Under the second part of the 1935 Act a Central Federal Legislature was to be formed with two houses. Crucial functions, such as defence and foreign affairs were to be reserved to the Governor General. The Legislature was organised so that the Upper House had 40 per cent representation from the States, the lower 33 per cent. That this would guarantee a conservative presence was ensured by the fact that these seats were to be filled by nominees of the States' rulers. This would have made it impossible for Congress or any party to acquire a majority in the Central Government. 1

The established policy of the Congress to this scheme was one of outright rejection. 2 However, we will show that in these years there was an attempt to shift the Congress policy towards one of political development through constitutional change, a process which was sought to be aided through threat of direct action.


2 "In view of the Announcements made on behalf of the British Government that steps will be taken to inaugurate the proposed Federation, the All India Congress Committee re-iterate their emphatic condemnation of the scheme and their decision to combat it in every possible way open to them. "AICC Resolution Calcutta, October 29-31, 1937. A.M. and S.G. Zaidi (ed), The Encyclopaedia of Indian National Congress, New Delhi, 1980 (hereafter Encyclopaedia of INC), Vol. XI, p. 257."
The Gandhian leadership's attitude to Federation and the relationship between the Congress and the movements for democratic representation in the Princely States were interrelated in this development. Three phases can be observed in this relationship: (i) up to late 1938, the Congress pledged moral support to the demands of the States Peoples' movements but disassociated itself from active involvement; (ii) between late 1938 and April 1939, Gandhi, Patel, and other leaders were themselves involved in the movement of the States' subjects; (iii) after April there was a reversion to the earlier attitude. These phases may be made sense of in terms of (i) a period of negotiations between Lord Lothian, the Viceroy and Gandhi and Right Wingers on the Federation scheme; (ii) a period of pressure attendant on the significant development of movements for responsible government in the States which the Congress leadership actively participated in as individuals; (iii) the cessation of such an involvement, with suggestions of a fundamental awareness of the limits of such a policy of involvement.

4.1 Negotiations

Congress policy had been adamant in its refusal to involve Congress organisationally in the States. Gandhi had mentioned opposition to this policy as one reason for his retirement from the Congress at the Bombay session in 1934. It is possible that caution in the States was related to doubts about the viability of extending the organisation to a new and very different

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3 See above, Chapter 1.1.
terrain. However, when at the Calcutta AICC session of September-October 1937 a resolution was passed seeking active support to the Mysore people Gandhi's hostile response seemed incommensurate with the challenge posed to established policy, at least if it were a question merely of minor tactical problems. He was strongly opposed to the resolution and considered it ultra vires as such a change could only be made by a General Session of the Party. More significant was his private response. In an unprecedented move he suggested to Patel that he and the others resign and that Nehru be left to form his own committee. The problem was resolved by the CWC overruling the resolution and referring the matter to the Haripura session.

Reasons for the Mahatma's hostility are suggested by Birla, who was performing his customary role of mediator between Congress and the colonial rulers. Attempts had been made at the same AICC meeting to ensure that Congress Ministers resign in

4 The differences in the state form between British and Princely India is significant here. The lack of civil liberties and institutional checks on authoritarian rule in the latter would obviously make mobilisation a completely different problem from the case of the more developed civil society of British India. See Mridula Mukherjee, "Peasant Movement in Patiala State, 1937-48", *Studies in History*, Vol. I, No. 2, July-December 1979, pp. 215-83 for some suggestive remarks on this problem.


7 To Patel, 1 November 1937, *ibid.*, pp. 285-86.

8 *Bombay Chronicle*, 3 January 1938.
the event of Federation being imposed, and Birla claimed that it was because of Gandhi that the resolution was defeated, hinting thereby that a negotiated settlement of the issue was possible.10

The possibility at this point then was that it was not merely political and organisational problems which restrained Congress intervention in the States. The brake was being applied to facilitate a context for negotiated settlement of the Federal plan. In Birla's account to Linlithgow such a possibility was projected with the concreteness of specific suggestions that would bridge differences. Thus he noted that while Gandhi's objections to the Federation as it stood were the principle of nomination in the States and the reservation to the Governor-General of defence and foreign policy, Birla believed that compromise could be achieved though lesser concessions. In his view, if larger states could be persuaded to use the existing legislatures for the purposes of electing the Ruler's nominees the first objection would not be so important. As for the second, Gandhi would only require an assurance that ultimately there would be changes. Linlithgow noted that as far as the

9 This resolution had been proposed by Masani and rejected by a vote of 92-6. Another amendment to the Federation resolution was also defeated. This was Sri Prakash's amendment urging the Central Assembly to pass a resolution opposing any action from the Assembly to implement Federation. Indian Annual Register, ed. N.N. Mitra, July-December 1937, p. 355.

latter was concerned there would be no hard and fast rule and that he would bring the reserved areas within the purview of his ministers in the Federal cabinet while reserving final decisions to himself. Birla thought that this would appeal to Gandhi. He thought that the main impediment would be Nehru, though he hoped Gandhi would be able to influence him. He concluded by urging Linlithgow to push through the Federal scheme quickly, while Gandhi was alive, so he thought that Nehru would be difficult to deal with unchecked by Gandhi. 11

Gandhi had a tendency to defer the concrete specifications of policy in relation to issues which were not immediately on the agenda, and Birla had in the past misinterpreted this to mean a willingness to compromise. However, in this instance other evidence indicates that Gandhi's reaction in September 1937 might indeed have been governed by the Federation issue. Further, while Birla had exaggerated the extent to which the Gandhian leadership would be willing to moderate their objectives, his emphasis was correct. For the Right wingers and Gandhi the priority was that the structure of the States' representation change in order that a Congress majority at the Centre be facilitated; the question of reserved powers occupied a longer-term position within their strategy.

This becomes clear in Lord Lothian's conversations with Congress leaders in January 1938. Gandhi had noted that the Federation as it stood now would not be acceptable to the Cong-

11 Birla's interview with Linlithgow, ibid.
ress unless the party's position as the only representative body of the Indian people was recognised and the States' peoples were elected. This he said would not end opposition to the Act but would constitute a crucial step in doing so. He then struck a more conciliatory note, saying that he did not envisage an amendment to the Act at this stage but only required a change in the status of the Congress through a process of recognition and collaboration with the British in which both were seen to be united in pressurizing the princes. He envisaged later a situation in which there would be the calling of a constituent convention to amend the constitution. When Lothian asked him to clarify that such a convention would come about as a result of negotiations between the Viceroy and the Federal cabinet, so as to preclude the apprehension that unlimited modifications might be asked for, Gandhi said that such an assurance was implicit. But, in conclusion, he noted that it was his final desire to replace the Act by one made by a real people's parliament. 12

The last statement can be regarded as a long term objective. In essence Gandhi was renewing the characteristic demand that the popularity and singular representativeness of the Congress be recognized. This was in itself a major demand which would not be easily accepted by the Government. Once it was accepted, especially through the practice of a joint pressure exerted on the Native States' rulers, a fundamental shift in the balance of political forces would be achieved. But there was

12 Lothian's Memorandum to the Viceroy, 24 January 1938. Linlithgow Ms. F. 125/5.
a difference here from the earlier expression of this position. In the Impasse of March–July 1937 the demand that the Congress' representativeness be recognised was correlated with a demonstra-
tion of the party's power to halt the constitutional process
started by the Colonial government, thereby affecting the confi-
dence of its administrative and social bases. Here, however, the negotiations were being carried on in private. As far as the newspapers were concerned the leadership had outrightly rejected Lothian's proposals.

The emphasis which Birla made in his evaluation of the leadership's priorities, and which is evident in Lothian's talk with Gandhi, found its way into the Haripura resolution on the Federation, which emphasised the question of State's representa-
tives rather than reserved powers. There had been amend-
ments proposed by Masani, Z.A. Ahmed and Kamaladevi Chhattrapadhyaya, the first wanting the resolution to be more specific in

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13 See above, Chapter 2.

14 e.g. Bombay Chronicle, 3 January 1938, p. 1, in which it was noted that the CWC had given "short shift" to Lothian's move.

15 In the first paragraph the conventional rejection of Federation and invocation of Constituent Assembly was articula-
ted. This paragraph concluded with the statement that the scheme excluded from the sphere of responsibility vital functions of Government. Then the bulk of the resolution went on to focus on the problem of States' representation noting that it should approximate to the British Indian provinces. Encyclopaedia of INK, Vol. XI, pp. 429-30. Birla, trying to prove to Linlithgow that the Congress was moving towards accepting Federation, pointed out the em-
phasis on States' representation in the resolution. Interview with Linlithgow, 7 February 1938. Linlithgow Mss. F. 125/5. Tomlinson again misrepresents details here by noting that the nomination of the States' representatives was the only objection to the Federal scheme in the CWC resolution. op.cit., p. 113.
its attack on the reserved powers, the second wanting joint action with the Kisan Sabha, Trade Union Congress and the States Peoples Movements in ending Federation, the third simply asking for direct action in the event of the imposition of Federation. All of the amendments were defeated.16

Purshottamdas Tricumdas of the CSP was later to speculate on the relation between the visit of Lord Lothian and the Hari-pura resolution on the States. He suggested that the expression of Congress policy here was oriented to enable Congress to accept federation without altering the 1935 Act.17 And in fact the resolution on the States complements the Federation resolution in these terms. The resolution initially directed that the position of Congress Committees in the States be examined, that they might be disbanded and that no direct action was to be undertaken by them. Due to considerable opposition - Sitaramayya condemned this as a betrayal of the Congress organisations which

17 ".... However much our Working Committee members protest, in the background of the Lothian Scheme the resolution on Federation contains a plain suggestion - of course with a verbose loophole - that the Congress might consider the acceptance of Federation if the States were in form at least democratised. The resolution on States was a fitting sequel to this position. It might be argued by the Princes that if the Congress continued to exist organisationally in the States any democratisation would be so much accession to the influence of the Congress. The Congress very obligingly withdrew its organisation, from the soil of the States... "Unity in Freedom: Problem of the States" Congress Socialist, 4, 10, 5 March 1939, pp. 5, 7. He did not explain however why leaders like Bajaj, Patel and simultaneously with his article's release, Gandhi himself, had since entered the States' fray.
had been developing in Mysore, Travancore and Cochin under the Congress name - it was modified to allow existing organisations to function under the direction of the Working Committee and as long as they did not undertake direct action. 18 This, in conjunction with the Congress demand for reform in the States in the Federation resolution, effectively meant that scope was being given for a non-conflictual and self-activated reform by the Princes and through the intercession of the colonial government. If the States' movements themselves effected this, well and good. But the Congress was not at this stage going to frighten the princes away from the idea of the reform by interceding itself.

This was effectively what Patel said in his address to the Deccan States' Peoples' conference in May. He claimed that the Congress had faith in effecting a change in the Princes. He agreed that there existed some states which were autocratic, but these were protected by the Paramount Power. He appealed to the States' subjects to carry on their own struggle by reiterating that Congress was not out to antagonise the Princes. He concluded by hoping that the Mysore Durbar would usher in reforms which would be emulated by the others. 19

There dominated within the argument for cessation of Congress struggles in the States at Haripura a strand of tactical withdrawal, now espoused by Nehru as well. He argued that things

19 Bombay Chronicle, 23 May 1938, p. 7.
could get out of hand and that the Congress might not be able to control the situation in the States. He argued for careful preparatory work and that the States' peoples take the responsibility for their own struggles until the situation changed. From the Congress' point of view it was necessary to consolidate their position in British India before undertaking activity elsewhere. Nehru was here echoing the traditional opposition to intervention in the States and obviously from a tactical viewpoint it had some relevance. But the attempt to disassociate Congress from this very preparatory work fitted in with the Right Wing attitude of conciliation.

Birla argued to Linlithgow that the Haripura resolution argued well for Congress malleability on the Federation issue. And secret reports for the period exhibited a similar analysis. Patel and Bhulabhai Desai were reported to have argued that opposition to Federal elections would work adversely on Congress and that resignation from the ministries would not help. At the same meeting Gandhi was reported to have said that at this time it was not "advisable to give prominence to Federation other than by expressing condemnation of the scheme." One


21 Interview with Linlithgow, 7 February 1938. Linlithgow Ms. F. 125/5.

22 This was at Calcutta, before the CWC meeting of 1-6 April 1938. Survey of Secret Information Relating to the Congress Attitude towards Federation enclosure in Linlithgow to Zetland, 6 April 1938, Linlithgow Ms. F. 125/5.

23 Ibid.
report also had him saying at a confidential meeting after the Haripura Congress (which included Premiers) that they should trust him for the next four years even if Federation was accepted, by which time Congress would have control over the country and would have capacity to start a civil disobedience movement.24 Patel, Desai and Munshi were said to have recommended modifications in the Federal scheme25 while reports from Calcutta, Poona and Maharashtra all claimed that Gandhi was trying to manoeuvre the Congress into accepting a modified Federal scheme.26

Birla's and the government's reports were over-optimistic. While Gandhi and the Gandhians could envisage participation in a Federal scheme in which the States' representatives were elected, they were not as flexible, or as politically desperate, as the reports would suggest. Patel had in fact told Lothian that Congress intended to make a success of provincial autonomy so that they would have the strength to fight Federation.27 And Rajendra Prasad, far from accepting Federation, had wanted legislation to be speeded up in anticipation of a deadlock over this issue.28 Gandhi and the Gandhians were willing to negotiate, and were even prepared to orient Congress resolutions so as to facilitate this, but they had certain definite demands which they would not dilute.

24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid.
27 Lothian's Memorandum to the Viceroy, op.cit.
28 Rajendra Prasad to S.K. Sinha, 4 March 1938. Rajendra Prasad Ms. 3-B/1938.
These qualifications are borne out by the talks Linlithgow had with Gandhi. Gandhi’s views were as represented by Lothian. He noted that while his intention remained to break the Act, he recognised the difficulty of a major amendment so soon and what he wanted in the meanwhile was recognition that the Congress was the only party that could resist the Government or deliver the goods and that the States should concede the right of popular choice for choosing representatives to the Centre. The issue of Defence and Foreign affairs was not so important he said as the imperative was to reach a viable settlement. He emphasized the demand for recognition of the Congress’ representativeness; and on the question of representation in the States he hinted that the Government should seek to influence the rulers. While maintaining the latter demand, and emphasising that Linlithgow should not think that without these the Congress would grumble but work the Act, the questions of recognition of Congress remained paramount in his mind, and all else would flow from that first step.²⁹

These demands were problematic from the British point of view. Their hopes were only kept alive by the pronouncements of a minor Congress politician. Satyamurti, a constitutionalist, and a figure who carried little weight in the party, told Linlithgow that some modifications of the Federal plan, such as a couple of the major states undertaking changes should be pushed through so that Gandhi would have a basis on which to persuade

²⁹ Interview with Gandhi, 15 April 1938, ibid.
The Congress to accept Federation. They did not get such a moderate proposal from anyone else. Bhulabhai Desai for example urged the Government to pressurize the States into accepting a representative form of Government, failing which, Linlithgow felt he had implied, no meeting ground could be managed. Even Rajagopalachari's assurance that the Congress was not hostile was predicated on the same condition, i.e. elected States' representatives. As for the dominant leadership, their position remained as consistent. Patel told Lumley that the Congress would accept Federation only if the power acquired at the Centre was sufficient to rechannelize military expenditure into developmental schemes.

However, the British might have gleaned some hope from the fact that he also noted that the majority of Congressmen did not want a fight. Perhaps this statement was conditioned by Right-Wing anxiety over the disunity that had developed in the party under the ministries. But to say that the Congress did not want a fight was not the same as saying that they were willing to accept less than their minimum demand on the issue. This is made clear by the next phase of the Gandhian relation-

30 Linlithgow's interview with Satyamurti, 12 April 1938, ibid.
31 Interview with Desai, 12 April 1938, ibid.
32 Erskine to Linlithgow, 17 May 1938, ibid. However, as we have shown, his attitude to Federation was more ambiguous than suggested here, Ch. 34.
34 Ibid.
ship with the States' Peoples' movement, when Gandhi, Patel and others became personally involved in the agitation.

4.2 Agitation

By September 1938 there had been disturbances in Travancore, Kashmir and Hyderabad and Brabourne, acting Viceroy, thought that this development had the support of the Congress leadership. He believed that they wanted to pressurize the State governments into accepting popular representation so that Congress would attain a majority in the Federal Legislature. His proof was that the Provincial Ministries under the Congress had refused appeals to intervene in the States on the grounds that they did not have the necessary police reserves and did not have a proper knowledge of the situation. The Governors were hamstrung because independent action by them would have led to conflict with their Ministers.\(^{35}\) C.P. Rama\-swamy Aiyer, the Travancore Dewan echoed this and claimed the Congress was increasingly involved in struggles for responsible government in the States in order that they get a majority in the Federal Assembly. He asked the British government to pointedly dissociate themselves from these movements so that they would be deflated and a unified thrust from the Congress could be prevented.\(^{36}\) This implied that it was suspected in a number of quarters that the Congress was attempting a careful attack on the structures of the Princely states to ensure a

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35 Brabourne to Zetland, 4 October 1938. Linlithgow Ms. F. 125/6.

36 Memorandum to Government on disturbances in the States, ibid.
change in the power balance underlying the constitution, a strategy that would be foiled if the British maintained a resilient attitude on the chances of such a ploy affecting the Act.

A change did in fact seem to have taken place in the Gandhian leadership's attitude, perhaps in response to the development of strong movements in the States. Earlier in the year Gandhi had, in interpreting the Haripura resolution, noted that the Congress could help the State's people not by "meddling with their affairs, but by acting as an intermediary". However, by September, though the emphasis on the self-activity of the States' subjects to redress their grievances remained, he was now irritated by the attempt to use the Haripura resolution to criticise Congress involvement. He noted that it had never been regarded as a principle and the Congress should extend help wherever possible. But the image of non-antagonism towards the Princes and the function of Congress as impartial arbitrator continued. In October, at the Baroda States' subjects' conference, Patel, while reasserting traditional Congress policy, urged the rulers to establish popular rule. More significantly, he noted that unless this was done there was no point in talking about Federation. Further, unless this change was comparable


38 "... If the people of the States feel safe in entrusting their welfare to the Congress, the Princes should feel equally safe in trusting the Congress..." "Non-Intervention", Harijan, 1 October 1938, in ibid., pp. 94-95.
to that in British India "the latter would not think of joining the Federation". In November, Gandhi unleashed a definite threat. He said he was disturbed to hear rumours that the British policy allowing the Princes to grant responsible government had changed at the instance of Prince and Dewans. He went on to criticise the Paramount power, formally responsible for Justice, for supporting repression in Dhenkanal in Orissa. Most significantly, he noted that Ministers in the Provinces could not remain unmoved by occurrences in neighbouring States and approved the Orissa Ministry's giving refuge to the Dhanakanal subjects. It was the Ministers business to give advice to the Paramount Power and the latter, "if it is to enjoy friendly relations with the provincial ministers in bound to give sympathetic listening". After noting that inspite of the Congress non-intervention policy it was bound to intervene in the face of injustice he concluded:

And if the Princes believe that the good of the people is also their good, they will gratefully seek and accept the Congress assistance. It is surely in their interest to cultivate friendly relations with an organisation which bids fair, in the future, not very distant, to replace the Paramount Power, let me hope by friendly arrangement. Will they not read the handwriting on the wall?

The change in the Gandhian leadership's attitude to the States may be related to two factors. The generation of power-

39 Bombay Chronicle, 29 October 1938, pp. 6, 20; 31 October, p. 4. He invited the States' rulers to study the Haripura resolution before entering the Federation and thence take steps to democratize Government.

40 "States and the People", Harijan, 3 December 1938 in Princes and the People, pp. 95-99.
ful movements in the States in the wake of Congress Ministry formation is the most transparent reason. It is difficult to establish that this can be in turn related to fear of left-wing ascendancy in these areas, as was suggested by Birla to Linlithgow. While Birla's suggestion here may simply be seen as another point of psychological pressure on the Colonial officialdom, exercised in order to get them to settle with the Gandhians, there is certainly room for further research here.

The other reason is suggested by an interesting speculation by Zetland. He pointed out that there had probably been disappointment when Linlithgow returned to India with no tangible concession on the issue of Federation. He noted that Gandhi had completely withdrawn and speculated that he was now conjuring with a frontal attack on the States to attain his goal. In fact there had been some hope in the nationalist press that this had been the objective of Linlithgow's visit to England. It is noteworthy that Linlithgow returned to take over the Viceroyalty on 25 October and Patel's address to the Baroda States Subjects Conference, with its explicit connection between the acceptability of the Federal Scheme and the democratisation of the States' representation, took place on 28 October.

In December and January, though the responsibility for atrocities in the States was squarely placed on the shoulders

41 Interview, 14 December 1938. Linlithgow Mss. F. 125/6.
43 Bombay Chronicle, 5 May 1938, p. 1; 13 May, p. 8; 9 July p. 1.
of the Paramount Power's representatives by Gandhi, it was clear that this was with a view to pressurize the British to intervene to reform the State's structures.\textsuperscript{44} He was quite uncompromising in having the pressure for this maintained at this stage, despite Patel and Bajaj thinking that at that moment a major crisis would not be good for the Congress; Gandhi was reported to have said that he was not sure if it would be for India's good if Bajaj, leader of the Jaipur Praja Mandal, withdrew.\textsuperscript{45} The Bombay Ministers were also reported to be nervous about the possibilities of the Rajkot issue, and apprehended a call to resign by the CWC.\textsuperscript{46}

In this context a communique from the constitutionalist, Munshi, is particularly revealing. Written to Lumley and claiming to be his own views, but representing those of Patel as well, it clearly bears the stamp of Patel, and demonstrates a determin-

\textsuperscript{44} See "Rajkot", Harijan, 7 January 1939. Princes and the People, pp. 107-08; "Rajkot", Harijan, 4 February 1939, ibid., pp. 104-08, in which he emphasised Congress Ministries' responsibility to the States' peoples. "It is insufferable that the Congress which is today in alliance with the British Government should be treated as an enemy and outsider in the States which are vessels of the British". 21 January 1939, ibid., pp. 256-57, in which he feared that the Jaipur movement would have all-India repercussions because the leader, Bajaj, was a CWC member, and because the method of repression was too drastic to countenance without endangering all activities in States connected with legitimate political aspirations: "Rajkot and Jaipur", Harijan, 4 February, ibid., pp. 111-12, in which he said the fight was really between the Congress and the British in the form of the Rajkot Resident and the Jaipur Premier. He said it was the duty of the Viceroy to restore the infringed Rajkot pact made with Patel in December and to lift the ban on the Praja Mandal in Jaipur.

\textsuperscript{45} Lumley to Governor General, 28 January 1939. Linlithgow Ms. F. 125/53.

\textsuperscript{46} Lumley to Governor-General, ibid.
nation, taking the lead from Gandhi's own intransigence, to make the most out of the threatened crisis. It stated that the Rajkot ruler's breach of the agreement had effectively been backed by the British either actively or passively - so that the responsibility for the struggle and its consequences fell on the Colonial Government. The struggle was to be conceived of as that of the Rajkot State subjects against the agency police, the former backed by the people of India. It was the basis for a fight by political India. An extended struggle was promised because of this backing, and the non-intervention of the Provincial Governments would be guaranteed, the infringement of which by the Colonial government would lead to an irrevocable constitutional crisis. There was a certainty that this would create a ferment in the country given the national and international contexts (i.e. Britain trying to get India involved in a war against her will). The logical conclusion was reached by the demand that power be transferred both in the States and at the Centre. However, because there was a lack of faith on the part of the people vis-a-vis the Princes and the British, there was a strong likelihood of civil disobedience, deriving from the smallest of issues. Finally there was the important and revealing question, "Are these the issues on which such a situation should be allowed to develop leading to a struggle between Britain and India?" Pressure had definitively replaced negotiation in this barely concealed threat demanding British intervention for democratisation of the States.

47 30 January 1939, enclosure in Lumley to Linlithgow, 31 January 1939, ibid.
Haig was quite prosaic about the whole situation. He did not think the Congress was really interested in a generalised fight over the States issue, though he conceded the possibility of localised agitations backed by the non-intervention of Provincial Governments. This was derived from his own observation of the U.P. Congress' attitude to agitation in Benares State. In Madras, however, there was grave apprehension that a general resignation might be ordered because of the States issue, though Rajagopalachari reassured Erskine that this was unlikely. In Bombay, Lumley was even drawing up a plan of action in case the Ministry resigned.

That this phase was one of pressure and negotiation rather than a prelude to total conflict is indicated by the mediation undertaken by Birla and Mahadev Desai to reduce friction between Congress and the Colonial Government. They assured Linlithgow that Gandhi's position was not really as stated in the Harijan. Earlier Gandhi had written a conciliatory note to the Viceroy on the Jaipur issue and Desai and Birla suggested to Linlithgow:

48 Haig to Linlithgow, 31 January 1939, Linlithgow Ms. F. 125/102.
49 Erskine to Linlithgow, 3 February 1939, Linlithgow Ms. F 125/107.
50 Lumley to Governor-General, 7 February 1939, Linlithgow Ms. F. 125/53.
51 "Shri K.M. Munshi, Sir Purushottamdas and now Shri G.D. Birla tell me that my writings in Harijan about the States have been causing you embarrassment — more especially about Jaipur. I have therefore suspended publication of the accompanying article (this dealt with the Jaipur Premier Beauchamp St. John threatening to use violence to deal with non-violence, ultimately published under the title "Jaipur" in Harijan, 11 February 1939). I need hardly say that I
gow that he develop this good will by calling Gandhi for an interview. The Viceroy was unwilling to do so as he thought that such a move would alienate the Princes, especially in the wake of the articles Gandhi had written on the States. Desai and Birla explained that Gandhi's public statements were intended for public consumption and therefore need not be taken seriously. Appeals came also from Rajagopalachari who urged the Viceroy to call for Gandhi so as to terminate the Rajkot and Jaipur struggles. Gandhi himself suggested an interview and this convinced the Viceroy that he wanted to develop his image as mediator and the Congress as emergent power. Linlithgow of course declined because of the implications this would have for the confidence of the Princes, Muslims and Services in his Government.

Cont'd... f.n. 51

have no desire whatsoever to do anything that would cause you embarrassment, if I could avoid it. My purpose is to secure justice to the people concerned. How I wish it were possible for you to take effective action in the 3 cases mentioned by me in last letter. 31 January 1939. CWG, LXVIII, p. 357. On 26 January, Gandhi had drawn Linlithgow's attention to repression in Rajkot, Talcher and Jaipur and the involvement of British residents in two of these. He said this meant that the States subjects had to fight the central government as well. He urged that it was the duty of the Paramount Power to intervene and secure justice for the States' subjects, ibid., pp. 330-31.

52 Interview between Laithwaite, Private Secretary to the Viceroy, Birla and Desai, reported in Linlithgow to Zetland, 7 February 1939. Linlithgow Ms. F. 125/7.

53 Rajagopalachari to Viceroy, 10 February 1939, Linlithgow Ms. F. 125/67.

54 "...If you think that by a meeting you could clear my mind of the disquiet and show me that my belief is erroneous, I would be glad to run up to Delhi..." Gandhi to Linlithgow, 12 February, 1939, CWG, LXVIII, p. 409.

55 Linlithgow to Zetland, 14 and 21 February 1939, Linlithgow Ms. F. 125/7.
However, the whole context of agitation, and its potential significance, entered a completely different phase with Gandhi's fast in support of the Rajkot people's demands. Instead of the controlled exercise of pressure, the elemental atmosphere of outright conflict came into being. Bombay for example showed strong signs of giving way under the pressure unleashed by Gandhi's decision, and there were reports of mounting hysteria amongst the Gujarati population. Kher feared that resignation was imminent because it was felt that the Rajkot rulers could not withstand such pressure without tacit British support. 56

Rajagopalachari changed his tune, fearing now the consequences of Gandhi's action: he reiterated the normal solution of having the Viceroy call Gandhi for interview, and also urged that the Government make the Thakore Sahib, ruler of Rajkot, accept Gandhi's proposals that he vacate his place and allow a Council of Administration to be set up as well as a constitutional committee. 57 Pant also urged intervention on the grounds that it would be difficult for the Ministry to function in the event of Gandhi's death. 58 Shri Krishna Sinha of Bihar echoed him. 59

56 Lumley to Viceroy, cable on 5 March 1939. Linlithgow Ms. F. 125/53.
57 Erskine to Viceroy, 3 March 1939, Linlithgow Ms. F. 125/67. If these moves were not made, Rajagopalachari said, "I tremble to contemplate alternative...." Communicated by Erskine to Linlithgow, 5 March 1939. Ibid.
58 Haig to Linlithgow, 6 March 1939, ibid., F. 125/102.
59 Hallett to Linlithgow, 5 March 1939, ibid., F. 125
The shift that took place here was unexpected. There seems little likelihood that the Gandhian leadership ever intended to bring the States' problem to a point where generalised conflict threatened to replace a pressure for negotiation and change, inspite of the threats Patel had blandished through his lieutenant Munshi. This is indicated by several features of the agitation: firstly, inspite of Gandhi's militant denunciations of both the States' rulers and the Raj for repression in the States, the simultaneous diplomatic approaches by his intermediaries, Mahadev Desai and Birla, and his own letters to Linlithgow indicate that a similar motivation underlay his own attitude to the Rajkot issue. Further the very places selected for agitation had been carefully chosen, evidently with a view to ensure that the agitations did not cross the boundaries of control, suggesting that highly specific and limited struggles were conceived of: Gandhi, Patel and Jamnalal Bajaj had substantial influence in Rajkot, Baroda and Jaipur. And it seemed to be just such a controlled agitation, oriented to a swift and amicable settlement, which Gandhi had in mind when he arrived in Rajkot. The desired agreement would probably be registered and followed by other States rulers as a model of change.


61 Thus Kripalani wrote to Rajendra Prasad that Gandhi had noted that there should be no change in policy and intervention should only take place in the event of inhuman repression of legitimate action. He claimed that he had been misunderstood and did not merit the compliments of
However, Gandhi met with a stubborn attitude in Rajkot, and this led to his resorting to the drastic measure of a fast. If he had died he must have known that this would unleash confrontation with the Raj, as the responses attending the fast indicate. But the logic of immediate commitments seems to have overwhelmed the compulsions of strategy. There was a precarious balance here between controlled pressure and the basis for outright conflict. This crisis was averted by the Viceroy's intervention, on 7 March, when Sir Maurice Gwyer was asked to arbitrate in the matter.

It is this development which makes the most common explanation for Gandhi's involvement with the States' Peoples' movements seem so limited. This is the belief that the changed attitude of the Gandhian leadership on the States was related to power struggles in the Congress. The States would now afford a foothold to Gandhi to win back the ground lost by Bose's election at Haripura, and the concentration on the Rajkot issue just before and during the Tripuri Congress was to draw attention away from the internal conflicts of the Congress and to consolidate Gandhi's prestige. 62

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the Socialists. He basically only wanted diplomatic pressure to be brought to bear on the British and the States' rulers. The Haripura resolution was to remain valid. 2 March 1939, Rajendra Prasad, Ms. 2-9/39/coll.1.

62 Robin Jeffrey, op.cit., p. 13; James Wood, also makes this connection in the context of the Rajkot satyagraha, p. 263; Sumit Sarkar implies a similar analysis of the Rajkot satyagraha when he notes that "Gandhi himself went to Rajkot and started a fast on 3 March - just on the eve of the
4.3 The Withdrawal

The withdrawal of the States' agitation was posed as a temporary development by Gandhi. When he noted that satyagraha had to be suspended, he went on to suggest that this would not be the situation permanently. Characteristically he resorted to the standard plea to the States' rulers to placate the demands of their people. As characteristically, it was asserted that it was the Paramount Power's business to intervene to facilitate this. However, simultaneously, Gandhi had made a criticism of his own methods in the case of the Rajkot satyagraha, which is revealing of the larger compulsions at work in the Congress policy to the States. In April, when the Owyer award, confirming the agreement that had been earlier arrived at between the Rajkot rulers and Patel, was subverted by the Dewan, Virawala, an

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Tripuri Congress, where his leadership was being seriously challenged by the reelection of Bose”. Modern India, 1885-1947, Delhi, 1983, p. 367. B.R. Tomlinson, while surprisingly not making a connection of this order, more generally states that “The relationship of the Congress to the States Peoples movement was one governed by the internal Congress politicking, not by a grand strategy to acquire power at the Federal centre”, op.cit., p. 122.


64 "Its Implications", Harijan, 24 June 1939, ibid., pp. 239-41. In this context it is worth noting that the Constitutionalists still hoped for Federation. When Munshi told Linlithgow of this, the Viceroy replied that if this meant a modification of the Act it would be impossible. Munshi replied that they were helpless because they could not unambiguously declare for early Federation. Linlithgow to Zetland, 26 May 1939, Linlithgow Ms. F. 127/7.
Gandhi had to admit defeat. And, at the same time he admitted that he had erred in his use of satyagraha. He believed that he had tainted his past by seeking British intervention when he had already invoked God to his aid; true Satyagraha would have entailed a direct and unmediated appeal to the heart of the opponent.65

Though this view had a strong moralistic emphasis we can interpret it in terms of an awareness of the limits of such methods of direct action in the context of the Princely States. The peculiar duality of power in the States, the fact of a greater power buttressing the immediate wielder of power made the possibility of achieving substantial change difficult. Simply put, this implied that the direct appeal to "the heart" of the opponent, i.e., the Prince, could only be achieved by neutralizing this duality, i.e. by removing the Paramount Power.

That this was the underlying principle of Gandhi and the Gandhian Right's view on this issue is indicated by a letter Gandhi wrote to N.V. Kelkar, President of the All India States' Peoples' conference in 1934. After admitting Congress inability to aid movements in the States, Gandhi noted that

I am of the opinion that whatever we are able to accomplish in British India is bound to affect the States....66

The Rightists held a similar view. In 1935, after making the same point about the Congress inability on the State's front,
Rajendra Prasad noted in a speech to the Deccan States' people that

You must bear in mind that you will be benefited if India is benefited....67

And in his speech on this issue at the Lucknow Congress Prasad made a similar point while drawing attention to the varied nature of the States and the difficulty of carrying on a uniform policy:

Unt... the two Indias joined there would remain a difference in their (the States) development. The chief cause of their backwardness was that the British Government would not let them excel the British standard of administration.... We believe that if we can make British India totally democratic its influence on Indian States would be an effective step. At the moment we do not wish to add to our problems, and therefore do not wish to raise false hopes in the minds of the Indian states subjects.68 (sic.)

The withdrawal in this sense was always likely. In retrospect the period 1938-39 was a remarkable conjuncture for the States peoples, and perhaps a very significant one for building

68 14 April 1936, Bombay Chronicle, 16 April 1936, p. 12. Emphasis added. In this context James Manor has made the following observation:

"National Congress leaders realized that the States stood at one remove from British India, less than fully integrated into the Imperial system. They therefore concluded that states people could make no direct contribution to the dismantling of the Raj. The Princes would be dealt with after the struggle for British India had been won."

James Manor, "Gandhian Politics and the Challenge to Princely Authority in Mysore, 1936-47", D.A. Low ed., Congress and the Raj, Delhi, 1977, p. 410. This is only partially true, and loses focus of the basis of the Colonial state,
up the experience of agitation that was so crucial in 1947 after Congress' accession to power, when power was successfully transferred in the princely context as well. This conjuncture was founded on two factors: the formation of Congress ministries, which stimulated democratic movements in the adjacent States, and the constitutional agenda of the Federation, to which the problem of the States' representation was linked by the Gandhian leadership, and which in turn led them to participate in these movements. For a short period, there was a genuine attempt to alter the basis of the 1935 Act, an attempt to undermine its authoritarian blue print for the projected Central Government by forcing the democratisation of States representation in the Federal assembly. That there was a reversion to the earlier policy was related to the gap between the minimum demands of the Congress leadership in this context, and what the Colonial government was capable of giving without impairing the basis of its rule.

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in which the Princes were a crucial element. Any serious threat to them would have seriously weakened the system of alliances on which the Colonial regime was founded. But there was indeed an admission that the situation in the States was too complex to be handed without the larger reins of power transferred.