After the proclamation of emergency the political situation in the country underwent a basic transformation. In order to meet the challenge of the new situation, the opposition parties including the Congress(0), were compelled to basically change their roles. So long, they had acted simply as election machines; now, they were to play the role of militant agitators.

Role-changing is itself a difficult process. It becomes much more difficult when a new role is imposed upon one against one's own will. It takes a long time for one to perceive the new role requirements and act accordingly. What is true of an individual in the sphere of role acting is also true of a group or a political party. Therefore, a pretty long time elapsed after the proclamation of the emergency when the Congress(0) in West Bengal could fit itself in its new role of an agitational group. Basically, the Congress(0) had been an election-machine and in spite of its election reverses since 1971, the party had never seriously thought of taking to agitational politics. The state Congress(0) leaders, during 1972-1974 used to express their apprehension that "Politically the country is heading towards dictatorship, giving a go-by to all democratic means," but they

had never foreseen the numerous official and non-official restrictions upon opposition political activity which were imposed during the emergency.

A few minutes before the midnight of 25 June 1975, the President of India proclaimed the internal emergency and in an early morning swoop the government arrested the prominent opposition leaders including Jayaprakash. The government also imposed pre-censorship of news on the same day. Mrs. Gandhi was thoroughly efficient in her new role of an authoritarian. But the entire opposition was taken by surprise. The immediate impact of the proclamation upon them was one of dazed stupor.

**First Reaction Against The Emergency**  
The West Bengal Congress(O) did not evidently possess the required capabilities of launching a mass agitation against the emergency in a big way. The state Congress(O) leader, P.C.Sen, took the easiest means of registering a protest. Sen was the chairman of the NNS. On 26 June, the NNS turned itself into *Jana Sangharsha Samiti* (Peoples' Struggle Committee) by a resolution adopted at an emergency meeting in Calcutta. As chairman of the JSS, Sen announced a public meeting to be held at the Calcutta maidan on 27 June, knowing fully well (and perhaps also hoping) that violation of the prohibitory orders on meetings and processions would entail his arrest and detention.

But the Congress government of West Bengal did not extend to the Congress(O) leaders the honour of such political adversaries who need be detained. The police dispersed the crowd that had assembled at the Maidan on 27 June afternoon; arrested P.C.Sen,
IP.C.Chunder, took them to their residences and released them.
The few other demonstrators who had been arrested at the Maidan
were also released after a few hours. Nothing came out in the
newspapers next day and it seemed as if West Bengal did not
react at all against the imposition of the emergency.

The Role of the CPI(M) The leftist parties, particularly, the
biggest of them, the CPI(M), did not also launch any agitation.
Since 1973, the CPI(M) was languishing in a "political exile",
so to say, because of the alleged fascistic onslaughts upon its
ranks undertaken by the youth wing of the ruling party. When the
emergency was imposed, the CPI(M) apprehended a greater danger to
its existence and therefore adopted an innocuous role of total
non-performance. This fact is corroborated by a secret
intelligence report quoted in his memoirs written by the P.A. to
the then chief minister. He writes:

A secret report dated 26.6.75 from Intelligence Branch
reflected the mood of the CPI(M) and left parties sequel
to the declaration of Internal Emergency. The report
states as follows: "...In the context of declaration
of Internal Emergency and arrest of opposition leaders,
the CPI(M) has directed its different front organizations
to put off their programme of activities for the present.

Many consider the CPI(M) to be an "antisystem" party in India.
But, actually, the CPI(M) is more an electoral party abiding by
the norms of Indian parliamentarianism than one pursuing the
Marxian weapons of class-struggle and revolutions. There is
obviously much truth in the remark,

India has two strong Communist parties whose strength
varies from state to state, but their "anti-system"
character has not been as pronounced or as much feared

2 Saroj Chakrabarty, With West Bengal Chief Ministers: Memoirs
as in Europe because they have both acted within the rules of the game of Indian politics.  

In short, after the proclamation of emergency in West Bengal, the Congress(O) and other rightist anti-Congress parties were incapable of playing the role of an effective agitational opposition, while the CPI(M) and the leftist parties, though they possessed the strength to act, preferred to lie low. The net effect was that the proclamation of the emergency and the consequent suppression of the democratic rights of the people and the press went, at least for the time being, unchallenged.

**Congress(O)-R.S.S. camaraderie** A few days after the proclamation of the emergency, the R.S.S. - a militant volunteer wing of the Jan Sangh - and a few other Naxalite groups were banned. But though the Congress(O) and other opposition parties were not formally banned, there was imposed a de facto blanket suppression of all their normal activities. In West Bengal, the state and the district headquarters of the Congress(O) and other opposition parties were frequently raided, duplicators and typewriters of these offices were seized by the police and many important middle-rank leaders were frequently arrested, detained for a few days, then released and again arrested.  


4 WBPCC(O) Circulars issued during July-September 1975.
But as is the rule, a political party, when it is suppressed and denied the normal facilities of democratic functioning, takes to methods of underground operation. Rightly has it been remarked,

****** Once political parties have emerged in a political system, their repression does not necessarily terminate their activities. Where parties are outlawed, they will usually continue to operate underground.5

Hence, under the various official and non-official restrictions imposed on them, the R.S.S. and the Congress(O) in West Bengal tried to build up a network of underground organization for continuing their operation. In this conspiratorial phase of their activities, there developed a strange camaraderie between the democratic-minded, secular Congress(O) activists and the Hindu-revivalist, militant R.S.S. elements. This peculiar courtship between the two manifested, later on, in the Janata party, in the form of a political alliance between the Sen faction of the Congress(O) and the Jan Sangh.

Anti-emergency agitation6 The Jana Sangharsha Samiti led by P.C.Sen was composed of the Congress(O), the Jan Sangh, the BLD and the Socialists. The Congress(O) faction (led by Abha Maity and Nirmalendu Dey) which had been functioning under the banner


6 Information regarding the details of the anti-emergency agitations given this report, unless otherwise mentioned were collected by the author from his in-depth interviews with the JSS and LSS leaders, P.C.Sen, Karpoori Thakur, P.C.Chunder, Abha Maity and Nirmalendu Dey.
of the West Bengal Citizens' Committee since 1974 was not represented in the JSS. This Congress(O) faction participated in the programmes of the JSS and maintained contact with it through one of its ELD friends, Anil Bhattacharya, but at the same time, it organized its own separate programme of protest-meetings and demonstrations.

It is worth noting in this connection that in spite of the grave danger (as alleged by them) posed by the emergency and their professions of the need for a broad-based, united movement, the warring groups of the state Congress(O) could not combine in a common platform to fight against their common enemy, the Congress government of Mrs. Gandhi. The position, after a few months, became so anomalous that Karpoori Thakur (a former chief minister of Bihar and a close associate of Jayaprakash) who had been absconding during the emergency, and with whom the Citizens' Committee had very close contact, appointed Abha Maiti as the convener of Lok Sangharsha Samiti's (the all-India body) eastern regional committee. The Congress(O) group led by Abha Maiti and Dey, from then on, began to function on behalf of the said committee. Thus there were two parallel committees functioning in West Bengal on behalf of the All India Lok Sangharsha Samiti - the JSS led by P.C.Sen and the LSS - eastern regional committee led by Abha Maiti.

Activities of the Congress(O) Though a constituent unit of the JSS, the state Congress(O) issued separate news bulletins in its name during the emergency. The first such bulletin claimed that more than 250 people were arrested at the public meeting of 27 June. After the imposition of the emergency, the state
Congress(O) headquarters in Calcutta got a few thousand posters printed and thousands of anti-emergency leaflets cyclostyled. These were sent to the lower committees of the party for extensive distribution. But the party was not efficient enough in its conduct of the anti-emergency movement, at least, in its initial stage. The leaflets issued by the party and its front-organizations often gave contradictory reports about the same event. Thus while the party's bulletin No.1 stated the number of arrests made at the 27 June public meeting to be 250, the first issue of "Bahni Sikha" dated 30 June 1975, the organ of the state Chhatra Parishad-O (students' wing of the Congress-O) put the figure at 150.

After his failure to hold the public meeting of 27 June, P.C. Sen announced the detailed programme of a week-long (8 to 15 August) foot-march to be undertaken by him in protest against the "anti-people declaration of emergency by the fascist government of Sm. Indira Gandhi". The foot-march began as per schedule from Mayapur village of Arambag subdivision of Hooghly district, but immediately at the start of the march, the police arrested Sen and ten other satyagrahis (passive resisters). P.C. Sen was again released and taken to his residence. The state Congress(O)'s next bulletin declared,

The next phase of the padayatra (foot-march) satyagraha programme of Shri Prafulla Chandra Sen will be announced in due course.

But no such nadavatra ultimately materialized.

On 15 August, the JS8 again tried to hold a public meeting at the Calcutta maidan. The police again foiled the attempt and arrested the state Congress(O) Secretary, Rabi Chowdhury, the Chhatra Parishad(O) leader, Sanat Majumdar and the youth Congress(O) leader Bulbul Chatterji along with 17 others. In a similar attempt at organizing a foot-march at Mankar, Burdwan, 12 Congress(O) workers led by Mrityunjay Datta were arrested. Another batch of 38 Congress(O) workers were also arrested during a demonstration at Habra, 24 Parganas.

Organized mass protest against the emergency actually began in the city of Calcutta from December 1975. In the five-month period from July to November 1975, the constituent units of the J.S.S. could build up a somewhat rudimentary organizational structure for staging the anti-emergency demonstrations in Calcutta and for carrying on a sustained publicity campaign. Cyclostyled and printed bulletins on behalf of the J.S.S. began to be issued at frequent intervals and these carried accounts of local protest demonstrations and arrests in the districts and the city. One such bulletin remarked,

Never before India has seen such total abridgement of fundamental rights. Never before India has seen such dictatorial tyrannical and ruthless suppression of human freedom. Never before the voice of the National Press so shockingly silenced. Never before the country was so iron-curtained from the outside free world.

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9 Bahni Sikha West Bengal Chhatra Parishad(O) Bulletin No.5, 1 September 1975.
11 A Time To Think And A Time To Act : J.S.S. leaflet, 4 August 1975.
In another bulletin, Sangram (Struggle), the J.S.S. claimed that till 1 January 1976, more than one thousand satyagrahis had participated in the anti-emergency agitations. Another leaflet published on 26 January 1976, narrated how the different sections of the people—the students, youths, factory labourers, peasants, educationists, lawyers, literateurs, journalists—were participating in the agitation. The leaflet also publicized the support the movement received from various foreign and international organizations like "The International League For The Rights of Man", "The Socialist International", "The Amnesty International" and others. An open letter written by an eminent journalist of Calcutta, then detained, was printed and extensively distributed by the J.S.S.¹³

The Maiti-Dey faction of the Congress(O), as already mentioned, worked in cooperation with the J.S.S., but also had its own separate programme of action and organizational set-up. In the name of the West Bengal Citizens' Committee this group tried to organize civil disobedience demonstrations in Calcutta and in the districts. Abha Maiti was arrested at least six times (and later released on every occasion) while leading satyagrahis in Midnapur district and Nirmalendu Dey took charge of secret operations in the districts of Bankura, Purulia and Burdwan. One of the militant activists of the group, Himanshu Halder was arrested from a Calcutta hotel while arranging publication of anti-emergency leaflets. Halder was the last MISA detainee of


of West Bengal to be released in February 1977. In an interview, Haider gave the author an account of physical torture perpetrated upon him while in detention. Besides cruel beatings, Haider, it transpired, had to bear the torture of a wooden rod being penetrated into his rectum.

The Citizens' Committee published a series of printed and cyclostyled leaflets named *Pahanseo Bulletins* (Paschim Banga Nagarik Committee Bulletins). In one of them, the then General Secretary of the Citizens' Committee appealed:

... We shall not bow down before the red eyes of this pygmy dictator, the Russian lackey, Indira Gandhi. Let us start our struggle for freedom afresh in the villages, towns and in all parts of the country. If necessary, the foundation and pedestal of the permanent future structure of Freedom will have to be built through the shedding of blood of hundreds of freedom fighters.

In other bulletins, the Citizens' Committee laid particular stress upon building up secret bases of anti-emergency operations in the villages. These bulletins also exhorted the people to boycott the government, pay no taxes and organize local parallel governments.

Besides staging a few demonstrations and publishing a number of leaflets, the Citizens' Committee organized hide-outs and shelters for the absconding leaders. At different times between July 1975 and December 1976, Karpoori Thakur, George

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14 *Bykta Swadinata Haraner Biruddhey Bidroha Karun (Revolt Against the Usurpation of Individual Liberty)*, Bulletin, West Bengal Citizens' Committee, Calcutta.
Fernandez, Nanaji Deshmukh and other eminent leaders, then absconding, were given shelter in Calcutta, taken to Nepal via Darjeeling and to other places. At Karpoori Thakur's behest, Nirmalendu Dey organized several hide-outs in the West Bengal-Bihar border area in Purulia district for storage of materials to be used by the anti-emergency agitators. These materials were brought to West Bengal from Nepal via Bihar. As the RSS and the Jan Sangh elements of West Bengal worked in close cooperation with the Sen faction of the Congress(O) in the JSS, so also the West Bengal Socialists (who were intimate to Karpoori Thakur and George Fernandez) worked hand in hand with the Maiti-Dey faction of the Congress(O) under the banner of the LSS-eastern regional committee.

In all their leaflets, both the JSS and the Citizens' Committee of West Bengal made the CPI and the U.S.S.R. their special targets of attack. This was quite natural since both the CPI leaders and The Pravda, the official organ of the Soviet Communist Party, had welcomed the promulgation of the Internal Emergency by the government of Mrs. Gandhi.

The ruling party often accused the opposition of receiving foreign money for organizing the anti-emergency movement in India. To what extent, the J.S.S. and the Citizens' Committee of West Bengal received foreign monetary support could not be readily ascertained. But both the organizations distributed copies of some newspapers published from the U.S.A., the U.K. and West Germany during the emergency. Of them special mention may be made of The Daily Mail, London and the Washington Post, Washington.
Therefore, it seems that Mrs. Gandhi's accusations against the opposition was, at least, partly true.

Without referring to the outside forces by name, she (Mrs. Gandhi) said they were giving powerful support to "the underground movement" within the country and she knew several M.P.s and M.L.A.s receiving at least two foreign newspapers regularly. One of them was very finely brought out and printed and one wondered where money came from for sending all these papers by mail, she asked.15

During May-June 1976, Abha Maiti managed to go abroad, ostensibly in connection with the meetings of an international women's organization of the Indian branch of which she happened to be the president. Maiti utilized her foreign tour (in which she visited U.K. and a few West European countries) for propagating the views of the Indian opposition parties among her European friends. It is not unlikely that the contacts she made with the leaders of the Amnesty International, the Socialist International and other organizations in Europe during that tour stood her (and her friends in India) in good stead during the latter part of the emergency period. But whether she received any monetary support could not be ascertained.

If however any foreign financial support to the anti-emergency movement was available, the volume of such support was, beyond doubt, very small in comparison with the needs of the movement. Most of the financial resources needed to organize and sustain the movement were collected by the opposition leaders from within the country. In West Bengal, the J.S.S. had to depend

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mainly upon collections made by P.C. Sen and the Citizens' Committee had to rely upon the donations raised mainly by Nirmalendu Dey.  

16 These informations were gathered from the author's in-depth interviews with P.C. Sen, Abha Maiti, Nirmalendu Dey and other prominent JSS and Citizens' Committee leaders.

Tightening of the Emergency Grip  
Till early 1976 two opposition governments remained functioning in two states: the Congress(O)-led Janata Morcha government in Gujerat and the DMK government in Tamilnadu. On 1 February 1976, the Tamilnadu DMK government was unceremoniously dissolved under Article 356 of the Constitution on the ground that the state government was not abiding by the Constitution. In Gujerat, fortunately for Mrs. Gandhi, defections in the ruling coalition reduced it to a minority. On 12 March 1976, President's Rule was imposed in the state following the defeat of the Janata Front government on a budget demand. Thus did the whole of India come under the direct rule of Mrs. Gandhi's party.

It has already been mentioned that the most powerful opposition party of West Bengal, the CPI(M) had from the beginning of the emergency preferred to "lie low". In March 1976, there were signs that the government was taking a tougher line in respect of the opposition. On 9 April, 1976, a CPI(M) delegation consisting of five members of the party's polit bureau met Mrs. Gandhi in Delhi. Reporting on the meeting, Jyoti Basu the
West Bengal CPI(M) leader said,

We had no discussion on elections. CPI(M) leaders told Mrs. Gandhi that their party had always fought Right reaction. The party had supported the Congress whenever it took an anti-imperialist stand and fought Right reaction.\textsuperscript{17}

It was evident that CPI(M) did not even then want to make a common cause with the rest of the opposition.

**Jayaprakash's efforts for Opposition unity** During his detention, Jayaprakash had fallen seriously ill and was therefore released by the government on 15 November 1976. After his release, as soon as he became tolerably fit, Jayaprakash began consultations with the non-Communist opposition leaders and advised them that unless they merged to form one single party they would not be able either to resist the governmental repressions or face the coming elections. Jayaprakash's proposal for merger of opposition parties was very warmly responded to by the Jan Sangh and the BLD but the Congress(O) did not react favourably.

Reporting on the discussions of the Congress(O) Working Committee meeting held on 9 May 1976 in New Delhi, P.C.Chunder the West Bengal Congress(O) president remarked,

The Congress(O) would not merge in the ruling party or any other party, nor would it dissolve itself to form a united opposition party. This was the consensus of the meeting of the Working Committee of the organization held recently in Delhi.\textsuperscript{18}

Thus in May 1976, in spite of Jayaprakash's advice to the opposition parties, the state Congress(O) leaders were clearly opposed to the formation of a united opposition party in which

\textsuperscript{17} The Statesman, Calcutta 19 April, 1976.

\textsuperscript{18} The Statesman, Calcutta 15 May 1976.
the Congress(O) would lose its separate identity. An extended meeting of the executive committee of the WBPCC(O) unanimously ruled out "the merger of the Congress(O) with the ruling party or with any other party or parties". The meeting recommended that the Congress(O) should maintain its separate identity.\(^{19}\)

On 15 May 1976, Asoke Mehta, the president of the All India Congress(O) was released from jail. Before he joined the undivided Congress party, Asoke Mehta had been one of Jayaprakash's closest associates and a leader of the Socialist Party founded by Jayaprakash. Mehta was in complete accord with Jayaprakash about the need for the formation of a single united opposition party. Under his influence, the next Congress(O) Working Committee meeting held in Bombay in early June decided "to work for the consolidation of the democratic forces" and declared that it was prepared to have a "marcha" or a united front with the democratic opposition.

The West Bengal Congress(O) leaders, however, did not share Asoke Mehta's views on the issue. On 17 June 1976, when asked why the Congress(O) was opposed to a merger with the Jan Sangh, the BLD and the Socialist Party, P.C. Sen replied:

... a "paper party" lacking discipline would result from such a merger, because each of the units would have its own ideology, programme and methods of work. We want to retain our identity. We are not going to commit suicide.\(^{20}\)

The dissidents in the state Congress(O) led by Abha Maiti and Mirmalendu Dey were, on the contrary, very keen about a merger of all non-communist opposition parties into one party. During June-July 1976 Maiti and Dey went to Bombay and Delhi and talked to Jayaprakash and Asoke Mehta and registered their support to

\(^{19}\) WBPCC(O) Extended Executive Committee resolution, 13 June 1976.
the merger idea. In a resolution the West Bengal Citizens' Committee wholeheartedly welcomed Jayaprakash's proposal for merger of all the non-communist opposition parties into one party.21

44th Constitution (Amendment) Bill When the opposition parties were debating the issue of their merger into one party, Mrs. Gandhi's government proposed before the Lok Sabha, on 1 September 1976, the 44th Constitution (Amendment) Bill prescribing far-reaching changes in India's Constitution, basically intended to further increase the powers of the central government.

This move of the government united all the opposition parties, except only the CPI, in a common platform known as the "People's Union For Civil Liberty and Democracy", which organised a seminar in the middle of October in Delhi to protest against the proposed Constitution (Amendment) Bill. A resolution adopted at the seminar declared,

The effect of these proposals, in sum, would be to deprive the ultimate sovereign, namely the people, of rights and leave them only with duties. Conversely, the servants of the people, namely the executive, would be placed in a position of owning all manner of rights and owing no duties.

The effect of the 44th Amendment Bill will be to eliminate the whole system of checks and balances provided in the Constitution and leave the way clear for the arbitrary exercise of executive authority to the detriment of the citizen. 22

21 West Bengal Citizens' Committee resolution dated 20 June 1976.

Protests were organized throughout the country. The opposition parties, many eminent members of the Bar, educationists, women leaders and people belonging to varied walks of life pleaded for a postponement of the amendment to the Constitution till fresh elections were held. But they were of no avail. On 11 November 1976 Parliament passed the Amendment Bill. The next day, Parliament also approved the extension of the term of the Lok Sabha by one year.

Merger efforts renewed The passage of the 44th Constitution Amendment Bill by Parliament and the extension of the term of the Lok Sabha naturally made the opposition parties apprehensive of the emergence of a dictatorship. Fresh efforts were therefore made for organizing the unity of the opposition parties. In late October, Jayaprakash visited Calcutta and declared that he would soon call a conference of all non-communist opposition parties to form a single party. He felt that this would provide a national democratic alternative to the ruling party.

The state Jan Sangh and the West Bengal Socialist Party welcomed Jayaprakash's announcement. But the West Bengal Congress(O) was not reconciled to the idea of the merger, P.C.Sen stated that the Congress(O) was not in favour of an immediate merger. It would rather prefer to develop a front on the basis of a common programme.23

The central leaders of the Congress(O), particularly, Asoke Mehta, the president of the party, Shanti Bhushan, the party's treasurer and others like Nijlingappa, S.K.Patil, C.B.Gupta were

all in favour of Jayaprakash's merger proposal. They tried to persuade the West Bengal leaders to adopt the same stand as theirs, but their persuasion failed. On the contrary, apprehending a pro-merger decision at the Working Committee the party's West Bengal executive committee adopted a resolution stating:

...only a plenary session of the party can decide the question of the merger of the four major opposition parties as proposed by Shri Jayaprakash Narayan.

The resolution also said,

...the need of the hour is to sustain a resistance movement against authoritarianism. This is not the time to weaken the organization by talking about dissolving the party.24

Peculiarly however, though the West Bengal Congress(O) leaders were opposed to the all-India merger move, they were at that time not at all averse to a programme of united action with the leftist parties of West Bengal. On 18 November 1976 a joint convention was organized in Calcutta at the call of P.C.Sen, the CPI(M) and the Forward Bloc leaders for "carrying on the struggle for civil liberties and democratic rights".25 Again, on 10 December, the same organizers unitedly observed the Human Rights Day and passed a resolution stating their concern at the violation of human rights "by many countries including ours".26

An objective assessment of the above-mentioned events would suggest that P.C.Sen and other state Congress(O) leaders were not at all optimistic about an idealism-based, programme-oriented unity of the four major opposition parties, - the Congress(O), the Jan Sangh, the B.L.D. and the Socialist Party. Again, it seems probable that the West Bengal Congress(O) leaders were not so...

24 Resolution of the WBPCC(O) executive committee, 14 November 1976.
much interested about a national alternative to Mrs. Gandhi's Congress party, as they were keen about a state-wide electoral alliance between themselves and the CPI(M), the biggest party in West Bengal. The Congress(O)'s potential allies at the national level - the Jan Sangh, the B.L.D., or the Socialist party - had no effective organizational base in West Bengal. Therefore, perhaps, Sen and his associates in the state Congress(O) were more desirous of an electoral understanding with the CPI(M). During November-December 1976, Sen made many friendly overtures to the CPI(M) in spite of his basic anti-communist prejudice and in spite of the CPI(M)'s non-committal role during the emergency. Perhaps Sen knew that his gestures towards the CPI(M) would be a paying political investment for the future, in case, the state went for elections.

Opposition's detente gestures By December 1976, the emergency restrictions had almost paralyzed the entire opposition and they wanted to find a way out of the impasse. An initiative in this regard was taken by Karunanidhi, the DMK leader and former chief minister of Tamilnadu, who convened a meeting of the opposition leaders in Delhi on 15 December. The leaders of the Congress(O), the Jan Sangh, the BLD, the Socialist Party, the DMK as also some Congress dissidents (who had opposed Mrs. Gandhi when she promulgated the emergency) like Krishan Kant declared in this meeting that they were willing to participate in any discussion the government might like to hold "to normalize the situation". This meeting was followed by another in which the opposition M.Ps
declared that:

... the opposition were committed to democracy and as such accepted the reasonable restraints that should apply to the government, the opposition and the public. The opposition was prepared to work out a code of comprehensive democratic functioning binding on all the three actors of political life. Dedicated as the opposition are to democratic ways of functioning, we are always ready for discussion with the government on national issues, particularly at this stage, when normalization of the political life in the country is of paramount and pressing importance.

The opposition efforts at a reconciliation with Mrs. Gandhi were pursued by Asoke Mehta, the Congress(O) leader. He carried on a correspondence with Mrs. Gandhi and wrote in his last letter that the best means for resolving the differences between the government and the opposition would be "a direct discussion between you and the opposition".

Birth of The Janata Party Mrs. Gandhi's response to the opposition's gesture of reconciliation was quick; it was also quite unexpected. Instead of having a dialogue with the opposition, she invited the opposition parties to a trial of strength in a free and fair general election so that the whole people of India might also register their views in the confrontation between the government and the opposition. Mrs. Gandhi, as the Prime Minister advised the President, dissolution of the Lok Sabha 15 months before its tenure was due to end and holding of fresh elections to the Lok Sabha in March 1977.


28 Asoke Mehta's letter to the Prime Minister, extracts of which were published in The Statesman, Calcutta 6 January 1977.
The opposition was taken aback. Leaders of the opposition were still not united and they knew very well that they would be simply wiped out of existence if they remained divided and fought the election separately. Nor would the formation of a coalition or a Front suffice because the SVD experiment in the later sixties and the Janata Morcha government in Gujerat in 1975-76 had failed. Jayaprakash also gave an ultimatum to the opposition to unite. He warned them that unless they (the non-communist opposition parties) all united under one flag in one party, he would dissociate himself from them.\textsuperscript{29}

After the announcement of the election, most of the opposition leaders including Morarji Desai of the Congress(0), L.K. Advani of the Jan Sangh and others were released. Immediately after their release they met at Desai’s residence in Delhi. After a two-day meeting, on 20 January 1977, Morarji Desai announced that four non-Communist parties - the Congress(0), the Jan Sangh, the BLD and the Socialist Party - would unite and fight the election as one party under one flag and one programme. The new party would be called the Janata Party. Desai also declared that even after the election there would exist one party in place of the four. The time was too short for the technicalities, legalities and formalities to be got over to form one party, "but as soon as the elections are over we will have one party."\textsuperscript{30}

\textsuperscript{29} The Statesman, Calcutta 20 January 1977.
Thus was the Janata party born. A 27-member provisional national committee (under the chairmanship of Morarji Desai), in which the four constituents were given equal representation, was formed. The West Bengal Congress(O) leader P.C.Sen was taken in as a member of the national committee of the new party. Sen's previous objection to a merger of the Congress(O) in a united party could not be heard.

### Congress(O) Factions inside the Janata Party

After the announcement about the formation of the Janata party, the central committee of the CPI(M) declared that the party would seek seat adjustments with the Janata party though entertaining no illusion about its rightist political character. In West Bengal, the six-party Left Front (composed of the CPI-M, the Forward Bloc, the R.S.P., the Marxist Forward Bloc, Biplabi Bangla Congress and the Sudhin Kumar faction of the R.C.P.I.) began negotiations with the Janata party's state leaders. Promode Dasgupta, the CPI(M) General Secretary, declared that, if necessary, "the CPI(M) would be ready to give up the seat of any of its sitting members". P.C.Sen, the state Janata chairman on his part, said, "The CPI(M) is a national communist organisation to justify his alliance with the CPI(M).

At the all-India level, the sudden defection of Jagjivan Ram (an important cabinet colleague of Mrs. Gandhi) from the Congress party, his formation of a new party called "the Congress

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31 Resolution of the CPI(M) central committee, meeting held in Delhi on 28-30 January 1977.
33 *The Statesman*, Calcutta 6 February 1977, Quoted in "ON RECORD".
For Democracy and the quick conclusion of an electoral adjustment between the Janata party and the CFD had a disheartening effect upon the morale of the ruling party's cadres and an encouraging impact upon the opposition campaign. In West Bengal, the former president of the ruling party, Bejoy Singh Nahar and his followers formed the state unit of the CFD and entered into electoral adjustment with the Janata party and the leftists. Of the 42 parliamentary seats, the Janata party - CFD combine was allotted 14 seats; 2 seats were allotted to pro-Janata independents and the remaining 26 seats went to the Left Front led by the CPI(M).

The results of the Lok Sabha election were astonishing. The Janata party with its allies won more than a two-thirds majority in the Lok Sabha. The Janata party secured 43.17 per cent of popular votes. In West Bengal, the Janata-CFD combination and Independents backed by it, bagged all the 16 seats they contested, while the leftists won 23 seats conceding 3 to the Congress. The Congress(O)'s share in the Janata harvest was respectable 8 out of 16. Obviously, P.C.Sen's political investment of having an understanding with the CPI(M) since November 1976, had paid his group a rich dividend. The Congress(O) had been able to secure not a single seat and only 5.58 per cent of popular votes in the last 1971 Lok Sabha poll. It was mainly the vast network of the CPI(M) organization which helped the Janata candidates win the 1977 election.

After the election, a Janata government headed by Morarji Desai was sworn in on 24 March 1977. Four political parties had united to fight the election in the name of the Janata party, but formally the party itself was yet to be born. The
Congress(O), the Jan Sangh, the BLD and the Socialist party were yet to formally dissolve themselves and merge in the new party. Thus a new precedent was created; a Janata party government was installed in power before the birth of the party itself.

For the purpose of formally launching the Janata party, a national meet was convened to be held in Delhi on 1 May 1977. Delegates belonging to the constituent parties assembled at the convention in hundreds and took the opportunity of their meeting in Delhi for dissolving themselves and for deciding to merge in the Janata party. The Congress(O) dissolved itself and decided to merge in the Janata party at its plenary session held on 30 April 1977.

**Janata Party - a "quasi-feudal coalition"** At the national convention of the Janata party on 1 May 1977, Jagjivan Ram announced that his party, the Congress For Democracy would also dissolve itself and merge in the Janata party. Thus, instead of four, Janata party, from now on, became a coalition of five constituent groups. These constituent parties had till only recently their separate leaders, separate programmes and separate organisational structures from Delhi through the states downward to the remotest villages. The rank and file cadres of these different groups were so long loyal only to their respective leaderships. These sub-coalitional leaderships within the Janata party, as we shall see, failed to evolve a cohesive, national Janata leadership as such.

While speaking about political leadership, James Mac Gregor Burns, in his presidential address at the American Political
Science Association Meeting in Chicago in 1976, remarked:

Some define leadership as leaders making followers do what otherwise followers would not do, or as leaders making followers do what the leaders want them to do; I define leadership as leaders inducing followers to act for certain goals that represent the values and motivations - the wants and needs, the aspirations and expectations - of both leaders and followers.\(^{34}\)

The leaders of the constituent groups within the Janata party, as was normal for them, continued to pursue their respective values and motivations, their (and their followers') wants and needs, aspirations and expectations. And however sincere their professions about their integration in the Janata party might be, the values, motivations, wants, needs, aspirations and expectations held by the leaders and the followers of the Congress(O), the Jan Sangh, the BLD, the CFD and the Socialist party were not the same, but multi-directional. The result was that the constituent groups in the Janata party continued as separate factions within it.

About factions (sic) in a party, Maurice Duverger says:

Each faction (sic) is itself authoritarian in structure: it is composed of a few leaders and the party members whom they have gathered around them and whom they generally submit to a disciplining similar to that which exists within the party itself.\(^{35}\)

In the Janata party, factions had not to be organized afresh. The constituent groups - the Congress(O), the BLD, the CFD, the Jan Sangh and the Socialist party - entered the Janata coalition as well-organized and readymade factions.

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Chandrasekhar, the newly elected president of the Janata party expressed on 2 May 1977 his hope that he would be able to bring about complete integration of the former constituent units of the party, and that, the Janata party should not merely represent the unity of certain parties for winning the elections and that the party would be built up "as a strong and cohesive organization that can cope with the numerous challenges facing the country". But, due to reasons as stated above, Chandrasekhar's dream was not fulfilled. The meetings of the national committee of the party became, as Key.Jr. remarks about the national committee of an American party, "a gathering of sovereigns (or their emissaries) to negotiate and treat with each other".

In spite of the solemn promises by the leaders of the constituent groups in the Janata party, that they would forget their past differences and work as one single party, the groups continued to maintain their separate entities and rampant ghatakbad (representation in all committees and offices on the basis on an equal quota for each group) prevailed in the Janata party from the national to the state levels. The Janata party fitted in exactly with the following description given to the two American parties, by a political analyst:

...Perhaps the best word to describe the structure of our two great parties is "feudal", but it is feudalism with few enforceable pledges of faith, feudalism in which the bonds of mutual support are so loose that it often seems to border on anarchy, feudalism in which one party does not even have a king.

Under such circumstances of party functioning, the Congress(O) also, like all other constituents, continued to exist within the Janata party as a faction.

The Mid-term Assembly Elections  Immediately after the Lok Sabha election, Jayaprakash had expressed his opinion that elections to the state assemblies should be held as early as possible so that "we have new representatives who are in tune with the new Union government".\(^{39}\) Elections to the legislative assemblies of those states where the Congress had been defeated in the Lok Sabha election were, therefore, a definite possibility. Considering this possibility, the West Bengal committee of the CPI(M) expressed its opinion as early as on 11 April 1977 that, "a non-Congress government formed by the leftist front and the Janata party-CPD combine was possible in the state" and "an alliance on the basis of a common programme could be built up in West Bengal".\(^{40}\)

On 30 April 1977 the acting President of India dissolved the assemblies of nine states including West Bengal. The six leftist parties in the CPI(M) led Left Front of West Bengal immediately proposed an election alliance with the Janata-CPD combine with the aim of forming a non-Congress government in the state. But astonishingly (for the leftists) came the most disheartening response from the Janata state chairman, P.C. Sen, who said, "As far as I am concerned, there can't be any coalition with the CPI(M)".\(^{41}\) Sen however added that the Janata party was


\(^{40}\) *The CPI(M) West Bengal Committee resolution*, Calcutta 8-10 April 1977.

prepared for an adjustment of seats with other parties in the assembly election on "a reasonable and justifiable basis".

The Janata party's West Bengal state council under the chairmanship of P.C. Sen unilaterally adopted on 4 May, a resolution stating that an adjustment of seats with the leftist forces in the assembly election was possible but, "in no circumstance should it (the Janata party) concede more than 80 seats (out of 294) to the leftist combine". But Jyoti Basu, the CPI(M) leader, even in the face of what he termed, "insulting terms for seat adjustments through the press", maintained,

We shall try, till the last day fixed for filing nomination papers, for Janata-Leftist unity in the West Bengal assembly election. The unity, in the context of the correlation of forces in West Bengal, must be based on a common minimum programme and its purpose is to form an alternative government in the state.43

Jyoti Basu and three other important members of the CPI(M) polit bureau—Hemant Kumar Basu, Basavpunniah and Harkissen Singh Surjit—met the Janata president, Chandrasekhar, in Delhi on 6 May and pleaded with him for convincing his West Bengal colleagues about the need for unity. Ultimately, the CPI(M) gave up its demand for an agreement on the basis of the formation of a coalition government and agreed to enter into seat adjustments with the Janata party.

42 Resolution of the West Bengal state council of the Janata party adopted on 4 May 1977.

The talks for seat adjustments between the Janata party and the Left Front led by the CPI(M) started on 11 May 1977. The leftists were agreeable to concede 55 per cent of the assembly seats to the Janata party, but the latter would not agree to give more than 110 seats to the leftists. The Janata prime minister, Morarji Desai sent C.B. Gupta (a former Congress-0 leader and Janata treasurer) to Calcutta to persuade Sen and the state Janata leaders to agree to the 55 per cent - 45 per cent formula, but even Gupta’s efforts failed.44

Sen’s dominance in the election committee In order to appreciate the reasons as to why the West Bengal Janata party decided to fight the assembly election on its own, one should know about certain developments that took place in the party before the election. The Janata president, Chandrasekhar, had appointed a state election committee of the party to negotiate with other parties and to run the election. P.C. Sen was its chairman and the party’s constituent groups had, each of them, two members in the committee. During the negotiations with the leftists, the Socialist group represented by Biman Mitra and Swarajbandhu Bhattacharya pleaded for acceptance of the leftists’ offer, but the Congress(O) faction along with other constituents stuck to their view of having no track with the CPI(M). And that is why the talks failed.

The CFD and the BLD members in the state Janata election committee were former Congressmen who had a strong anti-communist

bias similar to that held by P.C. Sen. Sen, on his part, having been much enthused at the success of the Janata candidates in the last Lok Sabha election, was very optimistic about the victory of the Janata party in the assembly election. Sen was confident that there would be installed in West Bengal, a Janata government headed by himself and Sen's belief was shared by the CFD, and the BLD members of the election committee.

We have already noted that, during the emergency days, a very close relationship had developed between the Congress(O) led by P.C. Sen and the Jan Sangh/RSS elements in West Bengal. Inside the state Janata party, the Jan Sangh members always sided with Sen, and therefore, with the support of the CFD, the BLD and the Jan Sangh members, Sen could easily dominate the meetings of the state election committee of the party. Whatever Sen desired became the accepted Janata line. And in their enthusiasm for an unmixed Janata state government, the Janata constituents rejected the leftist offer of a 55 per cent share in the assembly seats.

In perspective, it seems, Jyoti Basu, the CPI(M) leader had been able to correctly assess this psychology of dominance on the part of the Janata leaders of West Bengal. As early as on 7 May 1977, Basu had remarked,

The Janata party wants to form its government in West Bengal and in this context it has to offer the minimum number of seats possible to the leftists... Difficulties have arisen only after the Janata party, in its desire to form its own government in the state, has started dictating terms.

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But, there is a gulf of difference between what one desires and what one is able to achieve. When the Janata party prepared to have its own election campaign, it was beset with great difficulties - inside its own house and outside.

**Janata's debacle in the assembly election**

To what deplorable extent factionalism was prevalent in the West Bengal Janata party can be known from the development that took place inside the party after it decided to go it alone in the assembly election. In the election committee of the party there were divisions over the selection of candidates for most of the seats. At times, the meetings of the committee turned into a "free for all". There were frequent walk-outs, manhandling of members, breaking of chairs, tearing of papers and throwing of paperweights. And all this came out in the press! Through such continuous infights (often physically undertaken) the state Janata election committee decided the nominations. Then began a mad rush of group leaders to Delhi seeking changes in the nominations. The final list of party candidates came out from Delhi after some changes being incorporated in the state list.

P.C. Sen had relied too much on a "Janata wind" which, he believed, was then blowing in the whole of India. When, however, the campaign actually started, most of the Janata candidates found that they had no base of their own in the constituencies. In fact, none of the CFD, the BLD, the Jan Sangh and the Socialist party had any organizational base in West Bengal. The Congress(O) alone could claim to have a few pockets where it could command some popular support. Neither did the Janata party.
have any convincing logic in support of its stand of having no track with the leftists with whom it had entered into an alliance in the Lok Sabha poll only three months ago. Some Janata leaders like P.C.Sen even pleaded for support by the Congressmen against the leftists. This type of campaign-approach very badly tarnished the anti-Congress image of the Janata party. On the top of all this, there were the continuous mutual accusations among the different group leaders of the party being publicly ventilated through the press. The results were as could be anticipated.

The Janata party could win only 29 out of the 294 seats securing 20.55 per cent of popular votes. In contrast, the CPI(M) alone got 60.20 per cent seats and 35.91 per cent of popular votes. Even the Congress party of Mrs. Gandhi secured 22.53 per cent of popular votes, a larger percentage than secured by the Janata party. The state Janata party faced its first serious debacle mainly because of the wrong direction given to it by the Congress(O) faction led by P.C.Sen.

Sub-factional quarrel in the Janata's Congress(O) group

The Congress(O) factionalism inside the West Bengal Janata Party was bi-polar in the sense that actually two Congress(O) sub-factions operated as mutually antagonistic forces within the wider Janata party forum. The existence of two broad factions inside the West Bengal Congress(O) party has already been discussed. There were the official group led by P.C.Sen and the dissenters led by the

46 Information regarding the Congress(O) factionalism inside the West Bengal Janata party were collected by the author through his interviews with the leading members of the Janata party including the former Congress(O) elements, and from newspaper reports.
Abha Maiti and Nirmalendu Dey. After the Congress(O)'s merger in the Janata party, the former Congress(O) dissidents, no doubt, got entry into the Janata party, but P.C. Sen consistently thwarted their attempts to secure any dominating position in the state Janata party. Among the former Congress(O) dissidents, Abha Maiti, however, because of her being a woman-leader and also because of her somewhat moderate and compromising attitude, had been able to secure a Janata ticket for the Lok Sabha election. She was elected and became a member of the central Council of Ministers. After her promotion in a governmental position, Maiti gave up her previous anti-P.C. Sen stance and her intimacy with the former Congress(O) dissidents. Maiti’s alienation from the dissidents left Nirmalendu Dey alone to lead the anti-Sen elements of the Congress(O) in the state Janata party.

In his isolation, Dey, began to cultivate his non-Congress(O) connections (within the Janata party) which he had developed during the anti-emergency struggle period. Since the Janata victory in the Lok Sabha election, Anil Bhattacharya, the BLD member in the state Janata executive council and subsequently, in the state Janata election committee, began to act as Nirmalendu Dey’s spokesman in the state Janata party. The Socialists who opposed P.C. Sen’s anti-CPI(M) stand during the

47 Anil Bhattacharya was a close associate of Nirmalendu Dey during the emergency days. Bhattacharya was a follower of Karpoori Thakur with whom also, Dey had very intimate relationship.
assembly election, also found it convenient to cooperate with the Dey faction. It was through Dey's non-Congress(O) friends in the state party's election committee that Dey could secure party nominations for Himangshu Halder, Ashok Ghosal and a few of his followers in the assembly election. But Dey himself was not given any Janata ticket in spite of the best efforts of his BLD and Socialist friends because of P.C. Sen's uncompromising refusal. Thus the Congress(O) group in the West Bengal Janata party became really two sub-factions having different sets of alliance with the other constituent groups in the Janata party.

After the Janata party's defeat in the assembly election, there arose within the state party the worst sort of group fights. The anti-P.C. Sen faction of the Congress(O) along with the BLD and the Socialist elements openly accused P.C. Sen, Asoke Dutta and others of mismanagement of the election campaign, partisan distribution of election funds among Sen's favourites and also of not submitting the election accounts to the party. They demanded a thorough reconstitution of the state party committee. P.C. Sen and his followers, on the other hand, blamed the Socialists and the central leadership of the party for the election defeat. This mutual vilification between the two went on for months and the party organization remained at a standstill.

Janata's total discomfiture in the Panchayat elections. The Left-Front government led by Jyoti Basu decided after it assumed office, to hold the "Panchayat" (rural self-governing bodies) elections which had been long overdue. The leftists felt that through capturing the rural self governing bodies in the state, they would
be able to consolidate their position in the rural areas where, so long, they had been weaker than the Congress. Under a new Panchayat Act\textsuperscript{48} passed by the previous Congress government, a three-tier structure of rural government had been provided for.

After the Panchayat elections were announced to be held in August 1978, P.C. Sen, the state Janata Chairman evolved a new thesis of partyless democracy for the Panchayats. He declared that the Janata party would not contest the Panchayat elections on a party basis, but instead, would cooperate with all democratic elements for setting up "partyless candidates". The real purpose behind this slogan of "partyless democracy" was the forging of a broad-based united front of all anti-CPI(M) forces including the Congress(I) and the Congress(S).\textsuperscript{49} As the Janata party's state committee had become practically defunct since the assembly election, Sen's political line became more or less known as the official Janata party stand in respect of the Panchayat elections. The anti-Sen elements within the party (including the Dey faction of the Congress-O) opposed Sen's stand and pleaded for the setting up of official Janata party candidates who would fight the elections with the party symbol.

The anti-Sen elements in the state Janata party represented their case to the central Janata leaders, but could secure the parent body's approval of their stand at the very last moment (just one day before the last date for filing nominations). This group could manage to set up only 110 Janata party candidates.

\textsuperscript{48} The West Bengal Panchayat Act 1973.

\textsuperscript{49} After the mid-term assembly elections of June 1977, the Congress party led by Mrs. Gandhi underwent a split in July 1977. From then on, there came into existence two Congress parties—one led by Mrs. Gandhi and the other by Swaran Singh. The two Congress parties became known as the Congress(I) and the Congress(S).
(for the total of more than a few thousand seats) in the
Panchayat elections. These candidates fought with the party
symbol while most of the Janata men fought as independents in
accordance with P.C.Sen's line. P.C.Sen was however betrayed
by his Congress friends. The Congress(I) set up its own party
candidates fighting with the Congress(I) symbol and the
Congress(S), in most of the areas it contested, set up its own
candidates with no sort of alliance with the Janata elements.
Thus in most constituencies there were quadrangular and in some
places, pentangular contests with the leftists fighting as one
undivided bloc. The net result was a clean victory for the
Left Front which captured more than 90 per cent of the seats.
The whole of West Bengal went red.

The State Janata as an Opposition party Soon after the
Panchayat elections, practically the whole of West Bengal was
engulfed in a devastating flood. Lakhs became homeless and
standing crops worth crores of rupees were lost. The state's
Left government organized its relief and rehabilitation
operations as best as it could and utilized the newly elected
Panchayat agencies for implementing its relief programme.
The central Janata government also came to the aid of the
state government in a big way. But the state Janata party
cut a sorry figure so far as relief activities were concerned.
Excepting the activities of Abha Maiti who toured the flood-
affected areas and distributed relief and of P.C.Sen who
organized relief activities in his constituency, there was no Janata
endeavour of flood relief worth mentioning. Instead, the Janata M.L.As
frequently assailed the Left Front government for its alleged
failure to conduct flood relief work in an efficient manner and
for alleged corruption in the distribution of flood relief.

The new Janata government at the centre started a new programme for helping the rural unemployed. Under this scheme known as "the Food For Work Programme", rural projects involving manual labour were undertaken and the unemployed people in the rural areas were given employment in these projects. The wages were paid partly in food grains and partly in cash. The state government received a handsome central grant on this account. But the Janata M.L.As of West Bengal and the state Janata leaders never felt happy about this. On the floor of the assembly they criticized the left government of the state, alleging corruption, nepotism and partisanship in the implementation of the Food For Work programme. In their party meetings the M.L.As and the state Janata leaders criticized their own government at the centre for having given the CPI(M) government of West Bengal such huge amount of central aid which, they alleged, were utilized by the leftists for strengthening their rural organization.

United Janata resistance against the CPI(M). However acrimonious their inter-group rivalries might be, all the constituents in the state Janata party were one in their opposition to the CPI(M). After the CPI(M) came to power in West Bengal, clashes between the CPI(M) cadres and the Janata supporters in the villages began to take place. These clashes assumed serious proportions in the Contai Subdivision of Midnapur district and in the Baraset police station of 24 Parganas district. The Janata party workers put up admirable resistance movements against attacks by the leftists and organized massive protest demonstrations at Panshila in the 24 Parganas district and at Bhagabanpur in Midnapur. It was the Congress(O) leader P.C.Sen again who was in the lead in these
movements though the organizational infrastructure of these movements were mainly the handiwork of the Congress(O) faction led by Nirmalendu Dey. The Congress(O) group in the Janata party was at the forefront in its opposition to the CPI(M).

The state Janata's opposition movement against the left government reached a peak in connection with the Marichjhapi incident. When at Marichjhapi the East Pakistan refugees were attempted to be forcibly evicted by the state government, all the constituent groups within the state Janata party—the Congress(O), the Jan Sangh, the BLD, the CFD and the Socialists—put up a united opposition condemning the police excesses committed upon the refugees. These constituents in the Janata party also put pressure upon the central Janata government and urged upon the Prime Minister to take action against the state government. Morarji Desai then sent a three-man team of Janata MPs to West Bengal to inquire into and report on the matter. This team also condemned the excesses committed on the refugees. But the Prime Minister supported the state government's stand in respect of the deserter refugees and wanted that they should go back to Dandakaranya from where they had come. Ultimately the refugees were forced out of Marichjhapi and compelled to go back to their old rehabilitation site. The state Janata leaders had to face a serious political humiliation.

A large number of Bengali refugees from East Pakistan who had been rehabilitated by the government of India at Dandakaranya in Madhya Pradesh, deserted their relief camps and came to West Bengal after the Left Front was installed in power. A section of them settled at Marichjhapi, a small island in the south of West Bengal. Marichjhapi however, was within the protected forest region of the state and the left government wanted the refugees to vacate the area. The police cordoned off the island and a number of kolkata clashes took place between the police and the refugees. A good number of refugees were killed and many injured in these clashes.
Inner-Party developments in the Janata  In the meantime, the state Janata party committee had been reconstituted in late 1978. The chairmanship of the state committee went to Fazlur Rahman, a former Congress(0) associate of P.C.Sen, but who posed to adopt an independent stance after his appointment as the state party chairman. In the new committee, the anti-Sen elements (particularly Nirmalendu Dey and his followers) got a larger representation. Preparations started for holding the organizational elections of the party. But ultimately the elections did not come off. A court injunction restraining the Returning Officer from holding the organizational elections was obtained by a section of BLD supporters.

The latter part of 1978 and the first few months of 1979 thus passed off without the state Janata party being able to set its house in order. In the assembly and through press statements and by holding a few meetings and demonstrations, the state Janata party tried to carry on its political campaign against the state's left government, but, objectively speaking, these made actually little impact.

The 1980 Lok Sabha poll and after  When the state Janata party was in such doldrums, came in succession, the split in the all-India Janata party, the defection of the BLD group and a few of the Socialist group, the resignation of Morarji Desai from the Prime Ministership, the installation of a caretaker government under the premiership of Charan Singh and finally the Lok Sabha election of 1980.

The state Janata party election committee (formed for the Lok Sabha election) under the stewardship of P.C.Sen set up 35 candidates for the 42 parliamentary seats in West Bengal. This
time, the former dissident Congress(O) faction of Nirmalendu Dey got quite a good number of party nominations since P.C. Sen's hold upon the central leadership had, by this time, diminished to a great extent. But this was of no avail to either the dissident Dey faction of the Congress(O) or to the Janata party as a whole. All the Janata party candidates were miserably defeated in the election; only two out of the 36 Janata candidates could secure more than only one-sixth of the polled votes - others lost their election deposits.

In sum, if we assess the role of the Congress(O) elements within the West Bengal Janata party from the day it was established till the 1980 Lok Sabha election, we would find that these former Congressmen had no group solidarity in the Janata party evidenced in the other groups like the BLD, the GPD and the Jan Sangh. The Congress(O) people within the Janata party in West Bengal worked actually as two independent factions - one owing allegiance to P.C. Sen and the other being associated with Nirmalendu Dey - often holding opposite viewpoints, always opposing each other in their inner-party power struggle and each combining with other groups within the Janata party in their attempts at reaching the helm of the Janata party power-structure in the state. No doubt, between the two, the P.C. Sen group could all the time, maintain its superiority because of Sen's standing as a veteran Congress leader who was respected by all the groups within the Janata Party, by the party's central leadership and also by the other political parties of West Bengal. Moreover, because of the absence of any other Janata leader of P.C. Sen's stature in the state party, Sen could very easily assume the unquestioned leadership of the West Bengal Janata party as such, whether or not he remained its chairman.
The Sen and the Dey factions of the Congress(O) group however possessed a basically similar ideological orientation. Both were fundamentally anti-CPI(M) in their political outlook, both believed in the Gandhian political philosophy and both were secular in their attitude. Both pursued a consistently anti-CPI(M) politics within the Janata party, both agreed on having no track with the CPI(M) in the 1977 assembly election and both wanted the Janata party to fight the 1980 Lok Sabha election singlehanded. Again when the BLD group dissociated itself from the Janata party in July 1979, Nirmalendu Dey and his followers, in spite of their intimacy with Karpoori Thakur, Anil Bhattacharya and others, did not join hands with them but on the contrary, condemned them as defectors. Similarly, though the P.C.Sen faction had a close relationship with the Jan Sangh elements within the state Janata party, Sen and his associates did not join them when they left the Janata party to form a new party known as the Bharatiya Janata party. What actually kept these two factions separate from each other was no difference in their ideological motivations nor any quarrel on principles, but a power-struggle between the two factions which had started within the Congress(O) itself in 1973 and which found a continuing manifestation in the Janata party.

The Janata party failed in West Bengal and with it, the biggest of its constituents, the state Congress(O) withered away. A new political process started in West Bengal in 1980 - a process of the elimination of all small parties - leading steadily and surely to the emergence of a two strong-party politics.

In sum, if we analyse the activities of the Congress(O) in West Bengal from its inception in 1969 through its merger in the Janata party, to its miserable failure in the Lok Sabha election of 1980, we would notice that the party's role performance
could not reach even the minimum level necessary for the maintenance of the party process. The Congress(O) failed to perform its role. But why? We shall try to answer this fundamental question in our discussions in the succeeding chapters.