Chapter Two
In March 1943, all the political parties, with the exception of the Muslim League, were angered by the Governor's dismissal of the Progressive Coalition Party Ministry led by Fazlul Huq. The Hindu Mahasabha took an active part in opposing this move. Syama Prasad Mookerjee was a prominent speaker at the spate of meetings that were held in Calcutta.\(^1\)

But, the Mahasabha lacked a strong mass base. The popularity of the Congress, in the wake of the Quit India Movement, further eroded its credibility. The Mahasabha was conscious of the fact that the Quit India Movement had, in fact, captured the popular imagination. It realised the need to be a part of this movement to entrench itself in the popular psyche.

The Sabha, in a bid to adjust to the new situation, extended "moral support to the Congress Movement".\(^2\) Efforts to adjust itself to the new political situation were apparent when, sharpening its rhetoric, it threatened Direct Action if the authorities did not install a National Government.\(^3\) At the same time, it was prepared to share

---

\(^1\) Fortnightly Report, (hereafter, FR), April first half, Govt. of India, *Home (Political)* *Department*, (hereafter, *Home Political*), File No. 18/4/43.


\(^3\) Ibid.
Ministerial responsibilities in coalition Ministries. Simultaneously, the Mahasabha protested against the repressive measures employed by the colonial authorities to stamp out the Quit India movement.

In addition, the famine presented it with an opportunity to increase its mass base and make itself popular among the masses. The party viewed the famine as a man made one which an efficient administration could have avoided or controlled at an early stage. S. P. Mookerjee attacked the Ministry for the role it played in worsening the situation. He said that the earlier Ministry had already declared its absolute lack of control over matters of distribution of food, and that the Food Department of the Government of Bengal was directly controlled by the Governor.

This, therefore, was also an attack on the Muslim League Ministry which attempted to blame the Fazlul Huq Ministry for the crisis. The Hindu Sabha defended the latter:

Although the Fazlul Huq Ministry was in office in Bengal in March-April 1942 when Burma fell and the sources of supply to meet the deficit of rice in Bengal were cut off, they had practically no voice in the formulation of the food policy of the province and its

---

4. "Mr. Savarkar's instructions to the Hindu Mahasabha to take the lead in forming coalition Ministries evoked derisive comments in the Nationalist press." FR, August first half, 1943, op. cit., File No. 18/8/43.

5. In their resolution of 5th October, the Working Committee of the Sabha condemned the policy and manner of imposing collective fines, and set up its own Committee of Inquiry to enquire into allegations of Police and Military excesses. Ibid.

6. 'Annual Report of the Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha for the year 1943-44' (hereafter, 'Annual Report'), All India Hindu Mahasabha Papers, File No. C-59, p. 142. See also the 'Memorandum submitted to the Famine Inquiry Commission, 1943', Ashutosh Lahiry Papers; 'Dr. S. P. Mookerjee's speech during the debate on the food situation in Bengal at the Bengal Legislative Assembly on 14th July', Published by Prof. Hari Charan Ghosh. Pamphlet No. 19, ibid.


8. Ibid. See also, 'Annual Report', op. cit., p. 142.

9. See, Statement of the Minister of Civil Supplies on the food situation, 8 July 1943, PBLA, Vol. LXV, pp. 81-86 where he says that the earlier Minister exhausted whatever reserve the Government had maintained.
administration. This was taken up almost entirely by the Governor himself in consultation with some of the permanent officials.... The past Ministry did attempt to solve the food situation.\(^\text{10}\)

This became a constant refrain for the Mahasabha leaders. Speaking at the Hindu Conference at Naihati in November, N. C. Chatterjee, the President of the Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha (BPHM), blamed the League for its subservience to the colonial authorities, which had resulted in the famine condition.\(^\text{11}\)

Thus, while it defended the earlier Ministry, it attacked the policies of the present one. In the Assembly debate, Syama Prasad Mookerjee criticised Suhrawardy’s statement that there was no shortage of food grain in Bengal. The latter claimed that the Department of Civil Supplies had stated that there was no shortage of rice in the province, and hence, the resultant panic was wrong.\(^\text{12}\) Suhrawardy argued that it was the news of shortage which was creating the panic and the situation for 'hoarding and black marketing'.

The Mahasabha, along with other opposition parties, criticised the League Ministry for "minimising the gravity of the situation"\(^\text{13}\) and making it appear that "things were really not so bad as represented by the Nationalist Press and to lay the blame at the door of their predecessor-in office and also of the agriculturists and merchants who were

---

\(^{10}\) 'Memorandum for the Food Shortage Commission', *S. P. Mookerjee Papers*, Instalment II-IV, Subject File No. 110, p. 80.

\(^{11}\) He said:

Neither the Denial Policy nor the Unplanned Purchasing Scheme were initiated by the Ministry then in office. The Imperialists manoeuvred to get rid of Ministers who dared to protest, and were anxious to get in the League Ministry who were expected to be more subservient to their behest.


\(^{13}\) ‘Annual Report’, *op. cit.*, p. 142.
accused of hoarding and of holding their stocks from the markets".\textsuperscript{14} By attacking the theory of 'shortage of supply due to hoarding', etc., the Mahasabha could, in fact, point out the Ministry's acceptance, and toeing, of the arguments forwarded by the bureaucracy.\textsuperscript{15} A Food Department communique clearly stated this official point of view:

Examination of the position as a whole shows a shortage of 1.29 million tons between estimated surpluses likely to be secured through Government procurement and estimated needs of provinces, Indian States and defence services... It is essentially one of getting adequate flow of food grains from cultivators. That adequate flow is at present lacking. Cultivator continues to hold
(a) In the hope of increased prices.
(b) Because of his apprehension (to some extent justified) of probable decline in value of token money and anxiety to secure bullion instead of paper.
(c) In parts of Eastern area because of fear of Japanese invasion and anxiety to have reserve on which to draw.
(d) There exists a deep rooted conviction among cultivators spread by diverse anti-Government interest [sic] which one (sic) (? ours) propaganda cannot shake that there is a drain on India's resources for the defence services so enormous as to lead to a certainty of serious shortage.\textsuperscript{16}

But even the authorities were realising that the Food Drive was not going to solve the problem:

We are organising anti-hoarding drives and our efforts have so far had some success. But that does not touch the root of the problem. We are clear after an exhaustive review of the whole position that only answer is substantial import of food grains from outside with the help of H.M.G. to start not later than September.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Ibid.} Interestingly the most powerful campaign on the calamity was carried out by \textit{The Statesman}, a not so friendly newspaper so far as the Indians were concerned. See Sen, Amartya, \textit{Poverty and Famines An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation}, OUP, Delhi, 1982 (first published 1981), p. 80, fn. 35.

\textsuperscript{15} Later on the Mahasabha President N. C. Chatterjee articulated this in his Presidential address at Nadia on 21 November 1943. He said:

On their assumption of office the League Ministry unfortunately started the propaganda that there was no shortage of food in Bengal. They danced to their master's tune and tried to implement Mr. Amery's thesis of hoarding and over eating by the people of Bengal as being responsible for the failure.... To substantiate the so called hoarding theory they resorted to food drive, excluding Calcutta and the stockists' centres and aided the hoarders to rehabilitate themselves.

Chatterjee, N. C., \textit{op. cit.}, p. 46.

\textsuperscript{16} Government of India, Food Department to Secretary of State, 15 July 1943, N. Mansergh (ed.), \textit{op. cit.}, Vol. IV, p. 75.

\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Ibid.}
The attack of the Mahasabha was, therefore, also an attack on the official position of repeatedly emphasising hoarding by the people as the chief reason for the crisis. It was also for this reason that it was extremely critical of the Food Drive initiated by the Ministry.

Even before the Drive began, Manindra Nath Mitra, the General Secretary of BPHM, issued a statement on 4 June criticising it. He said that the entire process was based on an erroneous understanding that Bengal had food reserves, a hypothesis which was entirely wrong. He also alleged that the news of the Drive had created a sense of panic among the population, especially in the rural areas. He declared:

It must be said that the Mahasabha has no objection in collecting correct information of the existing supply of rice and paddy in the province. Actually Hindu Mahasabha wants this only. Hindu Mahasabha wants that illegally hoarded rice should be acquired and brought to the market. But Hindu Mahasabha will not tolerate any partiality. If there is a house to house search, the large godowns of the white men and the half-Indian Mahajans, friendly to the Ministry, should not be left out. Otherwise the nation will not forgive the efforts of the Ministry to retain its power and hide its inefficiency by disturbing the middle class and the peasants and creating conditions of panic and creating class war in every village and every locality.\(^\text{18}\) (translation mine)

The General Secretary, in the same communiqué, listed a number of activities for the Mahasabha to perform in these circumstances. The emphasis was on the active involvement of the Mahasabha members so as to not hamper the Squad Master and his group in obtaining a correct food census.\(^\text{19}\) In the subsequent statement issued on 12


\(^{19}\) *Ibid.*
June, the populace was reminded of the Food Drive and asked to be vigilant. At the same time, it appealed to the party members for active participation.20

As a corollary to the attack on the 'hoarding theory', the Party also brought to the fore the woes of those peasants 'who had some stocks and felt threatened by the Food Drive of the Ministry'. The threat of being deprived of their stocks appeared real in a short while. Bengal, especially the eastern areas, had already experienced the hardships imposed by war. The Food Drive, which began on 6 June 1943, was soon, therefore, attacked by the Mahasabha for aggravating the situation. N. C. Chatterjee commented:

Backed by all resources of the state, exercised on a terror stricken helpless people who could make no distinction between the agent and the principal, large scale purchases made in diverse districts (sic). The covert threat of Defence of India Act, the willing co-operation of the Police and the Magistracy and the limitless resources placed at the disposal of the agents led to their successful operation in the rural areas. Rural economy of the countryside was thoroughly upset.21

Thus, the Party criticised the Ministry for helping the state to be more tyrannical, in a situation where the suppression of the Congress and a large section of political workers had deprived the province of any vocal political opposition.22 The famine,

In carrying out the entire province, with the exception of Calcutta and the municipalities of Howrah and Bally, was divided into units consisting of two unions in the case of rural areas and a municipal ward or block comprising 3,500 or 4,000 houses in the case of urban areas.... Each unit was put in charge of a squad consisting of one officer, 4 official subordinates and 4 non-officials. They were given instructions to organise sub-unit committees... consisting of 12 members who were elected, as far as possible by the residents in the sub-unit concerned. Under the supervision of the squad in charge, the committee of each sub-unit was made responsible for undertaking a systematic house to house inquiry to discover the quantities of rice, paddy and other foodgrains held by each family, as well as the requirements of that family....

Famine Inquiry Commission Report on Bengal (hereafter, FIC), Government of India, Delhi, 1945, p. 56.


21 Chatterjee, N. C., op. cit., p. 47.

22 For details of the suppression of the Quit India Movement in Bengal see, Review, op. cit., File No. SS-I.
therefore, provided the Mahasabha with an opportunity to articulate an anti-colonial political agenda without recourse to its usual communal and anti-Congress rhetoric.

It also accused the Ministry of corruption, and of favouring the Muslim League supporters in various ways to the detriment of public interests, and tried to organise agitations against it. The Mahasabha was not opposed to the Food drive as such, but what it apprehended was its use for ulterior purposes. "...the Hindu Mahasabha has issued instructions emphasising the necessity of caution to ensure that the Muslim League does not use its political influence in a manner prejudicial to the interest of the people." It further suggested

The Mahasabha's policy is apparently that there is no objection to co-operation with Government in the equitable distribution of food grain and no objection to the seizure of hoards but in the absence of a definition of "surplus" apprehension is expressed lest action taken should display partiality on communal or party line... there can be no co-operation where there is a possibility of a clash between classes of the population, when it must be made clear that the object of the drive is to harass the middle classes and emphasis is laid upon organising to use all constitutional means to protect legitimate interests.

So far as the class bias was concerned, it is quite apparent that the Mahasabha was concerned about the class which felt most threatened by the Food Drive, i.e., the traders and sections which had stocks. This became clear when the party voiced its opposition to the procurement of the aman crop during the winter of 1943-44.

---

23 Chatterjee, N. C., *op. cit.*, pp. 45-46. In order to subserve their object of establishing party hegemony in the interest of an exploiting group they had jeopardised the lives of thousands of Hindus and Muslims. The bulk of the Food of the Province was sucked in and handed over to the agents over whom neither the children of the soil nor the conscience of the Nation had any control. The agents were the unfettered exploiters of the situation. The Famine-made prosperity helped the economic propping up of the party caucus which but for this timely succour would have been overthrown by their exploited victims.


24 FR, first half of June 1943, *op. cit.*, File No. 18/6/43.


"Bengal", it claimed, "could not afford to allow the state agents or profiteers to have another run with this crop and thrive on the starvation of the people." 27

It showed its determination to agitate against the possible procurement of the aman crop as early as October 1943. The Government and industry were asked to release huge stocks which "they are represented to be holding up." 28 It asked the Government not to purchase directly but to leave "distribution of the crop to the ordinary trade channels". 29 By February 1944, it intensified its agitation and in Nadia it issued "propaganda leaflets opposing sale" 30 while at "a meeting in Bakerganj towards the end of January the audience were urged to hoard foodgrains for one year". 31

The Mahasabha was, thus, active in opposing the policies of the Muslim League Ministry. It was around this time that Syama Prasad Mookerjee took the initiative to form two relief committees, viz., the Bengal Relief Committee and the Bengal Provincial Mahasabha Relief Committee. 32 The Bengal Relief Committee began its operations in September 1943 but soon the Hindu Mahasabha section prevailed upon Mookerjee to expend relief exclusively through the party platform. Thus, the Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha Relief Committee took shape. 33 The enormity of the crisis meant that any

27 Chatterjee, N. C. op. cit., p. 47.
28 FR, October second half 1943, op. cit., File No. 18/10/43.
29 FR, December first half 1943, ibid., File No. 18/12/43.
30 FR, December first half 1943, ibid., File No. 18/12/43.
31 Ibid.
33 'Annual Report', op. cit., p. 143. The report further said:
... our President Dr. Syama Prasad Mookherjee (sic) took the initiative of inviting leading people and representatives of different organisations to a Conference to devise ways and means for organising relief on a sound basis. Thus came into existence the "Bengal Relief Committee" which began relief operations in September 1943. But among the donors a considerable section wanted that their monies should be spent by
individual or group action was insufficient, and State support was absolutely required in this situation. The Mahasabha received assistance from the government to carry out relief works. But the authorities noticed that it was generating publicity for itself too.\footnote{34} By February 1944, Syama Prasad Mookerjee received a sum of about seven lakh rupees and 35,676 maunds of foodgrains,\footnote{35} which, given the vastness of the calamity, was utterly inadequate.

The Mahasabha's relief works extended to a large area - almost all the affected districts of the Province - but the enormity of the crisis and the paucity of funds made the scope and the area of action limited. Syama Prasad Mookerjee was the central figure in the entire operation. He received letters requesting relief from different parts of the province. These limitations probably resulted in the Mahasabha's relief work being concentrated in Calcutta.

A large part of the famine was also 'inflationary' - the prices of food grain rose consistently in this period.\footnote{36} The lower middle class, especially in the small towns and villages of Faridpur,\footnote{37} Noakhali,\footnote{38} Bakerganj, Midnapore, etc., were badly hit as they

\footnote{34} "... the Hindu Mahasabha and Syama Prasad Mookerjee... accepted Government's assistance and procured the maximum publicity for such relief as they are doing with these and other resources". FR, October first half 1943, \textit{op. cit.}, File No. 18/10/43.
\footnote{35} 'Annual Report', \textit{op. cit.}, p. 45.
\footnote{37} See, Mukherjee, K., \textit{Agriculture,Famine and Rehabilitation in South Asia}, Shantiniketan, Visva Bharati, 1965.
exhausted their resources very early during the crisis. The Hindu Mahasabha tried to provide some relief to this section. Herein lies the significance of the Mahasabha's emphasis on the fact that "it spent Rs. 6,000/- for relief of the Pandits of the tols. Rs. 7,650/- as cash relief in different districts of Bengal..." This did not go unnoticed by the colonial authorities. A report said: "The Hindu Mahasabha has been prominent in announcing schemes for the relief of middle classes and has set aside considerable sums for relief to families of security prisoners". (italics mine)

Special relief was given to "Teachers of 35 Schools in Munshiganj Sub-division, Dacca, teachers of the high schools in Noakhali District..., teachers of all High schools in the District of Pabna, 200 teachers of all High Schools of the Chandpur Sub-Division in the District of Tippera. Special Relief was also given to 100 families of Lawyers (Pleaders and Muktears) of the Faridpur District through the District Hindu Mahasabha". The relief for this section of the population began in September. These activities were supplemented by its agitation against the procurement by the Government of the Winter crop (aman), in October.

Though the Mahasabha leaders refuted the "insidious propaganda that Bengal leaders wanted to utilise the food crisis of (sic) their political purposes", it was apparent that the famine as well as the relief work and agitation against Government policies provided it with space to influence sections of the population. The Party emphasised the correlation between relief works and its increased membership. It

---

40 FR, September second half, 1943, op. cit., File No. 18/9/43.
41 'Annual Report', op. cit., p. 147.
42 FR, October first half 1943, op. cit., File No. 18/10/43.
43 'Annual Report', op. cit., p. 137.
announced that "inspite of famine and pestilence", the number of branch Sabhas had increased from 1,004 to 1,217, and the membership figure to 40,887 from a mere 15,474 in 1942.\textsuperscript{44}

Barisal, traditionally a surplus district, was hit by the government policies which rendered it a deficit area. The Food Drive, and the subsequent Procurement Drive badly affected the area, and a substantial part of the middle classes.\textsuperscript{45} Barisal District along with Bhola sub-division recorded the highest membership figures in 1944 and 1945.\textsuperscript{46} This gives some credence to the Party's suggested correlation.

From the early twenties itself when its formation in the province was announced, the Party was faced with the dilemma of reconciling the political aims and the cultural ideals and symbols around which it mobilised people for those political goals.\textsuperscript{47} Thus, though its slogan of Sangathan of the Hindus was predominantly an evocation to rally

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{45} See some of the contemporary writings expressing the woes of the middle class:
The middle class also suffered because no organised government relief touched it. Free kitchens, homes for destitute and emergency relief hospitals were meant for the working classes. Middle class people were free to go to them. But they would not and could not because their notion of respectability stood in their way and it was also difficult to jostle with hundreds of unwashed men, women, and children for a meal of gruel. They would prefer to get dry grain doles... Many district Magistrates when approached for help were reported to have disowned responsibility for aiding the middle class and said that if they could not go to the free kitchens they should fend for themselves.

Narayan, T. G., \textit{Famine over Bengal}, The Book Company Ltd., Calcutta, 1944, p. 216. The middle class came in for official scorn too, which was apparent to outsiders. For example:
Every official whom we met asked with a slight suggestion of disdain whether we had come to help the Bhadralok. From the days of Macaulay the middle classes of Bengal have been an object of disdain to the rulers and when later these classes showed that even the worm could turn, they became an object of distrust. The distress of those who are getting 30 or 40 a month is no less than those of others attending the gruel kitchen.


\textsuperscript{46} \textit{Amrita Bazar Patrika}, Cal., 28 Feb. 1945, p. 1.

\textsuperscript{47} For the history of the Mahasabha's inception and continued attempt to entrench itself in the Bengal politics, see, Papiya Chakravarty, \textit{Hindu Response to Nationalist Ferment}, Subarnarekha, Cal., 1992, pp. 179-190.
around a cultural unit, i.e., the Hindus, it aimed at organising Hindus to counter the Congress and wean people away from it. In Bengal, this also meant a move to mobilise the depressed classes, particularly the Scheduled Castes who constituted a substantial population of the province. The Party since its formation in the early twenties tried to include the removal of caste disabilities in the province in its agenda. Speakers at the Annual Conferences of the Mahasabha repeatedly stressed the importance of the removal of untouchability and other discriminations based on the caste system.48 It was at this time that the Bengal Pact of 1925, and subsequently, the Poona Pact (1932) were signed, which significantly changed the course of provincial politics.49 The elections of 1937 and the post-election political developments demonstrated the importance of the Scheduled Caste leadership for any power alliance.50

It gradually became apparent that the colonial authorities were using a new instrument in the shape of the Scheduled Castes to deal with the Congress and other Nationalist forces. The Mahasabha, which was trying to bring this section into its fold...
through its evocation of the unity of the Hindu community, now had to contest not only the Congress but also the Muslim League which found the new Scheduled Caste leadership a possible political ally. To add to the fray, the colonial authorities were also trying to define the Scheduled Castes, though differently, from the manner in which the Hindu Mahasabha defined them. The Census was a prominent site of contestation, and the Mahasabha campaigned vociferously against the attempts of the Census authorities to categorise Scheduled Castes and Tribes as different from Hindus. Therefore, in Bengal, the Party actually widened its ambit to bring the Scheduled Castes into its fold. Earlier, its primarily middle class and uppercaste Hindu social base had precluded such overtures. The Famine opened the possibilities of going beyond that limited social base, while conversely it was this very social base that became a stumbling block in the venture, as it obstructed the vision of the Party, preventing it from transcending its limitations.

The Mahasabha, as we have seen earlier, found itself in a tight spot due to the Quit India Movement launched by the Congress, as well as the popular appeal of the Congress leaders. This was true even in the case of sections of the Scheduled Caste population who, despite the condemnation of the Quit India Movement by some of its

51 Mahasabha fought very strongly against the Census operations of 1941 in which, apart from other things, the method of classification under the category of 'communities' rather than 'religion' had been adopted. The Hindu Mahasabha conceived this as a threat to the numerical strength of the Hindus. This, in its view, helped to increase the communal ratio of the Muslims in all provinces, most notably in Bengal. Census of India, 1941, All India Hindu Mahasabha Papers, File No. C-31, p. 2.

However, in the context of Bengal, the problem had another dimension. Scheduled Caste leadership in the province was powerfully entrenched by the 1940s, and hence, the Mahasabha found it difficult to penetrate. However, the 1941 Census saw the Mahasabha spearheading a movement for 'correct enumeration' which created deep communal antagonism in the province. They demanded that there be a correct enumeration of the Hindus so as to not give a clear and consolidated demographic majority to the Muslims. See Amrita Bazar Patrika, Cal., 18 Jan., p. 9; 21 Jan. 1941, p. 5; 3 Feb., p. 6; 4 Feb., p. 5; 5 Feb., p. 5; 6 Feb., p. 5; 7 Feb., p. 5; 8 Feb. 1941, p. 5.

52 Among the students and youth, Congress was more popular than either the Mahasabha or the Communist Party of India. See Review, 1942 and 1943, op. cit.
leaders, had shown sympathy for the movement and had, in fact, participated in it.\footnote{53} Therefore, while the class base of the Hindu Mahasabha prevented it from penetrating deeper among the masses, the Quit India Movement proved that it had to discredit the Congress before it could gain entrance into the popular psyche, even among the Scheduled Castes.

The relief works during this period, however, led to the Mahasabha increasing its political space, which posed a threat to political groups like the Forward Bloc, some of whose members had joined the Ministry. They were concerned by the former's growing influence.\footnote{54} Therefore, the period was crucial for the Mahasabha as it could, in the absence of the Congress and other Nationalist groups, direct the political agenda in the province. Since the League Ministry was cushioning the colonial authorities, it was also contextually correct to attack the former, as a corollary to the Sabha's criticism of the

\footnote{53}{A report about the Scheduled Castes' Conference that took place in Calcutta on 25th October says:

This conference which was sponsored by the Hon'ble U. N. Burman, Birat Chandra Mondal, passed a resolution... emphatically condemning the destructive movement started in the name of Indian National Congress which was creating anarchy and chaos in the country and was responsible for so many hardships in so many families.... Some Namasudras arrested in Barisal admitted having promised help in carrying out a raid that was proposed on Gournadi Police Station in that district, and one of them, a cultivator, said in the course of his statement to the Police “we agreed to help the Congressmen as we were promised good services, high education, exemption from taxes, etc., by the Congress Government - things we are not getting from the British Government”.

See, Review, 5 Nov. 1942, op. cit., File No. SS I, p. 119.}

\footnote{54}{An Intelligence report says:

... two Forward Bloc Ministers and their Parliamentary Secretaries have watched with grave concern the growing popularity of Syama Prasad Mookerjee and the Hindu Mahasabha and the consequent eclipse of the Forward Bloc. In an attempt to regain the prestige a committee to be known as “National Relief Committee”, which was to include all parties except the Hindu Mahasabha... was formed on the 17th September with a framework of Forward Bloc leaders. The ostensible purpose of this committee is purely philanthropic, but the real motive behind it is the employment of ex-political prisoners on relief work in the hope of gaining the sympathy of the public and retaining its interest in the Congress.

Review, September 1943, op. cit., File No. SS II, p. 76.}
latter’s policies. This it achieved by levelling charges against the Ministry of corruption, nepotism and communal demand for Pakistan.\(^55\) The introduction of the Secondary Education Bill by the Muslim League Ministry in April 1944, added thrust to the Hindu Mahasabha’s clamour that the Muslim League was communalising the entire province.\(^56\)

The Ministry found itself in a difficult situation and the introduction of the Bill was partially dictated by the exigent circumstances. The protests that followed the introduction of the Bill found the Mahasabha at the forefront. The overall opposition to the Bill, however, did not allow the Mahasabha to capitalise on this. By June 1944, the agitation took a radical turn with the Ministry on the verge of losing its support.\(^57\)

In the midst of the widespread opposition to the Bill for its avowedly communal and separatist nature, what agitated some of the Mahasabha leaders was the question of control over the field of education. Ashutosh Lahiry writing to V. G. Deshpande, the General Secretary, All India Hindu Mahasabha, on 10 June articulated this fact regarding the bill, "...which if passed into law will mean the domination of the Muslim League over the entire field of Secondary Education in the Province, that is to say over 1600 high schools which the Hindus have established and running with their own resources".\(^58\)

---

\(^{55}\) Even the colonial authorities accepted the fact that there was widespread corruption in the Ministry. See, Moon, Penderel, *Wavell, The Viceroy’s Journal*, OUP, Delhi, 1977, p. 46.

\(^{56}\) According to the Mahasabha, the Muslim League Ministry’s attempt was “a calculated measure designed to cripple the Hindus politically and culturally and also to perpetuate the tension of feeling that is prevailing amongst communities just to serve the purposes of the rank communalists. By the introduction of the nefarious system of separate electorate it sought to keep out of picture those Moslems (sic) who enjoy the confidence of the Hindus and other communities”. Syama Prasad Mookerjee to Rai Bahadur Harish Chandra, 29 June 1944, *S. P. Mookerjee Papers*, Instalment II-IV, Subject File No. 62, p. 41.

\(^{57}\) See pp. 74-75; 79 of Chapter I.

\(^{58}\) Ashutosh Lahiry to V. G. Deshpande, 10 June 1944, *All India Hindu Mahasabha Papers*, File No. C-40, p. 36A.
By the last week of June 1944, the Muslim League Ministry was on the verge of collapse and it was at this juncture that Governor Casey intervened, and notwithstanding his earlier reservations against this Ministry, provided it a breathing space. He prorogued the Assembly on 28 June, at a time when the anti-Secondary Education Bill agitation had forced even the ever supportive European group to administer counsel to the Chief Minister to wind the matter up. After the Governor's sudden announcement of this decision, Syama Prasad Mookerjee presented the political scenario in his letter to Rai Bahadur Harish Chandra of Delhi dated 29 June. He wrote:

... I presume you have learnt by this time about the dramatic turn that the Bengal political situation has taken. In the face of the growing strength of the Opposition the Assembly has been prorogued by the Governor. Public opinion has been strongly agitated over the matter.

Barely a week later Chakravarty Rajagopalachari in a fresh move wrote to Jinnah and later released the correspondence to the Press. This resulted in the creation of a new scenario in the province, and Syama Prasad Mookerjee whose stature had risen in the wake of the Famine and the Secondary Education Bill controversy, found himself the chief spokesperson for the apprehensions of sections of Bengali Hindus.

II

The Congress leaders in the Province demonstrated the confusion in their rank regarding the CR formula. H. M. Kiron Shankar Ray, a prominent leader of the Congress who

59 See entry on 4 August 1944, Diary of Richard Casey, Richard G. Casey Papers, Reel No. 1, p. 12.

60 Syama Prasad Mookerjee to Rai Bahadur Harish Chandra, 29 June 1944, S. P. Mookerjee Papers, Instalment II/IV, Subject File No. 62, p. 141.

though released earlier was not active in the relief operations during the famine, expressed his shock and dismay. He met Gandhi at Wardha on 11 August and apprised him of Bengal’s opposition. However, he was attacked by the Gandhians led by Satish Ch. Dasgupta, Gandhi’s lieutenant in Bengal, who along with a leading Congressman J. C. Gupta felt that it was ‘Gandhi’s unity move’. Hindu Mahasabha, in its outright rejection of this formula, reflected the mood of those who were apprehensive of Gandhi’s new move. In Bengal and Punjab, the Mahasabha by its tough stand gained a foothold in organising public opinion. The absence of Congress workers and any other leaders of standing made its position favourable. The Mahasabha leaders thought of consolidating the public opinion. The Punjab Hindu Sabha leaders were in touch with the Bengal Sabha leaders. One Brijlal, writing to Syama Prasad Mookerjee on behalf of the Punjab Hindu Vigilance Board, suggested attempts for consolidation of non-Muslim League public opinion. He wrote: "I agree with you that Mahatma Gandhi and the


63 See, Amrita Bazar Patrika, Cal., 6 August 1944, p. 3. Also ibid., 2 August, p. 5; 13 August, p. 4.; 14 August, p. 3. A detailed description of the reactions of individuals and groups on this issue comes from Syama Prasad Mookerjee’s letter to Savarkar: Regarding the two Congress Parties you should write to S. K. Basu and Mr. K. S. Ray. The Congressmen who are with us (for an all party anti Pak Conference to be held in Delhi) are reluctant to come on a common platform until something actually happens after Gandhi-Jinnah interview. If the talks break down they do not propose to move further in the matter. If Gandhi commits himself finally to Pakistan then they will openly join with us. (italics mine)

64 Similarly, Narendra Nath Das of Khalishota, Barisal, wrote, "... any appeal to Gandhiji will be of no avail. We must marshall and organise public opinion and shatter this diabolical move....” Narendra Nath Das to S. P. Mookerjee, ibid., p. 173.

The Bengali Hindus living outside Bengal also expressed their concern. The Bengali Association, Bihar, Danapur Branch reported: "In a special meeting of the Bengalee Association Bihar, 16. 8. 44, an unanimous resolution was passed severely criticising Rajaji’s offer to Mr. Jinnah...." ibid., p. 295.

Dr. Mookerjee took a tough stand and was thinking of a broader alliance. On this matter writing to Master Tara Singh he expressed his thoughts: “I am most anxious that the Hindu and the Sikh... of the Punjab combine and Bengal is with them, Pakistan will never come”. S. P. Mookerjee to Master Tara Singh, 23 August 1944, ibid., p. 321.
National Congress should give up for good their policy of appeasing the communalist Muslims.... Rather than wasting our time and energy on him it is better to consolidate the non-Muslim League Public Opinion". 65 Sarat Chandra Guha, President, Barisal District Hindu Mahasabha, wrote to Syama Prasad:

Ignoring all this Mahatma agreed to this particular without consulting Bengal at all. This will if carried out liquidate Bengal. The Bengalees will fight this menace under your leadership to their utmost might. Local Congress though many against it, is vacillating. Only the Communist boys are loud in support of Mahatma along with Muslim League. We had a meeting of Protest yesterday in which the Communists created little trouble but no body takes this into account. 66

Intensity of feelings could be heard from Dacca from where Girish Chandra Das, a pleader in the district court wrote: "... The Rajagopalachari proposal has to be resisted by all means". 67

The protest against CR formula gave a boost to the organising efforts of the local Hindu Sabhas as could be seen from this report sent to Syama Prasad Mookerjee on 14 August from Faridpur.

... I intend to reorganise the branch Sabhas by enlisting members and to form new branches wherever possible. Sj. Sarat Ch. Guha came here and he has taken charge of Madaripur Sub-division. It is expected that half the members may be enlisted from Madaripur.

The Pakistan protest meeting was held here on the 7th of August last. The Communists came in a body to create disturbances in the meeting.... The Ambica hall were packed up. We were sufficiently strong and had a grant majority. The protest resolution was moved. Seconded and supported without any disturbances. Afterwards some Communists wanted to speak but they were not allowed to proceed. 68

65 Brijlal, Punjab Hindu Vigilance Board, Nabha to S. P. Mookerjee, 20 October 1944, ibid, p. 19.
67 Girish Chandra Ghosh, Pleader, District Court Dacca, to S. P. Mukherjee, 20 August 1944, ibid., p. 257.
68 Rajendra Nath Sen, Secretary, District Hindu Mahasabha, Faridpur to S. P. Mukherjee, 14 August 1944, ibid., pp. 233-4.
The opposition to the CR formula brought the Hindu Mahasabha's slogan of Hindu unity back into the forefront. A public meeting at Faridpur declared the formula anti-national and a "great hindrance to the independence of India. This meeting urges the Hindus to unite and to oppose it at all costs". 

The CR formula, it was felt, would vivisect India and especially Bengal and the Punjab. The fear of the Partition of India agitated people's mind and the Mahasabha tried to give it an organised form. This was reflected in the repeated and constant threat of vivisection that the Hindu Mahasabha accused the CR formula of generating. At the Jessore District Hindu Mahasabha meeting, it was stated:

This meeting strongly condemns and records its protest against the Pakistan scheme in any form whatsoever introduced as at present by Mr. Rajagopalachari and sanctioned by Mahatma Gandhi in his individual capacity, in as much as it tends to the vivisection of India which is detrimental to the interests of the people of India specially those of Bengal.

Thus, the feeling of indignation was so great that even people who never attended Hindu Mahasabha meetings readily responded to its call.

The indignation and apprehension that the Mahasabha leaders saw prevailing in the country soon catapulted Syama Prasad Mookerjee to the position of a major national spokesman. People from outside Bengal and especially those of Hindu Mahasabha persuasion wanted him to take the lead. On 31 August, in reply to the correspondent Chandravarkar, Syama Prasad Mookerjee refuted the charge that "he was lying low". He told Chandravarkar,

I have been holding meetings in Bengal which have been attended by thousands of people and organising public opinion in every district. More than five hundred protest meetings

---

69 P. C. Moitra, President, Faridpur Hindu Mahasabha to S. P. Mookerjee, ibid., p. 237.

70 Resolution of the Jessore district Hindu Mahasabha passed on 7 August 1944, Jogendra Basu, President, Jessore District Hindu Mahasabha to S. P. Mookerjee, ibid., p. 305.

71 Sarat Chandra Guha, President, Barisal Hindu Mahasabha to S. P. Mookerjee, 11 September 1944, ibid., p. 90.
have been held and resolutions adopted by various classes of people... A large section of Congressmen is working with us. From the statement which I have issued I think I have made it abundantly clear that I am not just keeping quite (sic) and allowing things to drift.\footnote{S. P. Mookerjee to Chandravarkar, 31 August 1944, \textit{ibid.}, p. 241.}

On the same day he wrote to Savarkar stating his approval of an all Party anti-Pakistan conference in Delhi in October.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, p. 253.} He was seen as a saviour and compared with Surendra Nath Banerjee who, in the words of one correspondent, saved Bengal from getting partitioned.\footnote{Akhil Chandra Dutta (Village & P. O. Lata, Barisal). to S. P. Mookerjee, 19 August 1944, \textit{ibid.}, pp. 259-61.}

Syama Prasad went to Sevagram and met Gandhi in order to apprise him of the apprehensions and resentment in Bengal. His enhanced status could be seen in that the Hindu Mahasabha members advised him to not meet Gandhi as it would weaken his and the Sabha's position. M. V. Ganapati, General Secretary, Hindu Mahasabha, Madras wrote to him:

\begin{quote}
Do not meet Gandhi. First of all you will put yourself personally in the wrong, even though innocently.... We are thinking to make you President of the Mahasabha next year. But our President should not go seeking interview with any other leader.\footnote{M. V. Ganapati, General Secretary, All India Hindu Mahasabha, Madras, 30 July 1944, \textit{ibid.}, p. 302.}
\end{quote}

In fact, P. Varadarajulu Naidu, President, Madras Hindu Mahasabha, also opined that his meeting with Gandhi would weaken the Mahasabha'.\footnote{Varadarajulu Naidu to S. P. Mookerjee, 30 July 1944, \textit{ibid.}, p. 304.} This stemmed from the same apprehension expressed for the Gandhi-Jinnah meeting.

Syama Prasad, however, was sure that no result would ensue from the Gandhi Jinnah meeting. He wrote, "Gandhi himself does not realise the harm that has been done
in Bengal in respect of those Muslims who were so long fighting with the League. These Muslims rightly feel that they have been let down and they do not know where to go.\footnote{S. P. Mookerjee to S. Sadanand, Managing Editor, Free Press Journal, Bombay, 14 September 1944, \textit{ibid.}}

To a great extent this was true. In fact Gandhi's approval of the CR formula and his subsequent meeting gave Jinnah an enhanced and representative status. This in Bengal meant that the internal dynamic within Muslim politics gave increased legitimacy to the idea of Pakistan than the socialist agenda that Abul Hashim said he was propagating.\footnote{Hashim, Abu'l, \textit{Amar Jihon O Vihag Purbo Bangladesher Rajniti}, Chirayat Prakashan, Cal., 1987, p. 60-65.} Pakistan got concretised in the imagination of the people. This endorsement also took away from the Congress the moral strength to fight Pakistan in Bengal (and in the Punjab).

At the same time, it brought into prominence Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee in Bengal and Master Tara Singh in Punjab to lead the fight against Pakistan.\footnote{\textit{Amrita Bazar Patrika}, Cal., 6 Aug. 1944, p. 4.} Thus, the surrender of the anti-Pakistan movement to the two communal organs resulted in the heightening of the communal boundaries and increased legitimacy to the communal demands and that of Pakistan.

\footnote{The Colonial eye only saw what it wanted to see - the advantage for Jinnah in whatever form it might come. Of the Punjab situation, a colonial authority reports: \textit{Political interest has been focussed on the coming conversations between Gandhi and Jinnah... Whatever Gandhi's intentions may have been, his advance to Jinnah has certainly come in at a most opportune time so far as the Unionist Party is concerned. Jinnah's share in the political market had begun to deteriorate. Thanks to Mr. Gandhi Jinnah's importance has now revived and he will certainly do his best to ascribe to the Unionist the blame for any failure or disappointment in store for him at Bombay... Gandhi's manoeuvres have had the effect of solidifying the great bulk of Punjabi Hindus and Sikhs against Pakistan. There is a very strong feeling that Gandhi's behaviour in using minority communities in the Punjab as a pawn in his game without consulting them in advance was most reprehensible.}}
III

For the Communist Party, the CR proposals and the subsequent correspondence between Gandhi and Jinnah came as an endorsement both of its own appeal for national unity and of its demand for Congress' acceptance of the Pakistan demand as one of for self-determination by the Muslims in India. It took upon itself to defend the CR proposals and the Pakistan demands with utmost energy and declared that "patriotic opinion of all sections in India backs it". The Communists found the "Reactions to Gandhiji's interview with Gelder and to Rajaji's formula on communal settlement, stand in striking contrast to the atmosphere of mudslinging and communal discussion which prevailed in Bengal upto quite recently, following the controversy on the Secondary Education Bill. The general feeling among the people at large is that a great turning point is at hand." The Communist Party's reading of the situation, as reflected in its own Press, was contrary to that of the Hindu Mahasabha. It said:

Congress and League circles are both favourably impressed and the disruptive criticism coming from the dovecotes of the Hindu Sabha, the Proja Party and the Forward Bloc is not finding the public response they expected. The general feeling among the people at large is that a great turning point is at hand. Thus, the party took upon itself to attack any opposition to the CR formula and labelled it as 'Hindu Mahasabhite' or Hindu communal opposition. The party constantly dubbed Kiron Shankar Roy's criticism of the CR Formula as evidence of his closure of ranks with Hindu Mahasabha and Syama Prasad Mookerjee. It emphasised the isolated stand of Kiron Shankar Roy in this regard.

---

81 Ibid.
82 Ibid.
In a lead article, Nikhil Chakravarty wrote about the overwhelming support that Gandhi's formula was receiving from all quarters and especially from among the Congressmen. It also suggested that the anti-Rajaji Formula stand was not that of the Congressmen but that of the "Official Congressmen" who had been in unholy alliance with the Hindu Mahasabha. However, the correspondent also tried to show how some of the groups of the official Congress were criticising the stand taken by Kiron Shankar Roy. The Nirmok group of Hooghly, he continued, in one of their meeting on 23 July declared "complete agreement with the recent writings and utterances of Mahatma Gandhi". Similarly, the Congress workers in Burra Bazar, it reported, met on 23 July and "accepted the solution of the present stalemate offered by Mahatma and Rajaji".

Communist Party now declared Kiron Shankar Roy's criticism of the CR formula as unrepresentative, and instead tried to show how there was a genuine mass support for the move and how Kiron Shankar Roy had been criticised from different quarters.

---

83 Ibid., 6 Aug. 1944, p. 3.
84 Ibid. He wrote:
But the trouble is not with Congressmen, but with the official leadership of the Congress... But one year of unholy alliance with Shyamaprosad (sic) has made them too weak, they cannot leave him.
Their neutrality and inactivity has, however, only encouraged the Boseite Press and leaders to intensify their anti-Gandhi campaign and become more disruptive, provocative and communal day by day... The campaign terrorised Kiron Shankar to line up behind this Forward Bloc-Hindu Sabha cry against Gandhi and unfortunately got from him this statement, published on 30th July: "It is understood that a large number of Congress leaders and workers including some members of the AICC belonging to Calcutta and the Mofussil recently met" where it is felt that Rajaji's formula meant the vivisection of India and partitioning of Bengal and therefore was unacceptable.
Further, the principle underlying the formula ran counter to the last resolution passed by the AICC on the subject.

86 Ibid.
including Gandhians like Satish Chandra Dasgupta. The Muslim League resolutions and the district leaders' support to the Rajaji formula, and Gandhi's approval of Bengal's support to the move was also highlighted.

The Party, by attacking all opposition to the CR formula as communal opposition, in fact, helped narrowing down the differences between the communal opposition to the idea of Pakistan and the non-communal opposition to it. Any opposition to the idea of Partition was criticised and declared as absurd. Writing on the absurdity of the fear of Partition, Somnath Lahiry said:

> There is nothing inconsistent in fighting partition forty years ago and recognising Pakistan today. Then it was fighting against the Government, today also recognition of Pakistan is to unite our people to fight against the Government. I would rather live in a free Pakistan than in an enslaved Hindustan. (sic)

Once this line of argument was accepted, it became extremely difficult to differentiate between the logic behind the Congress' support of the partition of Bengal and that of the Mahasabha's in 1947.

The Party workers also assisted the Rajshahi District Muslim League to organise a Pakistan conference in 1944, in which Abul Hashim, who was touring the province on his mission to strengthen the League participated. Talking on the Gandhi-Jinnah meet, Hashim reciprocated the help now by clothing his ideas on Pakistan in a language which only the communist leaders mastered in giving shape to their utterings on Pakistan. Gandhi-Jinnah meeting was described as not just a meeting between two leaders but, "... the joining hands of forty crores of Hindus and Muslims." Hashim, said:

---

87 Ibid., 6 Aug. 1944, p. 3.

88 See, ibid., 23 July 1944, p. 1; 6 Aug. 1944, p. 3; 13 Aug. 1944, p. 3.

89 See, ibid., 27 Aug. 1944, p. 5.
Some say that Gandhiji’s recognition of the right to self-determination is a defeat for him at Mr. Jinnah’s hands, but it is not so; the real defeat is for imperialism. And his acceptance of the right is the biggest guarantee of Indian unity.90

The party likened the CR formula and Gandhi-Jinnah meeting and the attempt to come to an agreement with the Muslim League to its own National Unity line for which it had been campaigning for some time. What was missed out in their espousal of the CR Formula and the Gandhi-Jinnah meeting was Gandhi’s resistance to the ‘two nation theory’. On the other hand, the Communist slogan of national unity had by now got mixed up with its support to the Muslim League’s demand for recognition of a separate Muslim nation. Thus, the two positions were totally opposed to each other. The political imperative had forced the Communist Party to recognise a communal demand as a national one. It not only supported the demand but campaigned for it too.

With the German attack on the Soviet Union - "the prime determinant of world Communist policy" - the tactical orientation of the Communist Party faced a fresh crisis.91 The Indian Communist party, for which the war till now was the ‘imperialists’ war, a change of policy became imperative in the changed scenario. The party effected a policy change by the end of 1941 and declared the war as a People’s war.92 To implement

90 Ibid.
92 See, ibid., pp.171-221 for a detailed discussion on the ‘Imperialist war line’ as well as ‘People’s war line’ of the Communist Party of India. An official reading of the change in the Party line was presented by an Intelligence Officer in these words:

The most important matter to consider in relation to the CPI is its change of policy towards the War. Before Russia was invaded, and when Russia was looked down upon as an ally of Germany, the war was held to be an imperialist war the prosecution of which had to be impeded. After Russia was invaded by Germany and became an ally of Great Britain the Party persuaded itself that it could and should support Russia’s war effort without supporting Britain. In December before Japan’s entry into the war, a change of policy was decided upon, although not announced.... The new policy is described in the Party Letter No. 54 dated 1st December from the Central Committee.... The letter says “We went wrong because our blind bourgeoisie nationalist hatred of British imperialist Government prevented us from grasping the simple fact
this People's war line, it had to call for National Unity for national defence and national government, and "its tactical implementation" pushed the party to call for Congress League unity, i.e., embodying what the party called national unity.93 This line required the party to define the League afresh, which it did by calling it "the premier political organisation of the second largest community of our country".94 This new definition demoted the Congress to a position on par with the League, and it was demanded that there should be co-operation between these two parties.

The Party, therefore, conceded the communal basis of Indian politics' by demoting Congress to a position of parity with the League. Joshi constantly reminded the Congress that the latter had some responsibility towards the League and the former cannot simply shrug off the League as just a reactionary party. It was, according to him, this attitude of the Congress which made for the communal disunity in the country. The Congress must therefore, the logic followed, boldly concede the sectional demand of the Muslim League, he declared - presumably signifying that the Congress must accept the League's demand based on the Lahore resolution of 1940.

In the event of 'People's War' the imperative for unity increased because it would not only solve the Indian problem but would not impede or hamper the war efforts. Thus, one of the first steps towards this unity was that the Congress should form joint Ministries with the League in various provinces.


94 Joshi, P. C., The Indian Communist Party, as cited in Overstreet, Gene, and Windmiller, op. cit., p. 201.
It was precisely at this juncture that Bengal and the Communist activities there became quite significant. This was because Bengal was closer to the war zone, and the so-called war efforts as well as the Communist presence were more significant here compared to other provinces.

The Party had been passing through a very critical situation in the Province. It had alienated almost all political forces, except to some extent the Muslim League, though the Communists were anathema to the latter's leadership.

The Communist attacks on Subhash Chandra Bose and the politics of the Forward Bloc since the days of the Ramgarh session of the National Congress constituted a prominent feature of the political life of the province. The Congress Socialists, who had some followers in Calcutta, and especially among the peasant leaders of Noakhali, Tippera and Chittagong were also bitterly opposed. Communist efforts to increase its membership among the students also did not come through. Attacks, often physical and violent, on the Communists, and counter attacks by the latter on other groups were repeatedly reported. To compound problems the outlaw status of the Party had its own problems.

---

95 For the political line which justified the Party's attack on Bose before 1941, see Adhikary, G., Ramgarh: A “Review” and Evaluation, People's Book House, Bombay, 1940; Joshi, P. C., Whom, How & Why does Bose fight, People's Book House, Bombay, 1940. The German attack on the Soviet Union and Bose's close association with Japan provided the Party with a different justification for its attack on the Forward Bloc.

96 Though the Congress Socialists were of no major significance except for some labour leaders like Sibnath Bannerjee and some followers in Noakhali, Chittagong and Tippera, the active role that they played during the Quit India Movement made some of their leaders like Lohia and Jayaprakash popular in Bengal. The constant communication between the Congress Socialists and the Congress leaders like Ananda Choudhury and Kiron Shankar Roy provided the Party with links, fresh enough to begin their operation in the post-Quit India Movement Bengal. See 'Review', March 1943, File No. SS-II, _op. cit._, p. 33.

Given this situation, it was natural that the party would attract the ire of a substantial section of population. The situation was further complicated by the advance of Japan's forces in the Eastern sector. Reception of the new Party line by the beleaguered Communists in the province was crucial. Some senior leaders, while not seeing eye to eye with the Central Committee, decided to follow its lead.\textsuperscript{98} For the younger members of the Party, however, the change meant that the "abandoning of bitter hostility to the British" would rob their "brand of communism of its chief attraction".\textsuperscript{99} In fact, one of the report said that Ganesh Ghosh and Ananta Singh of the Chittagong Armoury Raid fame, and other convicts in the Alipore Central Jail who had joined the CPI were bewildered by the change of policy and were thinking of "returning to the Jugantar Party".\textsuperscript{100}

Its predicament was heightened by its policy of equating Muslim League with the Congress, and by its decision to support the League demands. Soon, the Party's opposition to the Quit India Movement added to its discomfiture. The extreme sectarian attitude of the members towards all those who opposed the war and showed an anti-imperialist inclination and undertook anti-colonial activities resulted in more trouble for the Party members in the Province.\textsuperscript{101} These factors accounted for the stagnation of the Party in the Province. The members were aware of this and, in fact, complained that their

\textsuperscript{98} 'Review', 29 Jan. 1942, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 7-8.

\textsuperscript{99} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 8.

\textsuperscript{100} \textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{101} Branding of anybody opposing the Government as 'Fifth Columnists' reached such a ludicrous extent that even a "procession led by young students and some poor men under a socialist person was prevented by the party members owing to the concern that they would clash with the police". See, Sen, Manikuntala, \textit{Sediner Katha} (Tales of those days), Calcutta, 1989, p. 61.
"pronouncements on the subject of 'self-determination' have incurred the displeasure of the local Hindu Mahasabha".¹⁰²

Notwithstanding these problems, the party seemed to be enthusiastic about capturing political space, aided by the absence of the Congress. At the all India level too, the year 1943 was significant. The principal events were the All India Congress of the Party which was held in Bombay from May 23 to June 1st, and the dissolution of the Comintern on June 10th.¹⁰³ Sessions of the All India Kisan Sabha at Bhakhna in the Punjab in April, and the All India Trade Union Congress at Nagpur in May were also important for the Communists as the Party scored some successes.¹⁰⁴

Absence of most of the labour leaders who were in jail provided the Party with the opportunity to embark on its membership and union drive.¹⁰⁵ Taking advantage of Suresh Banerjee's detention in jail, it was able to extend its hold over the electrical workers in Calcutta and 24 Parganas; and it came to control the Calcutta Electrical Supply Corporation Mazdur Union with a membership of about 1,100 electric workers.¹⁰⁶ It succeeded in establishing control over the employees of public utility and transport services in Calcutta, particularly the Tramway Gas and Corporation workers, and by intervening in the bus strike in June was able to bring the bus drivers' union under its control. It also extended its influence over the engineering workers in the Entally,
Ballygunge and Kidderpore areas in Calcutta and in several metal factories in Howrah.\shortcite{107}

In May and June the party launched a campaign in the jute mill area to protest against the decision to close down some of the mills and for the redressal of the grievances of the Jute workers.\shortcite{108} When some factories in Dacca faced closure due to shortage of coal, the party workers organised themselves and brought "thousands of maunds of wood in exchange for coal so that the boilers in the factories remain in operation".\shortcite{109} The Party was also active among the textile and hosiery workers of 24 Parganas, Howrah, Hoooghly, Kushtia Nadia and Dacca districts.\shortcite{110}

A railway faction was also organised with Jyoti Basu as Secretary. He was "touring extensively in Bengal to increase the membership of the Bengal and Assam Railway Workers' Union".\shortcite{111} The efforts, it was reported, resulted in an increase of membership which exceeded 4,000, spread over Calcutta, Kanchrapara, Dacca, Mymensingh, Saidpur (Rangpur), and Assam.\shortcite{112} His efforts to effect an amalgamation of the Bengal and Assam Railway Workers Union, and the Bengal and Assam Railroad workers union, a rival union controlled by Birendra Das Gupta, an ex-detenu, however met with no success.\shortcite{113}

\begin{itemize}
  \item \shortcite{107} Ibid.
  \item \shortcite{108} Ibid.
  \item \shortcite{110} Ibid., pp. 67-77.
  \item \shortcite{111} 'Review', 14 October 1943, *op. cit.* File No. SS II, p. 88.
  \item \shortcite{112} Ibid.
  \item \shortcite{113} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
The Party appointed Indrajit Gupta as the Secretary of its trade union faction. Owing, however, to the opposition of the rival trade unionists under the influence of Dr. Suresh Bannerjee, Shibnath Bannerjee, A. M. A. Zaman, Aftab Ali, and other small groups, the Party was not very successful in establishing undisputed command in this sphere.\textsuperscript{114} In the newly elected executive of the BPTUC in 1943, it was able to capture only 9 out of 34 seats but it became the biggest single group.\textsuperscript{115} The Party generally exercised a steadying influence in the labour field and was not reported to have fomented any strikes during the period.\textsuperscript{116} When strikes did occur, however, members mediated so that production was not held up.\textsuperscript{117}

On the peasant front, Annual District Krishak Conferences were held in quick succession in the districts of Burdwan, Jessore, Tippera, Bankura, Bogra, Jalpaiguri, 24 Parganas, Howrah, Dacca, Noakhali, Bakergunj, and Rangpur, in February 1943.\textsuperscript{118} The Annual conference of the Bengal Provincial Kisan Sabha at Nalitabari (Mymensingh) was

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{115} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{116} Chakraborty, Jnan, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 65-77. Presenting the report of the Trade Union front to the Provincial Conference in Calcutta, Abdul Momin said:

> Without our effort citizens of Calcutta would have been without electricity and water... Most of the factories would have been closed, and administration immobile....

> We helped Calcutta from not turning into Rangun by keeping the Factories open.


\textsuperscript{117} Ibid. Even the Government report agreed on this fact. Writing to the Provincial Governments, Richard Tottenham, the Secretary to the Government of India, wrote:

> The Party has made every effort to extend its influence with labour, though it is doubtful whether any great success has been achieved... certainly the Party’s claims are exaggerated. Such influence as the party has with labour appears generally to have been exercised in the direction of opposing or minimising the effect of strikes... and it seems probable that cases in which local communists have supported strikes were generally due to irresponsibility and lack of Party discipline.


attended by about 5,000 persons including 500 women and local Garo and Hajong peasants. It was reported that a large number of volunteers of both sexes, including Krishak volunteers wearing red caps and carrying small lathis, guarded the Pandal and formed a guard of Honour. The absence of Muslim peasants was noteworthy. Peasant rallies and Hunger Marches were organised at times, and enrolment of Krishak members and the formation of union and subdivisional Krishak samities was reported from all districts. A Kisan Week was held in the first week of March to enlist primary Krishak members, and a 'grow more food' campaign was organised in the first week of July. Bankim Mukherjee was elected President of the All India Kisan Sabha at the annual conference at Bhakhna (Punjab) in the first week of April.

The Bengal Student Federation, with its Head Quarters in Calcutta and branches in all districts (excepting Darjeeling), was the mouthpiece of the party on the students' front. Little headway was made in this sphere probably owing to two factors, viz., (i) opposition of the rival revolutionary groups, and (ii) general indifference of the public towards the type of propaganda indulged in by its members and supporters. In the heat of the excitement and disturbances that followed the 9th August arrests the previous year, Communist propaganda went unheeded by the student community, and the BPSF seemed on the verge of a collapse. The opposition was considerable, and clashes and fights between its members and supporters and their rivals almost became a permanent feature at meetings and conferences of the students.

The District Students' Conference in Chittagong in April was attended by about 1,250 persons, including 750 students, of whom 10% were Muslims. "It seems", an


120 *Ibid.*, p. 89. Apart from notable exceptions, Muslim participation in the Quit India Movement was negligible. See *ibid.*, 20 Aug. 1943.
official report suggested, "that some hold has been established as a result of fostering friendly relations with Muslim League." Biswanath Mukherjee presided over the Provincial Annual Conference of the BPSF at Rajshahi in August and about 300 delegates from Calcutta and other districts attended. The shouting of slogans condemning Subhas Bose and Forward Bloc provoked hostility from the anti-Communist elements and the delegates camp was attacked with brickbats. Later, a free fight took place between members of opposing groups at another Communist camp outside the town resulting in injuries to both sides.

Thus, we have seen that the Party remained alive despite the odds working against it, and the members steadfastly held on to the belief which was more often passed on to them by the collective understanding of the Central party leadership. According to the Provincial Intelligence report in April, the total membership in 465 cells (excluding Midnapur and Bankura) was 2,972. The "class composition" of this membership according to sources was: 248 workers, 476 kisans, 329 students and 172 women. (The figure however excluded the districts of Bankura, Dacca, Midnapur, Howrah, Birbhum, Comilla and Assam.) However, the number of party members and activists on 1st January stood only at 1,110 and 2,000 respectively, and the number of whole-timers was only 549 on 1st January, and 695 on 14 October 1943.

121 Ibid., p. 88.
122 ‘Review’, op. cit., p. 89.
123 Ibid., p. 88.
124 The Party, however, provided a membership figure of 4,400 members at the end of December 1942 which was an obvious exaggeration. See Mukherjee, Saroj, Communist Party O Amra, Vol. II, National Book Agency, Cal., 1993, p. 149. By 1943, the CPI claimed to have altogether 2,637 "whole timers" - full time salaried functionaries. See Party Letter, III, 8 June 1943, p. 3.
A provincial Party letter, noticed in May by the Intelligence authorities,\(^\text{125}\) gave the party strength as it existed then:

| Party members ---- | 4,681 including 592 workers, 1059 peasants, 674 students, and 383 women. |
| WholeTimers ---- | 867, and paid workers 584. |
| Trade Union members --- | 37,015 (including Assam and Surma Valley). |
| Student Federation members-- | 20,815 (Bengal 18,115, Assam and Surma Valley 2,264). |
| Women's Self Defence Committee-- | 23,480 (Bengal 22,780 and Surma Valley 700). |

It is clear, therefore, that the party was conscious about the low level of its membership, and it was at this time that the famine introduced itself as an opportunity for the party to increase its membership.\(^\text{126}\)

The implementation of the party's policies in Bengal took place in the political context of the assumption of the Muslim League Ministry. The Party criticised any attack on the newly appointed Nazimuddin Ministry, because it felt that that this would jeopardise the efforts to solve the food situation. Hence, instead of criticising the Muslim League, it argued that other parties should join the Ministry because only in this way could the vital problems of the people be solved. Bhowani Sen wrote in People's War:

All the groups composing the Progressive Coalition Party are busy working up popular sentiment against Nazimuddin Ministry instead of considering the people's vital problems like food and working out means to achieve unity. 'If there is no united Ministry, the blame belongs to the League, so now all unite against the League' - such is the meaning of the agitation carried on by Mahasabhaites, Krishak Proja Party, and the Boseite men. Meanwhile they do not bother about food, A. R. P. and civil liberties.\(^\text{127}\)

---

\(^{125}\) 'Review', op. cit., p. 89.

\(^{126}\) The officials also commented on this characteristic of the Communists' Behaviour. "It is clear that during the period under review, the Communists' principal preoccupation has been to increase the strength of their Party." Tottenham, Richard, Secretary to the Government of India, to Provincial Governments, 23 September 1943, Policy towards Communist Party, Government of India, Home Political, File No. F-7/23/43.

\(^{127}\) People's War, Bom., 9 May 1943, p. 5.
With the onslaught of the famine and more particularly with the assumption of the Ministry by the Muslim League, the Communist Party demonstrated, as the officials noted, a "sobered down attitude". This meant that the Party no longer spouted anti-imperialist slogans as it used to before the adoption of the People's War line. It favoured the food policy of the Ministry and concentrated its energies on activities like hunger marches against hoarders, etc., relief operations and organising ration shops.

In Rajshahi division, it organised the Krishak Samities to demand for paddy seeds and suspension of repayment of agricultural loans, and to protest against high prices. Food Committees of CPI took up rationing in Chittagong. Even before the dismissal of the Huq Ministry, the Party organised a demonstration before the Assembly on 17 March, where "some thousands of women converged with demands for rice". The Party workers took up relief work honestly, but at the same time tried to increase their membership earnestly. In Dacca, Mymensingh, Burdwan, Chittagong, Rajshahi, Faridpur, Calcutta and other districts, the Communist workers opened gruel kitchens, organised medical relief centres and distributed milk for children.

Jnan Chakravarty, who was then Secretary of the Dacca district branch, has provided graphic details of the efforts by the party volunteers like Jiten Ghosh who led

---


Recently, however, famine conditions have had a sobering effect, and several party circulars and letters contain injunctions against provocative speeches calculated merely to expose and embarrass the Government. The Party seems to have realised that the time wasted in a fruitless crusade against the Government could have been more profitably employed on relief work in cooperation with the Government.

Ibid., p. 81.

129 FR, April first half, 1943, File No. 18/4/1943. Govt. of India, Home Political. See also the People's War, 11 April 1943, p. 4.

130 Ibid.

131 FR, March first half, 1943, op. cit., File No. 18/3/43.
the party workers to Barisal in small boats to bring rice to Vikrampur, as rice at Barisal at that time did not cost more than Rs. 30 a maund. Similarly, a group of volunteers under the leadership of Ananda Pal brought rice to the northern part of Dacca. Samar Ghosh and Pramatha Nandi led relief workers to the villages of Manickgunj sub-division.132

In Rangpur, especially in Nilphamari sub-division, Communist workers at Kurigram displayed special organising capabilities by opening ration shops, medical relief centres, etc.133 Though the hills of Mymensingh were not affected as badly as the other areas, Communist workers opened gruel kitchen there.134

The dedication of the Party workers, its newly organised cultural front - Indian Peoples' Theatre Association - and the women's organisations helped to popularise the party, and regain some of its lost ground.135 The period of famine, therefore, worked as the phase of rehabilitation of the Party.136 This was reflected to a great extent, in

132 Chakraborty, Jnan, op. cit., p. 65.
133 Mukhopadhyay, Sudhir and Ghosh, Nripen, Rangpur Jelar Krishak Andolaner Itihas O Party (History of the Peasant Movement in Rangpur District and the Party), CPI (M), Hooghly, 1985, p. 74.
136 Retrospectively, most of the Communist leaders accept the fact that it was the famine that rehabilitated the Party.

The Famine of 1943 came to us as a blessing of God. We tried to bring closer even the demoralised Congress minded students, through our relief works. One has to keep in mind one situation - we were practically alone. We wanted to serve the people - wanted to free the country - but we fell in the wrong side. We, then, could remain close to the people only through our relief works.

increased membership figures.\textsuperscript{137} Even though it is difficult to ascertain the real membership of the Party because of the tendency to inflate the numbers, it did gain a lot of ground during this period. The repeated official concern and suspicion of the Party indicated this growing influence.\textsuperscript{138}

According to the Party, "Imperialist policy led to the famine, the imperialist bureaucrats can't fight it. The hoarder is almighty and corrupt officials in key strategic posts guard him".\textsuperscript{139} Regarding the food crisis it began criticising the bureaucracy, and the hoarders and profiteers. But the need to adjust to the new tactical Party line forced it to gradually shun its "Left Nationalist deviation" of attacking the colonial power with all its strength, and while its criticism of, and agitation against, the hoarders became stronger, its criticism of the bureaucracy became milder.\textsuperscript{140} Finally, the hoarders and proprietors became the paramount concern, and the realisation dawned that these had to be checked by a united Ministry.

Therefore, the political crisis for the Party was due to this lack of a united Ministry. It said:

The Muslim League Ministry began very well. It had supported the resolution for the release of the Congress leaders and for Congress-League unity. It had offered very good terms to Dr. Shyamaprosad for a Coalition Ministry which he found unexceptionable except that Huq could not be in the Ministry. Sir Nazimuddin was everi prepared to take in Huq but Jinnah did not allow it. Dr. Shyamaprosad however wanted to stick to his alliance with Huq who did not represent the Muslim masses and would not go into a Coalition with the League which did represent them. (italics mine)\textsuperscript{141}


\textsuperscript{138} FR, March first half, Govt. of India, \textit{Home Political}, File No. 18/3/43.


\textsuperscript{140} Tottenham, Richard, Secretary to the Government of India, to the Provincial Governments, 28 September 1943, Govt. of India, \textit{Home Political}, File No. F-7/23/43, p. 14.

\textsuperscript{141} \textit{Ibid.}
This shows the compromising stand taken by the Party. The results of the above mentioned crisis, the Party thought, was calamitous for Bengal, as its political leaders. "having failed to unite to get people food, became puppets in the hands of their own section of hoarders and began factional wars to bring each other down".142

The Party in forwarding this idea scrupulously maintained equidistance from the Congress and the Muslim League. Thus, while the Muslim League was supported by the Muslim hoarders, Hindu Mahasabha and Fazlul Huq were supported by the Hindu hoarders.143 This understanding led to a corresponding political line for the Party. "My political thesis", wrote Joshi, "is that the acute political factionalism in Bengal is the struggle between the minority and majority hoarder to have supreme control over the ministry in its own selfish and sectional interests. Bengal is starving because Bengal's own patriots are not uniting to get the people food but playing into the hands of their own hoarders".144

In the Bombay Party convention, the Party tried to correct its 'Nationalist deviation' by toning down its criticism against the colonial authorities.145 Secondly, this clearly reflected its Unity line and its exhortations for a successful war effort, and therefore, its support to the Ministry. This became evident from the Party's relief efforts

142 Ibid.
143 Ibid.
144 Ibid.
145 The Political Resolution passed in the Bombay Convention examined the attitude of the Party towards the National leadership. An official report says:
The most serious shortcoming is described as a "left Nationalist deviation" (the emphasis seems to be on the word nationalist) which led the Communists to concentrate on "wordy abuse" of the bureaucracy while neglecting to expose the "negative and defeatist" policy of the national leadership.
too, which were enmeshed in its political line. After the Muslim League assumed office on 24 April, the Party began criticising any move to destabilise the political equation.146

The favourable attitude that it had towards the Muslim League forced it to ask for a tranquil political balance. Was it because of the fact that in its efforts to penetrate the Muslim masses, it thought it should first befriend the Muslim League?147 In Dacca, Mymensingh, Barisal, Rangpur, and Faridpur its equidistance from the League and the Congress was remarkable, though in many places, such as the Rajshahi Division, the Communist members identified themselves with the Congress.148

With this political tone of the Party vis-à-vis other parties, it supported the idea of self-determination. It was happy to see Abul Hashim speaking its own language. In the Rajshahi Pakistan Conference, Abul Hashim said:

Some Hindus want a Ram Raj and some Muslims dream of conquering the whole of India. Both are committing grave blunders. We shall unite India on the basis of self-determination and develop international brotherhood....149

---

144 'Fratricidal War on Bengal Front', People’s War, Bom., 9 May 1943, p. 5.

147 Communist Survey, July-October, 1943, Govt. of India, Home Political, File No. F-7 23/II, p. 18.

The Party's relations with the Muslim League were discussed at considerable length in the Central Committee and agreement was reached on the desirability of increasing the party's Muslim membership (which is less than 5 per cent) and of encouraging Communists to join the League ostensibly to enable the party to bring Congress and the Muslim League together and to stimulate an alleged "anti-imperialist awakening" in the Muslim masses as well as to foster a "progressive democratic trend" which the Communists profess to discern in Jinnah's leadership. As a first step in this direction the Urdu edition of the "People's War" is to be specially written in future for the consumption of the Muslim "Patriots", instead of being a mere replica of the English edition.

This urge for closer relationship with the Muslim League is the logical, if somewhat belated outcome of the unity campaign now over a year old.

Ibid.

148 FR, April second half, 1943, op. cit., File No. 18/4/43.

149 People's War, Bom., 26 March 1943, p. 4.
This was how the League leader spoke the Communist Party's language. For this Conference, the Communists in the district "carried on a systematic campaign through leaflets, posters and discussion".\textsuperscript{150} Abul Hashim's speech indicated the extent of the Communist influence over him which resulted in his presenting a different logic behind his idea of Pakistan when compared with the other leaders of the League.\textsuperscript{151} He said:

Pakistan is not a communal demand. It is the concrete image of free India. The territorial units where Muslims are in a majority should have the right of self-determination - this is the demand not of Muslims alone, but of all freedom loving nations of India."\textsuperscript{152}

This was the logic which the Communist Party constantly harped on, in its unity campaign. This had, further, become the basis on which it supported the CR formula, which while validating its own point on unity, took the air out of its unity campaign.\textsuperscript{153} Once the CR formula was published, the Party went all out to support it. While the formula and Gandhi's subsequent meeting with Jinnah brought a new factor into the politics of Bengal, the Party which hitherto had campaigned for 'self-determination' and Pakistan, now saw to it that the CR formula was given over-all approval.\textsuperscript{154}

\textsuperscript{150} Ibid.

Abul Hashim accepted that he was close to the Communists, but at the same time he repeatedly refuted the charge that he was giving a Communist turn to the Muslim League. He said that he was giving rather a true Islamic orientation to the Party. See Hashim, Abul, \textit{op. cit.}, pp.48,59,63.

\textsuperscript{151} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{152} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{153} See, Tottenham, Richard, Secretary to the Government of India, to the Provincial Governments, 28 September 1943, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 13:
With the Immediate Political Future in India as a whole so indefinite, it is probably idle to attempt anything in the nature of a forecast of future Communist Policy. One fact seems to me stand out, however, and that is that with the end of the War, they are going to have to find some positive platform to replace the present one, in which most of the planks are falling out - "Support the War" rapidly becoming meaningless, "Unity Campaign" their thunder stolen by CR plan, "food" fading out, we hope. (Italics mine)

\textsuperscript{154} The Party organs criticised any attack or criticism of the CR formula by anybody or any party. See the issues of \textit{People's War}, Bombay, July-Aug., 1943.
As we have already seen, apprehensions of a section of the population, as expressed by Kiran Shankar Roy as well as the entire Hindu Mahasabha, were dubbed by the party as only a Hindu communal reaction to the unity move of Gandhi. Nikhil Chakravarty, the young Communist, went to the extent of claiming, "If you look at the Bengal Press the impression given is that the whole Hindu Bengal is ranged against Gandhiji's formula for Congress-League unity. In reality, nothing can be further from the truth."  

On the other hand, the party took upon itself the charge of collecting the Muslim Press's opinion, which it found supportive of the formula. It said: "The entire Bengal delegation of the League Council is in favour of a settlement". What the party repeatedly tried to forget was that the Rajaji formula had, in fact, given shape to the Lahore resolution and that it was quite natural for the Muslim League to be favourable to any step towards providing legitimacy to the League demands— the legitimacy to the idea of Pakistan, and the representative status of Jinnah.

Then again, by ignoring the opposition of the non-Mahasabha forces to the formula, such as Kiron Shankar Roy, the Party was labelling the entire opposition to the CR formula as a Hindu communal reaction. It helped in validating the Muslim League's assertion that the Congress opposition to the Pakistan demand was nothing but a Hindu opposition to the just demand of the Muslims, i.e., Pakistan. Therefore, by its own logic the Communist Party not only supported the League demand but also accused the Nationalists of siding with the Hindu communalists by opposing 'Muslim Nationalism'.

---

155 Ibid., 6 Aug. 1944, p. 3; 13 Aug., p. 1; 20 Aug., pp. 1, 9; 27 Aug., p. 5; 3 Sept., pp. 1, 3.
156 Ibid., 6 Aug. 1944, p. 3.
157 Ibid., 27 Aug. 1944, p. 5.
This legitimised Muslim communalism, on the one hand, while reducing the space for nationalist opposition to the former, on the other. From July 1944 onwards, when the CR formula became public, and opinions of different parties began to crystallise, the Communist Party began to attack the opposing views. Meetings of the Hindu Mahasabha were disrupted in Calcutta when they did not allow Syama Prasad to speak at a meeting in the University Institute in July itself, while reports of creating obstructions in other meetings also poured in at Faridpur, etc. By constantly focusing its attack on Syama Prasad Mookerjee for opposing the formula, the Party indirectly helped to make him the focal point of the opposition to the idea of Pakistan and forces of the Muslim League:

He pleads for mobilisation of "Nationalist forces... irrespective of party policies." What Shyamaprosad Babu wants is Congress-Hindu Sabha unity on the basis of "complete independence and full and fair protection of minority rights". In other words, he wants Congress-Hindu Mahasabha unity to deny the Muslim nationalities their just right of self-determination, to sabotage Congress-League unity; the result being to perpetuate the deadlock and keep the British on the top for ever. The cry is: Do not sacrifice Bengal. But the plain meaning is: Congress-Mahasabha unity to bolster up Hindu vested interests in Bengal with British aid against the Muslims, the result being that India remains divided and enslaved.

Party workers such as the district Secretary, Abani Bagchi, Sudhir Mukherjee and others played a significant role in the Congress Workers' Conference convened by the Rangpur District Congress President, Maulvi Mahiuddin Khan. The major issue, one participant wrote, was the resolution on creation of national unity through self-

---

158 FR, July second half, op. cit. File No. 18/7/44.
159 Rajendra Nath Sen, Secretary, District Hindu Mahasabha, Faridpur to S. P. Mookerjee, 14 August 1944, ibid., pp. 233-4.
160 'Why the Mahasabha opposes Gandhi', ibid., 3 Sept. 1944, p. 3.
determination. He added, "... Except Communists, most of the workers strongly opposed the resolution." A significant fact comes out of this report, i.e., that leaders like Abu Hossain Sarkar who was known for his anti-Muslim League stand, and leading Congress leader of the District, Daulatayesha Khatun, supported the resolution.

From the standpoint of communal polarisation, the heat generated by the CR formula proved to be crucial. It heightened, as we have seen, apprehensions about a possible Partition. It not only demonstrated the fact that the top Congress leaders were also now in a mood to give in to the League demand, it also raised the status of Jinnah. This proved very significant so far as Bengal politics was concerned. The Pakistan Movement in the Province now had Jinnah as its focus. This had wider ramifications for the communal question, and the subsequent violence that the Province witnessed.

The Communist Party abetted these fears in Bengal and, what was more, it contributed to the narrowing down of the differences between the nationalist and communal opposition to Pakistan in the public eye.

The Gandhi-Jinnah meeting was a god-send to the Communist Party as the meeting, from the Party's point of view, represented the climax of the national unity move. The agenda before the Gandhi-Jinnah meeting was not about the procedure but the fundamental principles of the problem of the building of national unity for national salvation.

---

162 Ibid.
163 Ibid., p. 73.
However, the subsequent failure of the talks, for the Communists, was caused by the less than generous stand taken by Gandhi, who did not consider the demand for Pakistan as a genuine demand for self-determination, but regarded it as a lesser evil. Thus, the Congress was made responsible for not adequately recognising the democratic essence of the Pakistan demand. Hence, the Party through its actions and rhetoric, which also aimed at increasing its presence among the Muslim masses, legitimised the communal demand of the Muslim League.

These developments took place at a time when the mobilisation campaign of Abul Hashim was being carried on. While he was trying to present the Muslim League as an Islamic party which had Communist ideals, the Communist party saw the Muslim League as a progressive party. This, in the final analysis, probably harmed the Communist party itself as the radical Muslim youth and students would now rather join the League than the CPI to satisfy their progressive political urges.

Thus, the Communist party, by legitimising the Muslim League as a progressive democratic party, was fast losing what could have been a very fertile ground for its own penetration among the people. While its legitimisation of the Muslim League gave credence to the Muslim leadership's radical posture, its constant defence of the Muslim League positions made it lose its moral ground to oppose Hindu communalism.

Ibid.