June. The meeting was conspicuous for the presence of the prominent socialist of Batliwala (Bombay) and the Kisan leader Prof. Ranga. Prof. Ranga, reflecting on the state of Kisan movement, observed that he along with Biswanath Das had fought for the cause of kisans in Madras during 1923-30 and added that Das had become a disappointing moderate. He characterised the objectives of peasant movement as a fight against landlords, moneylenders and British imperialism. He also talked of 'no-tax' campaign and Civil Disobedience in case the Governor withheld the consent to the amendment of Tenancy Bills. he also threatened to make the issue of Madras Estates Land Act amendment Bill, if not approved, an all-India and a worldwide question.

The pattern of the peasant movement around June is worth-analysing. The 29 Village Sabha of Kujanga was abolished in June, and the differences between mahajans and tenants were amicably settled; cases were withdrawn mutually and aggrieved persons were compensated - thanks to the

159. HPD, FNR, Cuttack, 11.6.38, ACC-1038.
efforts of Mahatab and Bhagirathi Mohapatra. The local zamindar Purna Chandra Parija, got enrolled as a Congress member and convened peasant meeting. The meeting was attended by the erstwhile leaders of the '29 Village Sabha' including Naryan Birbara Samanta. In Jenapur peasant meeting (14 July) Biswanath Das observed that:

"Congress is a very old institution, which has allowed into its fold all sections of people high or low, rich or poor, labourers and capitalists, landlords and tenants, and kisans form the majority in it. By assuming power of Government, the responsibilities of all sections of people have increased and whenever any section of the people do or demand anything, it should be alive to its responsibilities to the province as a whole."

Objecting to the 'Kisan Slogan' about destruction of Zamindari system, he added that the system itself was not bad, though particular Zamindars might be abusing powers and privileges and that if they did so they would bring about their own destruction. He advised peasants not to withhold the rent of the landlords but urged them not to pay their illegal dues.

It is fairly clear that the advocacy of the line of conciliation between landed elements and the tenants, tried by the non-socialist section of PCC was necessitated in the context of militant position of the Krushak Sangha in the Kujanga, Sukinda, Madhupur, and Dharmasala areas of Cuttack. Phani Pal, after his release from jail again became active in Krushak Sangha activities. In the meeting at Pachikote (17 July), he advised the peasants to refuse illegal dues to the zamindars. But, a peasant from the audience protested against his advice saying that it was easy for the kisan leaders to ask the people to do illegal acts like cutting of trees, but when they (tenants) went to jail the leaders withdrew from the scene and kept aloof.

In the post-June phase, the campaign of Krushak Sangha

160. HPD, FNR, Cuttack, 25.7.38, ACC-1058.
161. HPD, FNR, Cuttack, 25.7.38, ACC-1058
162. HPD, FNR, Cuttack, 25.7.38, ACC-1058.
as well as the socialists mostly dealt with the usual demands of the Sangha. The campaign also sought to popularise the idea that from Governor down to Chaukidar, everybody be treated as servants of the people and they were bound to work according to popular wishes.\textsuperscript{163} The Krushak Sangha at Kusinga (Jagatsingpur) decided to resolve their disputes through the village panchayat.\textsuperscript{164} In the meeting organised at Burundadeipur hat (Dharmasala) to mark the celebration of Kisan Day\textsuperscript{165} on 1 September, the socialists again clearly spelt out their stance vis-a-vis Kisan Sangha and Congress Ministry. Nearly 15 to 20 thousands including peasants from Dhenkanal State attended the meeting. In his presidential address, Pranakrushna Padihary observed that though there had been no economic change in the status of the peasants in the one year since the celebration of 1937 Kisan Day, yet there had been a "new awakening" among the peasants within a year. He went on to add that:

"Today, the Santal peasants of Sukinda, peasants of Pachhikote have been gladly courting imprisonment. The peasants of Gop of Puri are at the doors of the prison. The peasants of Nilagiri States have the gun shots on their chest. Today the poor peasantry in Orissa are awakened.... Mere zamindars like Madhupur/Sukinda have no right to stand (up to them). They can be blown away.... The nation is moving fast like Punjab express. In one fine morning, you will find that the zamindars/the Government have gone. You shall then rule this country. Thus you shall have to unite and organise yourself villagewise to achieve swaraj".

Describing the Congress ministers as eunuch, he said that swaraj could not be obtained through them. He also went on to advise the peasants to organise and ask the Ministers to resign as nothing could be done by them. Again, while expressing satisfaction over the approval of Tenancy Act just before the 'Kisan Day', he pointed out that provisions contained in the Act were still insufficient and there was a need for the abolition of Zamindari system as well as mid-

\textsuperscript{163} Ibid., 25.7.38, ACC-1058.

\textsuperscript{164} HPD, FNR, Cuttack, 26.6.38, ACC-1058.

dlemen between Government and tenants. While asking peasants to emulate the example of Russian revolution, he observed that: "Within this year, the British empire shall be wiped out from the face of earth... no zamindars like Chausathipara, Sukinda, Dhenkanal... peasants/workers will be owners of this country". However, he also pointed out the need that peasants should enrol themselves as Congress members and take up non-violent fight under Congress guidance. Padihary, who was involved with other socialists in peasant mobilisation, subsequently disapproved the use of violence. Nabakrushna Choudhry made critical observation on the issue of violence/non-violence. In this connection he remarked:

"A time has come when if necessity arises and if it is not possible to us, we may not accept the advice of Gandhi, who is decidedly the only man who can claim to have brought about general consciousness amongst masses, peasants and workers, a new awakening among the people of the whole world.... Those who want to assault us, we should not assault them in return. This we have decided in consultation with Congress, considering the present political situation in the country as it would be best thing to organise ourselves peacefully".

But,

"if those who are in the habit of assaulting others, ...realising rent at the point of arms, if these people deliver lectures on non-violence, we are not prepared to hear them... as they have the right to kill us for their interest... we have also the right to kill them for our own interests..."

After the release of Phani Pal and the vigorous campaign by the Krushak Sangha and the socialist leaders, another phase of intense peasant mobilisation occurred around September. In a meeting at Andhari 166 (Korai P.S./15 September), Pal advised that each man should keep a lathi for self-protection and each village a drum to be used for rallying all the villagers to offer Satyagraha in case of oppression by the zamindars. A Taruna Sangha, a Congress affiliated youth organisation, headed by Laxmidhar Singhdeo, led a no-rent campaign in Sukinda as well as social boycott of Raja's officials and demanded the dismissal of assistant manager.167 Malati Choudhry also floated a Kisan Ashram in

166. HPD, FNR, Cuttack, 29.9.38/10.10.38, ACC-1058.
167. HPD, OPAI, No.35, 17.9.38, ACC-938; HPD, FNR, Cuttack, 29.9.38, ACC-1058.

133
October in Kulanda village (Dharmasala). We come across evidence of usual campaign over no-rent and remission of rent along with social boycott practiced against estate officials by the tenants in the estates of Balrampur, Madhubpur, Pachhikote, Sukinda and Chausathipara around September-October. The services of barber, washerman, shop-keepers were refused to the officials of the estate. Mahatab did not approve of the activities of Krushak Sangha of Jenapur and thought of having counter-propaganda against the Krushak Sangha activities. By December, Krushak Sangha of Chausathipara got into serious conflict with the zamindar for its policy of continued boycott and assault of zamindar's men. This was further followed by massive arrest of Krushak Sangha leaders. In Chhatia (Barchana P.S.) peasants were advised not to pay revenue to zamindars in view of famine. A pamphlet issued by Phani Pal in October for a peasant conference at Nadiabhanga in Sukinda (held on 1 November) called for the participation of one member per family within 120 miles of distance from the meeting spot. Attacking Samrajyabad and capitalism for the miseries of peasants, the pamphlet focused on rent reduction and wished victory to kisans and labourers. It emphasised the promotion of Kisan Sabha.

In November, Taruna Sangha which was functioning under Praja Parishad, the Congress organisation of Sukinda, broke away from it and joined the Krushak Sangha movement when the

168. HPD, FNR, Cuttack, October, ACC-1058.
169. HPD, FNR, Cuttack, 29.9.38/10.10.38, ACC-1058.
171. HPD, FNR, October, Cuttack, ACC-1058.
172. Huge Kisan Conference at Sukinda Thana, Pamphlet, Cuttack, Dt.24.10.38, ACC-1058.
latter's *Dabipatra* (Charter of demands) was not accepted. The *Dabipatra* highlighted demands like reduction of rent by 50%, abolition of *hat* tax, *padhan* system, right to timber from reserved forest, diversion of half of the net income of the zamindar for tenants welfare in education, public health and opening of industries to absorb unemployed labourers.\(^{173}\)

We can now sum up the developments in the district. After a brief lull, peasant mobilisation picked up around August mainly in the Jajpur sub-division. The Krushak Sangha and the Socialist leadership were active in the campaign. The socialist position of having a separate organisation for Krushak Sangha and its somewhat distancing from the PCC over the issue came to surface after the PCC annual conference in May. Mahatab and Padihary positioned themselves in opposition to the socialist/Krushak Sangha campaign of anti-landlordism. It is important to note that Padihary, being basically a CSPite, also distanced himself from the CSP's violent anti-landlord tirade.

The other point of import was that with their overall faith in the Congress and Gandhian ideology of non-violence, the Socialists often displayed their support to 'violent actions' by the peasants and also expressed their willingness to differ with Gandhian method of struggle. The shift became growingly noticeable in the post-May phase (after PCC's conference and Gopabandhu's takeover as the President). For instance, Naba Krushna Choudhry during 'Kisan Day' meeting at Dharmsala (earlier referred) justified the killing of landlords by the tenants by not accepting the advice of Gandhi. But, this position equally co-existed with their broad faith in the Congress and Gandhian method. For instance, in the peasants meeting at Barchana (16 May 1938) Malati Choudhry while eulogising the Marxian

\(^{173}\) *HPD*, Report of D.M. to C.S. on Sukindar affairs, 10.11.38, ACC-903.
principle for the objective of achieving a classless socie-
ty, and thus helping the peasant movement to originate,
explained to the peasants that the peasant movement in
India: "should be taken up in a non-violent way as had been
pointed out by Gandhi and Congress. Peasants and workers
should fight on the principles of it and not with arms and
ammunition. Similarly, Pranakrushna Padihary, exhorting the
peasants to emulate the example of Russian revolution also
advised them to take up a non-violent fight under Congress
guidance."174

Along with the above trend, co-existed the PCC's over-
all efforts at promotion of class harmony, as pointed out
earlier in the positions of Mahatab and Biswanath Das. But,
it is significant that this leadership was more responsive
to the socialist campaign than the rightist bloc led by
Nilakantha Das. However, with the presidency of PCC resting
with Gopabandhu Choudhry, the PCC's overall exercise re-
mained in terms of raising the 'mass-conciousness' with a
'spirit of non-violence'.

**Puri:**

The peasant movement in Puri initially got affected by
the differences between Nilakantha Das and Mahatab. Das,
hailing from Puri, had a sizeable influence on Puri DCC.
However, he came to be growingly opposed by the Socialist
forces, who tried to break away from the 'orthodox Congress
fold'. By January, Mohan Das (Nimapara), who was considered
as Nilakantha Das's protege, turned against him along with
Baiyanath Rath and Pranath Patnaik, the Socialist leaders.
Out of 27 member elected to PCC from Puri, 10 belonged to
the socialist camp.175 An apparent move by Das to form a

Conference, 21.5.38, ACC-888.*

175. *HPD, FNR, Puri, 10.1.38, ACC-1055; HPD, Report of C.S.,
15.1.38, ACC-1059.*
party within the Congress to dislodge the Congress Ministry was also not backed by the socialist group. 176

Mohan Das speaking at Puri District Kisan Conference (Jatni: 11 February) branded the older section of the Congress as capitalist and pro-Zamindar. 177 The Tangi Peasant Conference was held on 27 February. It was addressed by Naba Krushna Choudhry. In his speech, Mohan Das held the zamindars, moneylenders, Sarbarakars as well as the Government responsible for the exploitation of the people; and Prananath Patnaik observed:

"If mill hands go on strike and peasants stop paying rent, what can the Government do except to quit India... Police and Governments who are now being paid by the Government will also resign when they realise that they are not being properly paid."

Thanking the Ministry for appointing a committee to examine the forest laws, the meeting asked the people of Khurda to report their grievances to the committee for redressal. It also asked people not to pay illegal gratification and to subscribe to the Krushak newspaper. 178

In the context of starvation deaths in Brahmagiri, Gop and Kakatpur, the socialists voiced the demand for rent reduction and advocated taxation on the rich and zamindars. 179 In the peasants meetings, the leaders also focused on issues like right to salt manufacture, measures against flood. 180 During April, Mahatab toured the interiors areas of Pipli, Kakatpur, Nimapora and Gop, accompanied by the socialist leaders and addressed many peasant meetings. In these meetings, he talked about the difficulties facing the Ministers under the "exist-

176. HPD, FNR, Puri, 22.1.38, ACC-1055.
177. HPD, FNR, Puri, 25.2.38, ACC-1059.
178. HPD, Speeches of N.K. Choudhry, Pranath Patnaik etc. in Tangi Peasants Conference, F.No.73 of 1938, 27.2.38, ACC-1150.
179. HPD, FNR, Puri, 24.3.38, ACC-1055.
ing laws to do any real good to the people".181 In Benupur (Baliana P.S.) peasant meeting182 Bhagabati Panigrahi explained that socialism meant that everybody should get equal privilege whereas Congress was unwilling to go against capitalism. Prananath Patnaik advocated non-payment of taxes, if the Ministry resigned for any reason. Baidyanath Rath talked of the abolition of vested interests represented by the mahajan-zamindar-capitalist nexus. We come across a reference to the mobilisation of tenants in Balipatna by a Congress activist Krushna Chandra Mohanty around May as a result of which many cases against the Makdams were filed. The Mahantas also complained that they were forcibly offered bhog inside the local temple at Bhagabati Thakurani by the tenants.183 The local leaders like Krushna Mohanty and Kshetra Mohan Rai, advised people to carry on Satyagraha at the doors of the Ministers and officials unless flood protection measures were taken up and to demand lodging and accommodation in case their houses were washed away by flood.184

In the Banpur peasants meeting (10 June), Nilakantha Das with his typical anti-Ministry stance exhorted the audience to catch hold of the ears of the Chief Minister and question him as to why he had not taken up the question of "remission of land revenue till now". He alleged that the Chief Minister had reduced the rents in Khallikote and Athgada estates in Ganjam to serve his own self-interest as he was a rich landowner.185 The Puri District Political Conference (Bhubaneswar: 2 June) highlighted the existing local

181. HPD, FNR, Puri, 10.4.38, ACC-1055.
182. HPD, FNR, Puri, 25.5.38, ACC-1055.
183. Ibid.
184. Ibid, 10.7.38.
185. HPD, FNR, Puri, 25.6.38, ACC-1055.
problems such as flood, salt manufacture, and Khurda forest and abolition of Sarbarakari system. 186 The Prime Minister visited Khurda and addressed a peasant meeting 187 there (12 December). He was given a memorandum which contained demands like remission of enhanced land revenue. Das assured the gathering that he would take immediate action on their legitimate grievances.

**Balasore:**

In the meetings in Eram (January) and Gundripada (February) peasants were exhorted to utilise the privileges offered by the amended Tenancy Bill. So also, peasants were told that mutation fee had already been abolished. 188 During May, Malati Choudhury in a meeting (Chamargan village, Jalleswar P.S.) asked the peasants to refuse land tax in case British authorities stood against the passing of Orissa Tenancy Act to favour the zamindars. In that eventuality, she observed, Congress Ministry would resign and if an interim Ministry was set up, people should be prepared to refuse payment of land taxes. 189

The village of Ambo, bordering Korai P.S. in Cuttack, witnessed peasant mobilisation, following intense peasant struggle in Cuttack. The impact of Pachhikote Krushak Sangha activities was reflected here. The peasants of Ambo village who had attended the Kisan Sabha meetings in Korai (Cuttack) area were encouraged to form a 'Congress Committee' in the village. The Krushak Sangha activities picked up here and a pamphlet 190 issued by the socialists asked the peasants to


188. *HPD*, FNR, Balasore, 23.1.38/10.2.38, ACC-1629.

189. *HPD*, FNR, Balasore, May 1938, ACC-1679.

subscribe the socialist newspaper Krushak and explained to the people the nature and objectives of Kisan Sabha. Consequently, a Kisan Conference was organised in the village (Ambo) on 6 April. Phani Pal who was supposed to attend the meeting failed to turn up as he was assaulted on the very day at Pachhikote, as noted earlier. The meeting was conspicuous by the presence of the peasants from Keonjhar state. Gouranga Charan Das and Sargangadhar who spoke in the meeting focused on the existing grievances of the peasants in terms of road cess, bhete (present), death subscription, marriage present, lack of right over fishery and anabadi lands. This meeting signalled serious trouble for the zamindars. 191 The Kisan activists encouraged the barbers, washermen and labourers to boycott zamindar's people. They also asked people not to take lease of Nijchas land of the zamindars for cultivation. The emboldened peasants also withheld rent, forcing the Zamindar to mortgage ornaments to deposit land revenue on 28 April. Instances of stealing of fish from zamindar's tank also occurred. The peasants in Kuragola were told (by a 'Congress' activist of Korai, Purna Chandra Singh) that they were entitled to enjoy fish from the zamindari tank as well as fuel from the trees of anabadi land. The mobilisation of peasants reached such a height that the zamindar agreed to forego collections in the shape of road cess, bhete death subscription, presents for marriage in zamindar family, grazing fee and bethi. The Minister, Nityananda Kanungo in connection with the issue noted:

"...responsible officers like S.P. ought to have severely warned the Zamindars for collecting these abwabs.... Holding back rent cannot be considered as an offence under any provision of law existing at the moment. Apart from law, it is the only way by which tenants can emphasise their point of view in matters connected with management of estates... responsible officers should never presume that zamindar is such a helpless person as he claims to be." 192


192. Ibid.
This report offers an insight into the Ministry's position regarding tenants' rights and the peasant movement.

In Lakhmananath (Jalleswar) peasants took up the issue of title to the estate in the zamindari of Satyendranath Ray during May. In the peasants meetings at Remuna and Brahmamania, Goura Mohan Das explained to the villagers that zamindars were their enemies and they should join Congress. He also asked the peasants to settle their disputes among themselves and report all matter of oppression to Congress office.

Another interesting development which occurred in the district during May-June phase was the attempt at salt manufacture and sale in the market. Balasore had witnessed intense mobilisation over this issue during Salt Satyagraha. Peasant meetings over the years had stressed the demand for the formation of committees in sea-coast villages for manufacturing salt. Around May, we come across a case of violation of Salt law by carrying six maunds of contraband salt for sale. Alongside these developments, the reaction of the landlords was also forthcoming. The landlords of Bhadrak petitioned the Government "to accept revenue without any penalty or process fee" as they had been having considerable difficulties in realising rents from the tenants. Interestingly, one of the signatory to this petition was Mahatab. Mahatab who toured north Balasore in February also voiced his concern regarding the difficulties of zamindars in realising rents from the tenants. He advocated the inclusion of certain provisions in the proposed amendment of the Tenancy Act to help the collection of rent.

193. HPD, FNR, BIS, May 1938, ACC-1679.
194. HPD, FNR, BIS, February 1938, ACC-870.
195. HPD, FNR, BIS, May/June 1938, ACC-870.
196. HPD, FNR, BIS, 10.2.38, ACC-870.
197. HPD, FNR, BIS, 10.2.38, ACC-870.
Balasore in April and advised the peasants not to withhold their 'lawful' dues and disowned the responsibility of Congress in any 'no-rent' campaign.198 These efforts by the PCC leadership were attempts at seeking reconciliation between landlords and the peasants.

The estate of Kanika continued to be characterised by popular assertion of rights. For instance, the rent collection in Panchamukha elaka was Rs.12,000/- by February 1938 as against Rs.50,000/- for the previous year. The tenants in Kanika collected funds to fight civil suits with the estate to enforce their rights on anabadi lands. So also the drive to form village level Congress committees and raising subscription for Congress funds continued. A youth association was also formed. As a reaction to the developments, the Raja's repression was stepped up the house of Chakradhar Behera, the leader of the tenants, was burnt down in March 1938.199

Jeypore Estate:

The pattern emerging in Koraput throughout 1938 serves as a vital link in the reading of popular perception of 'Swaraj' and the tribals attempts at actualising it. The campaign against the shandy (market) tax as well as tax on headloads entering the market (an issue which the DCC took up towards the end of 1937) in Koraput intensified around April 1938. In fact, Biswas Ray's efforts in this regard had led to Collector's recommendation for its abolition. The Government also postponed the move by the Jeypore estate to sell the right to collect tax on headloads to shandy contractors. However right since April, this tax came to be collected directly by the estate officials. Thereupon, the Shandy picketing picked up vigorously. The mobilisation of tribals were carried out by the circulation of brief letters, drafted by *Gandhi Gumas-


tas and Gandhi Naikos, who headed the rural units of Congress organisations. These ‘Gandhi notes’ called upon Congress activists to assemble at particular points to picket markets.

The following table on the nature and organisation of Shandy picketing during April (20-21) in the district is quite illustrative.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shandy</th>
<th>No. of Picketers</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Attendance Collection of the shandy Tax</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Mydalpur</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>Picketers wore Khadi Caps - exhorted sellers not to pay tax; shouted/clapped hands in a body. A.S.I. was present.</td>
<td>Normal Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Dabugam</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>Picketters took posts at the approaches to the shandy - Estate Forest Officer prevented from seizing bamboo mats on which forest tax had not been paid. Receipt forms snatched from Estate Collection agents and torn before the A.S.I. who was present.</td>
<td>do Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Pappadarhandi</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>Receipts issued to 5 tax payers, taken and torn. Constable present.</td>
<td>1/2 of do 0-1-3 from 5 persons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Kottagam</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Same as ‘A’. Also beating of drums. No police present.</td>
<td>Normal Nil</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, ‘Shandy picketing’ slackened by May thanks to the efforts of Biswas Ray and other leaders of DCC as well as the tour by Minister, Dube in the district advising people to be law-abiding. The DCC also took the stand that it would await an order by the Government in this regard and suspend the campaign till such time. It also advised the people to pay the shandy tax. But even then, the activists in Hat-

200. HPD, Confidential Diary of S.P. Koraput, 28.4.38, ACC-1676.

201. Ibid.

202. HPD, OPAI, No.21, 7.6.38, ACC-1676.
kinga (Jeypore), Chikima (Nowrangpur), Awarda (Padwa), continued with the campaign, carrying Congress flags and putting on Gandhi Caps. The villagers of Dumraguda under the leadership of Shama Gadba and Laikhan Poojari, who continued to picket Hatkinga Shandy, wanted the Government order by the end of May. The 'Gandhi notes' used to mobilise the tribals for picketing Shandies were replaced by similar notes issued by local level Congress activists instructing them not to stage any demonstration without the permission of the leaders. Similarly, non-payment of kists of rent, non-payment of royalty to the estate and the forest royalty to the Samasthanam, and refusal to carry the luggage of Government servants were the issues over which mobilisation of tribals occurred in Malkangiri taluk, Baipariguda (Jeypore taluk) and Mydalpur (Nowrangpur taluk). 203 Around July, Balram Palo (Kalyansingpur) advised the people to refuse rent to Samasthanam and accordingly wrote petitions for the villagers and in fact procured "supplies and labour free" from them. 204 The dombs (low caste) led by one Tingu Birisa (Oraon, Nandapur P.S.) advised people not to report crimes to police and stop the naikos in his attempt to collect revenue and taxes. 205

Biswa Ray and a local Congress activist of Konga led a procession of 100 men to Jeypore to lodge a complaint against the A.S.I., Konga, alleging procurement of bethi and assault by the said A.S.I. 206 Bhagban Amantya who was assaulted by the A.S.I. was a local Congress leader who had asked the people not to carry the A.S.I.'s luggage, even after they were paid since the A.S.I. was a Government servant. The subse-

203. HPD, FNR, Koraput, 22.5.38, ACC-1054.
204. HPD, Extract of FNR, Koraput, 9.7.38, ACC-997.
205. HPD, OPAI, No.28, 26.7.38, ACC-947.
206. HPD, OPAI, No.27, 19.7.38, ACC-997.
quent transfer of the A.S.I. was claimed as a result of the direct action by Hannu Domb, who had been advising people of Hatkonga to approach him for writing petitions against police, in case people were not satisfied in any incident. 207 At Kalyansingpur, primary Congress Committee settled petty cases in lieu of contribution to Congress fund. 208 Even criminal offences were compounded on subscription to Congress fund under the initiative of local Congress MLAs. 209 Balram Pal kept advising the Khond ryots of Kalyansingpur not to pay land revenue each year to the estate but to withhold it for about 3 years. He also advised that if after 3 years, they were sued, they could pay only one year's land revenue. 210 The announcement of abolition of tax on headloads for one year by the Raja in July was projected as a victory for the DCC and lent legitimacy to DCC's authority in popular perception. We come across evidence of clearing of jungles by the Dongria Khonds in Kalyansinghpur area for podu cultivation during August. A similar pattern also existed in Venkatpalem, Malkangiri and Nowrangapur areas. In these areas, ryots were encouraged to take to podu cultivation and also to withhold grazing and plough tax. 211 Instructions were given by "two Dombs" who urged "Congress activists" in Jeypore circle not to give information or evidence to the police or officials even in murder cases as Congress would deal with all offenders. 212 In Nandanpur area, the Bariko and Challan of the villages were told by Congress activists not to continue to prefer their

207. HPD, OPAI, No.29, 5.8.38, ACC-1010.
208. HPD, OPAI, No.26, 12.7.38, ACC-997.
209. HPD, FNR, Korapur, 9.7.38, ACC-997.
210. HPD, OPAI, No.26, 12.7.38, ACC-1010.
211. HPD, FNR, Koraput, 13.8.38, 12.9.38, ACC-1054.
212. HPD, OPAI, No.38, 18.10.38, ACC-1010.
duties. So also, villagers were asked not to pay shandy tax or act as porters. A villager was "forcibly prevented" from reporting a theft case to the police.\textsuperscript{213} As early as January 1938, villagers reported to the Congress leaders instances of oppression. For instance, a petition by Sunadhar Baranga of Bayapada (Jeypore P.S.) complained to Biswas Ray as to how his "field" had been intruded into by the elephants of the estate and his hay had been taken away by force. The petitioner alleged that the servants of the estate challenged (when Sunadhar protested about their "wanton act") him to complain before the "lords" like "Gandhi, Biswas Ray and Radhamohan Sahu" and demanded money and paddy in return for the hay. The petitioner also pointed out that: "I have joined the Congress... I have no one else to resort to than yourself. Unless you take action against the owners of the elephants, their servants will go on harrassing like this. You are our guide and master".\textsuperscript{214} In September, two Dombs deposed in the court that they had intentionally ignored the rules regarding restrictions as they were Congress members and had been advised so by the Congress M.L.A., Sadasiba Tripathy.\textsuperscript{215} Similarly, Nilakantha Patra (Kundra P.S.) who heard the complaints of villagers during October sent "non-cognisable" complaints of villagers to the sub-inspector, ordering the latter to investigate them. He also sought explanation from the S.I. for delay in disposing certain cases.\textsuperscript{216} Another development was the attempts to replace the existing village Gandas (choukidars, appointed by villagers) by Congress members in Jeypore circle in October. Accordingly, one Hari Domb was appointed near Hat Kongs and he was "presented with a Congress

\textsuperscript{213} HPD, OPAI, No.26, 12.7.38, ACC-1676.

\textsuperscript{214} HPD, Petition by Sunadhar Baranga, 17.1.38, ACC-1626.

\textsuperscript{215} HPD, OPAI, No.34, 13.9.38, ACC-1010.

\textsuperscript{216} HPD, OPAI, 12.10.38, ACC-1010.
cap and shirt". Yet in another incident, one Mudi Naik of Bholia village in Jeypore P.S., who refused to join Congress, had to face the combined opposition of the villagers of Nuput, Bholia and Baminia (villages under the control of the Naik). The villagers in fact, were mobilised against the Naik under the leadership of Narasingha Paduva and others. The campaign against the Naik was intended to boycott him and to get him removed from the position of Naikship.

By December, we came across a reference to an incident involving dispute over land in Borigumma P.S. Here a Congress activist Boli Kumar led a group of villagers of Samarthaguda and planted a Congress flag in the field of Pangentti Dalia as a symbol of his possession of land and then cut the paddy after threatening Pangenti Dalia. The ownership of land was under dispute right since 1935, but, in 1937, the dispute had been settled in favour P. Dalia. And the paddy was raised for the first time in 1938 after the settlement of dispute. The above action of Boli Kumar led the S.I. to enter the field and pull out the Congress flag. This was immediately followed by the gathering of the villagers of Samarthaguda at the spot and Boli Kumar threatened to attack the S.I. with an 'axe' saying that: "I have planted the flag and you can't reap the paddy". In similar attempts two persons, Ratna Gudavas and Sonu Gudava of Samarthaguda, were also arrested following their attempt at taking away the paddy from another disputed land. It is in fact, interesting to read the petition to the police by Hari Kumar and Boli Kumar in connection with the incident at Samarthaguda. The petition noted:

"...that we had posted a Congress flag under orders of the Congress. Sukku Pentia of Janiguda and a constable of Borigumma stole away the flag. They must show order winning the case. There is no use coming to us, but they must go to Radhamohan and Biswas Ray of Jeypore and show..."

217. HPD, OPAI, 26.10.38, ACC-1010.

218. HPD, FNR, Koraput, 12.9.38, ACC-1054.

219. HPD, OPAI, No.43, 28.11.38, ACC-1034.
Ratan Kumar has got a record of Rs.5-8-0. It is not his own land. Radhamohan and Biswas Ray had enquired about the result of appeal at Cuttack. It is Ratan Kumar's land. Chinganti Dalia must not go near the land.

Thus, at popular level, Congress and its leaders as well as its symbols were used to assert the rights of the tribals. In the tribal perception, Congress also came to be increasingly seen as an institution for righting their wrongs. In other words, the notion existing at popular perception was that the Congress was beyond the reach of the colonial authorities. The land dispute, once settled in favour of Dalia, Boli Kumar still looked to the Congress and its leaders to deliver the final judgement.

At this stage, we may also draw attention to the nature of Congress propaganda which existed in Koraput during 1938. One of the important aspects of the propaganda was that it was often backed by rumours of various sorts. We may draw out a table to understand them.220

(A) Nature of Rumour/Tendencies (N.R/T):

Hopes were held out to the tribals that they would be immune from the prevailing laws, taxes etc. and that the land which they tilled and for which they paid land revenue would become theirs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place/Month</th>
<th>Rumours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mathili P.S./September</td>
<td>Enrolment of Congress membership increased because people believed that they would be absolved from the payment of plough tax and their revenue would be assessed only on the crops actually produced.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nowrangpur/September</td>
<td>Congress propaganda on 'Socialist lines' was taken up by telling people that land would be confiscated from the rich and divided equally among Congress members.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(B) N.R/T

Rumours backed by persuasion/threats to boost the

220. The informations are based on the following sources: HPD, OPAI, No.39, 24.9.38, ACC-1010; HPD, OPAI, No.26-34; July to Dec.; Examples of dangerous tendencies among the aboriginal people in Koraput as a result of false propaganda with the purpose of undermining the authority of Government and its local officers. ACC-1010. HPD, FNR, Koraput, May to Dec. 1938, ACC-1054.
Congress membership enrolment drive. For instance,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place/Month</th>
<th>Rumours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Naurangpur</td>
<td>Due to the campaign by the local Congress activists that those who were</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Umerkote</td>
<td>not Congress members would die unnatural death and grow tails. As a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>response, people reached in Naurangpur to join Congress.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Jeypore</td>
<td>Those who did not join Congress would have their lands confiscated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Most places</td>
<td>Unless people became Congress members by paying 4 anna, they would be</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of Koraput</td>
<td>driven out of village and lose all claims to their lands. Often, fees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>higher than the prescribed subscriptions were realised even from women and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>children.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(C) N.R/T

Rumours went round that Gandhi would tour the district, visiting from house to house and those who could not produce the Congress ticket, which they must buy, would die similarly;

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place/Month</th>
<th>Rumours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Umerkote</td>
<td>Congress activist Lakshmi Chandra Das of Naurangpur preached such kinds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>of views.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Rayagada</td>
<td>A local activist persuaded the Khonds of Kerada village to construct a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>house so that Gandhi who would visit the district would stay there. Mat-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>erials for the construction of the house were taken from the estate with-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>out any permission.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Umerkote</td>
<td>The local Congress activist Nilakantha Patro preached that Nehru and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naurangpur</td>
<td>other leaders would visit the area and only Congressmen would be allowed to attend.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(D) N.R/T

In Padwa, Dora of Panua adopted the method of "spreading the name of Congress" through beat of drum that a Congress leader in Vizagpatnam had ordered that for 3 months husbands and wives should not co-habit. The instruction was issued by Mari Kamaga, a Congress activist of Paderu (Vizag). Similarly,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place/Month</th>
<th>Rumours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Umerkote</td>
<td>Raidhar Parija told the people that some members of Naurangpur had infor-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>med him that they had listened to a conversation between two bullocks to the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>effect that persons who tilled their lands on Tuesday/Thursday were expe-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>riencing scarcity of commodities. So, Congress members had decided not to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>cultivate land on these two days of the week. This rumour perhaps was an</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>attempt at 'Sanekritisation' of the tribals, sought to be attained under</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Congress banner.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(E) N.R/T

Villagers were warned that their lands would be confiscated, that they would not be allowed "to draw water from sources used by Congress members" or that Muhammadans would loot their villages, if they did not become Congress
members. For instance,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place/Month</th>
<th>Rumour</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kodinga Aug. (Nowrangpur)</td>
<td>Local Congress Committee announced by beat of drum that non-Congress people would be prohibited from sources used by Congress members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Umerkote Aug.</td>
<td>People were told that Mohammadans would loot their houses.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Money and various articles were realised from the villagers by activists who preached the abolition of any kind of illegal payment or bethi. Money at times was realised by false pretext, but people were not willing to give evidence against the offenders. For example,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place/Month</th>
<th>Rumour</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Padwa Aug.-Sept.</td>
<td>Money collected on the threat of instituting cases against persons for sacrificing bullocks at the time of certain festivals. The campaigners threatened such people to report the case to police where fine to the tune of Rs.25/- would be imposed. The rationale behind the campaign was the 'Congress advice' not to sacrifice animals.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Village Naikos were asked to become Congress members on paid of dismissal. As already referred, instances occurred in the context of Mudi Naik (Bholia village) case, and Malkangiri/Umerkote (October); Jeypore (September).

People were advised not to fear officials and to bring all their complaints to the Congress members, instead of going to the police or to the court. When such case were brought for arbitration, a 'large sum' was realised from the parties for the work. These instances, as observed earlier were reported from Kalyansingpur and Nandapur (in July).

Non-payment of revenue and taxes was advocated; people were asked not to report crimes to the police and if they had any grievance against the police, to go to the Congress members for redressal. This feature as seen earlier, was reported from many places, such as (1) case of Tingu Birisia, Oran, Nandapur/July; (2) case of Hannu Domb of Hatkonga/August; (3) Biswas Ray's address in Siparjiput; (4) the case of two Dombs.
of Jeypore asking people not to provide information to the police; (5) case of Nilakantha Patra (Kundra P.S.) ordering the police to investigate cases; (6) also, in cases of petitions to Biswas Ray and Radhamohan or the advice of Sadasiva Tripathy.

The law was broken and when the accused was questioned he answered that he did it deliberately as he was a Congress member and was advised to do so. This can be seen, as observed earlier, in the context of Dombs justifying their violation of laws on ground of being Congress members.

The reading of these rumours/tendencies points to the fact that mobilisation of the tribals at popular level occurred often using the symbols of Congress and Gandhi. More importantly, the legitimacy for popular action was derived from the notion of authority of Congress/Gandhi. The local leaders who were most prominent in taking up such campaign in different areas of the district comprised of Lakshmi Naryan Padhi, Apudu Padhi (Kalyansinghpur P.S.), Balram Pal, Nilakantha Patro (Kundra P.S.), Tingu Biriso (Oran), Hannu Domb and Dora of Panna. Besides, Biswas Ray, Radhamohan Sahu and Sadasiba Tripathy (DCC leaders) also often lent their moral support to some forms of the campaign.221

As far as the local level activists were concerned, Donardono Singh222 (Goliguma, Dasmanthpur P.S.) merits attention. He in fact, started preaching non-payment of taxes and forest revenue and fight against British rule around June 1938. He told people in his area that the (Congress) Ministers had ordered all of them to be Congress members, failing which they would be driven out of their villages. He also

221. Ibid.

collected fee of Re.1/- from the villagers on the promise that he would get their rent and royalties remitted. He equally charged Rs.1/8/- from each villagers as a fee for the work he had been doing to reduce taxes. So also, he charged 5 anna instead of 4 anna for enrolling a villager as Congress member; and collected Rs.10/- from the Naikos of the Dasmanthpur areas in order to provide them with Congress tickets. In a meeting at Girliguma in August, he reportedly told the audience that Swaraj would be declared in two months and the Government and the Maharaja of Jeypore would vacate the district. He also went on to instruct the people not to report cases to the police but to settle them through "Congress Panchayats" and added that he had received 'instructions' to dispose of cases himself. Around September, he threatened the employers with criminal action under Congress rule and held lathi demonstrations before the houses of ryots to make them pay what he considered 'reasonable wages'. He fixed the wages for field workers at Rs.7/- plus 12 putties of paddy per annum. He also claimed that the transfer of S.I., Dasmanthpur could be possible as he had lodged the complaint to Biswas Ray. In November, he told the villagers that he would be going to Cuttack to take the forthcoming collector's 'Examination'. He also conveyed the message to the villagers that after his return from Cuttack, the magistrates and police officers would be removed from the district and he along with his 'friends' would take over the administration. Further, he demanded free supplies of vegetables and fruit from village Naikos and in case of refusal, he threatened them with dismissal from their posts. A taluk magistrate of Malkangiri even advised the village Naiks not to pay grazing and plough taxes to the Jeypore estate.223

The other notable feature of the Congress campaign was

223. HPD, OPAI, No.31, 20.8.38, ACC-1010.
the massive drive for enrolling Congress members. As has been observed earlier, this drive gained strength through the circulation of certain types of rumours. Besides, in the Congress membership campaign drive, a certain form of moralistic preaching was very often adopted. As pointed out earlier, some of the rumours were also based on inculcating moral values in terms of stopping the sacrifice of animals or stopping cultivation on Tuesday/Thursday etc. Similarly, a pamphlet issued by Congress activist in Nowrangapur asked the Congress members to observe certain practices such as: (a) one must pray to God and ask Him to give wisdom to do good to the people; (b) to take bath early in the morning, clean teeth with charcoal, wash hands etc.; (c) to spin khadar, wear khadar, as per the rules of Congress; (d) not to sow seeds in another's land by force; (e) not to quarrel; (f) must renew the Congress membership every year; (g) not to take wine, opium etc.; (h) not to kill cows, buffaloes during festivals but worship with sweetmeats and be kind to animals; (i) to stick to truth etc. This shows how the drive for recruitment of Congress membership was associated with the process of educating the "illiterate tribals" with certain values basically of a Gandhian nature. The drive for membership was carried out under the overall supervision of Gandhi Gumastha and Gandhi Naiko, who headed the village Congress units. The structures of Congress rural units under Gandhi Gumasthas was effectively given shape under the initiatives of DCC leadership such as Sadasiba Tripathy, Radha Mohan Sahu (MLA) and Lakshmi Chandra Sahu.224 The anti-liquor campaign remained a major move by the Congress leadership in view of tribals propensity for alcoholic drinks. The Khonds at Narayan Patnam (Rayagada) who gathered for the Thakurani festival were offered Mandia Jau (preparation like Barley water) instead of

224. HPD, Confidential Diary of the S.P. Koraput, 28.4.38, ACC-1676.
liquor by the Congress volunteers.\(^{225}\) The campaign was so vigorous that proprietors of liquor shops had to bribe the picketers not to picket their shops.\(^ {226}\) There is also evidence of temple entry attempt by Harijans and Congress activists at Vikrampur, Nawrangpurgur area in September.\(^ {227}\)

In the context of divergent trends obtaining at popular levels of the movement, the DCC planned to organise various centres in the districts to impart training to volunteers in October. The DCC also resolved to train 400 Congress volunteers who, among other things, were expected to undertake the functions of rural police.\(^ {228}\) Accordingly, a training camp for Congress volunteers was opened at village Nuaput near Jeypore on 6 November.\(^ {229}\) Gopabandhu Choudhry along with Godabarisha Mishra graced the occasion. The leaders talked to the audience on issues concerning tribal upliftment and advised the tribals to give up intoxicants, opium and other "social malpractices connected with money"; and also to take to "hand-spun" cloth. The Nuaput training centre started with 300 volunteers partly financed by DCC's fund, raised through membership fees collection. Besides, subscriptions were also collected for the camp. The camp imparted training in scouting, lathi drill, and physical exercises. Besides, lecturers on spinning, homeopathy, country medicines, animal husbandry, and untouchability were also arranged in the camp. 20 volunteers were released after completion of training on 8 December and were declared "fit to instruct others". However, the number of volunteers dwindled on account of harvesting season. Some of the

\(^{225}\) Ibid.

\(^{226}\) Ibid., 28.6.38.

\(^{227}\) HPD, FNR, Koraput, 12.9.38, ACC-1054.

\(^{228}\) HPD, OPAI, No.39, 26.10.38, ACC-1010.

\(^{229}\) HPD, OPAI, 18.11.38, ACC-1010.
trained volunteers who left the camp with a booklet on 'untouchability' were declared outcastes back home because they had dined with the 'untouchables' at the camp. 230

As noted earlier, the Congress Minister Dubey's tour during April in Koraput in the context of agitation against Shandy tax and tax on headlouinds and his advice to people to be 'law-abiding' 231 and to pay the tax till orders were communicated by the Government should be seen as an effort by the leadership not to allow the movement to acquire a militant form and invite suppression. Besides, the use of the symbols of Gandhi and Gandhian values in the context of the mobilisation of tribals can equally be read as efforts to systematise the divergent trends, obtaining at popular levels. As elsewhere, and as has been seen in the context of Koraput, in the tribal perception also Congress Ministry came to be regarded as the Government of their own. The developments in the estate in 1938 caused concern to the colonial administration, which thought it necessary to distribute pamphlets warning the tribals against 'mischievous propaganda'. 232 It also sought to clarify its position on issues like bethi, Podu cultivation, Shandy dues, and rent payment. In fact, a pamphlet was issued by the Madras Government to counter the preaching among the tribals in Madgul in the Agency of Jeypore adjoining Koraput District but situated in Vizagpatnam District that mustadars, estate officials and Government officials should no longer be obeyed. Thus these were activities of Magha Kirasani and


231. *HPD*, Extract of OPAI, 16.5.38, ACC-1676.

Marri Kummaya of Allangapada in Vizagpatnam Agency. In one case, Magha Kirasani had dismissed "on his own authority" two village headmen as the headmen were in league with Muttahdar and police, and appointed others as new headmen. Again on 6 October, it was announced that all village headmen must attend before Mari Kamyya by 10 October to settle payment of kists failing which the headmen would be removed from their positions. Again on 12 October, the police were instructed by Magha Kirasani and Mari Kamyya that police need not enquire into or take action in the case concerning the dismissal of the headmen by them. So also, on 15 October, one Gali Ram Das, Secretary of Panasa Village Congress Committee (Sujankonta) asked all villagers to attend a Congress meeting on 28 October, wherein the 'benefits of non-violence' would be explained. These activities in the areas of neighbouring Agency had natural repercussion on the people of the Jeypore estate. That popular mobilisation had scaled a new height in the Jeypore estate can be gauged from the table given below. The table illustrates the collection of revenue in 9 thanas (out of 11 thanas) in the upper division of the Jeypore estate in 1938.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thana</th>
<th>Fasli 1346 (1936)</th>
<th>Fasli 1348 (1938)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kotpad</td>
<td>33.61%</td>
<td>22.84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nowrangpur</td>
<td>28.45%</td>
<td>19.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borigumma</td>
<td>18.16%</td>
<td>14.89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeypore</td>
<td>17.02%</td>
<td>14.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramagiri</td>
<td>14.23%</td>
<td>3.17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koraput</td>
<td>13.84%</td>
<td>12.07%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nandapur</td>
<td>9.55%</td>
<td>3.02%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pottangi</td>
<td>7.07%</td>
<td>3.35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malkangiri</td>
<td>27.51%</td>
<td>14.28%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The reasons for the fall in collection was the massive no-

233. HPD, Extract of Madras Police Abstract of Intelligence, No.41, No.42, 22.10.38/29.10.38, ACC-1018.

234. HPD, Report of Revenue Commissioner to Chief Secretary, 28.2.39, ACC-1018.
rent campaign organised in the period. The Revenue Commissioner, in fact, anticipated the possibility of allowing extension of time for the payment of cessess for the first time in the annals of the estate.

**Ganjam:**

In the context of the Madras Land Amendment Bill, initiated by the Congress Ministry, the peasants' expectation for immediate and substantial relief was whetted up. The official report, for February, commented:

> 'the villagers one and all are combined against Khallikote and Athagad Estates, owing to the introduction of the Madras Estate Land Amendment Act Bill. The people have been much excited and they have great hopes for immediate and substantial benefits resulting therefrom. Their expectations are increased still further by the fact that not only is the Congress Ministry in power but that the home of C.M. lies in their midst... the second instalment of the Estate revenue has not been paid this year though it was paid last year in similar circumstances. Nevertheless, the tenants are said to defend their action on the ground that the price of the paddy is low.... Police intervention looked with suspicion by the raiyats.... Estate servants are defied by the villagers and are threatened with violence... as long as the estate officers will merely ask the ryots to pay their rents and do not enforce their claims, it may be that there will be no disturbances but that if any attempt is made to enforce them, it is likely that a riot will occur'.

Truly enough, the revenue collection by the Raja of Khallikote around February was a paltry Rs.8,000/- against nearly one lakh collected in the corresponding period of the previous year. The Raja, in fact, sought for a time extension till 10 March for the total payment of revenue of January.

Now we can turn our attention to peasant mobilisation occurring in the district. A Congress meeting at Polosora (13 February) voiced the following resolutions:

(a) thanked the C.M. for passing the Estate Land Amendment Bill and demanded consent of the Governor to the said bill; (b) emphasised the raising of funds from the ryots to meet general expenses; (c) demanded necessary remissions of the rent and fixing a uniform market rate for paddy in the Khallikote/Athgada Estates; (d) demanded an enquiry into the 'police zaulum' against the ryots at the behest of estate officials.

The no-rent campaign picked up in Polosora, Kudala and


In Polosora, the tenants who were willing to pay the rent were held back under the threat of social boycott and it remained a fairly active pocket as far as organisation of peasants was concerned. The local Congress activists assured the peasants that if they withheld payments all the arrears due to the estate before the passing of the Amendment Bill would be written off. The tenant refused to pay until their petitions to the Chief Minister and Revenue Commissioner, in this regard were disposed of. Interestingly, the campaign regarding no-rent was carried out by selecting "influential tenants" in the village who would make other peasants withhold payment. The local Congress leaders such as Madhobo Naik, Doloshho Naik (Padampur), Saib Biswal (Balijoro), Judhisti Panda (Koirasi), Maguni Mohant and Bharat Naik (Sumandalo) toured villages and exhorted the peasants not to pay rent. In contrast, Dibakar Patnai (DCC, President) advised the tenants to pay what they owe to the estate. Similarly, a meeting of ryots and worker at Nuagam (Russelkonda/14 April) demanded: (a) cultivation of lands only bhagam when lands were leased out; (b) not to allow outsiders to cultivate the land of particular villages; (c) to raise the existing rates of wages.

In the context of peasant movement in Ganjam, the activities of Banamali Maharana (President, Kudala Talu Congress Committee) were quite striking. In a peasant meeting at Polosora, convened by Maharana following resolution were passed:

(a) remission at different scales for first, second and third batch of settlement villages; (b) to settle the remission suits pending in courts amicably; (c) to make necessary alteration.

239. Ibid.
240. HPD, FNR, Ganjam, 8.31.38 (ACC-1057).
241. HPD, FNR, Ganjam, 26.4.38 (ACC-1057).
242. Ibid.
tions in various patta demand rates where they were found in excess to the rates fixed for
the adjoining similar settlement lands and to grant a remission in accordance with the
rules under Section 39A of Amended Madras Estates Land Act 1934.

On 9th June, at a peasant meeting held at Sochina Jagannath-
pur, Banamali Maharana moved the following resolutions:

(1) wrongs done to the ryote by the Estate officials should be reported to the Raja of
Khallikote and Atagada Estates; (2) Raja of Khallikote should be requested to allow the
ryote to take timber from the adjoining forests on free permit; (3) to request the Raja not
to collect the arrears from those poor ryote on whom pattas had been tendered; (4) to
request the Raja to grant remission to the ryote at 4 annas, 5 annas, and 6 annas in the
rupee instead of 0-3-6, 0-4-6 and 0-5-6 in the rupee already granted by the Estate; (5) to
request the Raja to preside over a ryote' meeting; (6) to request the Raja not to be misled
by the reports of his subordinates who troubled the ryote very much.243

However the Premier, Biswanath Das, who addressed the
peasants in Kudala meeting244 (12 June) pointed out that if
the tenants did not pay their dues within "two weeks", he
would be compelled to offer police assistance to the Raja to
make distrains. He also asked the audience to convey the
message to peasants of other villages. Thus in a way, the
meeting signalled a warning to the no-rent campaign of the
tenants. However the very next day, Banamali Maharana
convened a peasant meeting at Sasono on 13 June. In the
meeting, referring to the speech of the Premier, Banamali
Maharana observed that the Minister who was "their creation"
was bold enough to say this as there was no unity among the
peasants. He also added that ryots were now ruling the
country instead of the zamindars, and hence the peasants
must organise themselves to fight for their rights and due
place in the Estates. He the peasants to withhold six pies
in excess of the amount of remission declared by the Raja
Bahadur.245

Similarly, in yet another meeting at Polosora246 (15
June), a local Congress activist Muli Panda blamed the Pre-

244. Ibid.
245. Ibid.
246. Ibid.
mier saying that the C.M.'s position was due to the votes given by the ryots. He further exhorted the peasants that: "Even though the ryots have not paid their kist till now, the estate official could not do anything to the ryot on account of fear of Congress.... So long as the estate does not grant the cut, the ryots, should take shelter under the Congress". He also advised the peasants to pay the estate at Rs.0-10-0 a rupee after deducting on their own the proposed remission of six annas. It is in this context that Kudala Taluk Congress Committee came to be converted into Kudala Taluk Ryots Committee in June with Banamali Maharana as President.247 A Ryots Fund was also started to collect subscription (three pies in the rupee) from the peasants.

The demand for abolition of the mustajar system also gathered momentum.248 Under the system, when the Zamindar leased out his villages, he also leased out Hetta land (zamindari private lands) along with the villages or separately whatever suited him better. The zamindar of Sherguda had subleted his Hetta lands by 1st of July, to his subtenants. Govinda Pradhan (MLA) of Takkarada (under Sherguda estate) organised a zamindari ryot conference on 14 May. In the conference it was resolved that mustajari system be abolished. Pradhan also pointed out that a bill would be introduced in the Assembly in this regard; enabling those ryots who would be in possession of the Hetta lands by 1st of July to have occupancy rights over them. As a response, and under the leadership of Pradhan, the villagers of Serankuda encroached upon the Hetta lands already leased out by the mustajars and damaged the paddy plants. Following this incident, Govindo Pradhan complained to the police that the


248. HPD, Letter of Revenue Divisional Officer to Collector of Ganjam, 18.7.38, ACC-1057.
zamindar was ousting tenants who were in possession of the Hetta lands for more than 15 years.

The other noticeable feature of the peasants meetings was the condemnation of the magistrates, police and estate officials for their oppression. Also, complaints against local police and magistrates were sharply made in such meetings. Interestingly, Banamali Maharana explained to the tenants of Kudala in August that he had reminded the C.M. that he was a ryots' man and that the ryots could unseat the C.M. He also pointed out that as a result of the reminder, police protection to Raja to effect the collection of rent had not yet been materialised. 249

Again in September, Maharana advised the peasants to ignore the speech of the Premier in Kudala meeting as he (C.M.) had to act according to the "dictation" of the Congress. He warned that if the ryots association and Congress Committee were unable to cope with the situation, then blood would flow like a stream although the Congress creed was non-violence. He also added that if police were sent, the Kudala taluk would be turned into "another Bardoli". The campaign by the local activists in Kudala emboldened the peasants to cut off the irrigation sources, to catch fish without permission of the estate, and to commit offences in the State Reserve Forests. Popular resentment against police zulum also increased. In fact under the pressure of the activists of Kudala, who wanted the police S.I. of Kudala to be punished, the DCC had to appoint an enquiry committee to probe into the conduct of the police and the magistrate. 251

We come across evidence regarding the refusal by

249. Ibid., 29.8.38 (ACC-1057).
250. HPD, FNR, 14.9.38 (ACC-1057).
Khonds\textsuperscript{252} of Barakhomna (Baliguda) to carry out demarcation of reserved forests as they opposed any reservation of the forest in principle. The officials also apprehended that the Khonds might step up their encroachment in the reserve forest, in case the demarcation exercise was carried out by using imported labour.

At the peak of the no-rent campaign, the Raja of Khallikote appealed for police assistance under Section 80 of Madras Estates Land Act and also availed of the police assistance for distraint during September. This distraint continued till November.\textsuperscript{253} The distraint was marked by organised peasants resistance in many villages. For instance, Saibo Biswalo of Ballyajhar, a local activist, who had vigorously taken up the campaign of no-rent, kept his women folk in the front room as a barrier against police. In the Malhura and Solobondho villages, people snatched away the \textit{lathi} from the S.I. and threatened the revenue officers. People from the adjoining villages rushed into the village undergoing distraint to display solidarity and put up combined resistance. Often, grains and properties were concealed in the village \textit{muths}. The peasant resistance could be made effective due to the intense mobilisation taken up by the local activists. Maharana circulated printed leaflets asking the tenants to adopt Satyagraha as a protest against the assault on some of the tenants by revenue inspector of the Khallikote estate. He also pointed out that the move for Satyagraha enjoyed the backing of PCC President, Gopabandhu Choudhury.\textsuperscript{254}

\textsuperscript{252} \textit{HPD, F.No.88 of 1939 (ACC-1717).}

\textsuperscript{253} \textit{HPD, Report of Collector, Ganjam to Chief Secy (ACC-944), 15.9.38, 1.10.38, 6.10.38, 11.11.38; The New Orissa, 7.10.38.}

\textsuperscript{254} \textit{HPD, FNR, Ganjam, 29.10.38 (ACC-1057).}
In the context of these developments, the DCC formed a committee to enquire into the distraints. Along with this, DCC President, Dibakar Patnaik, advised the tenants to pay their rents and also asked the peasants to be prepared for "non-violent action" after six months in case the Madras Estate's Land Act Amendment Bill was not passed by that time. He also promised that an enquiry committee would look into the excesses committed by police and estate officials during the distraints. In a meeting at Kudala (15 October), he stopped Banamali Maharana when the latter tried to explain reasons for non-payment of rent. The meeting of the Krushak Samaja Sangha at Kudala (30 November) mooted the idea that a deputation be sent to the Raja. It also advised the peasants against the adoption of violent and aggressive methods. In fact, Krushak Samaj Sangha sprung up as a Congress sponsored Kisan Sabha. Maharana was conspicuous by his absence in the meeting.

**SAMBALPUR**

As early as January Congress Socialists like Malati Choudhury and the DCC leader Bhagirathi Patnaik toured the district and held peasant meetings to popularise Kisan Sabha ideology. In these meetings, the speakers exhorted peasants not to pay rent and not to care for police and even to assault Government officials. In the Bijepur Peasants' Conference, Tulsiram Giri, explaining the need for separate organisation for the peasants, observed:

> "the Congress is for all sects of people, rich, poor, capitalists and labourers etc. In case the capitalists go against the interests of peasants and labourers, the latter should organise themselves and fight tooth and nail against them (former) to safeguard their own interest. That's why it is necessary that every peasant should be a member of the Congress"

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255. *HPD, FNR, Ganjam, 29.10.38 (ACC-1057).*


257. *HPD, FNR, Ganjam, 13.12.38 (ACC-1057).*

so that one day they might capture the Congress*.

Malati Choudhury asked the peasants to demand the abolition of gountia system. In the Bargarh peasants meeting (11 January), Pranakrishna Padihary explained to the peasants that all servants of Government were servants of the three Congress Ministers of the existing Government. He also exhorted the people to boycott the courts and to solve their disputes through village panchayats.

At Fatapali (Laikera), Malati Chaudhry, referring to the repression of zamindars, advocated the formation of Krushak Sangha in each union. In the Remenda meeting, she exhorted the people not to appear before officers even if notices were served on them to do so on the latters' visit to villages. She also asked people not to fear the police. Referring to a murder case in which a villager killed an Excise officer and was eventually acquitted, she advised the people to defend themselves by way of private defence if any police officer was oppressive. In all these peasants' meetings, several resolutions reflecting local issues were passed:

- (a) condemning the India Act of 1935, which treated Sambalpur as an excluded area;
- (b) amendment of Central Province Tenancy Act to the benefit of the tenants of Sambalpur;
- (c) introduction of a standard measure for paddy in the district;
- (d) allowing tenants free use of forest produce;
- (e) disapproval of the conduct of Kolabira zamindar in not helping tenants as promised at the time of election;
- (f) introduction of prohibition in Sambalpur.

In Tulandi (Bargarh sub-division), the villagers teamed up against a rich marwari, a moneylender who had amassed great wealth through "usury and had acquired interest in the landed proprietorship of village". In fact, he got into trouble with a gountia who had taken a loan of Rs.50/- worth of articles from him to meet expenditure during his mother's Sradha ceremony. When after a year, the moneylender insisted on the repayment and used 'abusive'

259. Ibid.

language, the fellow villagers sided with the gountia and enforced a boycott of the moneylender. The services of barbers, dhobi, house-servants, local coolies were denied to him. Under the pressure of boycott, the moneylender thought of shifting to Barapalli. But the villagers assaulted him and prevented him from leaving the village. The local leaders also took away property worth Rs.1400/- from his house. Bhagirathi Patnaik and Fakir Behera (DCC leadership) lent moral support to the action against the moneylender by justifying the action of local activists. In fact, the organisation of the villagers was "made stronger by the intervention of Bhagirathi Patnaik",261 who advocated 'Satyagraha' on the issue. The police report on the issue pointed out that the villagers were conducting "non-violent non-cooperation" vis-a-vis the moneylender.

The local leader in Nawapara, Khariar, and Borasambar estates, duly backed by the DCC, raised protest against high rent, grazing dues (chari), pound rates, bethi, etc. Zoolum by police and estate officials also came to be opposed. Mobilisation of tenants in these estates had also a Gandhian touch. For example, tenants were advised to give up intoxicants and foreign cloth; Gandhi caps and Khadis were also sold in the meeting.262 The DCC's efforts at mobilisation reflected a degree of reformative exercise on Gandhian line. In a meeting at Sarandapali (Barapali) in September Bhagirathi Patnaik complained that none of the MLAs except Fakir Behera and Bisi Ganda would speak in favour of tenants while the others would speak in favour of Raja and Zamindars.263

261. Ibid.
262. HPD, FNR, SBP, 11.10.38 (ACC-1056).
263. HPD, FNR, SBP, Nov. (1056).
In the Sambalpur Praja Kisan Conference\textsuperscript{264} (Baltikra, Bargarh: 3/4 December), Fakir Behera in his inaugural address noted:

"Even during the Congress Government the conflict between the zamindars and tenants had increased. The Congress members in the Assembly forgot that they were servants of the people.... That is why this conference is organised to clearly express the views of the peasants in the administration of the country.... That is why it is more necessary for the peasants to combine and to march on the way of non-violence and truth.... The main point which should be kept in view is to fight against those who go against the representatives of the peasants."

\textbf{VI. THE STATE OF PEASANT/TRIBAL MOVEMENT (1939)}

We will here try to locate the pattern of peasant/tribal mobilisation during 1939 very briefly. One of the important aspects in connection with the peasant and tribal movement in 1939 was the distancing of the Communists from the Congress Socialists. The Communists also became increasingly critical of the Congress Ministry.

Phani Pal, who was away in Bengal in December 1938 to attend kisan meetings, came back in January 1939 and not only actively organised the peasants of Sukinda estate but also tried to mobilise the tenants of the Keonjhar state, which bordered the former. A pamphlet issued by Pal around November for a proposed peasant rally in December 1938 at Gobandhanpur (bordering Keonjhar state) exhorted specifically the youth of Keonjhar State to join in large numbers in the 'anti-Raja' struggle, for destroying the "rule based on kingship" and to replace it by establishing a responsible government.\textsuperscript{265} The pamphlet reminded the tribals of Keonjhar such as Bhuyan, Ganda, Juanga that their ancestors could dethrone any Raja for his slightest oppression. The pamphlet also pointed out how people in British Orissa were struggling for responsible Government by forming meli (congregation typical to tribal tradition of resistance against oppression by the Raja). It also deplored how the

\textsuperscript{264. HPD, Report of S.P. on the Second Kisan Session of Sambalpur (ACC-1036).}

\textsuperscript{265. Keonjhar Praja Sammilani (Oriya pamphlet).}
people of Keonjhar state had been turned into destitutes after paying various kinds of taxes and how the freedom of speech and right to listen to Congress meetings had been snatched away through Raja's rules and regulations. The pamphlet also wished the destruction of imperialism and the Garjat rule. The proposed meeting at Gobardhanpur, postponed till 9 January due to Pai's absence in Orissa in December was banned by the authorities and restrictions under 144 Cr. P.C. were imposed on Pal and other Kisan activists, preventing them from holding meetings. However, a protest meeting denouncing the order was arranged on the same day under the initiative of Bhagabati Panigrahi (editor of Krushak), but this was again prevented. It is interesting that as per the instructions of Pal, the people who came to attend the meeting had carried with them lathis.  

Similarly, Sachi Routrai with his communist outlook in a peasant meeting (Korai, 14 January), observed that "the present leaders in the Congress have no mind or time to help the peasants... in the past struggles, with British Government, the workers from the capitalists section could not stand the trouble... during the struggle and they had to retreat... the peasants should have to be members of Congress or else the capitalists will capture the Congress. The conservatives compelled the Congress to accept office and the result was that the Congress Ministry had forgotten their fighting attitude. They are after compromises. Had the peasants captured the Congress, 144 Cr. P.C. notice would not have been served on peasant workers".  

In yet another protest meeting against the imposition of restriction on Phani Pal, at Duburi (Sukinda: 3 March) Naba Krushna Choudhury dubbed the order against Pal as illegal and whimsical. He also remarked that: "It will be possible to get the magistrate punished by the Congress Government for issuing such orders". In the meantime, Pal was arrested in April while trying to organise peasant meetings in Sukinda estate and got jailed. After his release

266. Ibid.


268. HPD, FNR, Cuttack, 14.3.39 (ACC-1082).
from jail he strove vigorously to mobilise the tribal of
the states. For instance, a pamphlet addressed to the
tribals of Keonjhar and Mayurbhanja states titled Congress
and Salt Meli: A word to all men and women talked about the
'Salt Meli' organised "ten years ago" and how jails were
"filled to overflowing". It went on to exhort the tribal:

"Your previous meli was crushed by the Raja, Government officials by means of threat....
You concealed yourselves and became destitute.... Do not do it again as such action on
your part is against the Congress creed.... Congress is the biggest Meli. If such Melis
are formed, the British Government will abdicate.... There are several parties within
Congress. One of them is the socialist party. The socialists say that there should not be
any Raja, Zamindar, big factory owners or rich man. Labourers will have all. All you
labourers must combine. I will tell you later how to get rid of the Rajas, Zamindars and
factory owners. Let the workers of the world unite. They will then win".

In June, Pal also put forward the idea of establishing
schools to train children in physical exercises in Sukinda
areas. He was also planning to lead the refugees of Dhenka-
nal and Talcher states to offer Satyagraha before the Secre-
tariat at Cuttack as "a form of revolt" against the local
Rajas. It is in this context that the ever-widening gulf
between socialists and communists climaxed. Malati Choudhry
and Nabakrushna Choudhry resigned from the socialist group
as they could not reconcile to the extreme views held by
Bhagabati Panigrahi, Baidyanath Rath, Sachi Rutrai, Pal
etc.

In August, J.P. and Swami Sahajananda visited Cuttack
in connection with the Provincial Youth Conference (3rd
Session: 12/13 August). Elaborating on the programmes
outlined by J.P., Sahajananda exhorted the youth: (a) to
work among the peasants and to prepare them for a no-rent
campaign during future struggle; (b) to prepare the workers
to go on strikes during the struggle; (c) to educate the
masses to run a parallel Government in case of future strug-

269. Congress and the Salt Meli (Oriya pamphlet).

270. HPD, Letters of S.P. to C.S., 25.5.39; and Weekly
Confidential Diary of S.P., 8.6.39 (ACC-1134).

271. HPD, FNR, Cuttack, 14.7.39 (ACC-1082).
gle. Criticising the Das Ministry for issuance of 144 Cr. P.C. notices, he said that the ministers had forgotten their main duties.272

During the Kisan Day Celebration (1 September 1939) at Jenapur, songs from booklet Rakta Sikha273 (collection of poems mainly addressed to peasants/workers, written from a communist perspective) were read out. Similarly in the meeting at Kosala, Bhagabati Panigrahi criticised the ministry for its failure to reduce taxation. However, in the context of Ministry's resignation in November 1939, Pal, in the peasant meeting of Baragadia (Sukinda: 22 November) observed: "only through the efforts of our Congress Ministers you all were saved from bethi etc. but the peoples' representatives were not given enough powers".274 Asking people to continue with Melis, he observed that:

"During the last C.M, Sarkar oppressed many people, but this time there is a tiger pouncing upon the Sarkar and this is the opportunity for us and we must take the Swaraj forcibly. This meli will be carried on everywhere. Even people in Sukinda jungle are able to understand what is Congress.... In the meli, the individual who will not join will side with the Raja.... I will ask his padhan (headman) to boycott him - he can't get fire and water...."

We come across reference to the warning issued by the Krushak Sangha of Sendhapur (Jenapur) to the labourers asking the latter not to reap the field of one Kanhu Patnaik.275 The latter had been boycotted by the Sangha for acquiring the land of another tenant with the help of the proprietor of Chausathipara estate. The Kisan Sangha activists assaulted the labourers of Kanhu, who reaped the crop


273. HPD, FNR, Cuttack, 1st half of September 1939 (ACC-1082).


from the disputed land. In Aul estate, the discontent of the tenants against the Raja climaxed in an attempt on Raja's life. One Narayan Samal who had often been beaten and framed in theft case by Raja's men, defended his action against Raja observing that: "Raja who oppresses and spoils the unmarried girls of his tenants is not fit to govern his people". 276

In Anugul, the demand for the abolition of hat-tolls continued to be voiced. The tenants boycotted the Government established hats and set up new hats outside the jurisdiction of the lessees. The no-hat toll campaign was vigorously pursued. The local Congress activists threatened the officials as well as lessees who tried to collect hat tolls. 277 The Socialists also organised few training camps for the youth. One such camp functioned in Ahiyas 278 (Jajpur) under the overall guidance of Nabakrushna Choudhry. Trainees were given training in physical exercise including playing of daggers and country-games. Besides, discourses on world geography, economic drain, anti-imperialist struggle of India, 1857 revolt, Gandhi, Tilak, Nehru and Marxism, etc., were imparted. Choudhry himself taught history to the participants. The trainees were instructed to read newspapers like *A.B. Patrika*, *the Samaja*, *the Desakatha* and *Krushaka*. The camp was financed by raising subscriptions from the locality.

**Puri:**

Pal toured the rural areas of Puri and addressed many peasant meetings. At Chhatabar (Chandaka P.S.: 20 February) he exhorted the cultivator combine and not cultivate the


278. *HPD*, FNR, Cuttack, 15.5.39 (ACC-1082).
rich persons' lands. In the peasant meeting at Mendhasal (Chandaka P.S., 28 February) he maintained:

"the Ministers with their limited powers could not possibly render any substantial help but the only facility the people could get was that they could develop mass consciousness by holding meetings and opening organisations... So that they might be better mobilised for the impending fight with British Government."

He also reminded the people that the few concessions granted to the peasants were the aftereffects of their combined agitation. The meeting, among other things, demanded 50% reduction of rent and the abolition of Sarbarakari system. The mobilisation of peasants led to the withholding of rent and the repayment of taccavi loans in Gop area and the petition against the local zamindar by the villagers of Vchupur, Oruali and Malagaon.

In Puri District Peasant Conference (Astaranga: 19 May) Bhagabati Panigrahi made scathing attacks on leaders like Nilakantha Das and Godabarisha Mishra as being responsible for the imposition of 144 Cr. P.C. orders on Kisan activists. In this connection Panigrahi maintained that Congress and Kisan Sangha as not two different organisations and pointed out that Kisan movement was started to train peasants for future struggle. Reflecting on the nature of peasant movement, he remarked that previously the peasants stooped to violence to revolt against the oppressive zamindars in order to redress their grievances. But, in contrast, the present peasant movement was an all India one


281. Ibid.


based on non-violence. He asked the Ministers to take immediate action against the Magistrate who had issued 144 Cr. P.C. notice on Kisan activists and pointed out that Ministers did not accept office to crush popular movement but to encourage them. Prananath Patnaik advised the peasants not to pay rent if the scheme of federation was imposed on them and thus paralyse the Government. In that case, he pointed out, the British Government would not get sufficient money to maintain the military forces or bureaucracy. Gokul Mohan Roy Churamani exhorted the peasants to turn every village to a fort and every youngman to a soldier by orga­nising training camps in every vilage, to stand by Congress in case of a fight. Churamani also distributed a pamphlet titled *Dhwansare Mukti* (Freedom through Destruction) which advocated the destruction of the Zamindari system.

In a peasant meeting at Gamharipada (Kakatpur P.S.) Mohan Das congratulated the audience for attending the meeting without being afraid of local zamindars and observed that the oppressions of zamindars was gradually decreasing since the Congress accepted office. Roychuramani also talked about a Jungle Satyagraha (Mukunda Prasad meeting: 2 October) in case Khurda Forest Laws were not amended and pointed out that laws could not be amended without a fight. Pranath Patnaik also explained that the purpose of the meeting was not to condemn the Congress Ministry but to train the masses to agitate for their legitimate demands.

As in Cuttack, a training camp was organised at Tonkol (Khurda). The 15 volunteers who received training in the Camp included persons from the states of Nayagarh and Khan­dapara. The participants were given training in sanitation,

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parade and how to arouse mass consciousness. Bhagabati Panigrahi, Naba K. Choudhry, Mohan Das (the Socialist leaders) as well as local intelligentsia took care of the training camp. The local Kisan Sabha unit arranged the accommodation of the camp. Similarly, in Balasore, a training camp was organised at Soro to train office bearers of rural Congress units. Congress activists from each Chaukidari union of Soro, Khaira, Simulia and Basudebpur were trained. This training camp offered training in constructive activities such as spinning, sanitation, panchayat work, as well as Congress propaganda. A plan was equally afoot to open a political school at Bhadrak.

Ganjam:

The peasant movement in Khallikote and Athagada estates continued to be characterised by the demands of peasants for remission of rent, amendment to the Estate Land Bill in the face of Ministry's support to the Raja in the collection of rent by resorting to distraints. Banamali Maharana and Jagannath Mishra (President, DCC) toured the estates exhorting the peasants to be ready for observing satyagraha if the amendment to the said bill was not passed by 31 May. In this situation, the Raja offered to seek a compromise with the ryots by granting a remission of six annas in rupee provided the ryots did not press for the passing of the Madras Estates Land Act Amendment Bill. Despite this offer, the Ganjam District Ryots Committee resolved on 12 May to go ahead with the plan for Civil Disobedience. Maharana and Govinda Chandra Mishra thought of trying out Satyagraha as a legitimate protest for the grievances of the peasants. Interestingly, Nilakantha Das with his usual

anti-Ministry stance also backed the proposal. The Ryots Committee advocated non-payment of taxes and disobedience of laws from 1 June and also asked the Ministry to resign in case the bill was not passed by 31 May. Accordingly, a meeting was organised in Kodala (1 June). In fact, 14 satyagrahis assembled in the meeting to start their journey to Berhampur Sub-Collector's office, mobilising peasants in the villages on the way. Maharana in his speech exhorted the peasants not to agree to any compromise with the landlords and hoped that if 15 thousand ryots would follow him, the assent of the Viceroy to the bill would be obtained. But DCC leaders like Dibakar Patnaik and Jagannatha Mishra backed out from the proposal of launching a Satyagraha immediately. Jagannatha Mishra said that as the PCC had not approved of the proposed Satyagraha, it should be postponed for a future date. Dibakar Patnaik pointed out that even if the bill were passed, there would be considerable delay before the ryots reap the benefit from it. In this situation, he suggested that the peasants should first try to 'dictate' the terms of compromise to the zamindars and in case the negotiations failed, then they could launch a no-tax campaign or some other kind of civil disobedience. Further, the satyagrahis were advised not to go to Berhampur for offering Satyagraha, but to travel through the villages and mobilise the peasants for future Satyagraha, if it finally became necessary. Maharana and Govinda Mishra had to finally accept the decision to postpone the Satyagraha. In this connection, Biswanath Das undertook a visit to Ganjam and advised the ryots to pay upto 50% of their rent and then ask for remission.

290. *Ibid*.
291. *HPD*, FNR, Ganjam, 25.5.39 (AC.No.1080).
In the peasant meeting at Phasi (14 June), Das pointed out that the delay in the passing of the bill was due to the fact that no decision had been arrived at on proposed compromise between ryots and zamindars. He went on to add that it would be profitable for the peasants to accept the terms of a compromise. He warned the peasants against any 'no-rent' campaign without the permission of the AICC. Maharana, however, expressed his opposition to the views of Das in the same meeting and asked the peasants to begin satyagraha even without waiting for the orders of the AICC.292 There was a virtual stoppage of rent payment around May-June and the hope of the ryots for announcement of remission rose high. In July, the Raja announced remission for the estates. For Khallikote and Attagada estates, it was 4 to 6 annas in the rupee with additional remissions in particular cases. For Birdi estate, remission of 4 annas in the rupee was conceded. Besides, a month's time was given to pay the rent to take advantage of the remissions. The announcement of remissions was 'fairly well received' in Attagada estate; but in Khallikote, where Maharana was 'more influential', the response was not favourable. Maharana continued to advise peasants not to pay more than what they had paid till then and asked them to be prepared for distraints.293 By August, however, there was a clear cut improvement in the collection of rent, followed by the grant of remission as well as imposition of distraints in particular cases.294 Maharana continued to advise the peasants to pay the rent if they were capable and in case they could not afford to pay to "keep their door open" for distraints without fear. However, the popular resistance to distraints could not be

292. HPD, FNR, Ganjam, 28.6.39 (AC.No.1080).
293. HPD, FNR, Ganjam, 28.6.39/13.7.39 (ACC-1080).
successful and peasants in most cases paid the rent. But we come across evidence of combined and forcible opposition to distrants as late as September in Borida village of Attagada estate. Here, the distraint had to be given up. Maharana also organised a youth association around July in Kudala. The association stepped up its activities in the context of Maharana's call for Satyagraha. The association demanded the removal of the non-Oriya clerks (basically Telugu) of the estates and advocated the appointment of residents of the estates.

In September, the Khonds of Luhagudi and Mohana refused to do bethi in connection with Agency civil work, even after being offered advance payment by the authorities. They demanded 4 annas a day for the work. The Khonds pointed out to the authorities that the Congress workers had assured them of the order against bethi. In fact, the DCC circulated a leaflet in the Agency explaining that: "Collectors have been instructed to punish the person demanding unpaid labour and none should render bethi services to anybody and report such cases to Congress authorities". The DCC also organised meetings in the Agency and explained to the Khonds that no one should render any bethi service and that police and magistrates should be defied. The campaign was so effective that the official report noted that "unless Government at once broadcast information in the Agency clarifying the position and saying that the customary 'bethi' labour of the Agency has to continue... it will be practically impossible to get any civil work done in the Agency...."

Jeypore Estate

What was noticeable in Jeypore estate in 1939 was the

295. Ibid.

296. HPD, Bethi in Kandhamal, September 1939, (Oriya pamphlet issued by Ganjam DCC); HPD, Collector (Ganjam) to Revenue Commissioner, 12.9.39, ACC No.1805.
establishment of "Congress houses/Ashrams" in many parts. These Ashrams were usually constructed by the "graduates" of Nuaput camp (referred to earlier). The objective of building these Ashrams was that they would be used as Congress offices and schools with the dawn of Swaraj. In fact, a vigorous drive for raising subscriptions towards the construction and maintenance of these ashrams was undertaken. Those who refused to contribute in the shape of money, paddy and wood were threatened! For example, a trainee of Nuaput camp Jagabandhu Das (alias Bhim Singh) raised subscriptions by way of imposing fine and even preached that those villages which would not pay would be 'destroyed' by 'Congress force' or "balls (bombs!) would be thrown" into the villages. Such ashrams sprung up in Bodonaikoguda, Duddari, and Godala in Borigumma - Dasmanthpur areas.297 Similarly, two Congress activists Kuruma Naiko and Bania Bin Naiko built a 'Congress house' at the foot of Dhobulumali hill. The house had a Congress flag hoisted at the top. Kurumo Naiko also offered puja in the house and contributions in terms of rice, vegetables and money were raised.298 In many cases, such ashrams were built by taking timber illegally from the reserved forest of the estate. The DCC defended the 'right' of the people cut timber for the construction of such ashrams. The DCC also protested to the forest authorities regarding cases involving confiscation of timber.299 In one case of theft of timber for the construction of Congress houses, the S.I. who conducted the enquiry was mobbed by 50 villagers. The people demanded that they all be arrested claiming that they were Congress members and they had stolen the timber for the construction of Congress

297. HPD, OPAI, No.106, April 1939 (ACC-1138).
298. HPD, FNR, Koraput, 27.3.39 (ACC-1083).
299. Ibid., 26.4.39 (ACC-1083).
house. The emboldened tribals, while mobbing the S.I., raised slogans like Gandhi Ki Jai and referred to one another as Soinia (troops) and called their leaders as Senapat.

Again in Nawrangpur, timber stolen for using in ashram construction and seized by the authorities under Forest Act was recovered by the people. The other interesting feature was that the ashrams with their collection of subscriptions in the shape of paddy were used as co-operative societies. In the final analysis, the ashrams were used as headquarters for popularising Congress ideology.

Interestingly, the tribals were advised to attend these 'Congress houses' instead of Magistrate's courts. For instance, Radha Mohan Sahu (MLA) advised the people charged with the clearing of jungle for podu cultivation to attend the Congress offices before they appeared in the criminal court. We come across a reference to the tribals who refused to attend the court in connection with a timber-cutting case in Jeypore. However, they appeared later in the court under the leadership of a Congress Gumastha and told the judge that they were kept at the Congress office where they had been instructed not to fear the magistrate. So also, a 'Congress pleader' defended the case involving timber cutting. The idea of Swaraj with its attendant infringement of laws and defiance of authority was a trend which started in 1938, and was further heightened in 1939. For instance, the Khonds refused to pay fees to the Excise staff for keeping Solapo toddy (Palm juice). In one case the Khonds assaulted the Excise peon.

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300. Ibid., 27.5.39 (ACC-1083).
301. Ibid., 12.4.39 (ACC-1083).
302. Ibid., 13.5.39 (ACC-1083).
303. Ibid., 30.2.39 (ACC-1083).
activist Kapilo Patro, appointed village officials superseding those appointed by the estate. He advised the people to ignore the estate officials and report directly to the Maharaja.304

Danardan Singh who was fairly active in 1938 started telling people that the Premier would have the police prosecuted and D.M. removed.305 The Khonds of Kunakbandi (Bissemcuttack) opposed the move by the authorities to reserve the jungles.306 Medingi Sisa, a follower of Marri Kamaya (Vizagpatnam), along with a local Congress activist of Nandapur advised the people to refuse to work in connection with Government construction. Accordingly, the Naik of Wardah refused to repair the school building at Padwa.307 So also, a Congress gumasta (clerk) in Jeypore circle instructed a village watchman to make over his gonda lands to Punu Domb, who was proposed to be appointed as a Congress Gonda of the village. In Tenthulikhunti P.S. (Nowrangpur), two constables who went to Lakidipalli village to execute a non-bailable warrant on a Congress activist Sanyasi Domb, were robbed of their purse, and assaulted by the villagers. The turban and shirts of the constables were torn. The villagers under the leadership of the Congress gumasta of Kongra, Bhagat Majhi, and the village Naiko assaulted the constables. The constables were then taken to the President of the Congress unit of the area, Ananda Behera. The constables were detained under a jack fruit tree for two hours in the sun. The President took down the names as well as the handcuffs of the constables after which, the constables

304. Ibid., 12.4.39 (ACC-1083).
305. Ibid. (ACC-1083).
306. Ibid. (ACC-1083).
were handed over to the village Naiko.\textsuperscript{308} In this connection, the DCC leader Sadasiba Tripathy (MLA) and the villagers lodged a counter case against the constables for preventing them from attending the Congress meeting. The villagers also admitted that they combined together against the constables.\textsuperscript{309} The DCC extended full support to them on the issue. In a meeting organised at Tentulikhunti, people were encouraged to resist the 'law'. Those who declined to give evidence in support of the Congress activists were threatened. The villagers were told that the Ministry would be asked to resign, if the demands of local leaders were not fulfilled. Under the pressure of the anti-police campaign, the S.I. of Tentulikhunti fled to Madras without reporting to the authorities.\textsuperscript{310} Further in Nowrangpur, the market lessee were prevented from collecting the tax by the people who claimed that Congress had abolished the tax.\textsuperscript{311}

There is also evidence regarding the looting of a granary in September. The tribals led by Congress gamaasthas approached the moneylender, Government officials, and police inspectors in connection with paddy loans. This specific development, however, occurred in the context of general withholding of paddy loans to the people by the Mahajans and moneylenders in view of proposed moneylenders' bill by the Congress Ministry, which promised a reduction in the rates of interest chargeable for loans of grain.\textsuperscript{312} More interestingly, a sympathetic S.D.O. of Koraput, enquiring into the grain looting incident, sought to effect a compromise

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\textsuperscript{308} HPD, Spl. Report Case No.13/1939, Koraput, 13.5.39 (ACC-1171).
\textsuperscript{309} Ibid.; HPD, FNR, Koraput, 13.5.39/27.5.39 (ACC-1083).
\textsuperscript{310} HPD, F.No.207/1939 (ACC-1776).
\textsuperscript{311} HPD, FNR, 13.5.39 (ACC-1083).
\textsuperscript{312} HPD, FNR, 27.8.39/13.9.39.
\end{flushright}
with the local activists and settled the matter by obtaining an undertaking from the people not to repeat such action. The action of the concerned S.D.O. was interpreted by the police as "abdicating in favour of parallel Government".\textsuperscript{313} In this context, it is important to note that the one of the objectives of the formation of 'Congress house' was to use these houses as co-operative lending societies. For this, subscriptions in the shape of paddy were raised by the Congress activists even under the threats of jail! In fact two grain golas were organised in Koraput taluk around June, 1939 for storing ragi.\textsuperscript{314} Biswas Roy had appealed to the people in a meeting at Dasmanthpur in April for contributions of grains for the Congress co-operative houses.\textsuperscript{315}

Another form of popular mobilisation existing in the estate was the circulation of Gandhi Khatoli,\textsuperscript{316} (small wooden apparatus) which kept moving from village to village. People in the village kept the Khatoli for a number of days and made offerings to the Khatoli along with pujas before passing it on to the next village. The 'Khatoli' was said to have originated in Madras presidency. The purpose of the circulation of Khatoli was to mobilise and indoctrinate tribals with Gandhian ideology.

In April, the DCC in its meeting decided that Congress activists would tour villages informing people that 'Swaraj' had been achieved. It also decided to enroll women and children as Congress members.\textsuperscript{317} However, the Congress

\textsuperscript{313. Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{314. HPD, Examples of dangerous tendencies..., F.No.142/1939 (ACC-1122).}
\textsuperscript{315. HPD, FNR, Koraput, 26.4.39 (ACC-1083).}
\textsuperscript{316. HPD, FNR, Koraput, 13.5.39 (ACC-1083).}
\textsuperscript{317. Ibid., 26.4.39 (ACC-1083).}
membership enrolment for 1939 was in a low key.\footnote{Ibid., 13.5.39 (ACC-1083).}

It is in this context of fall in the number of Congress membership that Biswas Roy talked of preparing people for the revival of Civil Disobedience around May.\footnote{Ibid.} So also, Sadasiva Tripathy mooted the idea of 'Satyagraha' against plough tax and forest taxes. DCC also often stood by actions at popular level. For example, it instituted non-official enquiry committees comprising of local Congress activists in cases which had already been dealt with by the authorities.\footnote{HPD, Examples of dangerous tendencies... Koraput, F.No.142/1939, 25.5.39 (ACC-1122).} So also, the DCC sanctioned Rs.50/- for the defence of certain Congress activists.\footnote{Ibid.} In fact, Biswas Ray despatched a telegram to the C.M., the PCC and the Governor of Orissa in May severely complaining of mal-administration of Jeypore estate (particularly by the forest and police department) and the repression on Congress activists. He also referred to the police excesses in Tentulikhunti village (referred to earlier). The local newspaper Prajabani also sought to highlight the police excesses and repression by the estate authorities by equating the prevailing condition in Koraput with that of "pre-Russian revolutionary period" and a "condition where European countries overthrew the Government".\footnote{HPD, F.No.207 of 1939, Question of allegation against Prajabani, 9.6.39 (ACC-1776).} Both Biswanath Das and Nilakantha Das toured the district in June and addressed meetings. In the meetings, popular grievances concerning bethi, Gudem, Mustajari system and oppressions by forest officials were conveyed to the P.M. The Premier, conceding
that condition prevailing in the estate were not satisfactorily appealing to the estate authorities to take up necessary reforms. Nilakantha Das brought out a report titled *The Truth about Jeypore* on the basis of his enquiry into the popular grievances. The report lay stress on the abolition of Mustajari system, grant of receipts in Oriya for every payment, and recognition of Congress committees by estate officials as well as the Raja. It also pointed out that in cases involving forest matters, the Congress committees should be consulted. The official report in connection with the campaign by Congress leadership observed that it was meant to undermine the authority of officials. When the authorities wanted to prosecute Biswas Roy for "encouraging the inhabitants of the district for breaking laws", as well as the editor of *Prajabani*, Premier, Das, observed in his note to Chief Secretary:

> "I have tried to use my influence with the MLAs, whose activities are legitimate and open, and have also appealed to the estate... Sanction of prosecution under the circumstances necessarily implies a break up of the peaceful atmosphere already created.... I would not allow the Magistrate or any other official to proceed against the people concerned or Government taking any steps."  

This position by the Premier was indicative of the fact that the Ministry was defensive of DCC leadership and its activities. In other words, movement at popular levels was allowed openness and initiatives and such trends were strengthened by the overall support of top leadership such as the Ministry and PCC.

In Khariar sub-division, Congress activists took upon themselves the tasks of defecting excise offences, specially illicit possession of liquor and in certain cases arresting


people for such crimes.\textsuperscript{327} Similarly, popular assertion against oppressions by Zamindar's officials and police continued in Khariar estate. So also, tenants' opposition to the payment of ranua and chari (grazing tax) also continued.\textsuperscript{328}

\section*{VII}

The review of the state of peasant/tribal movements in the province during 1935-39 clearly indicates that by its diverse forms of struggle as well as various methods of mobilisation, it transformed the existing peasant consciousness. Besides, the peasant movement by projecting and popularising various demands on class lines distinctly eroded the legitimacy of the landed elements. Hence, it created a climate for the radical transformation of the existing agrarian structure. The other significant aspect of the movement was that it was based on the ideology of nationalism.

As we have seen, in the course of mobilisation of the peasantry, not only the demands of peasants but also the message of anti-imperialism got injected into remote and diverse areas of the province. Similarly, as observed earlier, from Congress platforms, Kisan Sabha meetings were also organised. As in many cases and more particularly in Ganjam and Koraput, Congress membership enrolment drive was basically the method of mobilising and enrolling peasants to Kisan Sabha.

However, peasant resistance involving Satyagraha, Civil Disobedience and no rent as well as popular assertions against oppressive officials and police were in many cases encouraged by the existence of Congress Ministry. The latter helped to transform the notion of 'Swaraj' at popular

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{327} HPD, FNR, SBP, 27.9.39 (ACC-1079).
  \item \textsuperscript{328} Ibid., 10.2.39/25.2.39 (ACC-1079).
\end{itemize}
levels. Besides, the left wing leadership in terms of Congress socialists and Communists exerted considerable impact on the movement. It is moreover, important to observe that wherever the socialists/communists backed Krushak Sangha pushed the peasant movement to a militant pitch, the Ministry explored solutions not only by bringing out compromises with landed elements, but also often by backing the leadership at local levels. Further, the ministry by defending civil liberties of many radical Congress/Kisan activists created space for the thriving and progressive leap of the movement.