CHAPTER - III
The Pact signed by Mahatama Gandhi and the Viceroy, Lord Irwin, on 5 March, 1931, brought the first phase of the Civil Disobedience Movement to a halt. The main intention behind the signing of a Truce for the Congress, and especially Gandhiji, was to gain a breather.

For the Government, it was an effort to rope in the Congress for the next round of conference, to be held that year, to decide the new Constitution for India. During the recently concluded first Round Table Conference, it had realised that without Congress being a party, no consensus Constitution could be formed. So, with this end in view, the government released the members of the Congress Working Committee and invited them for talks to end the Civil Disobedience Movement. Notwithstanding the compulsions on both sides, this pact which was signed on an equal footing, provided the Congress, the erstwhile unlawful organisation, the status of being the representative of Indians which could negotiate with the colonial government.

But the Truce did not last for long and the Congress had to resume the movement in January 1932. It was clear right from the beginning that Congress was taking the settlement as a temporary arrangement and not a final settlement. The intention of the Congress was to utilise this opportunity to consolidate the gains of 1930 and prepare itself and the
people for the next round of struggle. So, with this aim in view, Jawaharlal Nehru, as President of the AICC, sent a circular to the Provincial Congress Organisations on 10 March, which said: "It is vitally necessary that you should take immediate steps to consolidate the position gained by the Congress during the last year and to strengthen it still further. The immediate action to be taken is to send out our workers, those who have been discharged from jails and others to the villages to explain exactly what had been done in Delhi, further to see that there is no harassment or oppression of any kind in the rural areas".

He further emphasised to his workers that "if we now establish firmly definite centres of work and activity in rural areas, we shall strengthen our organisation and prepare the people for any contingency that might arise. I need not tell you that the provisional settlement at Delhi means a Truce only and no final peace. That peace can only come when we have gained our objective in its entirety".1

In UP, consolidation work began immediately. Congress workers and ex-prisoners fanned out to the rural areas, spreading the Congress message and mobilising peasants to prepare them for striking a favourable bargain with the Government as well as the zamindars on the question of rent remission. The effort to gain a substantial remission in

1. FN-33/37/1931, Home Poll., NAI and WRPA, March 21, 1931, UPID.
rent and revenue in view of the prevailing slump in the prices of food grains, due to the Great Depression, continued throughout the Truce period. Evidently, the activities of UP Congress in this period mostly concentrated in rural areas. Very little political activity took place in the urban areas as almost all the Congress workers from the urban areas were busy in the villages. Even the occasional political meetings organised in the urban centres were devoted to the question of remission and harassment of peasants by zamindars and officials during rent collection.

The political activities of the UP Congress in this period can be divided into three broad sections. In the first part, I will deal with the general political activities of the Congress and other organisations in the urban areas; in the second, I will deal with the efforts of the Congress as well as some Muslim organisations to mobilize support for the impending Round Table Conference and the third section would deal with the activities of Congress in rural areas and its efforts at negotiating a deal with the government for a proper remission in rent. The justification for including Congress activities in the rural areas in this study, which focuses on the urban centres, is that, one, the volunteers from the urban areas were involved in the rural protest, and two, the agitation in the rural areas attracted province-wide interest and attention and support and became more than just a rural affair.
GENERAL POLITICAL ACTIVITIES OF THE CONGRESS

After the signing of the pact, political activities in the United Provinces, which were at a low key for a couple of months, suddenly increased. In the week ending 28 March, 1931, 258 meetings were reportedly held in the Province as compared to the 156 and 59 in the weeks ending 21 and 15 March respectively. In the Allahabad, Banaras and Kanpur districts, 12, 3 and 17 meetings respectively were held. So, instead of dying down, as the government had expected, political activities suddenly increased. The main reason behind this was the effort of the Congressmen to consolidate their gains of 1930. The main topic of the speeches was explaining the Truce terms to the common people. There were also some protest meetings organised by Youth Leagues and Students Associations all over the Province to condole the martyrdom of Bhagat Singh and his comrades.\(^2\)

But once the centre of attention shifted to rural areas, there were hardly any political activities in the urban centres. In the month of May, Congress organised a number of District and other political conferences. These conferences were held to maintain the political interest of the

\(^2\) WRPA March 15, 21, 28; April 4, 11, and 18, 1931, UPID and FR-March I & II and April I & II, 1931, FN-18/3/1931 and 18/4/1931, Hom. Poll., NAI. The political activities in the months of March and April 1931 has been dealt in detail in the first chapter to judge the people's reaction towards Gandhi-Irwin Pact.
people. One of the District conferences, organised at Benaras on 28 and 29 April, welcomed the resolutions passed by the Karachi Congress on Fundamental Rights and the National Economic Programme. A provincial political conference was organised at Mirzapur on 2, 3 and 4 May. Like other district conferences, this conference too concentrated mainly on the present economic slump, the condition of the peasants and the need for a proper remission in rent and revenue. On its second day, this conference, in a resolution, thanked the people of the Province and especially the foreign cloth merchants, for making the boycott of foreign cloth a success. The conference further appealed to the foreign cloth dealers to continue their support to the Congress and avoid dealing in foreign cloth. Generally attendance at these conferences used to be good. The conference at Mirzapur was attended by more than 7000 people on all three days. A Swadeshi exhibition was also organised as a part of the conference.

But apart from these occasional conferences, the one activity which Congress continued throughout this period was of picketing and propagation of swadeshi and khadi. Peaceful picketing was permitted in the Truce terms and the Working Committee of the AICC, in its meeting at Delhi from 26 February to 6 March, had laid down the rules and instructions for peaceful picketing. These instructions were

5. Aj, May 4, 5, 6 and 7, 1931.
published by the Congress in the local newspapers of UP. In these, the Congress warned its own workers as well as sister organisations that "the introduction of any element of physical compulsion will undo the great results" they had achieved earlier and "expose the Congress to the charge of a denial in practice of its own profession". The workers were expected to strictly abide by the rules laid down by the Working Committee. According to the rules, the conduct of picketing was to be uniformly courteous towards dealers and buyers, no burning of effigies of recalcitrant dealers or shouting hai hai, no cordon amounting to physical prohibition of the movement of buyers, no boycott of dealers or buyers and greater effort to be made to enlist the services of women. The emphasis was on convincing the shopkeepers to eschew dealing in foreign cloth completely by means of waiting on the shopkeepers in deputation and putting the national cause before them, distribution of leaflets showing the advantages of boycott, processions and singing parties, lectures, discourses, lantern exhibitions etc. The Working Committee was of the view that complete boycott was possible only by sustained work in villages through khadi.6

These regulations were largely followed during picketing in this period but picketing did not last for long. The fortnightly report for the first half of June noted that picketing of foreign cloth shops was less intensive as it had "largely achieved its purpose". In most of the towns,

dealers had generally agreed not to order fresh supplies of foreign cloth but the report also noted that in many districts dealers were allowed to dispose of their existing stock in lieu of this agreement. This could be true as we find a letter from Jawaharlal Nehru to the Secretary, Town Congress Committee, Kanpur, in which he admonished him for allowing certain foreign cloth dealers to dispose off their existing stock. In his reply, the Secretary accepted that some dealers were selling foreign cloth but he argued that, due to the lack of volunteers, they were in no position to cover the whole market. So they were concentrating mainly on the wholesale dealers and importers of foreign cloth and had achieved considerable success as only 4 out of 300 foreign cloth dealers refrained from signing the pledge. Of course, there were some violations by the signatories but all of them except two tendered written apologies and promised to abide by the pledge in future.

The Secretary, TCC, Kanpur, however, believed that they were getting the willing and voluntary cooperation of 'almost the whole of the cloth market of Cawnpore' in making the boycott of foreign cloth a permanent feature of the Kanpur mandi. Congressmen also succeeded in convincing the brokers and commission agents of the mandi to boycott those firms which were being picketed by the Congress volunteers.7 But

7. Letter from JL Nehru to the Secretary, Town Congress Committee, Kanpur, dated June 27, 1931 and the Secretary, TCC, Kanpur, to the General Secretary, AICC, Allahabad, dated July 1, 1931. FN - G-139/1931 and FN - 74/1931, AICC, NMML.
the disposing of the old stock by the retailers continued even then. In a letter to the General Secretary, AICC, Allahabad, dated 6 September 1931, the Secretary, TCC, Kanpur, said that they were 'not at all picketing the shops' which were 'merely disposing of their old stock'. He again pleaded that they did not have the necessary strength to picket such a huge market as that of Kanpur. He had also given the plea that except for some old stock of foreign cloth these retailers mainly deal in swadeshi. 8

This question of allowing the businessmen to dispose of their old stock of foreign cloth came up again when the Allahabad TCC decided to start picketing on 1 July and asked the foreign cloth dealers to get their stocks sealed. Some cloth merchants, both Hindus and Muslims, met Jawaharlal Nehru and P.D. Tandon and asked for their permission to sell their old stock of foreign cloth. They gave the plea that since they had been loyal to the Congress and had supported the boycott programme last year, they should be allowed to dispose off their old stocks and only those dealers should be punished who had not cooperated with them. But the merchants were denied any such permission on the ground that the Working Committee of the AICC had forbidden any kind of compromise with the dealers in connection with the boycott of foreign cloth. The local boycott committee of the TCC granted the dealers one week's time to get their stocks sealed. But The Leader reported on 2 July that not even one

8. Ibid.
cloth merchant had offered to have his stock of foreign cloth re-sealed and predicted that the Congress would confront considerable difficulty in enforcing the boycott.

The Muslim cloth merchants of Allahabad wrote to Jawaharlal that in view of the recent riots in various cities of UP, resumption of picketing would lead to communal tension. But Jawaharlal dismissed their doubts as baseless.9 The collector of Allahabad, R.F. Mudie, also wrote to Jawaharlal Nehru requesting him to cancel his instructions for picketing as it would cause amongst 'Muhammadans a very deep sense of bitterness against the Congress and Hindus in general'. He also believed that the Hindu cloth dealers were apprehensive that picketing might take a form which would lead to breaches of peace. Jawaharlal Nehru, in his reply on 1 July, tried to clear his doubts and assured him that there would not be any breach of peace from the picketers' side. All they wanted to do was to request the intending purchasers to buy only Indian cloth. He also said that they did not intend to boycott any shop and they would in no event put obstacles in the way of those who wished to buy foreign cloth.10

Notwithstanding all these disputes, picketing in Allahabad started on 1 July. Jawaharlal Nehru himself went into the bazar and asked all the cloth dealers to seal their

10. FN - 33/XVI/1931, Hom. Poll., NAI.
stocks of foreign cloth. And according to the reports reaching the Collector of Allahabad, the Hindu businessmen agreed to his appeal but the Mohammadans refused. The fortnightly report of the month says that picketing in Allahabad had not gone beyond the stage of distributing anti-foreign cloth handbills to intending purchasers. This kind of picketing which was very mild in comparison to the previous years's methods did not produce any result till 18 July, and by 21 July only the cloth dealers of Katra and Daraganj localities of Allahabad had agreed to get their stocks sealed, while the foreign cloth dealers of the main Chowk market were not at all affected by the picketing. Congress workers could secure pledges from just about a dozen merchants in the city with regard to the exclusion of foreign cloth from their shops and promises to get their stocks sealed.

The Leader of 12 September reported that there was a good deal of discontent against picketing among many of the cloth dealers of the city, including those who had cooperated wholeheartedly with the Congress in the boycott of foreign cloth during the Civil Disobedience Movement, and this

14. The Leader, July 24, 1931.
feeling appeared to be growing with the approach of winter. These foreign cloth dealers wanted to dispose of their foreign woollen cloth during the coming winter, for woollen cloth was liable to destruction by worms. So, a deputation of a number of leading merchants met and requested Jawaharlal Nehru and T.A.K. Sherwani to allow them to dispose of their existing stocks of at least foreign woollen cloth but both the leaders refused to oblige them. The extent of the anxiety of the merchants can be guessed from a report that a section of the cloth merchants of the city were contemplating the formation of an alliance to adopt some effective means to demonstrate their feeling of discontent against picketing. Unimpressed by the discontent of the merchants, the Boycott Committee of the TCC, after its meeting held on 8 September, once again called upon the cloth dealers to remove their stocks of foreign cloth from their shops to their godowns, warning them that if any of them was found selling foreign cloth at their godowns or through vendors, picketing would be resumed at once at his shop.15

At places other than Allahabad and Kanpur, Congressmen, it seems, were getting quick successes. At Sitapur, where picketing started in the first week of July, Congress workers succeeded in sealing the foreign cloth stocks of most of the Hindu businessmen within four days.16 At Jaunpur, picketing commenced on 21 July and lasted for four

15. The Leader, September 12, 1931.
days only as most of the foreign cloth dealers, barring a few Muslim shopkeepers, yielded to Congress pressure and got their foreign cloth stocks sealed. At both these places, newspapers report that picketing was largely peaceful and no complaint of breach of peace was reported. At most of the places, Congress workers strictly followed the directions of the Working Committee of the AICC and seldom did they give any chance to the government officials to complain against the breach of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact by them.

The only deviation which we find is the regular fining of the recalcitrant businessmen for breaking the pledge of not selling and importing the foreign cloth. For example, in Mathura, on 1 April, two foreign cloth shopkeepers who had earlier signed the Congress pledge were caught red handed by the Congress volunteers while selling foreign cloth. Volunteers then approached the Agarwal Sabha and got them fined Rs.21 and 11. When the shopkeepers refused to pay the fine, their shops were picketed. In Agra, a 'Hindu dealer' was fined Rs.51 by the Congress for importing a new supply of foreign cloth. At Mathura, four dealers were fined by the Congress for breaking the pledge. Three of them were fined Rs.101 and the fourth one was fined Rs.21. In Kanpur, as the intelligence report noted, the

17. The Leader, July 30, 1931.
18. FN - 33/1/1931, Hom. Poll., NAI.
20. FN-33/27/1931, Hom. Poll., NAI.
local boycott committee had appointed a separate enquiry committee to find out the dealers who were breaking the pledge. The report mentions a case in which a firm had promised to pay Rs.500 for the Tilak Hall in consideration of the removal of the picket.\textsuperscript{21} This is also substantiated by a letter to the Chief Secretary, Government of UP, from Messrs Ramjilal & Bros, importers and piecegoods merchants of Kanpur. This firm complained that if any merchant who had signed the pledge received any piecegoods from outside, his shop was at once picketed. But picketing was offered to be lifted if the merchant concerned agreed to pay a 'substantial amount of money to the Congress funds or some other ostensibly public charitable fund'. They mention two instances of such 'extortions', namely, the payment of Rs.600 by Hanumandas Suraj Prasad and of Rs.500 by Badridas Channolal.\textsuperscript{22} But the Secretary of the TCC, Kanpur, refuted these charges and said that their committee never made it a condition that any fine be paid to them or to any other charitable institution for lifting the picketing from any shop. He also challenged the concerned firm to honestly assert if the committee

\textsuperscript{21} WRPA, May 16, 1931, UPID.

\textsuperscript{22} Letter from Messrs Ramji Lal & Bros to the Chief Secretary, Government of UP, dated May 25, 1931, FN-33/13/1931, Hom. Poll., NAI.
had ever given them the option of paying money or of being picketed.\textsuperscript{23}

Along with the foreign cloth shops, picketing was also carried on against the liquor shops throughout the province. But, here too, success continued to elude the picketers. Initially it seems the picketers did achieve some success as picketing at the liquor shops resulted in the reduction of excise revenue for the Government.\textsuperscript{24} But the intensity and the emphasis on the picketing of liquor shops was nowhere near what it had been in 1930. In 1930, around 1600 liquor shops out of 7200 had been picketed but in 1931, till the end of June, just 220 shops were picketed.\textsuperscript{25} The number of liquor shops picketed kept on decreasing. In the fortnight ending June 15, picketing was directed at around 210 shops while in the first fifteen days of July only 112 shops were picketed.\textsuperscript{26} As a result of all this, the excise officials all over the province succeeded in getting better prices for the toddy shop auctions. In Allahabad, despite a fortnight long propaganda against the auction and the persuasion of the perspective buyers by the Congress workers, the sale attracted prices much higher than 1930. In 1930,

\textsuperscript{23} Letter from the Secretary, TCC, Kanpur, to the General Secretary, AICC, Allahabad, dated Sept. 6, 1931, FN-G-139/1931, AICC, NMML.
\textsuperscript{24} FR, June I, 1931, FN-18/6/1931, Hom. Poll., NAI.
\textsuperscript{25} FR, June II, 1931, FN-18/6/1931, Hom. Poll., NAI.
\textsuperscript{26} FR, Aug II, 1931, FN-18/8/1931, Hom. Poll., NAI.
nine toddy shops had attracted just Rs.23,145 while in this auction these shops were sold for Rs.36,245. Clearly, it was the decline of Congress activity which was responsible for the higher prices. However, at one or two places, Congressmen did succeed in hampering the auction of toddy shops. At Ghazipur, Congress workers succeeded in persuading many prospective bidders to abstain from the auction and as a result the sale attracted prices lower than those expected by the officials.27

Thus, if we look at the pattern of the picketing in this period, we find two different trends and this was evident in both the cases of foreign cloth and liquor shops. In larger towns picketing did not produce much result. Businessmen continued to be discontented and alienated from the Congressmen. Although some of them had signed the pledge, the sale of the old stock of foreign cloth continued. It seems Congressmen had come into a secret pact with them that if they did not order fresh stock, they would be allowed to dispose of their old stock. One reason behind this kind of attitude could be the lack of volunteers available in the urban centres. Since the Congress was concentrating on the rural areas, most of its workers were engaged there, and there was no other way out for the TCCs except that of going slow on the boycott programme. The plea of the Kanpur TCC that with a lesser number of volunteers, they were in no position to stop the sale of foreign cloth in such a large

27. Ai, Aug. 27, 1931.
market like Kanpur, carries conviction. Therefore they concentrated on wholesale merchants and importers and persuaded them to sign the pledge of not to import any further stock. Quite contrary to this trend, in smaller towns or in those centres where rural agitation was not very prominent, Congressmen succeeded in stalling the sale of foreign cloth completely.

Similar trends were seen in the case of liquor shop picketing. In large towns like Allahabad, which was also a place where Congressmen were busy in rural areas, the picketing of liquor shops was not very successful, though they might have succeeded in persuading people against taking liquor as the excise revenue kept on decreasing. While in smaller towns and places where rural agitation was not going on, they succeeded in their effort.

Other political activities like celebration of days and weeks also continued in this period, though less frequently and at a much lower pitch. For example, 'Lakshmi Bai Day' was celebrated in Benaras on 5 June. On this day, a procession consisting of only women was taken out which later converted into a meeting. The main speaker in this meeting was Mrs. Madan Mohan Malviya who exhorted the women of Benaras to come out of their houses and help their husbands and brothers to fight this evil rule.28 Similarly, birth anniversaries of Lala Lajpat Rai and Lokmanya Tilak were

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celebrated in Benaras.\textsuperscript{29} Gandhi Week was celebrated all over the province from 2 to 8 October to mark Gandhiji's birthday. At Agra, Allahabad, Benaras and Kanpur, celebrations were held on a big scale. The main emphasis in this week was laid on \textit{khadi} and \textit{swadeshi}. \textit{Khadi Bhandars} announced reduction in prices.\textsuperscript{30} In Allahabad, a National Week was also celebrated from 4 to 10 September. As a part of the celebrations, meetings were organised every day and were addressed by important leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru and P.D. Tandon. Throughout the week, Congress workers were seen recruiting fresh volunteers and collecting subscription for the City Congress.\textsuperscript{31} Apart from all this, Flag Days were organised every month by the TCCs. On this day new flags used to be hoisted in the morning with much fanfare. The members of the Hindustani Seva Dal and the Bal Bharat Sabha had instructions to be present at the site in full uniform to salute the flag and sing national songs.

Thus, we see that political activities in the urban areas of UP continued throughout the truce period, though inevitably, they were at a lower pitch than at the high point of the Civil Disobedience Movement in 1930. The aim and purpose of the political activities was also different. The objective was not to challenge the Government directly by defying its laws but to consolidate nationalist influence

\textsuperscript{29} \textit{The Leader}, Aug. 5, 1931 and \textit{Ai}, Nov. 19, 1931.

\textsuperscript{30} \textit{Ai}, Oct. 4, 1931.

\textsuperscript{31} \textit{The Leader}, Sept. 5, 1931.
over the people, re-organize the party machinery and remain in readiness for the next round of struggle. The character of political activity was suited to fulfil these purposes.

THE ROUND TABLE CONFERENCE AND 'MUSLIM' POLITICS

In UP, the Truce period was also marked by the debate among the Muslim community on the question of separate electorates. In the Second Round Table Conference, the issue of reservation for the minority communities was to be considered. The Indian National Congress and the Muslim League took different stands on this question. The issue of safeguards for the Muslims had been a bone of contention between both the parties right from the 'Nehru Report' days. Congress was in favour of joint electorate while Muslim League was a strong proponent of separate electorates.

In April 1930, some important Muslim leaders of the Congress had formed a Muslim Nationalist Party to win over the Muslim community to the Congress fold. In this period, they were busy in mobilising their fellow religionists to support joint electorates. But the communal Muslim leaders seemed to be more popular than the nationalists. In Allahabad, the communal Muslims organised a meeting on 11 May to support separate electorates. The meeting, which was addressed by Zuhur Ahmed Khan and Dr Shafat Ahmed Khan, resolved to support the resolutions passed by the All India Muslim Conference held at Delhi under Shaukat Ali. The meeting expressed the opinion that no Constitution was
acceptable to Muslims which did not incorporate separate electorates as according to them this was a vital necessity for the political existence of Muslims in India.32

On the other hand, the Nationalist Muslims were propagating that separate representation had, in the past, killed the very spirit of competition in the Muslim youth and shown to them the easiest and cheapest way of looking for backdoor opportunities. According to them, separate representation had arrested the natural and healthy growth of a public spirit among the Musalmans and that during the last 20 years, Muslims representatives had produced nothing that could advance the cause of education, health and economic welfare of poor Muslims. They believed that people's representatives elected through joint electorates could do greater service to the nation and to their respective communities. They emphasised that 'communities do not grow unless they come into clash with the strong and the brave'.

Moreover, some of them like Dr Farooqui stated that it was the system of separate electorates that was responsible for communal riots in Kanpur and other places. "Common electorates", however, would "draw out the best and noblest from the Muslim society". Thus, they emphasised that the Nationalist Muslim Party wanted the Muslims to stand on their own feet and become self-respecting people.33 They even proclaimed themselves to be the only true representatives of

32. The Leader, May 13, 1931.
33. The Leader, July 18, 22, 1931.
the Muslim community. But their rhetoric in meetings and in newspaper columns proved to be of no avail as the leaders of Jamait-ul-Ulema and the Muslim Conference had established a greater influence over the Muslim masses. Nevertheless, their activities forced the communalists to start a dialogue with them to arrive at an understanding on the question of separate or joint electorate. Many conferences were held at Delhi, Allahabad and Saharanpur but the issue could not be resolved. Moreover, the Nationalist Muslims received a final set back when the Government did not nominate even one member from their fold to represent the Muslims of India at the Round Table Conference.

Similar efforts were also made by the Congressmen to mobilize the untouchables to support Gandhiji and agree to joint electorates. Meetings of untouchables were organised by the sympathisers and workers of Congress to express faith in Gandhiji and no confidence in Ambedkar. In a meeting held in Allahabad on 27 October, the untouchables expressed confidence in Mahatma Gandhi and refused to recognise Ambedkar as their leader. In a similar meeting on 11 November, the untouchables of Amethi resolved to express faith in Mahatma Gandhi and Madan Mohan Malviya. They said there was no question of supporting Ambedkar as they had never heard of him. The cobblers and sweepers of Benaras,

34. Ibid.
too, expressed their confidence in Gandhiji and denied any association with Ambedkar and about 100 untouchables of Kanpur, in a meeting organised by the Acchut Uddhar Mission on 24 October, declared Gandhiji and not Ambedkar as their true representative. What effect these activities had on the Government and on the deliberations of the Round Table Conference is not clear, but it certainly laid a base for the Harijan upliftment work started by Gandhiji in August 1932.

CONGRESS ACTIVITIES IN RURAL AREAS

The conclusion of the Delhi Agreement had given hope to the Government of UP that this would ensure an end of attempts to stimulate an agrarian agitation which had, by then, taken a serious turn. But a week had not passed before the government realised that the Congress did not intend to allow the Agreement, which specifically provided for the effective discontinuance of the movement for the non-payment of land revenue and rent, to impair any advantage which it might have gained for the peasants.

Initially, the no-rent agitation was a political movement, which was started in October 1930 as part of the Civil Disobedience Movement. But in the meantime, the economic situation of the peasantry worsened drastically.

37. WRPA, Nov. 7, 1931, UPID.
38. Ibid.
The World Economic Depression had started showing its effect in India and the year 1930-31 saw an unprecedented fall in the prices of all food grains. The impact of the fall in prices was further augmented by the natural calamities which affected production. The extent of fall in prices will be amply clear if we look at the general price index of the principal goods since 1900.39

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This general fall in prices had made the payment of rents a serious and increasingly difficult proposition for the tenants of UP.

Congress leaders in UP had taken up the matter and organised kisans to withhold rent and revenue until a significant reduction was made in it by the government. The tremendous response that Congress received in rural areas was not just the result of its political propaganda, but it was also the inability of the tenants to pay their required rent which brought them under Congress fold. On the conclusion of

39. FN. G-140/1931, AICC, NMML
the 'provisional settlement' between the Congress and the Government, the UPPCC proclaimed the discontinuance of the 'political no-tax campaign'. But that did not mean it was about to give up the cause of the peasants. It had gained significant successes in rural areas and its main intention after the pact was to consolidate those gains. So, with this aim, the Congress leaders of UP decided to take up the matter of remission in a constitutional rather than an agitational manner.

Immediately after the Pact, Jawaharlal Nehru had sent a circular to all the PCCs asking for the sending of the ex-prisoners and other Congress workers to rural areas to explain the Congress stand on the pact. In UP, these ex-prisoners received a tremendous response in the rural areas. These political prisoners went back to their villages proclaiming their victory and "victory to the tenant meant non-payment of rent". In Badaun district, a Congress worker after release under 'amnesty' returned to his village, organised a procession, announced that Swaraj had come

40. FN-33/XI/1931, Hom.Poll., NAI.

41. WRPA, March 21, 1931, UPID and FN-33/37/1931, Hom. Poll., NAI.

42. Letter from Collector, Allahabad, to the Chief Secretary, UP, dated March 20, 1931, FN-33/XI/1931, Hom. Poll., NAI.
and that no rent should be paid. The activities of these ex-prisoners and other Congress workers greatly affected the rent and revenue collection.

The Collector of Allahabad informed the Chief Secretary of UP, 15 days after the pact, that the no-rent movement had "assumed a very dangerous proportion in this District". Just before the Truce, "things were improving and rent was beginning to come in and it looked as if the no-rent movement was shortly to be broken". But the activities of ex-prisoners and Congress workers had completely changed the scenario. "Rental payments fell off at once and have got steadily worse". It is very clear, then that the presence of the large number of Congress workers in the village after the signing of the Pact and the sense of victory that they conveyed to the tenants immediately led to the revival of a declining movement.

However, the no-rent movement had to be continued but on a new basis. Earlier it was part of the political protest against foreign rule, now it was to be based on the issue of the fall in agricultural prices. The signing of the Truce implied a lull in the political battle, but it could not prevent a movement that asked for remission in rent and revenue in accordance with the Land Revenue rules.

43. Letter from E.W. Emerson, Home Secretary, New Delhi, to Mr. Gandhi, dated March 21, 1931, FN-33/XI/1931, Hom. Poll., NAI.

44. Letter from Collector, Allahabad, to the Chief Secretary, UP, dated March 20, 1931, FN-33/XI/1931, Hom. Poll., NAI.
The new situation had to be explained to the tenants. For this, bulletins and pamphlets, written by the prominent Congress leaders of the province, explaining the position were distributed in the rural areas. One of the typical pamphlets of this period, written by Sitla Sahay, the District Congress President of Rae Bareli, said:45

Tenants can ask why Mahatama Gandhi stopped civil disobedience while rent was not reduced by one half or why the struggle was brought to an end while purna swaraj was not obtained. But our countrymen, especially tenants, should never forget that Mahatama Gandhi and the Congress can never sit quietly until purna swaraj is obtained and the difficulties and troubles of tenants removed, we will continue our effort to obtain purna swaraj.

Up till now, we told tenants not to pay rent until purna swaraj was obtained, but now that the Government is prepared to discuss matters about purna swaraj, it is only fair that we should say that the payment of rent should now not be stopped. It is therefore the order of Mahatama Gandhi that payment of rent should not be stopped. But some tenants will say how can they pay their rent on account of the low prices of grain. For this Government has agreed to suspend rent where necessary under the ordinary rules of land revenue administration. No doubt, owing to the low prices of grain, it is impossible to pay rent in full at present. How can a tenant manage to pay? For this, tenants should send application to the Congress office, and the Congress workers will see the zamindars, talukdars and deputy commissioners and try to get the rent suspended, remitted or reduced.

45. Settlement between the Congress and Government, a pamphlet brought out by Sitla Sahay on March 8, 1931 for Rae Bareli, DCC, FN-33/XI/1931 and 33/37/1931, Hom.Poll., NAI.
Apart from issuing such pamphlets, numerous meetings were organized by the Congressmen in rural areas to explain the pact to the tenants. Everywhere, the speakers concentrated on the rent and revenue question. Although they no longer advocated non-payment of rent, they advised the tenants "to pay only such reduced amounts as they felt able to afford, and to meet the demands of landlords only if the latter registered agreements in the Congress office to accept less than their full rents".46

In a meeting held at Village Nausari in Allahabad district on 15 March, 1931, Krishna Kant Malviya asked an audience of 300 cultivators not to pay their rent until the question of relief had been decided. At the same meeting, Mrs Uma Nehru announced that the Provincial Congress Committee had decided that a tenant could pay 8 or 6 annas in the rupee, provided the landlord was willing to accept it in lieu of full payment.47

Meanwhile, the UPPCC demanded a considerable remission in rent and suggested that 50% remission should be given to occupancy tenants and 60% to statutory tenants.48 It had conveyed this message to the Congress Committee of Fatehpur that "if the zamindars and the government are willing to give

46. FN-33/37/1931, Home. Poll., NAI.
47. Letter from E.W. Emerson, Home Secretary, New Delhi, to Mr. Gandhi dated March 21, 1931, FN-33/XI/1931, Home. Poll., NAI.
48. The UPPCC and the economic distress in the rural areas of the Province, FN-33/XI/1931, Home. Poll., NAI.
receipts to occupancy and statutory tenants by taking from them annas 8 and annas 6 respectively, the tenants should pay the rent. If they are not willing to do so ... you can tell the kisans to withhold the rent till some settlement is made". 49

In the second half of March, a number of meetings were organised, two of which in Allahabad district were addressed by Jawaharlal Nehru, Purshottam Das Tandon, Kamla Nehru and others. "The general impression gained by the audience at these meetings" was "that they should not pay their rent". 50 All these activities certainly resulted in the slowing down of the collection of rent. The no-rent movement thus continued, but on a new basis.

The government took these activities of Congress as a breach of the Pact. The Collector of Allahabad reported that "the Congress undertook effectively to discontinue the no-rent campaign, but they have actually continued it". 51 The Home Secretary of the Government of India complained to Gandhiji that no-rent was continuing in another form. 52

The Congress, on the other hand, denied these allegations. It was argued that the Congress, "as [it]

49. FN-33/37/1931, Hom. Poll., NAI

50. A letter from Collector, Allahabad to the Chief Secretary, UP, dated March 20, 1931, FN-33/XI/1931, Hom. Poll., NAI.

51. Ibid.

52. A letter from E.W. Emerson to Mr. Gandhi, March 21, 1931, FN-33/XI/1931, Hom. Poll., NAI.
represent[ed] a very large number of tenants, could not leave its tenant members in the lurch when they were admittedly in great difficulties’. The Congress further explained that ‘we were given to understand that the government would help in the solution of the problem in every way, if the political no-tax campaign was withdrawn, and would also try to give possession of lands from which ejectments had taken place.’ But once the pressure of no-tax campaign was removed, the government refused to give any general remission in regard to the kharif 1930 demand. A paltry remission of Rs.10 lakhs was given for the kharif crops in the case of worst affected districts only.53 As a result the tenants all over the province were facing tremendous hardship in paying their dues when the cash value of the kharif produce had on an average been reduced to one third of what it would have been in a year of normal prices.

The Government, on the other hand, had been putting pressure on the zamindars to pay up as much as possible. They were threatened with attachment of properties or withdrawal of licences for fire arms. In these circumstances, a few of the richer zamindars paid their dues from their private resources, some borrowed money to meet the demand, while most of them resorted to coercive methods to collect rents from their tenants.54 It was through this method that the

53. A note on the rent and revenue situation in the United Provinces – prepared by Jawaharlal Nehru on April 18, 1931, FN-4/1931, AICC, NHML.

54. Ibid.

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government boasted of collecting some 60% of the kharif instalment of revenue by the first week of April, 1931. Landlords, too, were successful in collecting about 75% of the total rents due to them. But this level of collection was not possible in all the districts of the Province. In those districts where the condition of peasants was exceptionally poor, even coercive measures could not help the zamindars and the government. In Allahabad, as the Collector reported, even Rai Bahadur Thakur Jaswant Singh, who had the reputation of being a strong zamindar, could only collect some four annas out of a rupee of his rents.

In a couple of districts where Congress had a strong following in rural areas, even these coercive methods were resolutely resisted by the villagers. The most common forms of resistance in these districts were picketing and gheraoing of the zamindar's house and attacking the agents and the properties of the landlords. The Collector of Allahabad reported several such cases to the Revenue Secretary of UP where large crowds sat on dharna outside zamindars' houses and refused to move until the zamindar had apologized or "paid subscription or fine to the Congress". In a village in Manjhanpur police circle of the district, 'the situation became so bad' that the DM and SP had to


proceed to the village to save the lives of the zamindar's family. Here the villagers had been sitting on dharna for three days, not allowing anybody to go in or out of the zamindar's house.

In another case at Dadauli village in Soraon Tehsil, a zamindar, on a mission to collect rent, was attacked by the villagers. One of his men was killed on the spot and three others were seriously injured while the zamindar himself narrowly escaped. In some other areas, the Collector of Allahabad reported that a special method was invented by 'the Congress' to protect people at points of danger. "If the police or zamindar comes to a certain village, the villagers raise a great shout which is carried on from village to village and in a very short time a crowd of several thousands is collected on the spot."57 The government officials collected many more such cases and put the accusation of committing violence on the Congress volunteers, who were said to be present in the villages 'in considerable numbers', working and 'spreading contempt of authority'.58

The Congress, on its part, accepted that 'in a few cases' kisans had 'acted wrongly' and it had warned the


58. Ibid.
tenants against acting aggressively. Jawaharlal Nehru himself requested the tenants of Allahabad to observe non-violence. He advised them to report the cases of harassment by zamindars to the Congress office at Allahabad which in turn would devise a peaceful settlement. However, at the same time, Congress reminded the government that the tenants were being made to put up with all manners of hardshaps by many zamindars and sometimes by the police. Reports of ill-treatment were received by the Congress office at Allahabad 'almost hourly' and 'crowds of kisans' came there 'with tales of their sufferings'.

The Congress prepared its own list of excesses done by zamindars on their tenants. To give a few examples - at villages Parkham of Mathura district, a tenant was taken to a zamindar's house, made to stand murga, (stand in a difficult and humiliating posture resembling a hen) and his aunt was dragged, all for arrears of Rs.12/8. Eventually, he pawned his aunt's ornaments to borrow money. Rangilal, a 12 year old boy was taken to the Garhi (zamindar's residence), made

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59. A note on the rent and revenue situation in UP by Jawaharlal Nehru, April 18, 1931, FN-4/1931, AICC, NMML.

60. A pamphlet addressed to the tenants of Allahabad by Jawaharlal Nehru, April 13, 1931, FN-33/XI/1931, Hom. Poll., NAI.

61. A note on the rent and revenue situation in UP by Jawaharlal Nehru, April 18, 1931, FN-4/1931, AICC, NMML.
murga for two hours and released only when his mother pawned her ornaments. Ram Chand, an old man of 70 years who had paid rents for kharif, was taken to Garhi and asked to stand murga. Since he could not do so, being an old man, he was beaten till he became unconscious. There were numerous other cases mentioned in the list in which the tenants' household goods, cattle, etc. were auctioned to obtain the dues by the employees of zamindars.

The stance of the Congress towards this high handedness of the zamindars was double pronged. On the one hand, it tried to persuade them to show forbearance towards their poor tenants and agree to accept a reduced amount of rent from them. In a pamphlet addressed to the zamindars of Allahabad, Purushottam Das Tandon requested them to stop their coercive measures and suggested that some leading zamindars and tenants and a few Congress workers should decide among themselves as to how much rent and revenue should be realised. He gave a sincere undertaking that they would help the zamindars in the realization of their dues from the tenants according to the decision arrived at among themselves.

Quite opposite to this stance, on the other hand, Jawaharlal Nehru had been giving speeches in Rae Bareli and Barabanki districts, threatening taluqdars and zamindars of

62. FN. G-140/1931, AICC, NHML.

63. A pamphlet addressed to zamindars of Allahabad by P.D. Tandon, April 5, 1931, FN-33/XI/1931, Hom. Poll., NAI.
the dire consequences which awaited them under the Swaraj Government. 64 At the same time, he placed before the tenants the prospect that with the victory of Congress, they would become full proprietors of the land they were cultivating. 65

By May, Congress activity and influence was especially prominent in the Allahabad, Rae Bareli, Pratapgarh and Barabanki districts. Allahabad, being the headquarters of the UPPCC and home of important leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru, P.D. Tandon, V.N. Tiwari, Sunderlal etc., naturally became the centre of the movement. Rae Bareli was another major centre of Congress activities. Here Congress Panchayats were established in many villages and the Deputy Commissioner reported that there were 1300 Congress volunteers in the district and 960 villages had hoisted Congress flags. The Congress had become so popular that it collected, within a week, about 200 maunds of grain in gate money from meetings held in rural areas. 66 At some other places, Congressmen tried to establish a sort of parallel government. The Collector of Mathura reported that in one part of his district, a Congress Tehsildar had been appointed, in other a Congress police station was established. In yet another part of the district, a Congress Court had been set up and

64. FR, June II, 1931, FN-18/6/1931, Hom.Poll., NAI.
65. Ibid.
villagers were urged to take their cases before this court instead of the ordinary courts.67 However, these kind of activities were regretted by Mahatama Gandhi during his talks with the Governor. He explained to him that it was no part of Congress plans to establish an organisation of tehsils and thanas and that the Congress was quite opposed to the idea of parallel government or any thing of this kind.68

In the latter half of May, Mahatama Gandhi visited Nainital to discuss the matter of rent remission with the Governor, Sir Malcom Hailey. But nothing came out of that discussion as the Governor refused to accept any of his suggestions. After that, on 23 May, Gandhiji addressed a 'manifesto' to the kisans of UP which expressed the same view as proposed by the local leaders earlier. He asked the tenants not to pay more than 8 annas in the rupee in the case of statutory and non-occupancy tenants and 12 annas in the case of occupancy tenants. He proposed this scheme for 10 districts viz, Agra, Mathura, Allahabad, Rae Bareli, Pratapgarh, Gorakhpur, Kanpur, Lucknow and Etawah. He believed that in some districts, tenants were in a little better position and could do with less reduction while in some others their condition was far worse. So he

67. A statement of case regarding no-rent campaign, issued by the Local Government on December 14, 1931, FN-33/37/1931, Hom.Poll., NAI.

allowed some variation in his formula as required by local conditions. But he expected every tenant to pay as early as he could, and in no case as a general rule less than 8 annas or 12 annas. At the same time he advised the tenants to see that they get, against their payment, a full discharge from their current year's rent obligation.69

Following the publication of this manifesto Congressmen engaged themselves in finalising arrangements between zamindars and tenants. They started acting as intermediaries and in some cases acted as agencies for the collection of rent.70 But these activities of Congress made the Government quite apprehensive and it started pressurising zamindars not to fall in the line with the Congress. This becomes clear from an intercepted telegram to The Hindustan Times and other newspapers from the Rae Bareli Congress Committee that since Gandhiji's visit, the attitude of Local Government towards tenants had stiffened, that landlords were being encouraged to take coercive measures against their tenants and to file criminal cases against Congress workers.71

Meanwhile, the government realised that the economic slump was not just a passing phase and its officials worked out a scheme that gave rent relief to statutory and occupancy

69. FN-33/XI/1931 and A Statement of case regarding no-rent campaign, issued by the Local Government on December 14, 1931, FN-33/37/1931, Hom. Poll., NAI.

70. Ibid.

71. FR, June I, 1931, FN-18/6/1931, Hom.Poll., NAI.
tenants in both Agra and Oudh areas. The aim was to bring their rents back roughly to the 1915 level and to make a proportionate remission of revenue for both Agra and Oudh landlords. Thus, a total of Rs.60 lakhs of revenue and Rs.207 lakhs of rent was remitted for the Rabi of 1931. But later on, it became clear to the government that stable tenants and cultivating proprietors also needed some relief. Earlier they had not been granted any remission on the ground that they received little or no rentals and hence suffered no loss in terms of income from rents.

Besides, the government also acknowledged that prices had fallen to the level of 1901 and not of 1915. A Rent and Revenue Committee was appointed by the UP Legislative Council. The Committee met on 10 August and decided to ask for a nomination of a member from the Congress as it was not represented in the Council. The Congress suggested the name of Pt. Govind Ballabh Pant, ex-leader of the Swaraj party in the previous council who, in turn, was invited by the Government to join the Committee. But by the time Pant could get the assent of the PCC and intimate the Government, the Rent and Revenue Committee had completed its deliberations regarding rent remission. The Committee taking 1900-01 as base year argued that since the prices had gone back to the level of 1900, so the rent should be curbed to that level. Hence it suggested a remission of Rs. 412 lakhs. It also added two

72. Gyanendra Pandey op.cit., pp. 166-67
provisions for the remission, i.e., no remission of rent was to exceed 8 annas in the rupee and District Officers were given power to add upto 25% to the standard rate of 1900 in case of occupancy tenants.73

Congress, according to the government reports, while taking credit for the reductions, asserted that the Rent and Revenue Committee was composed of only landlords and its recommendations were inadequate. It criticised the recommendations on some other grounds also. It said that during the eleven years of soaring prices from 1920-30, the annual collection of rents (both current and arrears) was only 79% of the net current demand in Agra and 90% in Oudh and it was 82% for the whole province. The Congress also reiterated that while, on one hand, rents had gone up by 56% since 1899, on the other, prices had fallen by 54% as compared to 1928-29. The rental demand for 1931-32 was Rs.19.5 crores out of which Rs.4.12 crore or 21% was to be remitted, the balance to be collected was around 80%. The Congress argued if in normal times when prices were at peak, the tenants could, with difficulty, pay Rs.82 out of every Rs.100 on account of rent, then how could the government expect the tenants to pay 80% of rent when prices had gone down by 54%. On these grounds the Congress condemned the remission offered by the Government and demanded that rents

73. FN. G-25/1931, AICC, NMML; A Statement of case ... FN-33/37/1931, Hom. Poll., NAI and Ai, Nov. 4, 1931.

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must be reduced by 55% in order to establish an equilibrium between rents and prices.\textsuperscript{74}

On 19 September 1931, the Allahabad DCC appointed a sub-committee to examine the question of rent remission throughout the province. The committee recommended that remission should be about 10 crores, giving an all round rent reduction between 60 to 70 per cent. It also suggested that all rent arrears should be wiped out and that there should be, in future, no ejectments. On 15 October 1931, the Allahabad DCC accepted these recommendations and asked the PCC to authorize them to start a no-rent and no-revenue campaign in Allahabad district. On 16 October, Jawaharlal Nehru cabled to Gandhiji in London that the rent remissions were inadequate; and that tenants were being harassed. Gandhiji cabled back authorising Jawaharlal Nehru to take necessary steps to meet the situation. On 23 October, a Kisan Conference was held at Allahabad with P.D. Tandon in the chair. The conference passed a resolution that in case government did not adopt suitable measures for meeting the conditions, the tenants of the whole district would oppose government by resorting to a no-rent campaign and carry out the instructions of the District Congress Committee.\textsuperscript{75}

Immediately after that Jawaharlal Nehru complained to the Chief Secretary of UP that the reductions of rent in

\textsuperscript{74. FN. G-140/1931; G-25/1931, AICC and A Statement of Case ..., FN-33/37/1931, Hom. Poll., NAI.}

Allahabad district had not been calculated in accordance with the formula adopted in the government resolution on this subject. The Chief Secretary in his reply advised him to meet the Commissioner and Collector of the District. But nothing came out of the discussion as the officials showed reluctance to reopen the whole policy underlying the remission to make any substantial modification in the recommendation. The reason that the Chief Secretary gave was that it would delay the collection of Kharif rent.

By 10 November, the PCC obtained the permission of the AICC President, Vallabhbhai Patel, to start "defensive action by advising peasants to refuse voluntarily to pay any rent or revenue till adequate relief was secured". On 12 November again, the President of the UPPCC, Mr T.A.K. Sherwani, wrote to the Chief Secretary and expressed the willingness of the Congress to discuss the question of remission as, according to him, the difficulties stated by the Chief Secretary were not unsurmountable. But the Chief Secretary refused to discuss the matter again. Therefore, on November 15, the UPPCC passed a resolution, condemning the attitude of the Government as thoroughly unsatisfactory and authorised the Allahabad DCC to advise agriculturists to withhold the payment of rent and revenue till the present negotiations continued. It also authorised its own sub-committee, which was dealing with the agrarian question, to consider the situation in other districts and to give permission to take defensive action where and when necessary.
Sherwani, the President of the PCC informed the Chief Secretary about the resolutions in a letter dated November 20. The Chief Secretary, in turn, informed him that the government had decided to refuse to have any discussion unless the resolutions were suspended and the leaflets distributed by Allahabad DCC withdrawn. The PCC then intimated the Chief Secretary that the resolutions and the notices could be withdrawn only if collections were stopped or suspended. This was the condition which the Government did not accept and the Chief Secretary, on 2 December 1931, finally withdrew all offer of discussion. On 5 December, the PCC in a meeting at Lucknow authorised the Local Committees of Kanpur, Unao, Rae Bareli and Etawah to commence a no-rent campaign. 76

After the formal permission granted by the PCC on 5 December, the no-rent movement started the following day in the five districts of UP (Allahabad, Rae Bareli, Kanpur, Etawah, and Unao). That day, Jawaharlal Nehru addressed a meeting of 7000 peasants in the interior of Rae Bareli and urged them to refuse to pay any rent and face the consequences boldly. On the same day, Sri Prakash held a meeting in Barabanki and requested the peasants not to pay

76. Based on FN. P-21/1931, AICC, NMML; Aj Oct. 25, Nov. 18 and Dec. 2 and 7, 1931; A Statement of Case ..., FN-33/37/1931 and FR. Dec. I, 1931, FN-18/12/1931, Hom. Poll., NAI.
rent. 77 In all the five districts, leaflets containing a kind of vow to be taken by tenants not to pay rent, were distributed. In Allahabad, specially trained volunteers of Seva Dal were despatched to tour the villages in furtherance of the movement. 78 As a result of these activities, the payment of rent, which had just started, came to an almost complete standstill in several districts. 79 In some other districts, the situation looked quiet on the surface, but beneath that a strong sense of disquiet prevailed. The Commissioner of Fyzabad reported that in his division tenants were "merely waiting for a definite lead from Congress". In fact, within a few days of the beginning of the no-rent movement in these five districts, ten more districts had applied to the PCC for permission to start this movement. 80

The government of UP had kept a very close watch on these developments. It had started gearing itself up to face the no-rent movement. As a preliminary step, the officials of these five districts were advised to make the best use of the existing laws to counter the Congress activities. But soon an Emergency Powers Ordinance was promulgated to strengthen their hands in dealing with the no-rent agitations. Initially it was applied in only five affected districts, but gradually it was extended to other districts also.

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78. Ibid. and FN-13/21/1931, Hom. Poll., NAI.
79. Ibid.
80. Ibid.
This Ordinance was immediately put to use and notices were served on Congress leaders, prohibiting them from leaving the municipal limits of the city and speaking or writing anything in support of the no-rent campaign. Till 24 December, 12 of the most important 'organizers' of Allahabad, including T.A.K. Sherwani, Venkatesh Narayan Tiwari, Narmada Prasad Singh, Lal Bahadur, Shiv Murti Singh, had been served with this notice.81 In Rae Bareli, the President and dictator, Sitla Sahay, and an important member of the DCC were arrested on 15 December.82 In other districts also, prohibitory notices were served to Congress leaders, the violation of which attracted immediate arrests. Holding of meetings and making speeches in favour of no-rent movement were strictly prohibited. In Rae Bareli, the police had suddenly became so active that most of the Congress workers left the district and took shelter in Barabanki district. In Kanpur, where the no-rent agitation and Congress propaganda had been very successful, the Ordinance came handy to the officials in checking the further spread of Congress activities. Here, all kinds of meetings in the rural areas were prohibited and till 24 December, Congressmen could organise only 3 meetings, and that too at the cost of 40

81. Ai, Dec. 18, 1931 and an express letter from UPAO, Lucknow to INDIA, HOME, New Delhi, Dec. 24, 1931, FN-33/36/1931, Hom. Poll., NAI.

82. Ibid.
volunteers. Congress bulletins and leaflets, calling on peasants not to pay rent, were proscribed and around 10,000 of them were seized in raids.

In the city, mill workers were prevented from going to their villages by stopping the plying of motor lorries. The officials believed that these workers could stir up agitation in their villages.83 Till 24 December, around 57 persons were convicted in Kanpur and the district officials reported to the state Government that the situation had been brought under control.84 At Etawah, the district officials prevented the holding of the Provincial Political Conference by the PCC from 24 December.85 At Unao, efforts at organising no-rent meetings were severely resisted by the authorities and by 24 December, 30 Congressmen including the President of the DCC were arrested for defying the orders.86

But in the districts which did not come under the purview of this Ordinance, agitation started taking shape and the Government hastily extended the Ordinance to those districts. Thus, Barabanki came under the Ordinance on 23 December and Pratapgarh and Sultanpur on 29 and 30 December, respectively.

Regular Congress activities in these places came to a complete standstill and the officials reported that rents had started coming in slowly in Kanpur, Etawah and Rae Bareli

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83. Ibid.
84. Ibid.
85. Ibid.
86. Ibid.
districts and the delay in payment was 'more due to [the] depression than to agitation'. 87 Many Congress offices, including the PCC office at Allahabad, were searched by the police for 'objectionable literature' like leaflets and bulletins propagating non-payment of rent. In Allahabad, by 24 December, 17 Congress offices in rural areas were searched and closed down by the police under Section 6 of the Ordinance. 88 At some places, police faced the ire of the local residents during their search operations as at Rudapur in Allahabad district where the crowd 'led by Congress volunteers' became violent and the police opened fire to disperse them. 89

On 18 December, P.D. Tandon was served a notice prohibiting him from leaving the municipal limits of Allahabad without permission from the district magistrate or Superintendent of police. He was also advised against propagating any strike and speaking at any meeting. But he violated the notice by speaking at a public meeting in Allahabad on that very day and got arrested the next day. In protest against his arrest, a complete strike was observed in the city on 19 December and at Kanpur and other places on 20 December. In Kanpur, two volunteers were arrested for calling for a strike on 20 December. 90

87. Ibid.
88. Ibid.
89. Ibid.
90. AI, Dec. 20 & 21, 1931.
Jawaharlal Nehru and T.A.K. Sherwani were arrested on 26 December when they were on their way to Bombay to receive Gandhiji. T.A.K. Sherwani, the President of the UPPCC, had been served with this notice quite early. On Jawaharlal Nehru, who had been touring the country for the previous couple of weeks, a notice was served on his arrival, prohibiting him from leaving the municipal limits without official permission. The DM of Allahabad was ready to allow him to go to Bombay, but Jawaharlal refused to recognise his authority to interfere in any way with his liberty. For fear of public protest, their arrest was made very quietly by stopping the train in which they were travelling at a suburban railway station of the district. Still a complete strike was observed in the city of Allahabad and at Benaras, Kanpur, Lucknow and other places. In Benaras, around 50,000 persons attended the meeting which was organised on 26 December to congratulate the arrested leaders. Ai reported on 30 December that "the response and enthusiasm of people reminded the days of last satyagraha". Processions and meetings were also organised at Kanpur and Lucknow.91

Thus, we find that after the signing of the 'Provisional Settlement' at Delhi in March 1931, the Congress in UP discontinued the no-rent movement on the political basis. After officially announcing the discontinuation of the no-rent agitation, the PCC and the senior Congress leaders of

the province started discussions with the Government about the remission in rent and revenue. Along with the discussions, they tried their best to put pressure on the Government to declare a remission which could be justified given the prevailing low prices. However, they advised the cultivators everywhere not to pay more than 8 annas in the rupee, a demand which they had been making during the agitation days. Initially, they were not very successful in persuading the Government to grant general remission in rent and revenue for the Kharif 1930 demand. However, they succeeded later in making the Government realise that the remission announced by the latter of Rs. 60 lakhs of revenue and Rs. 207 lakhs of rent for the Rabi of 1931 was inadequate. Then the Government on the advice of the Legislative Council appointed a Rent and Revenue Committee to go into the details of the remission. Even the recommendations of remission by this Committee were termed by the Congress as not sufficient. It demanded at least 55 to 60% reduction in rent as only then the equilibrium between the current price and the rent could have been established. But the Government refused to accept the demand of the Congress even after many rounds of talks between the officials and the Congress leaders. The PCC finally decided on 5 December 1931 to launch the no-rent movement in 5 districts. However, the movement was ruthlessly suppressed by the Government with the help of Emergency Powers Ordinance within ten days of its launching.
The withdrawal of the no-rent movement by the Congress, after the pact, has been criticised by some scholars as a betrayal of the interests of the peasants. Gyanendra Pandey says that Congress sacrificed the "interests of the most deprived section of its rural following in the name of what it believed to be the 'unity of the nation'".92 This argument can be countered in many ways. First, the no-rent movement in UP was started as a part of the Civil Disobedience Movement and therefore it had to follow the broader course and logic of this movement. Had it been an isolated or separate movement like Bardoli and stopped in this way without any final settlement then it could have been called a betrayal of peasants. Second, the official reports suggest that around the time of the signing of the pact between Gandhiji and the Viceroy, about 50% of rent and revenue had already been collected,93 "and it looked as if the no-rent movement was shortly to be broken". This meant that the movement had begun to show signs of weakness by the time of the Pact. And, contrary to Pandey's view, it was the Truce that actually revived a flagging movement. If we study the period between 5 March (truce was signed on this date) and 3 April closely, we find many reports in official files saying that the collection of rent had slowed down in this period due to extensive political work done in the rural

92. Gyanendra Pandey, op.cit., PP. 187-88

93. The DM, Allahabad, informs the Commissioner, Allahabad, on March 17, 1931 that by March 11, collections were just under 8 annas. FN-33/XI/1931, Hom.Poll., NAI.
areas by ex-prisoners and other Congress workers. Third, when the remission in *Rabi* 1931 demand was announced by the government, Congress rejected it as inadequate and demanded around 55 to 60% remission. Its leaders held long discussions with officials to get their demand accepted and when the government did not accept their demand, the Congress launched a no-rent movement in 5 districts and did not care about the pact. All this hardly adds up to a betrayal of the interests of the peasants.

Another point on which Gyanendra Pandey criticises Congress is that it was soft towards landlords. It is true that many landlords were members of the Congress. Even the President of the UPPCC in 1931, T.A.K. Sherwani was one of the bigger landlords of UP and we find many instances when landlords had helped Congress. However, it cannot be said that their support had made the Congress biased towards them and made it overlook or sacrifice the interests of the tenants. Rather, the official reports expressed the fear that the speeches of the Congress leaders were generating and spreading a feeling of hatred among the tenants against the landlords. Even the speech of the Governor in the Legislative Assembly in July 1931 mentions that the speeches of these leaders and activities of Congress tended, more and

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94. To cite one example, the Raja of Bara, one of the larger zamindars of Allahabad district, responded to the call of Congress by suspending 50% of rent from all his tenants. FN-33/XI/1931. The UPPCC and the Economic Distress in the rural areas of the province, *Hom. Poll.*., NAI. The support of the Raja of Kalakankar and Semari are also well known.
more, to promote class warfare against the landlords. Again, when the Committee appointed by the UP Legislative Council gave its recommendations for remission of rent and revenue, the UPPCC criticised its recommendation, *inter alia*, on grounds that the Committee consisted mainly of landlords who did not represent the tenants.

Further, Gyanendra Pandey says that it was the *volte-face* of the UP Congress on the question of peasant protest following the Gandhi-Irwin agreement, which was responsible for the decline of peasant resistance in the latter half of 1931.

Apart from the fact that this formulation is based on the false assumption of a Congress *volte-face* after the Pact, an assumption which we have already questioned above, it is also questionable on other counts. For one, it reduces the complex issue of the rise and decline of peasant resistance to the influence of a single variable - the Congress attitude. It thereby ignores or belittles other factors that could have a bearing on the issue, such as the attitude of the Government. It can indeed be argued with considerable justification that it was the determined effort of the government to curb any resistance in rural areas that was responsible for the relative decline. Gyanendra Pandey does consider this as one of the reasons, but given his obsession with 'Congress responsibility', does not give it the importance it deserves.

We find reports in the AICC files and newspapers like *The Leader* and *Ai* which emphasise that right from the
beginning of May, the UP government had launched a policy of 'subtle and indirect repression' in several districts of UP. Section 144 and 107 Criminal Procedure Code (Cr.PC) were being used to break the Congress organization and curb its activities. A Congress report provides a list of 125 cases registered under Section 107 Cr.PC from Rae Bareli alone. In Barabanki, it says, around 300 cases were pending in the court. It was as a result of these repressive sections of Cr.PC that, the report says, the Congress Committee at Sultanpur was completely closed down, as everybody worth the name in the Congress was a victim of Sec. 144. This section was applied extensively in the districts of Oudh to prevent the organisation of any meeting. In Gonda district, this section had been applied against all the Congress workers of the district. Consequently, the Congress Committee could not function. The main idea behind this policy was to rope in the Panches, Sarpanches, village-level congress workers and enthusiastic sympathisers of the Congress who formed the backbone of the Congress in the villages. Besides the use of this section of the penal law, the Government officers in certain districts openly worked against the Congress organisations. In Barabanki, the Deputy Commissioner visited a village and asked the people to leave the Congress and forbade them from wearing the Gandhi cap and using khaddar. In Ramnagar, a Sub-Inspector raided the
Congress office in village Budhara, pulled down the national flag, took away the Congress papers, arrested three men from the village and threatened others with arrest if they did not resign from the Congress. 95

It is also necessary to point that the policy of repression had the approval of the highest quarters of the Government. We find the Home Secretary of the Government of India suggesting, right in the first week of April 1931, to the District Officers to make the best use of the existing ordinary laws to counter the Congress activities. He had suggested that if the district officers found these laws ineffective, then the local governments should take special measures viz., the promulgation of unlawful instigation ordinance and actions under criminal law amendment act. 96 Furthermore, when the UP Congress finally launched the no-rent campaign in December, 1931, the Government, on 14 December, within ten days of launching of this movement, introduced an Emergency Powers Ordinance and curbed the movement before it could take any definite form.

Thus, it cannot be said that had the Congress not discontinued the movement after the Pact, the

95. Abstract of the report of Oudh District, FN-14/1931, AIICC, NHML and The Leader, July 29, 1931.

peasants would have been victorious and the Congress by discontinuing the agitation snatched this opportunity from them. In fact, even after the Pact, the UP Congress did not change its goal regarding peasants, what changed were the tactics for achieving it.