Conclusion

1. Under the Government of India Act, 1935, the electorate had expanded seven-fold, and important areas of administration (law and order, land revenue administration) had been brought under the direct control of the elected ministers, though this was on restricted financial and political terms (the continued weight given to central financial control, the Governors' special powers which allowed for interference in ministerial functioning in relation to several areas of rule). In addition, the constitution presented the conditions for divisiveness along communal lines.\(^1\) This combination of features - an unprecedented civil society for governments to rule over, and the guarantee that a segment of this rule would be conducted by non-nationalist formations (the Muslim-majority provinces) - appeared to Right Wing Congressmen to present the threat of a real shift in the mechanisms of socio-political influence.

This fear was implicit in the emphasis Rajendra Prasad placed on constructive achievement as being indispensable in the new circumstances. The explanation given for this was that the political situation was one of mass passivity.\(^2\) However, at the same time, Rajendra Prasad was confident that the Congress had not lost its mass influence. He was certain that the party would acquire electoral majorities in most of the provin-

\(^1\) Ch. 2.1.
\(^2\) Ch. 2.2.2(11).
ces, barring the Muslim majority ones.\textsuperscript{3} This implied that the question for him had now become one not of recapturing mass influence but of articulating it within the context of a changed atmosphere and in terms of new political structures.

The crucial emphasis here was on reform - the legal, institutionalised method adopted by the people's representatives to redress grievances and resolve conflict in civil society.\textsuperscript{4} Reform had to be undertaken by the Congress, because the civil society of the Act was splintered into non-national units - of the provinces, and as determined by communal electorates. The Congress was the only party to pose itself nationally, i.e. to cut through the boundaries of community and province.\textsuperscript{5} If it absented itself from these arenas of influence it risked the realisation of such a fracturing of society and of forfeiting the domain of reform and civil society.\textsuperscript{6} This fear amongst Congressmen was expressed, in the context of the Impasse, in relation to the activities of the interim ministers.\textsuperscript{7} And, of course, even in the event of a suspended constitution arising

\textsuperscript{3} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{4} "... Do not the people expect us to do them such good as is possible through the constitution?" Rajendra Prasad to BhuLabhaj Desai, 19 December 1935, ibid.

\textsuperscript{5} Munshi's analysis, Ch. 2.2.2(1).

\textsuperscript{6} Thus Rajendra Prasad's idea that reactionaries would be prevented from taking power if the Congress accepted office. Ch. 2.2.2(11).

\textsuperscript{7} Ch. 2.3.2(11).
out of Congress non-cooperation, a fracturing of the political space would continue with the functioning of non-Congress Governments in Bengal and Punjab. Congress non-cooperation in the context of the Act's viability in non-Congress dominated provinces was regarded with trepidation. 8

2. The countering of the terms of the Act was undertaken by Gandhi through his demand that the Governors should not use their special powers to intervene in ministerial functioning. 9 This demand drew attention forcefully to the extra-constitutional authority that continued to define Congress politics inspite of the decision to accept office. The resulting impasse led to what we have termed a reorganization of political space. The social and institutional supports of the Raj - the services, landlords, and even sections of the European community - felt the vulnerability of their position in a political situation suddenly fraught with uncertainty. This caused sections of the landlords, Europeans and a large element of the ideological support for constitutional politics, the loyalist and liberal press, to exercise pressure on the Raj to conciliate the Congress. 10 The constitution, designed to emphasise discrete provincial units of authority, was effectively deemed dependent on the good will of a party which acknowledged only a nationalist frame of reference.

8 Congress Parliamentary Board circular, 27 January 1936, Ch. 2.2.2(11).
9 Ch. 2.3.1.
10 Ibid.
3. Seen within the logic of Gandhian strategy, the Impasse also displayed certain characteristic motifs. The Mahatma's assurances clause was in effect a critique of the constitution, a pointing out of the authoritarian elements which underpinned it. But the critique was framed in such a way as to suggest a moderate view; no substantial change, in the way of a constitutional amendment, was being asked for. The framework of the constitution was deemed acceptable, if the intentions underlying it could be demonstrated to be progressive. Apart from exercising a point of moral pressure on the colonial regime, this mode of critique exhibit a distinct objective: to expand effective authority within the terms of existing, even if antagonistically framed, power structures.

Such a strategy was in evidence again in the approach of the Gandhians to the second part of the 1935 Act, relating to the creation of a Federal Government. The weight of imperialist restrictions in terms of financial power was emphatic here, and so too was the structure of representation in the Federal Legislature, affording as it did a large quota to the nominees of the Princely States' rulers. As with provincial autonomy, instead of assailing the unsupportable nature of the constitutional arrangements, Gandhi chose to press for an intermediary point of transformation: to change not the form but the content of the Federal legislature by urging, and subsequently pressuring, the Colonial rulers and the Princes to democratise states'
representation. That this effective modification of the Federal scheme would have altered the political balance in a fundamental way is indicated by the intransigence of the British in the face of these demands.

At its centre then, Gandhian political strategy in this period aimed to extend the space of nationalist and democratic authority within the inimical constitutional arrangements of the colonial state. This was pursued at two levels: at one, there was the presentation of a series of demands which were ostensibly moderate in nature but which struck at certain crucial features of the Raj's power; at the second there was the consolidation of nationalist authority through ministries.

4. We have observed a range of methods deployed to consolidate Congress's position through the ministries. Rajendra Prasad's emphasis on reform was now placed in a complex and contradictory situation. In terms of the agency of such a consolidation, Gandhi's and CR's views may be counterpointed. For Gandhi the development of nationalist power vis-a-vis the British would ideally be achieved by making the state itself irrelevant. An ideal community of the nation, integrated by a removal of divisions through reform, and adopting a disciplined approach in the context of constitutional functioning, would reduce the apparatus of British power to obsolescence. The party would be the primary agency to ensure the withdrawal of legitimacy from the state-structure.13

12 Ch. 4.1 and 2.
13 Ch. 3.4.
On the other hand, in CR's conception, developing on the lines of what I have termed a constitutionalist strategy, the state would be the chief avenue of the consolidation of Congress power and the party would be functional to this enterprise. Stripped of politics by a de-emphasis on extra-constitutional action, the state apparatus would become amenable to carrying out the policies of the popular government. In turn, greater control over the apparatus by the popular government was striven for by fending off incursions into its domain by the all-India Government. In this framework the focus of the strategy, unlike Gandhi's, was on hegemonizing the state machinery.

The Right Wing leadership more broadly had the priority of enacting legislation swiftly (the duration of the ministries' tenure was expected to be short because of the belief that a political crisis - whether over an attempt to impose Federation or due to any other contingent reason - was always likely). To ensure against a crisis that would jeopardise this objective an emphasis was placed on maintaining an equilibrium in politics, meaning thereby an observation of the limits posed by functioning within the constitution. Further, these priorities also entailed adjustments over the nature of legislation so as to enable a swift passage through the upper house.

14 As in the case of Munshi's model, Ch. 2.2.2(i).
15 Ch. 3.1.1.
16 Rajendra Prasad to S.K. Sinha, 4 May 1938, Rajendra Prasad MS. 3 B/1938. Ch. 2.2.2(ii) and 3.2.1.
17 Ch. 3.1.2, 3.2.1, 3.3.1.
5. These strategic models then had a common emphasis on social consolidation and the need to function legally in the ministerial context. But this emphasis was constantly challenged by a countervailing extra-constitutional activity by Congressmen and Kisan organisation workers. The actions of these individuals and groups related to two basic factors. The first was the belief that constitutional activity could achieve little and that it marginalised mass action, perceived to be the motor of the anti-imperialist movement. The second was the fact that the Congress ministries engendered a considerable increase in unrest, borne of a sense of expectation and of power. This tendency was in some instances given an extra fillip by the halting and on occasion totally inadequate legislation enacted under the compulsions of ministerial strategy.

Neither Gandhi's ideal community, nor CR's ideal state could function as strategies in the face of these realities. While the leadership's strategic emphasis inevitably led to a support to the use of the state's repressive apparatus, this was never a full-fledged policy. It was moderated by a tendency by Ministers to mediate with extra-legal action. And even within the party, while conscious, organised Right Wing action was successfully undertaken in organisational elections to consolidate control in order to protect strategy, it was not until

18 Ch. 2.2.1.
19 Ch. 3.1.2, 3.2.2 and 3.3.2.
20 Bihar, Ch. 3.2, passim.
21 Ch. 3.4.
22 Ch. 3.1.2, 3.2.2 and 3.4.
June 1939 that a disciplinary regulation against extra-constitutional action was instituted. We have suggested that while the basis for such a deferring of disciplinary action by the all-India leadership was related to the strength of popular movements, it was also related to their own essentially non-constitutional outlook.

6. This expansion of the terms on which ministerial strategy was conducted constituted the effective shape of nationalist strategy. It also functioned as a powerful point of pressure on the state apparatus. The multiplicity of the focii of power under the ministries, a situation of dispersed authority, tended to disorient the services and their confidence in the Raj. Nevertheless, while destabilizing the state apparatus and therefore subverting the colonial regime's mechanisms of control - this development was not unproblematic. The lack of political coherence involved was seen as threatening discipline and organisation in the party. As a result steps were taken which redefined the relationship of party to state. The actions of CR, Nehru and sections of the CSP converged, though

23 Ch. 3.4.

24 In Bombay junior revenue officials were said to have lost heart because of Congress interference. Lumley to Brabourne, 16 September 1938, Linlithgow Ms. Eur. F. 125/52; in Bihar some civil servants became very dispirited because of the ministry's unwillingness to have a clear-cut policy towards kisan agitators. Hallett to Linlithgow, 14 May 1939, ibid. F. 125/46. The situation in U.P. has been discussed in Ch. 3.3.2. Significantly there was no serious concern about the situation prevailing under the Madras ministry.
arising from different angles of vision. A separation of party and state functions was argued for. In OR's perception this was a way of exercising hegemony over the state apparatus, a demonstration that popular authority would not question the domain of the services, but would only formulate policy.25 For Nehru and Narendra Deva, this imperative was articulated from the viewpoint of the party; its association with the affairs of the state machinery - through threats of transfer, interference in service functioning - was seen to present a retrograde development.26 In seeing things this way a section of the left had come to accept the need for the impersonal functioning of the bureaucracy. Thus the ministry period inaugurated a process of adjustment with the characteristic institutions of the modern state.

7. This reading of office-acceptance runs contrary to the left-wing premise that ministry formation was necessarily an act of compromise, a succumbing to the offer of illusory power enshrined in the 1935 Act. Other similar left-wing interpretations of Gandhian policies, such as that relating to the Federal scheme, were also unable to comprehend the real nature of the strategy being deployed.

However if at the level of anti-imperialist politics the term Right Wing is inadequate to comprehend the Ministry experiment, the terms left and right still encompassed significant

25 Ch. 3.1.1.
26 Ch. 3.3.2.
elements of division within the Congress. The debates on the economic programme in 1936 are important here, as were the differences on the mass contacts issue.

While the question of an agrarian programme, and the level at which its demands are pitched, may be analysed in terms of the needs of an anti-imperialist class unity, programmes of particular groups within the overarching formation reveal the specific direction of social commitments. Thus, while the Left accepted the terms of the Congress agrarian programme, their embracing of zamindari abolition as their ultimate objective defined the particular viewpoint with which they conducted their anti-imperialism. On the other hand the Right Wing regarded social issues and social change primarily through the prism of politics and the need for political unity.

Such a viewpoint emphasised mediation instead of conflict, or rather, in Gandhian terms, a non-violent mode of handling conflict and change. In the framework of civil society, this was related to legality, to due processes of enacting and implementing change (through legislation and administrative action) and of settling disputes (through the courts). Thus Rajendra Prasad's significant letter to Nehru, regretting peasant direct action in the baksht conflict because it would rob the tenants of legitimacy in the courts.29

27 Bipan Chandra, "The Long-Term Dynamics of the Indian National Congress", op.cit.
28 Ch. 1.2.
29 To Nehru, n.d. (March) 1937. Rajendra Prasad Ms.
Rajendra Prasad's viewpoint tended to make him ineffectual in the face of the unequal relations within which the law functioned. And his sense of priorities in regard to political agency made him antagonistic to independent peasant organisation, opposed on the grounds that the Congress already had a large peasant membership. The notion of class organisation as an urgent requirement for the articulation of class interests in unequal power relations was conceived of as socially divisive and therefore politically harmful in his vision.

The alternate trajectory of the left provided the missing notion of agency to bridge this chasm in Right Wing strategy. This intervention took varying forms, some incompatible with the compulsions at work under the ministries. The Malabar movement was able to proceed largely in legal terms and on the basis of minimal agrarian demands; it also seemed to have a leadership which could exercise control and restraint. In the U.P. the unrest was more sporadic and uncoordinated but was by 1939 showing a certain cohesiveness under a deliberate policy of defending the proposed agrarian legislation of the Ministry. But in the cases we have examined in Andhra and, most strikingly, in Bihar, conflict manifested less negotiable features.

In Bihar, a series of factors would seem to have determined this. The Congress links with the small landlord made the bakasht struggle, carried out in a number of areas against

30 Ch. 1.2.
31 Ch. 3.1.2(ii).
32 Ch. 3.3.2.
this class, cause antagonism between segments of the party, i.e., between more orthodox, conservative elements and the Kisan Sabhaites. The Sabha's leadership, in turn, appeared unwilling to always call a halt to the movement, even if settlement was possible. This was perhaps related to the fact that the movement was less controllable than in other areas. But it was also related to a developing notion of agrarian revolution.33

This feature - of desiring to increase the pace of social radicalism - was a more general aspect of the left-wing objective in the national movement.34 This was myopic, given the uneven development of the movement as a whole.35 Further, at a political level, because of the left's inability to always spot the points at which radicalism was possible, or when the national leadership's policies were adequate or otherwise, they may have led themselves into a position from which the bulk of the nationalist intelligentsia would be alienated, especially because of their charges against the leadership.36

However, in spite of these problems the left-wing and, especially, the Kisan Sabha experience, points to the serious

33 Ch. 3.2.2.
34 Ch. 5.2.
35 In 1939, out of a total kisan organisation membership of 6,23,784, 4,09,000 came from Bihar. (These figures exclude membership of organisations in Bengal, U.P., Maharashtra, Karnataka, Central India and Rajputana.) Yajnik Ms. F.14.
36 Bipan Chandra, "Ideological Transformation of the Congress in the 1930s", Mimeo.
limits of the Gandhian strategy in its policies for social consolidation. The left functioned, in some sense, to correct these imbalances, and to extend the realm of the nationalist strategy in its social frame. But, ironically, as a result of its successful extension of these terms, it was in some instances left out in the cold by a section of its base which had crystallised its power in the agrarian structure in the wake of the agrarian mobilisation of the 1930s.  

37 The case of Bihar, Ch. 3.2.2. But this does not hold in all cases. In Kerala and Andhra for example the left continued to maintain agrarian influence.