Chapter 5

THE TRIPURI CRISIS: MILITANCY VS. "COMPROMISE"

The federation issue was to draw out the basic differences in strategy that separated Gandhi and the Right Wing on the one hand and the Left Wing as a whole on the other. Differences over this issue combined with a growing Left-wing antagonism to the Right Wing emphasis on the primacy of parliamentary activity and led in turn to leftist support to Bose in the Tripuri presidential election. However, responses to the crisis which ensued indicated differences within the left as well, and throw light on the larger issue of the strategy for power as it was related to by different segments of the national movement.

In this chapter, we begin with an account of the different left-wing trajectories (the CSP, Nehru and the CPI) so that their response to the Tripuri crisis can be placed in perspective. Central to our analysis will be the left's understanding of Gandhian strategy as being one of "compromise" with the colonial regime. In the second section we will show how this determined their position in the Tripuri election, and will then go on to examine how differences in the left-wing surfaced in the way the confrontation between Bose and Gandhi was handled.
5.1 The Left Wing
5.1.1 The CSP and Nehru

We examine the CSP¹ and Nehru together because they shared a number of similar features. As we have shown in our first two chapters, both Nehru and the CSP were committed to radicalising the Congress from within, i.e. by radicalising the Congress economic programme, and by developing its capacity to relate to class-based organisations.² They shared a common long-term economic programme founded on the pillars of the abolition of landlordism, feudal oppression of all kinds, and nationalisation of key industries.³ In turn, Nehru and the CSP accepted a minimum agrarian programme as a viable basis for action by the Congress Party as a whole.⁴ And finally, and most significantly, they believed that there should be no association with the constitutional arrangements of the Raj in order to realise this programme; it was an illusion to believe that this was possible and it would also distract attention from the real and progressive arena of political action, the extra-parliamentary sphere.⁵

¹. We are not examining the origins of the party, nor the ideological differences that developed in it. For these questions, see Thomas A. Rusch, "Role of the Congress Socialist Party in the Indian National Congress, 1931-42," Ph.D thesis, Chicago University, 1955.

². See above, 1.2.

³. See Draft programme of the CSP, Meerut, January 1936, Nehru Ms.F.No.133; S. Gopal, Jawaharlal Nehru, a Biography Vol.1, Delhi, 1975, pp.114, 148-49.

⁴. See above, 1.2.

⁵. See above, 2.2.1.
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This antipathy for constitutional realm was given a common theoretical foundation. Nehru explained the tendency towards constitutional activity as related to the interests of the big bourgeoisie, a point elaborated by the CSP in their formulation that the bourgeoisie, tied to feudalism, was incapable of leading a revolutionary movement, and was intent only on pressurising the colonial state for concessions.

In these formulations, both Nehru and the CSP were in effect charging the Right-Wing with being representatives of this class. Nehru analysed that the domination of constitutionalism in the Congress related to the resurgence of the influence of the big bourgeoisie, and Jayaprakash noted that the declining capitalist class's only sign of life was a leadership in the Congress which stopped the movement at the point at which it was getting radical.


7. "The capitalist class in India is not capable of leading the bourgeois democratic revolution. Capitalism long ago ceased to be a revolutionary force. In India its social base is very narrow and, therefore, it cannot act singly. Besides the feudal agrarian economy in India exercises an influence over all kinds of social relationships. Capitalism therefore, is in alliance with the landlords and as such cannot be expected to destroy feudalism." Narendra Deva, "Class Organisations and the Congress", Presidential address at the Gujarat Congress Socialist Conference, 23-24 June 1935, in Brahmananda (ed.) Towards Socialist Society (A Collection of Narendra Deva's Writings and Speeches), New Delhi, 1974, p.141.


9a. "Fifty Years", op. cit.
However, this clear-cut set of formulations was subjected to significant, if untheorized, change. While the CSP had started out in 1934 and 1935 with the objective of changing what they perceived to be a leadership that was putting the brakes on the movement, by 1936, this attitude had evidently undergone a change. We have shown how the Congress election manifesto and the Faizpur agrarian programme, with their reform-oriented proposals, had been seen as a positive advance. This was related both to a sense of the limits posed to a more advanced programme by the realities of power in the Congress and to the facts of an unevenly developed peasant

10. Thus the Sampurnand thesis of February 1935 recommended that an issue be raised around which the masses could be mobilised, that the leadership be offered to the Congress and whatever its reaction CSP objectives would be achieved for either they would accept or they would not, in which case they would lose legitimacy. It was clear that the latter was anticipated, that a crisis in the party would result, and the CSP would acquire the leadership after a certain period had elapsed. AICC G-23/1934-35. Jayaprakash condoned this view:

"It is natural for a left-wing minority like ours not to rely on its ability to capture the Congress by merely moving resolutions in the AICC. Looking at the present Congress Constitution and the weightage given to the Right-Wing by the present constitutionalist policy of the Congress it indeed seems a remote possibility. It was, therefore, suggested that along with our day-to-day work of labour and peasant organisation which is the foundation stone of our movement we must also concentrate our activity on some particular issue and capture the imagination of the masses by a supreme sacrifice..."

Clipping from Free Press Journal, 14 May 1935, ibid.

Two months later he averred:

"We do strongly believe that the Congress cannot become a strong revolutionary body unless the right-wing compromise seeking elements are driven out of it..."

Clipping from Searchlight, 17 July 1935, ibid. (emphasis added). At the end of the year, in his speech at the Gujarat CSP conference he noted:

"...The Congress as it is presently constituted cannot hold together for very long. The more successful we are in pushing our programme the nearer the day when a split will occur in it..." Towards Struggle, Bombay, 1946, pp. 130-31
However, the change was also related to a revised understanding of how the Congress could be radicalized. It was now believed that under pressure from the Congress rank and file, progressive measures could be forced on a recalcitrant leadership. This was implied in the notion that, in Narendra Deva's phrase, the Congress was a "national parliament embracing various sections and classes" and so it was possible that the leadership could be gradually marginalised under such pressure. Nehru's Presidentship for two successive sessions of the Congress, their own inclusion on the Working Committee, and the passage of the Faizpur agrarian programme, all convinced the Socialists that a gradual transformation was under way. Jayaprakash was exultant after Faizpur: he proclaimed that Gandhi's programme elicited little enthusiasm and that the Mahatma's star was on the wane.

But the events of 1937 belied their expectations. While the agrarian programme had been accepted by the Congress, no significant advance had taken place in the realm of mass contacts and activisation of the primary committees. Further, that which they considered the most serious impediment to a radicalisation of the party, office acceptance, took place.

11. See above, 1.2.
12. "Problems of Unity", in Brahmanand, op.cit., p.137
14. No concrete measures for the implementation of the Mass Contact Committee's proposals took place. See AICC G-80(KWI)/1938.
The logic of their critical attitude to the Right, and of their hostility to constitutional activity, should have placed the party in a position of opposition to Right Wing policies during the Ministry phase. And yet, while they were indeed critical of repression and attempts to subordinate direct action, they came to increasingly play the role of mediators between the ministries and extra-parliamentary movements and institutions. As we have shown in the case of U.P., Narendra Deva had supported Nehru in preventing the PCC from excluding MLAs from holding office in the PCC, thereby accepting the legitimacy of constitutional activity within the Congress. And in Bihar, Jayaprakash played a mediatory role in the bakasht struggle, always striving to bring about settlements and also reiterating faith in the Congress inspite of the Congress-Zamindar agreement. And both Narendra Deva and


15. See above, 3.3.2.

16. According to official reports, Jayaprakash did not want the Reora struggle to be magnified into a provincial issue. Bihar FR(2) December 1938. He was involved in achieving settlements in Reora (Congress Socialist, 4, 5, 29 January 1939, pp.1-2) and Darbhanga (Bihar FR(2) July 1939).

17. Congress Socialist, 13, 35, 27 August 1939, p.5. This was at a rally against the Tenancy Bill. In contrast to Jayaprakash, Sahajanand called the Bill a betrayal.
Jayaprakash were involved in toning down opposition to the Congress at the Gaya Session of the AIKS. 18

In spite of their differences with the Right Wing, and what they perceived to be the retrograde features of ministerial practice, the CSP tended to engage in such mediatory practice for two reasons.

The first lay in their conception of how to politicise workers and peasants. For example, Narendra Deva noted the following of working class activation:

The workers should participate in the anti-imperialist struggle led by the Congress... the working-class can extend its political influence only... by using its weapon of general strike in the service of the national struggle... (whatever our criticism of the Congress) it is the only broad platform of anti-imperialist struggle in India, and it is the only centre today from which such a struggle can be conducted. It is the broad arena of mass struggle where workers and peasants can receive political education and enlarge their influence and prestige. 19

And of peasant mobilisation he noted:

The Congress is the symbol of national freedom and is the organ of anti-imperialist struggle. The peasants, therefore, have to be taught to love and claim the Congress as their own organisation. If the economic struggle is to be linked up with the national struggle, it is only just and proper that the two organisations should be inter-locked in permanent union. 20

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18. According to officials Sahajanand had wanted to break away from the Congress and intensify agitation against the Congress ministry. Bihar FR(1) April 1939. P.C. Joshi's account of the Gaya session also suggests that the movement had come to the point of breaking with the Congress "Kisan Movement," National Front, 2, 8, 2 April 1939, p.135.


Narendra Deva was essentially saying that the Congress represented the space of the nation, and that the weight and presence of workers and peasants in that dominant political field (which, we might add, was also the shape, in embryo, of the future political system in an independent India) would be of critical political significance to their destiny.

Given this understanding, the socialists tended to forego independent organisation for mediation, as the former could lead to the peasant and workers' isolation from the national movement. In turn, these priorities led to the second reason for their acceptance of Right-Wing strategy. The acceptance of the domain of the nation meant that it had to be maintained as a coherent, functioning unit. This might entail accepting a logic which was not to their political logic, but having accepted that it would entail discipline in the movement. Thus, for example, their attempt to prevent Kisan Sabha activity from conflicting with the Congress, and their refusal to allow the extra-constitutional compulsion to override or embarrass the constitutional in a situation in which it was part of Congress policy (e.g. Narendra Deva's opposition to the UP PCC isolating the ministry).

Nehru underwent a similar development, but in a more decisive way. While the Socialists were essentially performing a balancing act in trying to temporarily reconcile their
extra-constitutional proclivities with the circumstances presented by office-acceptance, for Nehru the shape of things to come was much clearer. The points of significance for him were not only those relating to the disciplining of the extra-constitutional so that it suited ministerial conditions; he displayed an awareness that these adjustments to the institutions of the state were not a temporary phenomenon. Thus, while he had been disturbed at CR's prosecuting Batiwala for sedition, and had wanted a greater say for the Congress organisation in the exercising of such authority by the ministry, he questioned the notion that the Congress would never have to use force. Non-violence should ideally be the policy, but this might not be possible in practice. In discussing this issue he extended its terms to speculate about what situations force would have to be used in under an independent Indian state.

What is relevant here are these parameters. It was not that he was satisfied with the pace and extent of legislation, and he believed that timorousness at this level was

21. As he noted "we cannot agitate against ourselves..." 4 November 1937, SWJ, 8, pp.344-47.

22. "...I am quite clear that we are better out than in unless we can go ahead much faster... Indeed for the present, especially in Madras and Bombay, the question is of not going back..." To Pant, 25 November 1937. Nehru Ms. Correspondence, Vol.81.

23. See able, 3.1.1.

a major reason for the mass unrest which was developing under the ministries. And, while he was critical of the kisan organisations' tendency to expose ministerial policies through their rallies before the Council, he was also dismayed at the unsympathetic way in which Kisan Sabha unrest in Bihar was being responded to by the Gandhians.

These tensions remained, but there was a growing awareness, in a more decisive fashion than the CSP exhibited, of the need for discipline and beyond that, of the necessity of the state.

This was indicated in July 1939, when Nehru reviewed the positive and negative aspects of the office experiment. He noted that while he had been originally opposed to ministry formation,

later on, when I reviewed the balance sheet, what struck me most was that it was inevitable that we should have accepted office under the conditions existing then as also for various other reasons about which I need not talk here. Acceptance of office has undoubtedly done us a great deal of good. We have achieved much by way of mass awakening, and ministers have gained experience in dealing with numerous problems of administration. It is a training for the nation in the establishment of an equilibrium between the agitational and the militant side...

25. To the members of the Working Committee, 24 November 1937, ibid., pp.361-64.

26. See above, 3.3.2

27. Thus he criticised Mahadev for writing articles critical of the Bihar Kisan Sabha without finding out the facts. To Mahadev Desai, 28 December 1937, SWJN, 8, p.372. And amongst the reasons he was reported to have cited for agrarian turmoil in that province was that the Congress organisation in Bihar had been mostly influenced by the upper-classes. Clipping from Searchlight, 27 December 1937, AICC G.98/1937.

28. "Dissensions will weaken the Congress." Speech at Madras
This statement points to two features of Nehru's political thinking. Firstly, there was the tendency to move beyond a theoretical formulation (e.g. the anti-office position) into a field of intuitive practical functioning and adjustment. He never theoretically formulated why office acceptance had been inevitable; and its legitimacy now flowed from the logic of practical issues and adjustments (the relating of organisational and direct action modes in a constitutional context).

But a glimmering of the underlying rationale may be gleaned from his approval of the ministers' acquiring administrative skills. In that point may be discerned the recognition of the characteristic and necessary attributes of the state which nationalism had to cultivate. Being addressed here was a significant aspect of office acceptance, the acquiring of hegemony over the state apparatus. But so casually and matter-of-factly was it observed, that it evidently did not occupy the position of strategy in his thinking. But it had indeed been a feature of the ministerial exercise, even if not always consciously conceived of in those terms by the leadership. Even when it was consciously conceived, as with C.R., it was not realised on the terms - of depoliticising the services and entrenching ministerial authority over them -

28. (contd...)
25 July 1939. SWJN. 9, pp.590-91 (emphasis added). On the debit side he pointed to the party getting entangled in "petty matters". Further he did not believe the existing conditions could last long, and he was evidently expecting the renewal of the struggle against the Raj in the near future.
on which such control had been envisaged. Rather was it likely that service morale and continued belief in the Raj was disturbed by a combination of the constitutional and the extra-constitutional, as in U.P., where the challenging of the authority of the state apparatus went apace with a ministry which failed to take firm action against these tendencies.

The coordinates of the resulting strategy - of the inviolability of the state (the ministers "gain(ing) experience in dealing with numerous problems of administration") and the establishing of an "equilibrium between the agitational and the militant side" - were apprehended as facts, not as the results of a strategy for power. And this basic incomprehension also explains why the Gandhian attitude to Federation could not be grasped. For the Gandhians' strategy towards Federation bore similarities to their support to office acceptance. Both were founded on the premise that to extend the domain of nationalist hegemony it was not necessary to reject in entirety the structures imperialism had erected to buttress its rule.

Thus, in the case of provincial autonomy, the numerous, restrictions, financial and political, which the Act presented, could be temporarily ignored if the space for popular authority in the Act could be consolidated, and if in turn this space was extended, beyond the provincialising orbit of the constitution, into a coordinated, national, ministerial strategy.
Similarly, the Gandhian strategy towards Federation sought to ensure that the Congress position in the Federal legislature would enable them to command a majority in the Federal Government. This would be achieved in their scheme by the states nominees being elected. As with provincial autonomy, so in the case of Federation, the financial and political restrictions in the Act would be temporarily sidelined. In any case, with a Congress majority at the Centre, it would become difficult to enforce these restrictions, and inevitably conflict would brew, but on the grounds of an enormous increase in the Congress' image of representativeness and legitimacy. 29

However, such an adjustment was seen by the left in terms of the compromises it envisaged. Office acceptance itself had been seen as a compromise, and such a policy on the Federation issue must have been regarded even more gravely, as it related to the issue of the central government and finance, and so perhaps drew attention more sharply to the Act's imperialist features. It is possible too that the charges of treachery were reinforced by British acts of disinformation. For example, Sir Frederick Whyte (first President of the Central Legislative Assembly) had said that despite Nehru's outright rejection of Federation, discussion

29. See above, 4.1. We have here interpreted what could be discerned as the full logic of the strategy.
with "a member of the working Committee" indicated that the Congress would adopt an attitude similar to that on provincial autonomy.  

The member referred to was Bhulabhai Desai and his support to Congress participation in the Federation was dependent on the same condition as that stipulated by the Gandhians, that states representation be democratized. This was hardly a case of accepting Federation in the same way that Provincial Autonomy had been accepted.

Nevertheless, even if the Gandhian strategy had been properly understood, it is unlikely that opposition would have diminished. Anything short of total rejection of the Federation plan would seem to have been unacceptable. Thus Narendra Deva was reported to have regretted the tendency within certain quarters to accept Federation "with certain reservations". The CSP full-throatedly joined with Bose in his denunciation of attempts to compromise on this issue. The Bihar CSP warned the Congress leadership of the consequences of such a compromise and noted that in the eventuality of such a compromise a split was inevitable, and the CSP General Secretary urged the widest possible mobilisation.


31. Linlithgow noted that Desai had urged that the government pressurize the states into accepting a representative form of government failing which, the Viceroy felt he had implied, no meeting ground could be managed. Interview, 11 April 1938, Linlithgow Mss. F.125/5.


33. Bose said he would resign as Congress President if need be to carry on the anti-Federation struggle. Bombay Chronicle, 9 July 1938, pp. 1, 18.

34. Congress Socialist, 27 August 1938, in Rajendra Prasad Ms 1-a/38/col 11. 3
Nehru, now abroad, displayed incomprehension of what the Congress leadership's attitude was. He had been disturbed by Gandhi's notes to Lothian and Agatha Harrison on the issue. Lothian had interpreted Gandhi's communication to mean that there was a difference between Nehru and Gandhi on this issue. To clarify this Nehru wrote a long expose on the Federation for confirmation by the Working Committee. He suggested that there were two possibilities: firstly that there must be a revocation of the Act and that self-determination would be inaugurated on the basis of a Constituent Assembly; secondly, which he understood to be Gandhi's position, that there be a recognition of the right to self-determination and that a constitution drawn up by a Constituent Assembly would be favoured so that the Government of India Act was seen as a purely transitory measure. Inter-related aspects of this position would be democratisation of the States, no reservation of subjects and no exercise of special powers by the Governors. With these conditions realised steps would then be taken to ensure ending of the transitory period in a short time. In response, Gandhi wrote an article in Harijan confirming that there was no difference between him and Nehru on the Federation issue. However, the very letter cited to Nehru to reassure

35. Probably as in Lothian's memorandum to the Viceroy, op. cit.
36. Untraced.
38. 1 October 1938, SWJN, Vol. LXVII, pp.384-85; cable to Nehru, 16 September 1938, ibid., p.345.
him of the similarity of their attitudes on Federation is not without ambiguity. It was a reply to Carl Heath, who had said that a common statement by Nehru, Bose and the other leaders would clarify the Congress attitude and make a strong impression on British opinion. Gandhi noted that "it is not very easy for Congress to make a statement off hand..." indicating that matters were not so clear cut after all.

For Gandhi to make such definitive statements of policy was politically spurious, except in the broadest terms. For otherwise the Congress would be pinned down to positions which would impede its acquiring power in a series of intermediary stages, which would be worked out according to changing circumstances and possibilities.

Inspite of the adjustments they had made under the ministries, the CSP, and even Nehru, were unable to comprehend these aspects of political strategy. The fear of compromise continued to dominate their thinking. Nehru, however, instinctively trusted the Mahatma's political credentials, and so the charge of compromise was never taken seriously by him. However, both the CSP and, as we shall show in our next section, the CPI, tended to react more militantly to the possibilities of such adjustment.

39. 13 September 1938, ibid., p.332.
5.1.2 The Communist Party of India

It is useful to start an examination of the CPI's strategy during the united front period of 1936-39 by looking at their viewpoint immediately after the Civil Disobedience Movement, for it gives us a better perspective on their activities in that period. It will be suggested that there was a significant continuity in conceptions.

The emphasis in "A Draft for a Political Thesis," published in February 1934, was on an independent working-class leadership for the national movement. The important development here, arising from the CPI's debacle during the Civil Disobedience Movement, was the awareness that isolation from the national movement was a serious mistake. A revision of their attitude to the Congress was undertaken: though not accepted as a progressive party, it was admitted that it still maintained influence. In a characteristically reductionist analysis, their estimation of the Congress leadership was related to their understanding of the Indian bourgeoisie. The class was seen as dominating the party since 1907, and though

41. "(The Indian bourgeoisie's) growing consciousness found its expression in the splitting of the radical sections (1907) from the Indian National Congress, which began as a political organisation to voice the constitutional demands of the Indian upper class, under the auspices of British imperialism. The boycott movement of 1907-08 was under the leadership of the industrial bourgeoisie..." ibid., p.6. The emphasised portion here reveals a tendency to analyse the class character of particular phases of the movement in terms of the methods employed. Thus, constitutional methods implied the domination of elite interests seeking representation and power within the existing state structure, boycott meant the domination of Indian capitalists seeking to develop a market for their manufactures. (In fact the millowners did not participate in the First Swadesh Movement. See A.R. Kannanar, "Indian Millowners and Indian Nationalism Before 1914," Past and Present, No. 40, July 1968.)
it was seen as structurally tied to landlord and usury interests, it was believed to stand for independent capitalist development and this implied that "...A permanent compromise between the Indian bourgeoisie and British imperialism is not possible". But this was insufficient to grant it a progressive significance: for the communists saw capitalism not in terms of the development of modes of production, but simply in terms of competition and exploitation. As a result the significance of the involvement of the bourgeoisie was seen in completely self-advancing terms. Thus they noted:

...The industrial aspirations of the Indian bourgeoisie, its desire to obtain a substantial if not a demanding share in the exploitation of the country, is the basis of its nationalist tendencies...  

There was no understanding of the problem in terms of the formation of new social relations of production which independent industrialisation signified and of viable foundations this would provide for the nation-state. It was seen merely as a quarrel between exploiters, the Indian and metropolitan capitalists.

The Congress, conceived of as the instrument of the bourgeoisie, was seen to reproduce its strategy; to use the mass movements to extract concessions from the colonial state.  

The term used for this configuration of class interest and party

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42. Ibid., p.6
43. Ibid. (emphasis added).
44. Ibid., p.7.
45. Ibid., This is comparable with the CSP view outlined earlier.
expression was national-reformist, in conflict with imperialism but non-progressive. In the CPI view, at a certain point in time, when the mass movement had reached a pitch of revolutionary intensity, the bourgeoisie, and presumably the Congress leadership, would cross over to the imperialist camp. Their viewpoint was embodied in the following formulation:

Its (the bourgeoisie's) transition from National Reformism to open counter revolution - that is, from one form of counter-revolution to another - is determined by the strength and volume of the revolutionary movement of the masses...46

This refinement of their position, however negligible in fact it was, reflected the need to explain the continuing hold of the Congress. The earlier denunciation had not helped to now it was explained that the Congress and the bourgeoisie had not yet reached the stage of open counter-revolution.47

In keeping with this understanding of bourgeois domination of the national movement, the methods hitherto employed by the Congress were automatically seen to serve limited bourgeois interests. Thus the practice of boycotting foreign manufactures was not seen as a form of national economic and political struggle but as a means of advancing

46. Ibid. (second emphasis added)
47. Ibid., p.20
bourgeois interests. The "Draft..." directed that the practice was to be denounced because it sidetracked peasants away from the pursuit of their own struggles by taking them to the towns to picket cloth shops. 48

In practical terms this meant a denunciation of the Congress and the propagandising of the Communist viewpoint to the Congress' supporters with a view to bringing them under Communist hegemony. They would now involve themselves in movements under Congress leadership, but would combine this with relentless criticism. 49

The main task remained the creation of an independent working class party. 50 As for a wider anti-imperialist formation, the notion of capturing the Congress was rejected as illusory and there was instead a call to form an organisation - the Anti-Imperialist League - constituted by the bloc of anti-imperialist classes (workers, peasants and sections of petit-bourgeoisie, especially the youth). 51 Open mass parties were also advocated especially for educational purposes, such as the Young Workers' Congress. 52 Only in areas where the CPI was weak could party workers participate in the Congress, on condition that approval was received by the local or a higher committee. In such a case work though the Congress would be used to put forward an independent platform. 53

48. Ibid.,
49. Ibid.
50. Ibid., p.26
51. Ibid., p.21.
52. Ibid.
53. Ibid., p.30.
The goal of the party was the democratic dictatorship of the workers and peasants and the establishment of a workers' and peasants' Soviet Republic. 54 The slogan of proletarian dictatorship was jettisoned because it did not include the peasantry as a component of the revolutionary forces. 55 But on no account was the CPI to be a workers' and peasants' party as this was likely to hamper the consistency and resoluteness of lead the party could give. 56

In short the Communists in 1934 were arguing for a new, working-class leadership for the national movement because of the compromising and "national-reformist" character of the bourgeois Congress. This anti-imperialism was not, however, based on a concept of national economic and political interests; the CPI could not see how imperialism's underdevelopment of the Indian economy determined the forms of struggle of the movement. They tended to focus on the immediate and, in political terms, sectional interests of the workers and peasants. The bulk of the demands in the "Draft..." are class demands - confiscation of landed estates without compensation, cancellation of indebtedness, improvement of working-class living conditions (such as 8 hour day, wage-increase, state maintenance for the unemployed). 57 Even the demand for nationalisation of key industries must be seen in the context of the demand to

54. Ibid., p. 14
55. Ibid., p. 15
56. Ibid., p. 24.
57. Ibid.
establish a workers' and peasants' Soviet Republic. In their perspective, on the presumption that the bourgeoisie was economically and politically impotent, the movement necessarily became a class movement of workers and peasants.

With the inauguration of the united front era—signalled by the publication of "The Anti-Imperialist People's Front, by R.P. Dutt and Ben Bradley, in February 1936 58 there would seem to have taken place certain decisive changes in Communist attitudes. The Congress appeared to have become the focus of politics for the CPI. It was noted that workers' and peasants' organisations remained outside the Congress and it was urged that these forces be combined with the nationalist party either through a united front agreement or through collective affiliation. That the latter was the desired form is indicated by the fact that most of the article concentrated on how to transform the Congress into a viable united front organisation through collective affiliation and the democratisation of its organisational structures. 59

However, there were significant continuities. As in earlier conceptions, the leadership was deemed reformist, and

58. International Press Correspondence, Vol. 16, Nos. 11 and 12, 29 February 1936, ACHI
59. Ibid.
its the militancy that the Congress had displayed in two movements was interpreted to mean that there was a potentially revolutionary base which simply needed to be given a more progressive lead, and greater contacts with the workers and peasants in order for it to break away from Gandhism. Propaganda, collective affiliation and joint action between Congress committees and class organisations were the methods envisaged to achieve this.

The potential split between the reformist leadership and the rank and file therefore continued to define CPI strategy. Similarly, the task of building up an independent working class party still remained central. For the task of democratisation of the Congress was seen as aiding the development of a united mass CP.

In this context, it is likely that the united front policy was regarded not only as a politically appropriate line, but also as providing a space for action and growth for the illegal CPI. This opportunity was provided by Communist entry into the CSP after its Meerut session. And this led to the well-known conflict in which the CPI was charged with trying to take over the CSP.

60. Ibid., p. 298.
61. Ibid.
Acrimony was always a very likely development, for the two parties had fundamentally different ideas of how workers and peasants should be mobilized. As we have shown, the CSP leadership wanted such mobilization to take place within the Congress, so that these classes could make their impress felt on the nationalist party. The CPI on the other hand - and here again there was a continuity with their earlier views - gave priority to the unions whenever there were differences with the Congress leadership. This was their base, and they were unwilling to compromise their hold over it, inspite of the united front line.

Thus, in the discussion of the collective affiliation issue, the CPI asserted that on no account would be bourgeois leadership be allowed to dominate the unions:

...If the Indian bourgeoisie who dominate the Congress be allowed to interfere in the working of these class organisations and to dictate their programme and plan of action, independent class struggle cannot be waged by them and they would be dominated by the most reactionary type of reformist leaders... We can never have collective affiliation at the cost of the organisational independence of our class organisation. Genuinely revolutionary leadership alone can build up UF and not that is to be built up by the bourgeoisie dominating and shackle revolutionary elements... 64

We have shown how these priorities gave rise to often meaningless sectarian attitudes, as when TUC nominees for the 1937 elections refused to take the Congress pledge unless they were accepted as candidates. 65

64. *The Communist*, no. 7, March 1936, p. 21

65. See above, 1.2.5
This imperative caused continuous friction between the CSP and the CPI. The latter tended to emphasise, or try to achieve, a leading position in the unions, convinced that its leadership was the sole progressive one. The unions, especially of labour, were treated akin to points of power which had to be protected from bourgeois influence. Further, it was through the unions that the CPI tried to extend its influence, and in the process it consortcd with non and even anti-Congress groups in order to achieve this.

In Bombay the first form was in evidence, with the CSP continuously complaining of the Communist dominated TUC's sectarianism. Thus Masani complained that while it had been planned to observe May Day in 1938 under the joint auspices of the BESP and the BPTUC the latter had publicly announced that it would be held by it alone. In observing anti-federation day Mehta complained to Mirajkar, secretary of the BPTUC, that clashing dates had been fixed and that the BPTUC seemed determined to hold independent meetings in certain areas. In the Bengal Kisan Sabha also the CSP claimed that the Communists in the organisation were trying to build up their own base by propagandizing against the Congress and aligning with the Muslim League. Work with parties with

66. Masani to Mirajkar, General Secretary BPTUC, 30 April 1938. AITUC. F.No.59.

67. See the correspondence between Mehta and Mirajkar in September 1938 in AITUC, F.No.59.

mass influence, even if they were opposed to the Congress, occurred on several occasions. In January 1938 a peasants march to the Bombay Legislative Council was boycotted by the BCSP because of the participation in it of anti-Congress groups such as the Independent Labour Party (ILP) of Dr Ambedkar and the Bombay Peasants' Party. Mirajkar of the BPTUC argued that aligning with these groups was legitimate because it would be valid to align with any group with a mass influence for limited ends and that the CSP should not be passive before the Congress leadership's apathy to mass demonstrations. The distinction between influential groups whose character was economic and those - which in this instance the BPTUC was aligning with - which were politically defined was not considered significant. This was much more forcefully posed when the BPTUC combined with the ILP and the National Federation of Trade Unions in opposing the Congress's Industrial Disputes Act in November 1938. Mehta noted that the actual purpose here from the CPI viewpoint could not be considered merely sectional opposition within the Congress for the local communist paper, Kranti, had been carrying on virulent anti-Congress propaganda in sharp contrast to the moderation of the National Front. Lumley described the November 7 hartal as

69. Secretary, BCSP to Secretary BPTUC, 23 December 1937; Secretary BPTUC to Secretary BCSP, 6 January 1938, AITUC F.No.59; "The Trade Union Congress," Congress Socialist, 25 December 1939, p.4.

being dominated by the Independent Labour Party and as being the occasion not simply to protest against the bill but to stir up anti-Congress feeling. In Bengal the CPI had participated in the Haq Ministry's Palestine day though it had been boycotted by others. Bhowani Sen, defending communist participation, noted that the demand was anti-imperialist and that the Socialist trade unionist Sibnath Banerjee's attempt to amend the BPCC resolution advocating participation in only anti-imperialist demonstrations (to the end of barring Muslim League-called ones) received only 6 votes. However, he did not refute the charge that the Palestine Platform was used to project the achievements of the Haq Ministry. Muslim League - Communist ties were also in evidence in the Kanpur Mazdoor Sabha elections of 1938 in which the CSP candidate, Harirharmath Sastri, was defeated by the combination. In Madras work in the left-wing of the Justice and non-Brahmin parties was advocated by the party.

71. To Linlithgow, 15 November 1938, Linlithgow MSS F.125/52.


73. "Cawnpore Mazdoor Sabha", Congress Socialist, 27 August 1938 in Rajendra Prasad MSS.F.No.1-A/38 Coll.3; P.C. Joshi defended the alignment by noting that none of those aligned with were bringing communalism into the workers' field. "Cawnpore Picks its Pchilds", National Front, Vol.1, No.24, 4 September 1938, pp.1, 4.

74. "Circular No.4", 1930, op.cit.
This tendency to align with politically questionable groups on the basis of the mass influence they might exercise reflected both political confusion and an urge to extend the CPI's own influence in mass arenas, whatever the consequences. In some instances - as in the peasant demonstration to the Bombay Council, or the opposition to the Industrial Disputes Bill, the aims, if they were simply to voice the alienation of the peasants and working class, would not have been questionable. But the alliances engaged in infringed the united front and reflected an indiscriminate political attitude.

This account suggests that the communists had carried over their emphasis on class in a way which tended to make the notion of a united front, or of working within the Congress, a nominal credo. To a large extent, this was true. Their conception of the leadership as representing a vacillating bourgeoisie remained, and so did their understanding that working class and peasant mobilisation, in an exclusive fashion, would provide the real dynamic for the development of the anti-imperialist movement.

United front for the CPI was to be practised in these sectarian terms, and the imperatives of unity of different groups within the front tended to be argued for on defensive terms. The Party's tacticians were aware that, inspite of advances in certain areas, left groups were still weak. Therefore, the arguments they made in favour of unity in the Congress often took the form of urging leftists not to invite
suppression or expulsion by militant confrontation with the Congress leadership.

For example, in the context of the office - acceptance issue, it was argued that the left should be cautious for the Right's strategy was analysed as being against a split, but to use the left in the elections and then, if the left were adamant in rejecting office, to expel them. So it was initially advocated that instead of opposing office-acceptance the left should support it, thus preventing the Right from using opposition as an excuse for ejecting the left. The CPI suggested that instead of rejecting office, there should be a time-bound programme to be fulfilled by the Congress. If the British prevented this the Raj would stand exposed. If the Right did not accept such a programme they would be isolated. However, the CPI decided to accept leftist opposition as it did not want division on this issue.75

This wariness was misconceived in this context, as we have shown that the Rightists exhibited a genuine united front attitude during 1936-37, buttressed of course by the support they received for their policies.76 On the other hand the cautionary note struck by the CPI in relation to how left-wing mass mobilisation should be conducted connected with very real points of tension within the Congress. It was noted that if

75. "Elections", The Communist, No. 10, July 1936, pp. 7-13. They noted that it was their own illegality which had made it difficult to propagandize this viewpoint earlier and now it was too late and the left should not be disrupted.

76. See above, Chapters 1 and 2.
proper mobilisation of the masses against imperialism were undertaken, the power of the bourgeoisie would also be broken. However, this would be achieved not by direct confrontation but by leadership of the masses in their own organisations, and not in rivalry with the Congress. Otherwise the Right would use any sign of sectarianism to split the movement. 77

However, as we have observed, this was exactly the policy that was not pursued by the CPI in their union work. They tended to focus on militant class action which caused confrontation with the Congress leadership, and they often did this in the company of the opponents of the Congress.

Two distinct patterns may be discerned in this contradictory set of attitudes. The defensively conceived appeals for unity with the Congress leadership often emerged in a context in which it was feared that Left-wing militancy would engender an ejection of the left from the Congress. However, the second, sectarian pattern was manifested even within such appeals and in theoretical formulations. The leadership, which was seen to be under bourgeois hegemony, was by 1937 deemed a viable constituent of the united front because of the conjunctual circumstances of the class, which

77. "...Left sectarianism attempting to set up rival organisations must necessarily weaken the process of the present stage and plays into the hands of the bourgeoisie who are even now attempting to split the anti-imperialist movement ..." "Road to Power - Communist Party's Call to the Congress Rank and File" (CC, CPI), 5 December 1936, p.46, ACHI F.No.1936/2.
was facing an imperialist onslaught, and because of the growing strength of working-class, peasant and left-wing trends in the national movement. This last formulation in fact combines the features of defensive unity and sectarianism. By proclaiming the bourgeoisie a part of the anti-imperialist movement, it was being urged that the leadership should not be confronted; on the other hand, by ascribing the viability of their being kept in the movement to the strength of the left, the real sources of dynamism in the movement was being situated in the unions and left groupings, that is, along the trajectory of class mobilisation.

These aspects of CPI thinking were expressed in party publications of 1937 and 1938. At the time of the impasse of 1937, the period just prior to Congress Ministry formation, The Communist launched an attack on sectarian positions which insisted that the united national front was equivalent to a "Toilers' Front":

A sectarian tendency is not non-existent which would identify the whole UNF with an exclusive Toilers' Front. The Toilers' Front in India, in terms of existing organisations, would mean unity between the CP, CSP, AITUC and AIKS. Neither Dutt nor Bradley nor the PB visualizes the formation of such an independent Toilers' Front separate from the UNF. Whether the UNF will be transformed into a Toilers' Front at a later stage of the struggle, when and how, or a Toilers' Front will be formed as a separate but integral part of the UNF are today futile forecasts.

As we have observed, there was a fear that left-wing attacks on the leadership's policies, especially office-acceptance, would lead to a split which could only weaken the left. Thus the admonition of any position which confronted the leadership. To show that unity was possible, and that a sectarian tendency could be eschewed, they balanced the regressive inclinations of the leadership to accept office with the features of a countervailing "leftward" tendency in the bourgeoisie, such as the Bombay Indian Merchants Chambers' opposition to the 21 businessmen who had criticised Nehru's radical speeches. This trend could become dominant, especially as the rank and file would counter-balance vacillations. The united front with the bourgeoisie was now considered a feasible strategy:

Given the present rapidly developing international situation, given a rapid development and the consolidating of the UF of all the anti-imperialist forces on the basis of the INC, it would be possible not only to draw in those sections of the bourgeoisie inside the UNF but to retain them in it even up to the point of the overthrow of the British rule.79

This was a tactical conception, not a theoretical one, for it was subject to easy revision, as we shall see in the CPI's handling of the Tripuri crisis. Its context was a developing crisis between left and right wings, and its formulation was oriented to lessen the gulf, and to ensure

that the Right would not be given an opportunity to split the party. The definitive expression of this tactical line was the "Thesis on the National Congress and the Working Class" of mid-1938. Although the establishment of socialism remained the long-term task of the party, in this thesis the immediate task was defined as the "...liberation of the Indian people and the establishment of a democratic regime". The Congress was now accepted as having grown into "the Central Mass Organisation of the Indian people ranged against imperialism". It was noted that the mass struggles of the day and the Civil Disobedience Movement set a process of transformation in motion. With the broadening of the Congress which came about during the course of struggle and through subsequent developments "the characterisation of the Congress as a bourgeois organisation becomes more and more inadequate". It was emphasized that the leadership was under the domination of the industrial bourgeoisie which avoided mass mobilisation for a decisive encounter with imperialism but sought to arrive at short term compromises with imperialism while endeavouring at the same time to preserve its mass base and influence. But given the strength of the workers' and peasants' movements, the movement for the release of political prisoners and the growing strength of the left-wing in the Congress itself, the possibility of checking the vacillation of the leadership had increased more than ever before. Further, the offensive of

80. *New Age*, June 1938, pp.9-11 (last two emphases added)
imperialism in terms of seeking to impose Federation and dragging the Indian people into the war was seen as affecting the entire Indian people, including the bourgeoisie. The thrust of the thesis was summed up thus:

In other words, the possibility of our entering the National Congress in order to strengthen it, without allowing any section of its leadership to split off, is greater than ever.

In terms of their own evaluation of the situation, the circumstances were quite different from those presented in the "Thesis". Instead of the left being strong enough to prevent the vacillation of the leadership, it was observed that the growth of the mass base of the Congress was on Gandhian lines and that the left had actually lost ground in some areas. 81

This indicates the pragmatic basis for such a revision. It will be noted that while the bourgeoisie (= Right Wing) was included in their united front thesis, no revision had taken place of the class's character. Given the CPI's sense of leftist weakness and of Rightist strength, the thesis communicates the imperative of securing a space for left wing activity, of not rocking the boat.

The essential continuities in the characterisation of the leadership, and in the emphasis placed on class activity therefore remained within a more pragmatic framework of relating to the Congress. Their underlying assumption would

be that the leadership, by its very class character, was incapable of anything but compromise. Even when the CPI differed with other leftist groupings on the issue of office acceptance the larger strategic significance of the question seemed subsidiary to the problem of the balance of forces in the movement, and of how an anti-office position might jeopardize the weak leftist situation by giving the Right an opportunity to expel them. A genuine anti-imperialist strategy would, therefore, always remain outside the Gandhians' character in the CPI view.

5.2 The Challenge to the Gandhian Strategy

The problematic of "compromise" which characterised left-wing attitudes to Gandhian strategy crystallised around Bose's campaign for re-election to the Presidency of the Congress at the Tripuri session. Bose's campaign centred on the charge that the Right-Wing were about to enter into a compromise with the British Government and that in fact negotiations had reached such a stage that a prospective list of ministers for the Federal cabinet had been drawn up. 82

That credence was given to a campaign which deployed such wild, totally false charges gives us an index of the kind of acrimony which had developed within the Congress. This acrimony was, however, of a diffused character, without any controlling political position underlying it. Bose's

82. Bose's statement reported in Bombay Chronicle, 28 January 1939, p.20.
campaign witnessed the articulation of a series of disparate
grievances, and was the unified leftist challenge to Right
Wing compromise that he claimed it to be. 83

However the left, apart from Nehru, while not being
the dominant or defining element in Bose's victory against
the Gandhian candidate, Sitaramayya, did present a common
understanding of the meaning of the victory, and of what
changes it should lead to. Fundamentally, they saw the
victory as being one against the policy of drift and compromise
which they believed characterised Right-Wing policy.
The Communists emphasised the centrality of the anti-Federation
position in the advanced policy they envisaged arising out of
the election, and connected it in turn with involvement in the
states' peoples movements. The other aspects of the anti-
drift policy as it was termed was a check on ministerial
compromise and closer ties between the Congress and the workers'
and peasants' movements. 84 By bringing the energy in these
movements into the foreground of the nationalist challenge to
the colonial regime it was believed that a decisive attack

83. "...In the circumstances of Right Wing compromise it is
but natural that the Left or Radical Bloc in the Congress
should feel so strongly on the question of Federal scheme
and should desire to have a genuine anti Federationist in
the Presidential chair..." Bose's statement, ibid.

84. "What (the new) course of action demands is a decisive break
with the present policy. It demands that Ministries be used
during the period from now on for extending civil liberties,
for curbing the bureaucracy, for carrying through rapid
ameliorative measures. It demands all round unity-unity
between the Congress and the workers' and peasants' organisa-
tions, unity of the Congress with the states' peoples'
movements... National Front, editorial, "The Choice Before
the Nation," 47, 8 January 1939, p.4.
could be launched on imperialism. The CSP echoed this position and noted that the objective was to shift the basis of nationalism away from the straightforward patriotism of the past to a more concrete integration of mass needs, for only this they believed would bring about a sustained mobilisation against the Raj. 85

So there were two components to the left-wing critique. There was the attempt to break the attitude of compromise exhibited on the States' front and in the practice of the ministries; and there was a move to elevate working-class and peasant interests into a leading position within the protraction of the anti-imperialist movement.

However, there was ambiguity as to whether this would constitute only a challenge to established nationalist policy, or whether it would also lead to an alternative leadership for the movement. This question of leadership was raised in the context of whether the left should develop on the victory of Tripuri by forming a Left Bloc in the Congress.

85. Ashoka Mehta noted that "without a mighty mass upheaval we cannot defeat the Empire of Britain. Such a mass movement can arise for a time in response to the patriotic call of the Congress. But the movement can gain steady strength and momentum only if the millions of kisans see their interests advancing with every forward stride the struggle takes... There is no violence in abridging or eliminating the privileges of the zamindars as there is no violence in demanding a responsible government in the states." "Link Rajkot with Reora," Congress Socialist, 4, 7-8, 19 February 1939, p.7. N.G.Gore invoked a similar terrain of activity as opposed to previous forms of non-cooperation: "...these forces (workers, peasants, and states people's movements) will show maximum results providing their strength is not frittered away in manufacturing salt every morning. In this struggle it will be absurd for left groups to insist on the slogan of class-war but it will be equally absurd for the right to expect support from the TUC and the AIKC for a purely sentimental slogan..." "The Marching Orders," Ibid., p.8.
The CSP disapproved of the formation of such a bloc on the grounds that it would lead to a retrograde crystallisation of forces in the Congress, forcing people to take sides who would otherwise be amenable to radical appeals. The National Front, on the other hand, espoused the notion of a Left Bloc and dismissed the idea that there was the threat of a right offensive in response to such a left crystallisation. They argued that this attitude would rob the movement of the articulation of militant nationalist opinion that was required to keep the Congress on non-compromising tracks. It was argued, however, that their aim was not to capture power in the Congress but to advance the struggle.

The terms of reference of these two positions are instructive. The CSP’s focus on the rank and file’s capacity to be mobilised by radical appeals if they were not polarised suggests that in their view it was indeed a question of policy, and not of changing the leadership. Further, this approach suggested that as long as the leadership of the movement was not fought for, the progressive urges of the Congress cadres could carry the leadership ahead to a more militant policy.


87. "A Left Bloc is not a conspiracy to oust the Right or to capture the working committee... It is the weapon whereby the real voice of the Nation demanding struggle is effectively raised inside the Congress and among Congressmen. Disunity of the left is the basis of the present policy of capitulation, to reject the left bloc because it may lead to a right offensive is the height of absurdity and constitutes a vote for continued disruption..." Editorial, "Left Unity", National Front, 2, 19 February 1939, p.2.
This still made a division between the character of the leadership and the rank and file but not on the divisive terms of the CPI's notion of united front. The notion of a "right offensive" was its own creation. It had not been envisaged by the CSP, and it pertained rather to the Communists' own fears of the effects of a confrontation with the leadership. It pointed to a belief that there was an irreconcilable conflict between the leadership and the rank-and-file, a conflict which, while in the past was avoided because of Right-Wing power in the party, could now be envisaged with the victory of "left" nationalism. Of course, the terms of united front discourse would not allow for a straightforward articulation of this opinion. But we shall show that it did emerge more clearly during the course of the Tripuri crisis.

While Nehru analysed that Bose's victory was partially related to the sense of drift and moderation that had grown in the Congress ranks, he remained aloof from the conflicts of the period. Apart from disagreement with the issues on which the campaign against the Rightists had developed, he was uncomfortable with the nature of the support. Bose had received in the election. He cited opportunistic elements

88. "[The President's re-election] was the delegates' way of showing that they wanted a stiffening up of our policy". Where are We? 28 February and 1-6 March 1939, SWJN, 9 p. 518.
amongst them, people who were mistakenly called radical, but who were actually interested in their own self-advancement. He believed them to have a conception about the use of the party more authoritarian than that of the present leadership, and he envisaged that their activities would lead to a disruption of the Congress. It was clear that he saw this as being connected with Bose's previous Presidentship, of which he emphasised Bose's tendency to settle provincial matters from the top. He felt that factionalism, which had broken the unity and purpose of the Congress at the provincial level, had now surfaced to the top. 89

There was some substance to this criticism. The main differences that Bose had in the WC during his Presidentship were not ideological. They tended rather to be administrative or relate to the formation of coalition ministries in Assam and Bengal. In the first case he had wanted to shift the AICS office to Calcutta so that he could be in touch with its work. 90 Kripiani, General Secretary, complained to Nehru that Bose had a tendency to bypass his office in dealing with provincial matters, and was so

89. Nehru to Bose, 4 February 1939, Nehru Mss. Correspondence with Bose, "Where are We?", 28 February to 6 March 1939, SWJN, Vol. IX, p. 492.

90. Bose to Nehru, 28 March 1939. A Bunch of old Letters, New York, 1960, p. 340. He noted that the General Secretary was not loyal to him and had been forced on him against his will.
embittered by this that he threatened resignation. 91

On the issue of coalition ministries, Bose wanted such adjustments in Assam and Bengal. Of the PSC members, Azad and Rajendra Prasad objected to the Assam coalition, but the ministry was formed on the basis of support from Bose and Patel. But in the case of Bengal, Bose was isolated. Rajendra Prasad noted that the Parliamentary Sub-Committee objection here was that the Congress would be in a minority in such a coalition. 92 Bose was so perturbed that he even hinted at resignation over the issue. 93

In his concern with these issues, Bose had the aspect of a regional politician. But it would be inadequate to type him in this way. Bose's attraction was in the appeal he made to political militancy. Though he invoked the traditional demands of the left - that Congress should educate the masses in their economic interests, democratise itself and activise primary committees 94 - at the centre of his programme was a time-bound ultimatum to the Raj to accept the Congress demand for power, failing which the Congress would launch its attack. 94

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91. Kripalani to Nehru, 14 March 1938, Nehru Ms. Correspondence.

92. Patel to Rajendra Prasad, 19 November 1938; Rajendra Prasad to Patel, 21 November 1938, Rajendra Prasad Ms. 4-A/38/coll.6

93. Bose to Gandhi, 21 December 1938, Nehru Ms. Correspondence.

94. "Our Needs and Our Duties," National Front, 1, 36, 23 October 1938, p.1
Bose's political emphases and imagery provide a sharp contrast to Gandhian strategy. There was no concept of civil hegemony in his thought. The gradual growth of ideological power over the minds of the people was absent. Instead his views were often militaristically framed, suggesting the imagery of out-and-out war with the opponent. In terms of power, an undemocratic focus on the state was characteristic. This was expressed in The Indian Struggle (1934),95 in which he had spoken96 of a combination of fascism and communism as being India's need, and from which it is clear that his respect for Hitler and Stalin arose from the disciplined, even militaristic nation-states he saw in their achievement. "Socialism" (state planning for agriculture and industry, a new monetary and credit system, abolition of landlordism) for him was akin to state capitalism, and was clearly oriented to developing the power of the nation-state. And it would be achieved through a powerful, authoritarian state:

It will not stand for democracy in the mid-Victorian sense of the term, but will believe in Government by a strong party bound together by military discipline.97

This synthesis of communism and fascism would bear the following political characteristics: supremacy of the state over the

96. Ibid., p. 314.
97. Ibid., p. 312.
individual; denunciation of parliamentary democracy; belief in one party rule; suppression of all dissenting minorities. 98

In the late 30s Bose seemed to have substantially revised his views. In 1938, in an interview with R.P. Dutt he noted that:

What I really meant was that we in India wanted our national freedom, and having won it, we wanted to move in the direction of socialism. That is what I meant when I referred to a synthesis between Communism and Fascism. Perhaps the expression I used was not a happy one. But I should like to point out that when I was writing the book, Fascism had not started on its imperialist expedition and it appeared to me merely an aggressive form of nationalism. Similarly communism as practised in India seemed anti-national. That too has changed. 99

And in his Haripura Presidential Address he also appeared to have reconsidered his views on parliamentary democracy, for he now noted that in an Independent India there should be a plurality of parties. 100

It would have been difficult for anyone to hold views other than these given the democratic discourse of the Congress in the 1930s. Nevertheless, ambiguity remained. In the interview with Dutt, fascist rule was denounced not because of its internal history but because of its imperialist tendencies. And he was later to note that, on the question

98. "These common traits will form the basis of the new synthesis... 'Samyavada'... It will be India's task to work out this synthesis." Ibid., p.314


100. Crossroads, Bombay 1962, p.12
of foreign alliances. "We should not be influenced by the internal politics of any country or the form of its state". 101

This of course can be characterised as an attitude of realpolitik in international affairs. But it was a far cry from a leftist outlook. And the continued military emphases of his appeals, and his later attempt to carry out an armed struggle against the Raj suggest continuities in his thought at a strategic level.

To ascribe a military-based strategy for power to Bose at this stage may be a question of exercising hindsight. All that can be noted is that the ambiguities in his thought distinguished him from the left in ideological terms, and his emphasis on an ultimatum was antithetical to the Gandhian strategy which, in contrast, tended to gradually unravel conflict, and to do it in such a way as to isolate the moral authority of the colonial regime. The progression towards such a point of conflict - through the placing of demands, the carrying on of negotiations etc. - would of course be regarded with antipathy by a militant nationalist of Bose's mentality, as was displayed in his response to the leadership's handling of the Federation issue.

Militant nationalist opposition to Gandhian "compromise" (it would be inappropriate to call it a strategy from the contemporary leftist viewpoint, as they could not conceive of

101. Ibid., p. 24
such political procedures constituting a strategy) was also, significantly, an expression of the uneasy situation Congressmen found themselves in under the ministries. The tradition of non-cooperation with the colonial regime had been blocked by ministerial compulsions. The urge to break through this restrictive framework had been expressed by the left in their urging a greater commitment to workers and peasants and in their emphasis on an uncompromising legislative policy\textsuperscript{102} - perhaps with the idea of achieving a constitutional deadlock and ensuring a renewal of the fight with the Raj. This type of support is best illustrated by the support of the Kisan Sabha leadership to Bose.\textsuperscript{103}

As we have shown, there was a definite hope in these quarters that militant advances in the Congress policy would tie up with a radicalisation of the agrarian situation to the point of abolition of feudalism.\textsuperscript{104} Towards the end of the year Kisan Sabha leaders were in consultation with Bose about the developing war crisis, and Yajnik, wanting instruction for

\textsuperscript{102} See above, fn. 84 and 85.

\textsuperscript{103} Sahajanand welcomed the formation of the Forward Bloc after Bose's resignation from the Presidentship of the INC in April. Statement of 11 May 1939 in Yajnik Ms. F.11(2). Though Sahajanand did not join the Bloc, other leading Kisan Sabha members did, including Indulal Yajnik and Shilbhada Yajee. See letters from Sahajanand to Yajnik of 10 July 1939 and 13 September 1939 in Yajnik Ms. F.11.

\textsuperscript{104} See above, 3.2.2. Sahajanand, anticipating a confrontation with the Raj over the war issue, had written to Yajnik that: "Every possible effort has been made by us to keep our Bakasht fight alive and at the same time make preparations for readiness to rise to a man when the call for the supreme sacrifice comes." To Yajnik, 18 September 1939, Yajnik, Ms. F.11.
conduct of Kisan work in that situation, believed that:

we should make a bold attempt for carrying things to a decisive conclusion even in the Kisan Movement. All of us agreed that this was an opportune moment for making a bold attempt for eliminating zamindari system (sic.).

However, the leftist position was only one reason for Bose's victory. An examination of some of the better-known figures who supported Bose reveals a varied picture. Kidwai, for example, had always been a politically vociferous figure. He had opposed office acceptance and was openly partisan in the Tripuri election, describing Sitaramayya as profederalist. His political militancy did not, however, prevent him from joining the U.P. cabinet and, as Revenue Minister, he was quite willing to accept the priority given to the swift passage of legislation and offered concessions to the landlords. And as Acting Prime Minister during Pant's illness, he allowed an increase in the police force to deal with unrest. Inspite of his having accepted the "policy of drift" in these ways, he was so involved in Bose's anti-federation position that he resigned from the United Provinces cabinet before the election, though the resignation was not accepted. Sarat Bose himself was one of the leading

105. Yajnik to Sahajanand, 13 September 1939, ibid.
109. Kidwai to Patel, 12 November 1938, AICG P.L. 2/1939. He made it clear that it had nothing to do with the agrarian legislation.
lights of the Congress Nationalist Party, founded in 1934 to pressurize Congress to take a firm anti-communal award stance. Here was a brand of politics definitely tied to the problems of power in Bengal, a Muslim-majority province. As we have observed Bose spent a great amount of time trying to effect a Congress coalition ministry in this province.

Another supporter of Bose was M.S. Aney, Secretary of the Nationalist Party and a founder member of the revived Swarajist Party in 1934. Otherwise, frustrated politicians were in evidence. N.B. Khare, ex-premier of the Central Provinces, once out of power, became critical of the authoritarianism of the PSC and their tendency to prevent ministries from taking actions that would threaten deadlock. He spread the story that office acceptance had been a deal between the High Command and the Raj and that the former had said that they would work the constitution. Nariman of course had failed to secure the Premiership of Bombay.

In the regional breakup of the voting too we can detect a variety of motives. The Bengal vote was the main reason for Bose’s victory. He won by 325 votes there whereas his overall lead over Sitaramayya was only 205 votes. Another major


112. These names have been selected from a list of Bose’s important supporters in *Bombay Chronicle*, 6 February 1939, p. 8.
victory took place in Punjab, which, like Bengal, had no Congress ministry. In U.P. the partisanship of Kidwai as well as dissent against ministerial policy must have turned the tide in favour of Bose and in Kerala the support for Bose came from a left-wing PCC. Where the right wing was in firm control of the Congress Committees, as in Gujarat and Bihar, there were convincing victories. In areas like Karnataka the CSP claimed that it was because of its growing influence in the KPCC that the vote swung in Bose's favour, though Lumley's analysis was that it expressed antipathy to Patel's domination in the region. Tamil Nadu surprisingly went in favour of Bose. In Erskine's analysis of the election he felt that differences between Andhra and Tamil Nadu over the question of the formation of a separate Andhra State had been decisive. It was not, he suggested, because there was pro-Bose feeling in Tamil Nadu but because of dislike for Sitaramayya, who was a staunch separatist, that the vote went against him. Possibly then

113. This was Haig's opinion. Haig to Linlithgow, 8 February 1939, Linlithgow Mss. F. 125/102.

114. Out of 156 KPCC members 60 were claimed to be socialist. Congress Socialist, Vol. 4, No. 4, 22 January 1939, p. 8.

115. Lumley to Linlithgow, 31 January 1939, Linlithgow Mss. 125/53. Perhaps here, as in Tamil Nadu and Andhra, voting behaviour might have expressed regional identity and conflicts.

there was the development of a regional backlash here. Such an intertwining of factors - dissent of the leftist variety, of the anti-compromise, militant nationalist one, regional sentiments and simple anti-leadership, factional strife seems to have determined the victory. 117

Gandhi and the Right Wing presented a consistently conflictual approach to Bose throughout most of the crisis. While personal issues determined this - they felt that their integrity as a leadership had been infringed118 - the main issue was of defending their policies. This is indicated by the fact that, apart from Azad, 119 Nehru, 120 and Narendra Deva121

117. The election results were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Sitaramayya</th>
<th>Bose</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Sitaramayya</th>
<th>Bose</th>
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<tr>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Orissa</td>
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IAR, January-July 1939, pp.45-46.


120. Gandhi to Nehru, 21 December 1938, Nehru Ms. Correspondence, vol.25.

121. Nehru, "Where are We?" op.cit., p.516.
had also been suggested by Gandhi, for these were leftists compatible with the Gandhian strategic framework. Gandhi in fact was prepared to give no ground to Bose because of differences in policy. When the Pant resolution — reposing faith in Gandhi and his policy and resolving that the Working Committee should be selected in consultation with him — was passed at the Tripuri session, Gandhi refused to abide by it. He suggested to Bose that he form a homogenous cabinet, as there were fundamental differences in approach between them. He wanted Bose to put his programme before the AICC and to carry on if it were accepted or to resign otherwise. He later told Gandhi Seva Sangh members that he thought that the Pant resolution should have been a straightforward vote of no-confidence, as he believed that the clause specifying that he should select the Working Committee was coercive.

We will not go into the details of the subsequent AICC meeting at Calcutta in which, failing to arrive at an agreement, Bose resigned and formed the Forward Bloc, conceived to push Congress into struggle with the Raj. For our purposes what is significant was how the two left parties reacted.


123. Gandhi to Bose, 2 April 1939, Rajendra Prasad Ms. 2-C/39.

to the situations at Tripuri and Calcutta.

The CSP had not been enthusiastic about supporting Bose in the first place, and they later noted that they would rather have voted for Azad than for Bose. However, at the time of the Tripuri Subjects Committee meeting, Jayaprakash had been alienated by the refusal of the Right to compromise by reviewing certain aspects of the Pant resolution, such as the aspersions clause, considered particularly damaging to Bose.

However, in the open session Bose's supporters threatened to disrupt the meeting and dismissed Nehru's alternative to Bose's ultimatum programme, the National Demand (in which it was declared that the Congress was against the Act in toto and that its ambition to achieve an independent state on the basis of a constitution formulated by a constituent assembly could be realised), on the grounds that it lacked a plan of action. This the CSP denounced as left adventurism and they reiterated its identification with Nehru, and remained neutral in the voting on the Pant resolution.


126. Jayaprakash, "Neutrality - the Best Course," Congress Socialist, 4, 12, 26 March 1939, p. 8. The Pant resolution regretted the aspersions cast against the leadership.


The Communists, on the other hand, voted against it and they were hard pressed to explain why, for they too agreed that the forces of "left" adventurism which were manifested at the Congress must be discouraged. They noted that while the CSP's neutrality had been correct the bulk of the left thought differently and the CSP as their leader should have followed them to enable the maintenance of left unity. 130 P.C. Joshi indicated that a crucial element of this left current were the left nationalists - the Boseites - who would have been isolated by a neutral position. While disassociating themselves from left adventurism in the shape of the rowdyism at the Congress meeting, the Communists nevertheless reiterated their underlying bias against the Congress leadership by noting that it was perpetuating its hold by shifting the focus of the problem from one of policy, which is what they claimed had been sought to be changed, to one of leadership. 131

There followed a period of the two left organisations urging unity and putting forward joint statements to that effect.

The National Front talked about the stage of the movement being

130. "Socialist Unity", 17 March 1939, JP Papers, F.No.10; the communists agreed that while neutrality was correct they felt that a vote against the resolution was necessary to maintain left unity which "alone could win the whole-hearted co-operation of the old veterans, as also prevent the isolation of left nationalists (i.e. Boseites R.V.) from socialists as a whole, who together constitute the left." P.C. Joshi, "On Tripuri", National Front, Vol.2, No.6, 19 March 1939, p.1 (emphasis in the original).

131. "They noted that the resolution had been put forward by the rightists with a view to restoring the prestige lost in the Presidential election. They dared not do this by asking for a straight no-confidence vote against Bose. They could not do it by asking for a straight vote on the plan of action. This why they asked for a vote of confidence in Gandhiji and his fundamental principles." "Tripuri, a political Evaluation," op.cit., p.92.
that it was, therefore, not the time to challenge the existing leadership. It urged that a composite leadership be formed and wanted Bose to take the initiative in this matter.\(^{132}\)

A joint statement by Joshi and Jayaprakash was issued urging that a working committee be formed before the AICC in the following months.\(^{133}\) Clearly the CPI thought that confrontation should be eschewed. And the CSP emphasised that they would not support any group engaged in continuous conflict with Gandhi, and Masani went as far as to say that the Pant resolution had actually bridged the gap between the groups,\(^{135}\) not mentioning that if it did so it was with the supremacy of the Right-Wing as its basis.

\(^{132}\) G. Adhikari, "Royism Exposed: Inverted Rightism," National Front, 23 April 1939, pp.181-82. That they were concerned with the results of confrontation with the Gandhian leadership is indicated by the following passage by Adhikari: "...To make a bid for alternative leadership in the present stage of the development of the struggle is a preparation of suicide for the left. The slogan of converting the Congress into a narrow disciplined revolutionary people's party is an open invitation to the Gandhi Seva Sangh to convert it into a seat of Satyagrahis accepting Gandhism in its entirety." p.183 (emphasis original).

\(^{133}\) Indian Annual Register, January-July 1939, p.26. They also issued a statement criticising both rightist moderation and left adventurism. "On Threshold of Struggle," Congress Socialist, 30 April 1939, Vol.4, No.18, pp.1, 8.


\(^{135}\) "By not recognizing in time that the Pant resolution was a come-down from the attitude of non-cooperation and a return, however grudgingly made, to joint working we turned our success into a self-invited defeat..." Masani, "Turning Success into Failure", op. cit., p.5; Jayaprakash echoed this by noting that,
However, differences again emerged between the two parties at the Calcutta AICC, when Bose's supporters opposed Nehru's attempts to form a composite cabinet, and Bose resigned. The CPI had again played an at best uncertain role in these proceedings. Dutt Mazumdar had asked that Bose's right to nominate the WC be reinstated. But the Communists had National Front disclaimed this attitude saying that they been unable to coordinate and that their own resolution was meant to approve Nehru's proposal. The CSP on the other hand was critical of Bose for not accepting Nehru's offer and suggested that Bose's demand for a composite cabinet might have given the adventurist section which had disrupted the Tripuri session a field day again. Nevertheless there was criticism of the Right Wing also for being intransigent.

135. contd...
amongst the reasons for the CSP staying neutral on the Pant resolution was that they did not want to be a party to driving Gandhi and his followers out of the Congress; that it had been specified that it was not a vote of censure; that it was a matter for rejoicing as it gave the go-by to theories of incompatibility. "Neutrality - The Best Course," op.cit., p. 8.


138. Gandhi was criticised for insisting on the principle of incompatibility; "Accusers are Accused," Congress Socialist, 7 May 1939, pp. 4-5. But the weight of criticism was directed against Bose for not accepting Nehru's proposal and making his withdrawal of the resignation conditional on the final form in which the AICC resolution would be framed and passed. "That was tantamount to taking chances with the adventurist forces that were
Some analyses were not as amicable to Right Wing actions: C.K. Narayanaswami pinned the blame squarely on both groups but concluded that Nehru's solution was the only viable one as an internal conflict at the top of the Congress could not change the situation. Nehru at first refused to join the new Working Committee under Rajendra Prasad on the grounds that he would thereby be better able to unite different groups. Nevertheless his attitude at this moment seemed also to be determined by irritation with the Right-Wing. He told Krishna Menon that he had been alienated by the Calcutta proceedings.

138. contd...
seeking to enact another Tripuri at Calcutta." Bose was reported to have said that the changes which had taken place in the Congress since 1921 should be reflected in the composition of the Working Committee and that the "latent implications of the voting at the last Presidential election" should not be forgotten. He then referred the problem to the AICC noting that if they wanted him to withdraw his resignation they "should be good enough to show some consideration for the views indicated above." When Bose insisted on this Nehru withdraw his resolution. Asoka Mehta, "AICC Meets at Calcutta," op. cit.

139. "...It is not possible to get away from the fact that Rajen Babu and his group were as determined to have a vote of confidence in themselves as Subhash Babu was determined not to continue as President till he was given a free hand in forming the composite cabinet." "Towards Crisis or Unity", ibid., p.5.

140. 2 May 1939, SWJN, Vol. IX, p.564.
and felt that Subhash had been accommodating but suspicion against him had grown too much. 141 But he finally accepted a position on the Committee, his uniting instincts coming on top, and the CSP also joined, following his lead. 142

The next round of conflict was determined by Bose's decision to inaugurate the Forward Bloc with a view to giving a lead to advance the nationalist struggle. The different reactions were logical; the CSP with their opposition to the crystallisation of a left bloc in the Congress opposed it and said that its basis was not ideological but anti-leadership. 143 A directive to party members stated that they could not join the Bloc but that friendly relations with it would be maintained. 144 Nehru had a similar opinion. He noted that as was based on opposition to the High Command it offered opportunistic elements a forum for activity. He was also worried that the Tripuri assurance that there would be no break from existing policy was infringed by some of Bose's recent statements about organising for an impending fight with imperialism. 145

141. 4 May 1939, ibid., p.570.
The Communists on the other hand seemed to be undertaking another shift. Though they had exhibited caution on matters such as the National Demand and had deprecated the rowdyism at the Tripuri Congress they emphasised the importance of "left" nationalists. So their attitude to the Bloc was more positive, a logical position to hold in the context of their espousal of the idea of a left bloc in the Congress. Thus, after the decision of Nehru and the CSP to join the Working Committee, with the CSP applauding this as the triumph of the concept of united leadership, the National Front criticised them as it believed that united leadership could not be achieved without the inclusion of Bose and other left nationalists. At the same time it also criticised Bose for his dismissal of the CSP.

Constitutional reform proposals for the Congress heightened a tense atmosphere. Two proposals in particular excited uniform opposition on the left. The first sought to amend article 5(c) which barred elected members of communal organisations from holding posts in the Congress. It was suggested that this be extended to include elected members of any other organisation, which the leftists saw as a threat to themselves, as did Bose. The second sought to do away

147. Editorial, National Front, 21 May 1939, p.236.
with proportional representation in the elections except for one third of AICC seats, a move which had been attempted earlier but had on that occasion been dropped. The other controversial resolutions included: the banning of satyagraha without the prior permission of the concerned PCC; the making of ministries accountable only to the PSC and WC; the PCCs being disallowed a say in administrative matters but being allowed to approach the ministers privately and, in case of disagreement being able to refer the matter to the PSC. The National Front added objections to two more clauses: that no member could vote unless he produced the certificate of membership, opposed because this would prevent lower strata from voting; the other that no person could be eligible for an elective post unless he had been a member for three consecutive years, again diagnosed as a fear of recruits coming mainly from the masses. A clause that no new primary member could vote in a Congress election until 12 months after enrolment was also objected to by the Left Consolidation Committee.

148. National Front, 11 June 1939, p.283; B.T. Ranadive, "Tightening the Grip of Compromise", National Front, 18 June 1939, p.297; the two controversial amendments on restricting satyagraha and the accountability of the ministries were formulated by Gandhi on 23 June 1939, CWMG, Vol.LXIX, p.367.

149. "Statement of the Left Consolidation Committee," National Front, Vol.II, No.21, 2 July 1939, p.331. The Left Consolidation Committee's formation was announced in the Congress Socialist on 28 June, Vol.4, No.25, p.12. Formed under the auspices of Joshi and Jayaprakash its aim was to advance Congress as a whole on such issues as the National Demand, anti-war and anti-fascist resolutions, the States' Peoples' Movements, the implementation of the election pledge, the fight against communalism,
The first two were dropped, the last three it is difficult to see as anti-left or anti-democratic moves. There was a genuine concern in the leadership about the deterioration of Congress discipline in the ministry years and these proposals may be read as attempts to curb opportunist elements having a say in the running of the Congress. The other two, however, presented real problems for the left. Nehru claimed that the PCCs had been empowered to launch satyagraha and so it was not a restriction but presumably just a measure for ensuring disciplined activity and preventing adventurist elements from disrupting the Congress.  

149. contd...

democratisation of the Congress, elimination of corruption and attempts to disrupt the Congress by driving out socialists and communists. It opposed the Forward Bloc for developing factionalism in the Congress. However, the consultative conference they called for to take place at the time of the AICC was to include all left groups and all Congressmen moved with the aim of renewing a nation-wide struggle and resisting the war aims of imperialism.

150. Narendra Deva, who was on the constitutional sub-committee had appended a note of dissent on the issue of proportional representation, ibid., p. 6. Interestingly Gandhi stepped into salvage this form of election. On 22 June he advised the WC to drop this amendment on the grounds that such changes had far-reaching implications and should not be decided on the basis of a mere majority vote. CWMG, Vol. LXIX, p. 365.

151. 13 July 1939, SWJN, Vol. IX, p. 584. However, earlier, on 7 July 2 days before the demonstration against the constitutional changes Nehru, while criticising the idea of AICC members revolting in the form of an all-India demonstration against the AICC resolutions, admitted that the resolution on satyagraha in particular was indeed questionable. He concluded though that this did not warrant the Left Consolidation Committee’s action, ibid., p. 583.
However, the meaning of the resolution was more repressive than this. The Left Consolidation Committee said that this would encourage the PCCs to shirk the responsibility of organising mass struggles and would lead to popular movements being taken up by non-Congress groups, thus rending the link further between the Congress and the masses. 152 And it is true that the right-wing was in control of most PCCs and that action through them would now become difficult. As for the other clause on the accountability of the ministries Gandhi declared that the Governors had proved less troublesome than Congressmen. 153

In response to the passing of these controversial resolutions the Left Consolidation Committee called for an all India protest day on 9 August. The Right-wing first tried indirect channels to prevent this. Patel noted to Nehru that all those who were against the demonstration should publicly oppose it and he asked him to privately dissuade Bose from taking this action. 154 Nehru did so, making a criticism of this particular form of protest as smacking of


153. National Front, 2 July 1939, pp.331, 341-42. Apparently Nehru was very critical of this statement and Patel informed him that Gandhi was thinking of retiring because of Nehru's anger with him on these grounds. Patel to Nehru, 1 July and 3 July 1939, Nehru MSS. Correspondence Vol.81.

154. Patel to Nehru, 9 July 1939.
indiscipline, even in a case where the objects of attack were worthy of further discussion. 155 Rajendra Prasad had called for all Congressmen holding elective posts to desist from participating in the demonstration. 156

As a result of the Congress President's directive the CSP withdrew from the demonstration, as did the Royists. The CPI, the Forward Bloc and Kisan Sabha leaders persisted and the CPI criticised the CSP for having a conception of unity which subordinated them to the Right-Wing which was characterised as the anti-struggle leadership of the bourgeoisie. They claimed that it was necessary to remain with the Forward Bloc in order to prevent the isolation of these 'left' nationalists and their developing a simply anti-rightist attitude. 157 As a result of the demonstration Bose was suspended from holding elected office in the Congress for 3 years, 158 as were Kisan Sabha leaders, Sahajanand, K.P. Sinha and Sheelbhadra Yajee. 159 The CPI, always displaying

155. See above, footnote 68.
158. Rajendra Prasad to Bose, 18 August 1939. Rajendra Prasad Selected Correspondence and Documents, Vol.4, p.45.
159. All India Kisan Bulletin, 8 September 1939, Yajnik Ms. F.15.
a skeptical attitude to the leadership but leavening it with a pragmatic aspect, now revealed their true viewpoint. They had effectively tied themselves to Bose as the basis for a more radical leadership, confirming the sectarian interpretation of the left bloc they had argued for. They criticised Nehru's statement on the demonstration on the basis that, in a context of crisis, it was essential that disruptive moves from the right be fought. Their theoretical framework afforded now a greater approximation to their real activity. The power struggle at the top was legitimized, and thereby also the notion of alternative leadership, on the grounds that simple mass pressure was inadequate; exposure of Gandhian leadership at the top was necessary as it was tending to compromise. Gandhi as a leader and satyagraha as a form of struggle were seen as reflections of the Indian bourgeoisie. Though strong at one time and progressive in a context of conflict between British and Indian capitalism, with the development of workers and peasants' movements both the ideology and the technique were now under assault and were thus veering towards constitutionalism. In a fundamental shift from the 1937 "The National Congress and the Working-Class" it was noted that the bourgeoisie would cross over finally and that the

bourgeois leadership would be isolated. Clearly, as far as they were concerned a united leadership was merely a temporary stage in the movement. Nehru's actions demonstrating the demonstrators bore out what must have always been their real evaluation of him—a petit bourgeois who under the influence of radical and proletarian tendencies gave progressive slogans but who in the event of a determined struggle would support the upper classes.

161. "It appears that some comrades in our own ranks, understand the achieving of united leadership mechanically. It is viewed as a task of pushing the present leadership to the position of struggle by merely developing partial struggles on a nation-wide scale. There is a tendency to underestimate the task of carrying out political exposures of the anti-unity and anti-struggle acts of the present homogenous Gandhian leadership... Let it be clear that our slogan for united leadership is for the immediate future. It corresponds with the present level of the political consciousness of the masses and is just suited to take it forward to the next stage..." The changed context of organised class movements made it difficult for oscillation. Other forms of struggle would now develop, not just Gandhian ones. "...The struggle, made possible and started under the slogan of united leadership will, in the course of development, result in the further shift in the leadership—towards the hegemony of the proletariat... The shift from the present monopolistic leadership to a united leadership is... a step towards the progressive isolation of the bourgeois leadership..." It was underlined that the bourgeoisie would finally go over to the camp of imperialism when the danger of the mass revolution became immediate. G. Adhikari, "Unity for Struggle: The Slogan of United Leadership," National Front, 16 July 1939, pp. 365-66.

The patterns of behaviour which were pursued by different left-wing tendencies followed a definite logic. The CSP, even when alienated by the leadership's policies stressed unity and believed that pressure would prevent the leadership from going astray. In contrast the basic features of CPI Policy, sometimes confused by a shifting theoretical understanding, come into sharper focus: a basic skepticism of the Gandhian leadership's capacity to lead the struggle to its conclusion and a complementary belief in an alternative leadership linked to a left bloc in which the CPI would play a dominant role. In the crucial confrontation of 1939 then there was a significant overlap between the CPI's plans at the top and those of Bose's militant nationalism. The latter's fight with the Congress leadership seems to have precipitated their new attitude.

5.3 A Left-Wing Strategy?

However inspite of these differences, the left including Nehru were united in their incomprehension of the logic of Gandhian strategy. Further their inability at this level was not balanced by a concrete counter-strategy. The CSP and the CPI emphasised the radicalisation of certain practices such as legislative policy and argued for an integration of working-class and peasant organisations with the Congress, and a definite commitment to, and leadership of, the states peoples movements. This constituted the sum
of their proposals for changes in Congress policy. And yet there was an absence in all this of a unifying political strategy. It appears that to their radicalisation on these various issues would automatically present the conditions for the ouster of the British.

But what were the mechanics of acquiring power? What was to be the relationship between the national movement - even radicalised in the terms they desired - and the state? Were organs rivalling those of the existing state structure to be developed? If so, how was the monopoly by the state of armed force to be handled in such a counterposition?

We have suggested that Nehru came to have an understanding of these issues, but in an untheorised, ad-hoc fashion. He tended to register the significance of these issues by a series of practical adjustments to evolving situations (e.g. the bringing of extra-constitutional action in line with the constitutional under the ministries; the acceptance of the limits posed by state form in his acknowledgement of the worth of ministerial experience in administrative matters). But elsewhere these problems were not registered except in the case of the CSP, in terms of a series of temporary adjustments dictated by the

163. See Chapter 3.3.2 and above, 5.1.1
existence in Congress policy of different layers of authority and practice. 164

Instead of a political strategy the left seemed to have a notion of bringing matters to a crisis-point on various fronts, with perhaps the idea of creating a constitutional deadlock and renewing the confrontation with the Raj. In aiming for this, they hoped that this would mean not a down of class-conflict, but an intensification of it. We have already noted that Kisan Sabha leaders had hoped that the agrarian movement could utilise the opportunity afforded by the war crisis to extend the movement into affecting the abolition of zamindari. 165 And in meetings in Bihar in October, Sahajanand and other Kisan Sabha activists explained that though the Congress had ordered that there should be no activity at this time, there should be preparation for a no-tax and no rent campaign. 166 Later, Sahajanand made the link between the anti-war and anti-zamindar campaigns explicit when he noted in meetings that if the British desired to protect the zamindars then the Kisans would never join the war. 167 And Yajnik and Sahajanand had

164. See above, 5.1.1
165. See above, this chapter, for Sahajanand’s and Yajnik’s views.
166. Bihar FR (2), October 1939.
167. Bihar, FR(1), November 1939.
decided that:

in time of crisis the local Kisan Sabhas may without actually referring to the war situation, stiffen and reinforce its Kisan struggles with a view to bringing about economic and political crisis.\(^{168}\)

However, as we have shown, the social basis for the realisation of this objective was dwindling, as the peasant movement was on the wane in this period.\(^{169}\)

But perhaps it is not historically adequate to focus on the question of left-wing activity simply in terms of alternative strategies and their viability. For one of our arguments about the ministries has been that the Right-Wing emphasis on legislative achievement and legality had profound weaknesses implicit in it. Not only did it ensure for halting and inadequate legislation in some instances, but it also could not provide the agency to ensure that it was effectively implemented. The left wing's incapacity, or refusal, to comprehend the imperatives of this policy functioned in a sense to alter the terms and transcend the limitations posed by the Act. The continued emphasis the left placed on direct action and agitation acted as a constant pressure on the ministries and the administration to go beyond the terms of legal redressal and, in some instances, legislative policy.\(^{170}\)

In this sense, if the left did not provide an alternative political strategy, it nevertheless extended the social space of the strategy which existed.

\(^{168}\) Yajnik to Ranga, 2 November 1939, Yajnik Ms.F.14.

\(^{169}\) See above, Chapter 3.2.2

\(^{170}\) Chapter 3.1.1, 3.2.2.