The national movement in the United Provinces had had a very strong agrarian base from a very early stage. The first Kisan Sabha in the Province dated back to 1917 when the peasant leaders of Pratapgarh, Jhinguri Singh and Sahdev Singh organised a Sabha at village Rure.\(^1\) Shortly thereafter, many such Sabhas mushroomed in Pratapgarh district. (The popular kisan leader Baba Ramchandra found that, prior to his appearance in Pratapgarh in 1918, “as many as twenty or twenty-five sabhas” were already in existence.\(^2\)) By 1920, the Rure Kisan Sabha was reported to be able to draw peasants from neighbouring Rae Bareli and Sultanpur districts by the thousands and had a membership of “about one lakh”.\(^3\) Soon, Kisan Sabhas emerged in neighbouring districts as well. Meanwhile, at Allahabad, a group of nationalists participating in the Home Rule movement had formed another U.P. Kisan Sabha under the leadership of Pandit

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Madan Mohan Malaviya and Gauri Shankar Misra. Purshottam-das Tandon was chosen President of this Sabha. While the former group of Kisan Sabhas were concerned with the specific problems faced by the peasantry in their region, the U.P. Kisan Sabha appears to have taken a wider view of the problem. One of the first efforts made by the UPKS was to get representation for the *kisans* in the Montague-Chelmsford proposals. The UPKS, which was popular in the Agra region as well, was said to have, by June 1919, 450 branch Sabhas in 173 *tahsils* of U.P. In October 1920, on the eve of the Non-Cooperation Movement, a third organisation, the Oudh Kisan Sabha, came into existence in Pratapgarh. Its main work was to group together the scattered Kisan Sabhas in the Oudh region and to involve them in the Non-Cooperation Movement. Baba Ramchandra, Jhinguri Singh, Mata Badal Koeri of Rae Bareli, Kedar Nath of Fyzabad and Deo Narayan of Sultanpur were said to be the principal "local level peasant leaders" of the OKS, which also enjoyed the guidance and

4. *Ibid.*, pp.119-122. Kapil Kumar, *op. cit.*, also states that the two organisations did not know of each other's existence until 1920.


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support of Jawaharlal Nehru.\textsuperscript{8}

Recently, there have been several studies of the peasant movement in the U.P. in the 1920s. Correspondingly there have emerged different viewpoints on the character of the \textit{kisan} movement and its relationship with the Congress. Here, we shall take only the important few. Majid H. Siddiqi refers to two trends: the "patronage of politics from above" and "Kisan Sabhas from below". He further goes on to state: "The movement from below responded to the politics from above and the initially sporadic nature of Kisan Sabha activity was given a direction by the developing trend of national political events."\textsuperscript{9} D.N. Dhanagare, on the other hand, maintains that the Congress-led Sabhas tried to divert the then-powerful peasant movement into more reformist channels by blurring its anti-landlord and anti-moneylender focus.\textsuperscript{10} The "damage" was less extensive, according to him, in 1920-21 than in the 1930-32 period. By the latter date, Dhanagre posits, the movement had become wholly dependent on the "reformist" Congress leadership. Hence, when the leaders were arrested, there was no alternative leadership

\textsuperscript{8} Ibid., p.146.
\textsuperscript{9} Ibid., p.xi.
available and the no-rent campaign died a natural death. 11

In Gyanendra Pandey's work, we find a description of a few Kisan Sanghs of the thirties: the Achal Gram Sewa Sangh of Agra and Sitla Sahai's Kisan Sangh in Rae Bareili, for instance. These organisations preached amity between the zamindars and kisans. 12 Pandey feels that, in the districts of Agra and Rae Bareli, which he studied, the Gandhi-Irwin truce dampened the kisan movement, which was never able to recover the enthusiasm of the 1930-31 period. He also blames the Congress leadership, both provincial and district level, for taking disciplinary action against "militants" like Kalka Prasad who were advocating a no-rent campaign, rather than "giving a concerted call for organized peasant resistance." 13 Pandey, however, seems to overlook the strength of feeling in the Province, even at the UPCC level, for a no-rent campaign, from mid-1931 onwards. 14 As for the less violent and therefore less "spontaneous" character of the 1930-32 movement, we would only wish to submit that the worth of a movement must not be judged solely by the degree

11. Ibid., p.123.

12. The Ascendancy of the Congress in Uttar Pradesh, 1826-34, pp.41 & 175.


of violence permitted or employed. Its lasting impact - in this case, the ability to change the balance of forces between the landlords and the peasants in the latter's favour - is a better yardstick. All this is not to overlook the relatively poor guidance given by the Congress to the peasants during the agrarian crisis of the thirties, which seems apparent from all accounts.

Kapil Kumar views the growth of the peasant movement in the U.P. from the early twenties into the late thirties as a process of linear development and sharpening of focus.\footnote{`Congress-Peasant Relationship in the late 1930s' in Panigrahi (ed.), 
\textit{Economy, Society and Politics in Modern India}, (New Delhi, 1985), p.234.} According to him, from a movement which saw few contradictions between the landlord and the peasant in the twenties, the Kisan Sabhas of the late thirties grew to enunciate clearly the conflict of interests between the zamindars/taluqdars on the one hand and tenants and agricultural labour on the other. From 1936 onwards Kisan Sabhas strongly raised the slogan of abolition of zamindari - a demand which the peasants could not have thought of raising in the twenties. But by Kumar too, the Congress is seen as an obstacle in the growth of the kisan movement. He agrees with Dhanagre's view that the Congress was extremely keen to
blur the contradictions between classes in rural society—contradictions which were being increasingly brought to the fore by the kisan movement.

All this literature helps us to analyse the Kisan movement in U.P. during the Ministry period. We have already dwelt sufficiently on Congress Ministry's agrarian programme and the links between the CSP and Kisan Sabha activity. But how did the Kisan Sabha movement in U.P. function during the 1937-39 period?

The Report of the mass-contacts committee, constituted at Faizpur, had stressed the need to form "peasant associations", i.e., bodies wholly consisting of peasants, to help a "harassed, oppressed, demoralized peasantry" to take "its just place in the national movement." It was stressed that Congress Committees could not be expected to do the work of these peasant associations, since the former included all classes, many of which were more advanced than the peasants. The mass contacts committee of the UPCC also stressed the need for separate Kisan Sabhas, which alone could see to the "day-to-day demands" of the peasants. The Committee pointed to the paucity of Kisan Sabhas in the


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province at that moment which, it explained, may have been due to the fact that hitherto local Congress Committees "have often functioned as Kisan Sabhas". But it was felt that this was not enough and, for reasons mentioned above, "Kisan Sabhas should be started with the goodwill of the Congress and with its co-operation."19

In July 1937 the All India Kisan Sabha at its Gaya session appointed a U.P. Kisan Committee consisting of Acharya Narendra Dev, Mohanlal Gautam, Sajjad Zaheer and H.D. Malaviya with Dr. K.M. Ashraf as convenor.20 The Committee at first tried to function on its own, but with little success.21 It then decided to join hands with the U.P. Kisan Sangh (which had been revived in April 1935) since the unity of the peasant movement was proclaimed to be "the prime thing", and to jointly hold a Provincial Kisan Sabha.

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18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
21. The Committee tried to systematise the work of the existing Kisan Sabhas in the Province by sending out periodic circulars and asking district-level Kisan Sabhas to file weekly reports of their activities. However, no District Kisan Sabha complied and the matter was soon dropped. The Committee, despite its rather ambitious programme, ran out of steam very soon. Ibid.
Conference at Pilibhit in December 1937. It is important to note that the amalgamated U.P. Kisan Sangh remained an autonomous body until December 1938, when it was formally made a unit of the All India Kisan Sabha. Until then the UPKS was more a branch of the U.P. CSP.

The kisan movement in U.P. tried to establish a congenial working relationship with the Congress. It emphasised that "our comrades and friends should try to work in harmony and cooperation with the Indian National Congress."22 A questionnaire circulated by the UPKC to kisan workers of all districts contained the following queries:

Are you yourself a Congress member or not? If a member, please inform what position you occupy in the district, town, mandal and ward committees of the Congress?

If not a member, please tell us is it incidental or deliberate?23

Meanwhile, a lot of local-level Kisan Sabha work had already taken place. In the pre-election period, Kisan Sabhas had been formed only in such districts as had a previous record of peasant activity. In the post-election period, a great deal of spade-work was done on virgin terrain. This was largely owing to the efforts of the new

22. UPKC Circular No.1, J.P. Narayan Papers, op. cit.
23. UPKC Circular No.2, J.P. Narayan Papers, op. cit.
CSP, which controlled a fair number of lower level Congress committees. Thus, the job of setting up or reviving district, tahsil and mandal Congress committees was accompanied by the formation of Kisan Sabhas/Sanghs as well. However, the efforts were not co-ordinated at the provincial level at this stage.

In any district, the first step towards the formation of a Kisan Sabha was the holding of a kisan meeting, to which leaders from outside the district would be invited. Sajjad Zaheer and Damodar Swarup Seth were popular invitees, but occasionally Mohanlal Saksena and even G.B. Pant would be invited. Jhansi in the south-western part of the Province and Kheri on the extreme north hosted two of the earliest meetings of this kind. It is indeed noteworthy that most kisan conferences held in the pre-Ministry formation period combined anti-imperialist slogans with their class-based demands. This facet was unfortunately lost during the actual Ministry phase, when anti-imperialism gave way to anti-Ministry rhetoric.


A much larger and better organised Kisan Conference was held in the meantime at Baghpat, Meerut. (Police reports put the attendance at 3,000 whereas at the two meetings mentioned above, the size of audiences had not exceeded 300.) This conference was attended by All-India kisan leaders Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, Indulal Yagnik, Jayapракash Narayan, and even N.G. Ranga. One of the resolutions passed called for the "immediate suspension of all payment of land revenue and debts pending further legislation." Other resolutions included a demand for the release of political prisoners and a declaration not to participate in any future war, presumably Imperialist. The kisans of Meerut were thus being provided a wider political perspective than those at Jhansi and Kheri.

"Through the months of March, April and May, there was a definite widening of the base of the kisan movement. Sitapur, Pratapgarh, Agra, Hamirpur and Ghazipur all reported Kisan Sangh activities. Apart from meetings, which still drew small audiences, another form of activity was the organising of processions. On April 18, a thousand kisans were reported to have marched from Pratapgarh to Swaraj

26. PAI UP No.12/1937, p.239.

27. PAI UP Nos.13, 14, 15, 17, 18, 19/1937 for the periods 27 March-3 April, 3-10 April, 10-17 April, 25 April-1 May, 1-8 May and 8-15 May respectively.

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Bhawan in Allahabad to place before the AICC complaints of high-handedness by zamindars and taluqdar. Among the leaders of the procession were old-timers, Baba Ramchandra and Jhinguri Singh. 28 Meanwhile, Congressmen K.D. Malaviya and Gopinath Srivastava were reported to be planning a kisan march to the Council Chamber on the day that the Assembly began its session. 29 At Agra, on April 27 and 28 the Kisan Sangh organised a procession and carried placards and flags around the village where a meeting was to be held. 30

Agra was the first district to establish an organisational infrastructure for the Kisan Sabha. In April 1937, Parvati Devi was chosen as President and Reoti Saran Sharma as Secretary of the District Kisan Sabha which planned to establish branches throughout the district. 31 In Agra non-Socialists, but Congressmen with a past history of kisan mobilisation, were said to be organising the Kisan Sabha.

By July 1937, Kisan Sabha meetings were being held through the length and breadth of the Province: from

28. PAM UP No.15/1937, 10-17 April, p.286.
29. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
Aligarh, Agra and Etawah in western U.P.\textsuperscript{32} to the eastern extremities, Azamgarh, Ballia and Gorakhpur.\textsuperscript{33} While processions to local authorities continued to be organised,\textsuperscript{34} there were reports from Meerut of Chamars spiritedly refusing to perform begar for a zamindar.\textsuperscript{35} Unnao in the Oudh region stood out as a centre of pronounced kisan activity. In fact the earliest references to a kisan volunteer corps (akin to Congress Seva Dals) were from Unnao in late June 1937.\textsuperscript{36}

The first day of the Congress in office was marked by a 2,500-strong kisan march to the Council Chamber. Slogans such as 'Taluqdari Nash Ho' and 'Inquilab Zamindabad' were raised by the marchers, who were said to have largely come in from Rae Bareli.\textsuperscript{37} Such marches were to be repeated on

\begin{itemize}
\item[32.] PAI UP No.29/1937, 17-24 July, pp.530-1.
\item[33.] PAI UP No.27/1937, 3-10 July, p.510.
\item[34.] This was from village Hathaul, P.S. Bansdih, Ballia, from where on 11 July, Chitu Pande and Radha Mohan Singh took out a procession to the District Magistrate. PAI UP No.29/1937, p.530.
\item[35.] Ibid., p.531.
\item[36.] The corps was reported to have a membership of 450. PAI UP No.26/1937, 26 June-3 July, p.490.
\item[37.] PAI UP No.30/1937, 24-31 July, p.537.
\end{itemize}
several occasions in the ensuing months, notwithstanding the Pant Ministry's lukewarm and then discouraging attitude towards them.

The All-India Kisan Sabha had begun taking an anti-Ministry stand from a rather early date. On the occasion of All-India Kisan Day on 1 September, Swami Sahajanand Saraswati sent in a message to the U.P. kisan activists, expressing disappointment at the 'failure' of all Congress Ministries except the U.P. to implement the election manifesto. At the All-India Kisan Sabha meeting in the following month (i.e. October 1937) at Calcutta a resolution was passed, deeply deploiring and expressing strong dissatisfaction "with the piecemeal, superficial and perfunctory manner in which the Congress ministries have dealt with only some of the problems affecting the kisans." These pronouncements

38. On November 4, 1937, a hundred and fifty kisans of P.S. Kursi Barabanki had marched on foot to Lucknow and visited the Premier's residence as well as the Council Chamber to protest against a ziladar's doings. PAI UP No.44/1937, for week ending 6 November, pp.821-2.


strike us as having been rather premature, given the fact that the Ministries had been in office for barely three months. The condemnations seem to have had less to do with the actual performance-level of the Ministries and more with the Kisan Sabha conviction that the Ministries must be relentlessly flogged to prevent them from sliding into reaction and pro-Imperialism.

Though the U.P. Ministry had been singled out as the one Ministry whose performance was passable, the general tone of the AIKS tended to get reflected in some speeches in the Province. For instance, a kisan pamphlet brought out by Allahabad Socialists (in reality Communists) Sajjad Zaheer, K.M. Ashraf, H.D. Malaviya, Bhisham Arya and Z.A. Ahmed declared that the Congress Ministry’s "promises" to the peasants were "inadequate". The kisan leaders were critical of the Congress Ministry on other counts too, such as the firing on Kanpur workers and the delay in the release of political prisoners. Such rhetoric could make the Ministry somewhat defensive (though one wonders whether, in the

41. PAI UP No.33/1937, 14-21 August, p.557. The pamphlet was titled 'Kisanon ki Mang aur unki Larai'.

42. Sheopujan Tripathi, a Benares-based Socialist and Kisan Sabhaite commented that the Congress Ministries were becoming Anglicised "and hence the police were able to fire on the Congress gathering at Kanpur." PAI UP No.34/1937, 21-28 August, p.557.
first flush of legislative activity the Ministry even had
time to notice these speeches.)

There was another side to the picture. In the wake of
the formation of a Congress Ministry, kisans like other
sections of society experienced a new elation, a new confi-
dence. Almost always this new mood would be translated into
a spirit of defiance towards their landlords. A few inci-
dents may be cited to illustrate this: in Rae Bareli, P.S.
Mustafabad, a zamindar was prevented from ploughing his land
by fifty "Congress followers" who claimed that the land was
fallow.43 Almost at the same time it was reported from Azam-
garh that a large number of tenants, armed with lathis, had
cut paddy belonging to a zamindar.44 Meanwhile a European
zamindar in Sultanpur was stabbed to death by two tenants as
a fallout of a dispute over the land on which his bungalow
stood.45 In Allahabad, a woman zamindar was reported to
have been beaten for attempting to collect rent.46 In
village Pakhanpura, Ballia district, tenants managed to

43. Pai UP No.36/1937, 4-11, September, p.571.
44. Pai UP No.37/1937, 11-18 September, p.577.
45. This incident took place on 30 August. Pai UP
46. Pai UP No.39/1937, for week ending 2 October, p.588.
prevent labourers from cutting weeds on a zamindar's plot. The landlords were more than alarmed. Their reactions varied from a vague sense of uneasiness at the frequency of kisan meetings to a generalised fear and expression of a need to form counter-organisations. There were cases of retaliatory violence from zamindars in Azamgarh and Gorakhpur. In Jhansi, zamindars were reportedly panic-stricken by rumours that the zamindari system would be abolished.

There was a spontaneity to kisan mobilization at this stage. Where formal organisation existed, it was district-based. By the end of 1937, the chief district-level organisers of Kisan Sanghs/Sabhas could be clearly identified. For instance in Shahjahanpur there was Prem Krishen Khanna, Munshi Singh in Pratapgarh, Ayodhya Prasad in Jhansi, Sahgir

47. PAI UP No.41/1937, 9-16 October, p.600.
48. PAI UP No.49/1937, 4-11 December, pp.653-4.
49. Ibid.
50. For more details on this see P.D. Reeves, Landlords and Government in Uttar Pradesh (Bombay, 1981), pp.234-38.
51. PAI UP No.49/1937, p.654.
52. PAI UP No.47/1937, pp.20-27 December.
Ahmed in Etawah, Shibbanlal Saksena in Gorakhpur, Kalka
Prasad in Rae Bareli, Ram Lakhan Tiwari and Vishwanath
Mardana in Ballia, Harsh Deo Malaviya and Sajjad Zaheer in
Allahabad, Prag Narain Srivastava in Farrukhabad, Hakim
Brijlal Varman in Mathura, Rustamji Satin and others in
Benares. Activists like Harsh Deo Malaviya and Sajjad
Zaheer could often be found directing *kisan* activities
outside their own districts as well. What must be noted,
however, is that not all the *kisan* activity recorded above
was at the initiative of the U.P. Kisan Sangh. Indeed the
effort was uncoordinated, dispersed. An overarching unity
was provided, if at all, not by the U.P. Kisan Sangh but by
the context of the Congress in office.

The U.P. Kisan Committee and the earlier formed U.P.
Kisan Sangh, it may be recalled, had resolved to work to-
gether to make the Provincial Kisan Conference a success.53
The conference was held at Pilibhit on December 6-7. The
proceedings were on a rather low key.54 Police observers
attributed the relative failure of this conference to the

53. UPKC Circular No.3, 23 August 1937, *J.P. Narayan
Papers*, op. cit., p.39.

54. The attendance was only 5,000 at the highest, which was
the average attendance at any district-level *kisan*
meeting at this time. *PAI UP* No.49/1937, 4-11 Decem-
ber, pp.654-5.
inability of the more important leaders to attend, the pre-
occupation of kisans with watering the wheat crop, etc. In
our reckoning there were other contributory factors too --
such as the choice of the venue. Pilibhit, unlike many
other districts of the Province, was a low kisan mobiliza-
tion region in 1937 (though it had witnessed some activity
in February 1937). Had the kisan leaders chosen Gorakhpur
or Azamgarh, Jhansi, Etawah or even Sultanpur or Mathura,
they would, in all likelihood, have had a better-attended
conference. The second reason has been already cited above:
The U.P. Kisan Committee/Sabha had failed to try and bring
localised, dispersed pockets of kisan activity together
under its own umbrella. (Soon after this conference, such
an attempt was to be made, as will be seen later.) The
resolutions passed at this conference were non-descript, yet
worthy of notice because of their moderate tone, 55 and
effort at including the largest possible cross-section of
cultivators within the fold.56

Unsuccessful as the Pilibhit Kisan Conference might

55. Instead of any call for non-payment of rent, the Con-
ference only asked for those tenants to be exempted
from rent who were on the margin of poverty. PAl UP
No.49/1937, 4-11 December, p.655.

56. The Conference also passed a resolution to the effect
that land revenue should not be realized from petty
zamindars. Ibid.
have been, the ensuing period saw the growth of organised Kisan Sabha work in the Province. This was probably aided by a visit of Swami Sahajanand to the U.P. in early January 1938. Large crowds were reported to have turned up for his meetings at Unnao, Rae Bareli, Fyzabad and Barabanki. By contrast, his meetings in western U.P. were thinly attended, save for Shahjahanpur. The issue of Congress-Kisan Sabha relations was uppermost in Sahajanand's mind, because of the Bihar experience. Congressmen in Bihar had been asked not to take part in Kisan Sabha activities. Sahajanand himself had just handed in his resignation from the Working Committee of the BPCC. There was an edge of bitterness to his U.P. speeches, though he continually emphasised the need for Congress-Kisan Sabha unity.

Swami Sahajanand Saraswati had, at some of his


58. At Bijnor, which he visited on 12 January, his meetings drew an average of 300 persons; at Saharanpur 200 and at Meerut 150-300. PAI UP No.3/1938, pp.18-20.


60. In some of his speeches, Sahajanand was reported to have said that when the British Government left India, the "selfish capitalist element" in the Congress must not be allowed to usurp kisan rights. PAI UP No.3/1938, pp.18-20.

61. Ibid.
meetings, asked the kisans to take a pledge to join the Kisan Sabhas. After his return to Bihar, the U.P. Kisan Sabha chalked out a set of programmes to consolidate the gains. Interestingly the attempt was to channelise all activity Ministry-wards since there was a strong feeling that it was high time the Pant Ministry enacted some agrarian legislation. Kisan Day was observed in some districts on 12 January 1938.62 On 17 January, two hundred kisans of Lucknow and Rae Bareli districts marched to the Council Chamber to put their grievances before the Ministry.63 Meanwhile, the UPKS was planning a more elaborate march to the Council Chamber on 29 January, which would involve the peasants of all neighbouring districts. A list of 17 demands had been drawn up which the Sabha intended to subsequently place before the Haripura Congress. Virtually at the last minute, the march was put off, the Sabha having received an assurance from Jawaharlal Nehru that he would place their charter of demands before the Congress session at Haripura.64 On 1 March 1938, when after the withdrawal


63. PAI UP No.4/1938, 15-22 January, p.27.

64. PAI UP No.5/1938, 22-29 January, p.33.
of its resignation, the U.P. Congress Ministry returned to office, the kisans finally held the long-delayed march to the Council Chamber. About 20,000 kisans were reported to have come into the city, about 90 per cent of them being from Unnao.65 What were the demands put forward by these peasants? First and foremost was the demand that all categories of peasants, including those on sir land, be given hereditary rights. Reduction of rent and irrigation tax, the stopping of ejectments, the writing off of arrears of rent and previous debts, the providing by Government of loans at low rates of interest, of free pastures for their cattle and of free hospitals, courts and schools for their children were the other demands.66 There were political slogans too - such as the demand for removal of the ban on the Communist Party.67 Bishambar Dayal Tripathi, the Unnao leader, was undoubtedly the moving spirit behind this march. (Tripathi, himself a kisan-cum-Congress leader, had been initially opposed to the idea of forming separate Kisan

65. PAI UP No.10/1938, for week ending 5 March, p.62.
66. Sangharsh, 7 March 1938, p.16.
67. Ibid.
The *kisan* procession of 1 March was noteworthy for another reason - Kanpur labour and labour leaders also participated. A number of mill-workers carrying red flags had joined the marchers. In the evening, when the *kisans* were assembled at Amin-ud-Daula Park for a meeting, they were addressed, among others, by Arjun Arora, the Kanpur-based labour leader. He assured the *kisans* that 40,000 workers of Kanpur were behind them. This link between the more advanced labour movement and the Kisan Sabha could have been a useful one, had it been pursued. Indeed, in a country like India, the link between labour and the peasantry was still in existence. The average industrial worker of Kanpur, for instance, still had his moorings in a village - be it in distant Gorakhpur or adjoining Fatehpur. During prolonged strikes and at harvest time, he would return to his *dehat*. Agriculture still provided a supplementary source of income to his paltry earnings from the factory.

If Kisan Sabha leaders had realized the immense possibili-

68. On January 8, at a Unnao meeting in connection with Sahajanand's tour, B.D. Tripathi, had apparently interrupted Jata Shankar Shukla, who was asking the audience to take a vow to join the Kisan Sabha, and said that such vows could not be taken there. *PAI UP* No.3/1938, 8-15 January, p.17.

69. *PAI UP* No.10/1938, for week ending 5 March, p.62.
ties latent in these linkages, they could have requisitioned the services of labour leaders and even ordinary workers for rural mobilization. This is not to say that *kisan* leaders were oblivious to this potentiality. In late November 1937, Ayodhya Prasad of Jhansi was reported to be holding "secret meetings with *kisan* workers" to "amalgamate *kisan* and labour agitation."70 In March 1938, when feeling against the Ministry was running somewhat high due to the arrest of some labour leaders for "inflammatory speeches",71 Kisan-cum-Congress leader Jata Shankar Shukla of Unnao declared at a meeting that *kisans* must organise outside the Congress, just as labour had.72 Rather than ally with the Congress, Shukla said, *kisans* could ally more profitably with labour. But there is no evidence of a follow-up in this direction. Instead, the onus seemed to be on labour leaders to promote the *kisan* movement in their regions. In places like Jhansi, host to a number of important railway workers' conferences, labour leaders took interest in the peasant movement. In the case of Gorakhpur a strong peasant movement enabled the relatively weaker labour movement to find its feet. In the one instance where a major working class strike (in Kanpur, 70. PAI UP No.46/1937, 13-20 November, p.631.

71. Asok Kumar Bose and Santosh Chandra Kapoor were arrested under Section 107 Cr. P.C.

May-June 1938) co-existed with considerable agrarian ferment in the rural hinterland, it is difficult to determine whether the two were related, whether there indeed was an impact of the former on the latter.

The U.P. Kisan Sabha, owing to its heavy Socialist component, was more moderate than its Bihar counterpart. In January 1938, audiences at Kisan Sabha meetings were being told that they would have to pay up rent.73 On the other hand the attitude of the U.P. Congress leadership was also more accommodative, at least until April 1938. Although there was a vague uneasiness about the Kisan Sabha's style of functioning and the bona fides of certain elements within it were suspect in the PCC's eyes, there also was a strong body of Congress opinion in the Province (including Jawaharlal Nehru) which believed in the need for Congressmen to remain within Kisan Sabha units.74 This was revealed when some individuals tried to get the PCC to pass a resolution, in December 1937, debarring members of the Congress Executive Council from participating in Kisan Sabha activities.75 The resolution was defeated and Kisan Sabhaites

73. FAI UP No.3/1938, p.16.


75. Sangharsh, 26 December 1937, p.11.
like Mohanlal Gautam and Damodar Swarup Seth continued to serve on the Executive Council of the UPCC. The attempt by some U.P. Congressmen like Gopinath Srivastava and Mohanlal Saksena to import Bihar PCC-like tactics to the U.P. was thus nipped in the bud.76

At the beginning of 1938 Mohanlal Saksena had made the allegation that Kisan Sabhas in the Province had not done any constructive work.77 The accusation was not wholly unjustified. Through 1937, especially after the formation of Ministries, agitational politics had indeed been the hallmark of the Kisan Sabha's effort. With very little preparation, kisans had been exhorted to strike at their landlords, to refuse to pay rents, to snatch their lands, etc. By 1938, there was fortunately a change for better with some attempt at regular, day-to-day meetings and the ideological education.78 Yet the approach was predominantly

76. Gopinath Srivastava proposed the resolution alluded to above. Ibid. Mohanlal Saksena, a strong candidate for the presidency of the UPCC, was reported to have said in December 1937 that there was no need to have separate kisan organisation at all, since the kisans were not a separate class. Sangharsh, 3 January 1938, p.7.

77. Ibid.

78. In the summer of 1938, Kisan Sabhas planned political study camps in some places, e.g. Lalitpur, Jhansi from 16-30 June, where top Communist-Kisan Sabha leaders like Sajjad Zaheer, Rustamji Satin and Ayodhya Prasad would be present. Sangharsh, 9 May 1938, p.18.
agitationist - an approach whose fundamental weakness lay in the propensity of the landlords to retaliate with counter-violence, combined with the helplessness of the State (i.e. the Congress Ministry) to protect the kisans when they took to acts of aggression. Some Kisan Sabha leaders also adopted a rough, agitational approach towards hostile Congressmen and a Ministry slow to implement tenancy legislation. Faith in the Ministry would be lost the moment a kisan leader was arrested. However, in the long run, wiser and older counsel prevailed and often the salve would be applied on bruised relations by mouthing slogans about Congress-Kisan Sabha unity.

79. In December 1937, Mohanlal Gautam reacted sharply to Gopinath Srivastava's statements and resolution in the UPCC. He accused Srivastava of trying to placate the zamindars and lamented that a reformist trend was growing within the Congress. Sangharsh, 26 December 1937, p.11.

80. From April to November 1938, when the U.P. Ministry had to delay the introduction of the Tenancy Bill in the U.P. Legislative Assembly because of (i) referring the draft to a Select Committee of the Assembly and (ii) the Congress Working Committee's Parliamentary Sub-Committee's efforts to work out an agreement with the two landlord associations on the Bill, many Kisan Sabha leaders proclaimed that the Ministry had sold itself to the zamindars, that the tenants could expect no justice from the Ministry, etc.

81. See, for instance, the Lucknow meeting of UPKS, 2 April 1938. Sangharsh, 11 April 1938, p.16 & FAI UP No.15/1938, 2-9 April, p.97, where Kisan Sabha workers were urged to support and strengthen the Congress organisation in spite of provocation from certain persons in the Congress.
In the second quarter of 1938, the U.P. Kisan Sabha began showing signs of maturing. The meeting of 2 April at Lucknow was intended to gather together all district representatives of the Kisan Sabha. Apparently some 16 District Kisan Sanghs had established contact with the UPKS; yet several others were working on their own.82 A larger and better organised meeting was to be held in Kanpur on 12 and 13 June, to which two kisan representatives from each district with a membership of over 5,000 would be invited. This was in addition to all the members of the Provincial Kisan Sangh.83 Some study camps, as in Lalitpur, Almora and Agra were planned for the summer.84 The Unnao Kisan Sangh was especially active, holding regular meetings and forming tahsil-level branches.85

After the June meeting of the Provincial Kisan Sangh, the President, Mohanlal Gautam, issued a further set of instructions to the branch organisations.86 Local Kisan Sangh units were to undertake a membership enrolment drive

82. Sangharsh, 11 April 1938, p.16.
83. Sangharsh, 30 May 1938, p.13.
84. Sangharsh, 11 April 1938, p.13 & 9 May 1938, p.16.
85. PAT UP No.15/1938, 2-9 April, p.97.
86. Sangharsh, 8 August 1938, p.16.
(the fee being, of course, one anna), which was to be completed by 20 July. Following this the election machinery would be set in motion, with Mandal Kisan Sanghs holding their elections first, in August 1938. After this, elections to the District Kisan Sabhas were to be conducted. Finally the Provincial Sabha elections were to be held in October 1938. Quite obviously the framework of the Congress organisation was sought to be replicated. Even the enrolment drive seemed to be modelled on the Congress enrolment campaigns, conducted with so much aplomb in the 1936-39 period. Yet, the Kisan Sabha was never able to achieve the same degree of centralisation as the Congress, great as its desire seems to have been to do so.

As a backdrop to all this, kisan processions to local authorities continued with unfailing regularity. Indeed, by the summer of 1938 there was a marked increase in their frequency. 87 There was no dearth of Kisan Sabha meetings

87. A single issue of Sangharsh, of 16 May 1938 reported three such processions: one in Etawah (2,000 strong, to the D.M.) the second in Aligarh (100 to the Collector) and the third to Ghazipur (8,000 to the Collector), pp.15-16.

The Unnao Kisan Sangh took out demonstrations on April 6 & 12. PAI UP Nos.15/1938, p.97 & 16/1938, p.103.
either. An added dimension to the Kisan movement appeared with the publication of the U.P. Government's Tenancy Bill proposals in April 1938. Indeed, it was not just the draft Bill that activated the peasant movement, but its fallout in terms of landlord panic. In the following months, kisan activists could no longer complain of general apathy. Peasants in all parts of the Province were faced with the daily threat of eviction, refusal to be allowed to cultivate sir lands, and in the more backward areas, where landlord power was more absolute, physical assaults on tenants, kisan leaders and even Congressmen became the norm. These reactions from landlord quarters came in the wake of a fear that, under the new Tenancy Bill, tenants, especially those on sir lands beyond the stipulated limit, would get hereditary rights. Fear was also sparked off by the murder of a zamindar, Jangi Rai, in Maharajaganj, Gorakhpur, by his tenants in mid-May 1938, when he had gone to collect rent.

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fn.87...contd...

In Ghazipur the first act, after the formation of a District Kisan Sangh in May 1938, was the taking out of a procession of 2,000 kisans to the D.M.'s Court. PAI UP No.19/1938, 1-7 May, p.118. In Hardoi, a hundred kisans of tehsil Shahabad marched to the D.M.'s residence in early June to complain against zamindars. PAI UP No.23/1938, for week ending 4 June, p.141.

88. Chapter II of the Tenancy Act.

The murder shook up not only the zamindars; it had a chastening effect on the kisan activists and leaders as well.

The Maharajganj incident may be treated as a watershed in the career of the Kisan Sabha in U.P. In the aftermath of the murder, there was a change in the tone of speeches at Kisan Sabha meetings. Speakers, by and large, no longer incited peasants to acts of defiance and aggression against the zamindars (as was done in the early months of the Congress Ministry's tenure). Instead, peasants were, in the months of June-October 1938, being told to resist zamindari oppression firmly, either through passive resistance or by imposing a boycott on troublesome zamindars or by refusing to perform begar.90 Chitu Pande of Ballia went to the extent of suggesting, at a kisan conference, that if the zamindars forcibly ploughed their fields they should ask an old man of the family to lie down on the field and be killed, so that the authorities would have to convict the zamindar for murder.91 This piece of advice may not have been acted upon by the kisans but, by and large, peasants were favourably impressed with the above suggestions and tried to act in accordance with them. In Unnao (P.C. Aj-

90. See e.g. speech by Sheo Bhaddar Nath Tewari in Basti, PAI UP No.23/1938, for week ending 4 June, p.139.
gain), in July 1938, a tenant was denied his rights of cultivation of a piece of land he had been tilling for a long time. His zamindar had got the land ploughed and sown on his own. The tenant was undeterred. With the help of the Mandal Congress, he managed to plough up and re-sow the field. In Sultanpur, a chamar tenant refused to obey the zamindar's order to upturn a field already sown by the rightful tenants. He was beaten up by the zamindar's men, but he went to the local police station and filed a complaint under Section 452 IPC against the zamindar. From Gorakhpur, Basti, Aligarh, and Benares there were reports of boycott of zamindars.

Judging from the behaviour of the big zamindars and taluqadars after the publication of the draft Tenancy Bill, it seems that they were most exercised about restrictions on sir in the proposed Bill. This came as a shock to the

92. PAI UP No.29/1938, 16-23 July, p.175.
93. Ibid.
96. PAI UP No.34/1938, 13-20 August, p.205.
97. PAI UP No.50/1938, 3-10 December, p.317.
98. It was originally proposed that a ceiling on sir lands be placed, at fifty acres. This was later raised to 100 acres.
landlords who had hitherto been used to accumulating unlimited amounts of sir land. Believing that they could somehow retain the lands if they acted swiftly, they tried to evict the tenants who had been cultivating them for several years. In the sowing season of 1938 (i.e. the months of May-June) they tried to prevent tenants from entering the fields. Instead they tried to get such lands cultivated by their own servants, or low-caste peasants or other peasants who could not stake a claim to the land.99

Faced with this threat in virtually all parts of the Province, the kisans needed the help of an organisation and leadership to resist the onslaught. This need was fulfilled in most areas. Consequently there emerged pockets of peasant sangathan in the U.P. during the second and third quarters of 1938. Fatehpur and Jhanši, Unnao, Rae Bareli and Basti, Benares and Gorakhpur were some such areas. As a result of varying factors, a stronger movement grew in some areas as opposed to others. Sometimes it was owing to a strong leadership (as in Fatehpur, Gorakhpur, Jhansi and Unnao) or an earlier tradition of peasant protest (as in Rae Bareli, Fyzabad, Hardoi and Agra), or a sudden increase in

saimdari oppression (as in virtually all parts of the Province) and denial of long-standing rights (as in Fatehpur) or even a strong Communist-labour influence (as in Kanpur, Jhansi and parts of Gorakhpur).

To understand the nature of the U.P. peasant movement in the Ministry period better, we shall undertake three case studies of Fatehpur, Jhansi and Unnao district.

FATEHPUR

Fatehpur district had, from early 1938 onwards, seen the build-up of a formidable kisan movement. It began with mobilization "from above". The Kisan Sabha unit in the district held a series of kisan meetings in all parts of the district from 3-10 March. A steady tempo of activity was maintained thereafter, largely through the efforts of Swami Bhagwan, who was to emerge as an important peasant leader of the district. He was assisted by Swami Vidyamandji, Shivdatt and Rajendra Kumari. Between March and June 1938 the Kisan Sabha seems to have done the initial spade-work.

100. Sangharsh, 28 March 1938, p.12. On 3 March, the Fatehpur tehsil Kisan Sammelan was held in village Makanpur. On 5-6 March there were kisan meetings in Zafarganj Mandal. On 7-8 March it was at Ranipur village. On 8 March the Khaga tahsil Kisan Conference was held and on 9-10 March Kisan Sabhas were set up at Sawant and Kishnapur respectively.

101. Ibid.
On 3 June 1938 the Fatehpur District Kisan Sabha meeting reportedly attracted 10,000 kisans. The meeting was addressed by leaders from outside the district too - B.P. Sinha, editor of Sangharsh, and the ex-revolutionary terrorist-turned Communist, Manmath Nath Gupta, were among the main speakers. The meeting expressed sympathy with the striking textile workers of Kanpur.

There were several links between the industrial town of Kanpur and neighbouring Fatehpur. Indeed, the latter, as also Unnao, were Kanpur's rural hinterland. The two districts together provided a sizeable portion of Kanpur's industrial labour force. Fatehpur also met the greater part of the foodgrain requirements of Kanpur city. The district was well connected with all parts of the Province, since it was on the rail route with the East Indian Railway passing through the northern part of Fatehpur. The Grand Trunk Road also traversed the district from east to west. Hence, it was easily accessible to major leaders touring the Province. Yet Swami Sahajanand Saraswati thought fit to visit Fatehpur only on his third tour, in October 1938. This was perhaps in recognition of the Kisan Sabha's successes in that region.

102. Sangharsh, 13 June 1938, p.16.

103. Fatehpur Settlement Report, 1915, p.3.
Fatehpur did not really have a past history of *kisan* unrest, though it had participated in the no-rent campaign of 1930-31. The Final Settlement Report, drawn up in 1915 stated: "Relations between landlords and tenants are good, largely because the tenants are in so strong a position that landlords have little power of harassing them." At that time, about 65 per cent of Fatehpur tenants had occupancy rights. Landlords were being progressively weakened, as elsewhere, by frequent sub-division of their holdings. It was also noted that land was passing from the hands of the Muslim *zamindars* (who had lost 31.63 per cent of their land) into the possession of the Thakurs.

This region of relative landlord-tenant amity suddenly witnessed an upheaval in 1938. The publication of the draft Tenancy Bill's main provisions apparently caused an already insecure *zamindari* class to panic. There was large-scale denial of customary rights to tenants. One such right was the use of tank water for irrigation - the tanks being generally situated on *zamindars' lands*. In many parts of Fatehpur, the *kharif* crop of 1938 was affected by excessive monsoon showers, followed by a dry spell. When the tenants

104. Ibid., p.9.
105. Ibid.
tried to draw water for their parched fields, they found that the zamindars had blocked their access to the tanks. As a result, it was reported, the kharif crop was practically ruined. In Khaga tahsil a zamindar by the name of Agha Ali Khan had gone to the extent of stopping the flow of water from a canal into the tank and turned the tank into a field. About 550 bighas of land were said to have been affected by this action.106 The tenants of Khaga went to the district authorities for help but apparently the police and even the legal apparatus were hand-in-glove with the zamindars.107 The peasants had also made complaints in the local Kisan Sangh office as well as with the District Congress Committee. The latter appointed an enquiry committee which concluded that the zamindar was being unjust. The PCC was approached for permission to start satyagraha in the region, but this request was turned down.108

In spite of all these odds, or perhaps in response to them, the Kisan Sabha in Fatehpur gathered strength. But

106. Sangharsh, 1 August 1938, p.16.

107. Sangharsh, 8 August 1938, p.22. In tahsil Khajua, village Khusmabad, a widow's property was snatched by a zamindar. The Court gave a verdict in the zamindar's favour and the Government apparently supported the court's verdict. Sangharsh, 15 August 1938, p.16.

108. Sangharsh, 1 August 1938, p.16.
there was a slow moving away from the Congress. In mid-September, speakers at a Kisan Sabha meeting in Fatehpur advised the audience not to depend upon the Congress alone since the latter "had colluded with Zamindars and had done nothing substantial for the benefit of the tenants." The urgency of the need to join the Kisan Sabha was thereby stressed.

Henceforth, relations between the local Congress unit and the Kisan Sabha were strained. This was unfortunate, given the fact that the two had had cordial relations in the beginning. In this case the friction, which may have begun with the UPCC’s stiff attitude towards the Kisan Sabha

109. PAI UP No.38/1938, 10-17 September, p.236.

110. There had been no Congress opposition to the formation of a Kisan Sabha in Fatehpur, unlike Sultanpur, Meerut, Shahjahanpur, or even Rae Bareli. The second district Kisan Sammelan at Hathgam, Fatehpur, on 3 June 1938 was attended by Congressmen as well. Sangharsh, 30 May 1938, p.16 and 13 June 1938, p.16.

In Sultanpur kisan leaders were reprimanded for not having got the permission of the PCC President before organising the Sabha. PAI UP No.22/1937, 22-29 May, p.389. In Meerut the DCC President, Sheo Dayalu, rather quaintly accused the local Kisan Sabha of spreading "Communist propaganda" in the guise of the Congress. PAI UP No.25/1937, 19-26, June, p.472.

In Shahjahanpur and Rae Bareli Congressmen were vying with each other in a bid to attract larger audience for their respective meetings, which would be held simultaneously. PAI UP No.46/1937, 13-20 November, p.632, for Shahjahanpur and PAI UP No.24/1937 for week ending 19 June, pp.43-44 for Rae Bareli.
in mid-1938, was accentuated when negotiations with the zamindars over the Tenancy Bill were begun. Despite the Pant Ministry's non-involvement in the negotiations, the Kisan Sabha, perhaps influenced by Swami Sahajanand's rhetoric, tended to blame it. This apparently alienated the local Congress organisation, which, in November 1938, showed eagerness to dissociate itself from the Sabha's activities. Since the reasons for the Congress-Kisan Sabha rift remain somewhat obscure in this instance, and only speculation is possible, one may also venture to suggest that the growing popularity of the Kisan Sabha had caused alarm in Congress circles. The Fatehpur Kisan Sabha was making rapid strides in early 1939. There were reports of kisan meetings in every tahsil of Fatehpur on 13 February. By mid-1939, the district had a kisan volunteer corps. Formed with the intention of defending kisans against zamindari atrocities, the corps had recruits from every village. This corps was reported to be organising

111. Police reports recorded that in mid-November Kisan Sabha workers and 'orthodox Congressmen' held rival meetings at which audiences were advised to leave the opposite party. PAI UP No.47/1938, 12-19 November, p.301.

112. Sangharsh, 26 February 1939, p.16.

113. PAI UP No.23/1939, for week ending 3 June, p.134.
daily marches to the villages, where meetings would be held. The meetings were usually addressed by Swami Bhagwan who, in one speech, advised the kisans to give their landlords inferior grain in lieu of rent; at other meetings he exhorted his audiences to work for the destruction of capitalists and zamindars. 114

To recapitulate then: Fatehpur, a district where tenants were relatively strong, seems to have thrown up an effective kisan movement to meet the zamindars' challenge. The leaders of the Kisan Sabha were not prominent Congressmen, but they were not Congress malcontents either. It is difficult to quantify the effectiveness of the Kisan Sabha in defending tenants' interests vis-a-vis the zamindars. But the record of kisan mobilization was indeed impressive.

There was a growing sense of frustration with the Ministry at least at two identifiable moments: one, in October-November 1938 when it seemed that the introduction of the Tenancy Bill into the Legislative Assembly was being inordinately delayed, and the second in April 1939, when there was a feeling that the U.P. Government was trying to suppress the kisan movement by arresting activists under sections

114. Ibid.
107, 108 and 379 of the Indian Penal Code.\textsuperscript{115} Could this have been avoided? Were not the interests of the Kisan Sabha and the Ministry compatible to the extent that both were trying to secure tenant rights? To what extent was the sectarian attitude of Sahajanand and the AIKS contributory?

**UNNAO**

Quite a different pattern of Congress-Kisan Sabha interaction developed in Unnao. Unnao, though within the Oudh region, bore certain resemblances to Fatehpur (which was part of Allahabad division). Like Fatehpur, Unnao too provided a large number of industrial workers to Kanpur. Unnao, though a taluqdar area, did not have a strong proprietorial class. Indeed, taluqdar held only 21 per cent of the cultivated land. This was a "very low average for Oudh".\textsuperscript{116} The remaining portion of the land was held under joint zamindari (25 per cent), single zamindari (17 per cent), pattidari and bhaiyachara tenure (37 per cent). In 1921 it was observed that the general condition of proprietary communities was "one of struggling poverty, the almost inevitable results of constant multiplication of owners and

\textsuperscript{115} Sangharsh, 24 April, 1939, p.19.

\textsuperscript{116} Unnao District Gazetteer, 1923, p.
sub-division of land." Yet, tenurial rights were not very strong either. Only 0.83 per cent were occupancy tenants. Zamindars extorted hari begar, nazrana and other illegal exactions from the tenants.

The villages of Pipri, Dandanapur and Sadasukh Khera had shot into fame in 1931, for the violence unleashed by zamindars on tenants who had sent a petition to the District Commissioner, complaining against their landlord's excesses. The incidents, while giving a fair idea of the power of zamindars over their tenants, also reveal that Unnao participated in the agrarian movement of 1930-32. The Congress too was actively involved and pamphlets were circulated in 1930-31, outlining its efforts to get concessions for tenants, their futility and hence the need for withholding of rent, etc. The peasants' response to this propaganda was sufficient for the police to term the situation 'dangerous' in June-July 1931.

117. Ibid.
118. Ibid.
119. For a detailed account, see Majid Siddiqi, op. cit., p.174.
120. Ibid., pp.175-180.
122. Ibid., p.192.
Even before the formation of the Congress Ministry, and prior to the establishment of a Kisan Sabha in the district, the existence of a Kisan Seva Sangh was reported. Local Congressmen were the organisers. Plans were also afoot for a march to the Council Chamber. Indeed Unnao, perhaps due to its proximity to Lucknow, frequently organised such marches in the Ministry period. Kisan leaders like Pandit Ram Autar held meetings at which kisans were told not to pay rents directly to taluqdar but instead to deposit them in the tehsil office. In January 1938 Swami Sahajanand Saraswati visited Unnao and was received by estimated 4,000-strong crowds at Hasanganj and Achalganj respectively. Sahajanand's exhortation to the kisans to form Kisan Sabhas rapidly was, however, not well received by the local Congress leader B.D. Tripathi. Tripathi was of the opinion that Congress could itself take up the problems of the peasants. Jata Shankar Shukla, the other prominent Congress leader of the district, was of the view that Kisan Sabhas were essential. Tripathi later changed his views and

123. PAI UP No.26/1937, 26 June-3 July, p.490.
124. Ibid.
125. PAI UP No.4/1938, 15-22 January, p.25.
participated in Kisan Sabha work.

As in other parts of the U.P., the landlords of Unnao too tried to evict their tenants in the summer of 1938. As in other parts of the U.P., the landlords of Unnao too tried to evict their tenants in the summer of 1938. The Congress and Kisan Sabha proved their mettle by helping the tenants to resist these attempts. The movement was strongest in Hasanganj tehsil. By late July 1938 the peasants were being advised to resort to satyagraha en masse when faced with attempts at eviction. Kisan leaders apparently did not give much thought to the actual form that a satyagraha should take and whether it would be successful in a situation where the zamindars were hell-bent on denying tenants their rights. It was reported that, at the end of July, the Unnao DCC had issued a leaflet calling for 50,000 volunteers to begin satyagraha if, within three weeks the landlords did not restore fields taken away from tenants. This was followed by a series of meetings in early August. By the third week of August about 2,000

129. PAL UP No.31/1938, 23-30 July, p.188.
130. PAL UP No.33/1938, 6-13 August, p.200.
131. PAL UP No.34/1938, 13-20 August, p.205.
volunteers had been enrolled. It may be noted that talk of *satyagraha* against landlords was not limited to Unnao - simultaneously, such talk was being reported from Mathura, Moradabad, Dehradun, Hardoi, Allahabad, Benares and many other districts as well. However, in none of these places did plans materialize. Even in Unnao, the campaign seems to have fizzled out after some time.

The *kisans' cause in Unnao was facilitated by two factors - one was the strong leadership available and the other, the support and backing given by the State machinery. Ejected tenants who took their cases to the district authorities got justice after the authorities held special sittings to discuss the matter. By October 1938, *zamindars* had perforce to return lands to tenants. In some cases lands were returned even before the authorities' verdict was

132. At the beginning of 1938 a "social boycott" of landlords in Hasanganj and Purwa tahsils was reportedly so complete that the landlords found it difficult to get even the services of barbers and washermen. Notification of Indian Press Service, 8 February 1938, AICC/24/1937, p.19.


For Moradabad, see *PAl UP* No.37/1938, 3-10 September, p.229. For Hardoi, see Pt. Shanti Swarup's announcement, *PAl UP* No.31/1938, 23-30 July, p.187.
announced. 134

Unnao's was thus a successful peasant movement in the Ministry period. To this day, the struggle of 1938-39 is recalled with pride by Unnao leaders. 135

What was the attitude of the kisan leaders in Unnao to the larger Congress organisation? As mentioned earlier, the peasant movement was in the hands of important Congress leaders. Hence there was no conflict of interests between the local Congress and the kisan movement. Indeed, the most important work of the DCC was the organisation of the kisans in these years. Speeches against the Ministry were rare - only on one occasion, at a Lucknow kisan meeting on 30 October, was an explicit anti-Ministry speech, by Jata Shankar Shukla, recorded. 136 (B.D. Tripathi, in a series of speeches from May-August 1938 did emphasise that very little

134. *Sangharsh*, 3 October 1938, p.16. It may be mentioned here that in August 1938, the Ministry had issued a circular to all district officers to take action against erring zamindars, under the preventive sections of the law. *PAI UP* No.34/1938, 13-20 August, p.205.

135. Such as Bal Gangadhar Tripathi, younger brother of B.D. Tripathi, for instance. Interview at Unnao, 29 April 1988.

136. *PAI UP* No.45/1938, for week ending 5 November, p.288. At this meeting Pt. B.D. Tripathi also deplored the attempts at a compromise with the zamindars over the Tenancy Bill.
had been achieved by the Tenancy Bill.137) The fact that at kisan meetings speakers took pains to explain the provisions of the Tenancy Bill indicated a certain faith in the Ministry.138

However, in 1939, when the Gandhi-Bose rift took place, Unnao stated its clear preference for Bose. This district became an important centre for Forward Bloc activity in U.P., with B.D. Tripathi becoming the Secretary of the All-India Forward Bloc. By June 1939 the kisan movement in Unnao was also receiving the patronage of such well-known ex-revolutionary terrorists as Ram Dulare Trivedi, Dr. Prakashwati Devi and Sri Narain Tewari. These leaders exhorted the peasants to wrest freedom "by any means" during the next war.139 Village Rasulpur Baqi, where one such meeting was held, was the scene of a "riot" a month later. In this incident, which started as a zamindar-tenant dispute over a field, about 300-400 Congressmen reportedly surrounded a

137. UPSA Political File 187/1939, pp.1-2. Tripathi's favourite statement was that the Tenancy Bill had only given one anna in the rupee.

138. See for instance, kisan meetings in various parts of Unnao in mid-December 1938, PAI UP No.51/1938, 10-17 December, p.321.

139. The meeting was held at village Rasulpur Baqi, P.S. Hasanganj, Unnao, on 4 June 1939, PAI UP No.24/1939, 3-10 June, pp.141-2.
zamindar’s party and assaulted them with lathis.140

JHANSI

From Unnao we may shift to Jhansi, where satyagraha did not remain at the level of rhetoric but was translated into actual practice. As noted earlier, Jhansi had recorded a high level of peasant activity in 1937 itself.141 Lalitpur sub-division witnessed the greatest tumult in the 1937-39 period. Interestingly, this was the area of greatest landlord oppression as well. The land was largely held by the Bundela Thakurs who exercised feudal control over the tenants and extracted high rents from them.142

When the zamindars of Pali, Pargana Balabehat in Lalitpur, denied traditional forest rights to the peasants, a jungle satyagraha was launched on 10 July 1938. A procession of 3,000 kisans started out from Gandhi Chowk and proceeded to the forests where mass cutting of wood was undertaken.143 Meanwhile in Pargana Madaora, tenants of a

140. PAI UP No.29/1939, 8-15 June, p.179.
141. PAI UP No.12/1937, 20-27 March; No.46/1937, 13-20 Nov., p.361. The Governor, Sir Harry Haig had observed that backward Jhansi was now showing signs of ferment. Haig to Linlithgow, 8 Nov. 1937, Haig Papers, Roll 3.
143. Sangharsh, 18 July 1938, p.16. See also The Leader, 15 July 1938, p.10.
village had offered satyagraha against a zamindar. But the zamindar retaliated with vengeance—a couple of weeks later, when the Mandal Congress Committee took out a procession, zamindar's men fell upon the processionists with lathis as they entered the bazaar. The movement in Tal Behat, further north in Lalitpur, primarily involved the Chamars. On 21 September 1938, a mammoth meeting of Chamars of 64 villages was held and they were advised not to do begar for their zamindars. On the following day, the local Kisan Sangh organised a 'Begar Virodhi Divas'. Since begar was extorted from tenants and agricultural labourers, the Kisan Sabha in this region mobilised a larger range of peasants. Yet, resistance to begar was no new slogan—it had been raised as early as in 1920-21 in Rae Bareli and Pratapgarh. In Jhansi, however, even in the 1937-39 period, zamindars would not tolerate such protest and kisans as well as activists were liberally beaten up by the zamindars' agents. In October 1938, the Secretary of the Tel Behat Mandal Kisan Sangh reported that such incidents were of daily occurrence. But this did not dampen the spirits of

144. PAl UP No.28/1938, 9-16 July, p.169.
145. Sangharsh, 8 August, 1938, p.22.
146. Sangharsh, 3 October 1938, p.22.
147. Sangharsh, 17 October 1938, p.4.
the organisers and kisan meetings were held regularly in 1939.148 Indeed the March 1939 speeches, with talk of seizing control of police stations and tahsil offices, were broadly similar to the rhetoric in Unnao in the same period.149

Who were the organisers of the Kisan Sabha in Jhansi?

As suggested earlier, labour leaders of the region appear to have taken interest in the mobilization of the peasants. B.D. Dhulekar, labour leader and district-level Congressman, and Ayodhya Prasad were two prominent figures. The Jhansi movement has been described as a Communist-led movement by some Congressmen150 and if this were indeed so, the difference in tactics is more easily understood. The Jhansi kisan movement was different from the mainstream kisan agitation in the Province in respect of a greater tendency to take the law into its own hands. The movement seldom, perhaps never,

148. FAI UP No.6/1939, for week ending 4 February, p.25; No.8/1939, 11-18 February, p.38; No.10/1939, for week ending 4 March, p.50; No.11/1939, 4-11 March, p.53; No.12/1939, 11-18 March, p.58; No.13/1939, 18-25 March, p.64; No.15/1939, for week ending 1 April, p.76; No.23/1939, 27 May-3 June, p.133; No.32/1939, for week ending 5 August, p.201; No.33/1939, 5-12 August, p.210.

149. FAI UP No.12/1939, p.58. For B.D. Tripathi's speeches in Unnao see UPSA Political File 187/1939.

150. Interview with a Jhansi Congressman, Maurawan, Unnao, 30 April 1986.
used the Congress Ministry or the proposed Tenancy Bill as a ballast. Curiously, tactics such as organised marches to district authorities, which were marginal, were resorted to only in the later stages.151

From the above three case studies then, three broad types of kisan movement can be discerned. The Fatehpur model of a movement outside the existing Congress framework, becoming strongly critical of the Congress Ministry, can be applied to other districts such as Benares and Rae Bareli and Etawah to some extent, though it must be stated that the level of animosity was much lower Fatehpur than in these other districts. The Unnao model of coalescence between Congress and kisan activity can be applied to Gorakhpur, with Shibbanlal Saksena enjoying the stature of a B.D. Tripathi. Here, the kisan movement tended to rely less on the U.P. Kisan Sangh and the AIKS. Jhansi remains a unique case with the only point of similarity with any other district being the involvement of labour leaders in a peasant agitation - this being true to some extent of Kanpur, Benares and Gorakhpur as well.

Communist and All India Kisan Sabha rhetoric tended to

151. On 2 August 1939, a procession of 50 kisans from Babina marched to the ADM's bungalow to express their grievances. PAI UP No.32/1939, 29 July-5 August, p.202.
run along the same lines from October-November 1938 onwards.

While Kanpur Communist labour leaders such as Arjun Arora exhorted peasants at Kisan Sabha meetings to "kick aside" the Congress Ministry if it did not fulfil its obligations,152 Swami Sahajanand Saraswati on his October-November tour of the Province condemned the Congress Ministry and asked *kisans* to capture key positions in the Congress.153 The sectarian spirit which could be found only in isolated cases in the previous period154 became very pronounced towards the end of the year. Kisan Sabhaite became strongly critical of the Ministry in the months of October and November,155 probably out of a fear that the Bihar example of a Congress-*zamindar* agreement over the proposed agrarian legislation would be repeated in the U.P. as well. The disillusionment with the Congress may be seen in the larger context of the CSP's distress with the Gandhian elements at this juncture. Nor were relations with the UPCC

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153. *PAI UP* No.44/1938, for week ending 5 November, p.279.
154. *Kisan* volunteers of Saharanpur, Muzaffarnagar and Ambala were told in March 1938 that they were *not* Congress volunteers. *PAI UP* No.14/1938, for week ending 2 April, p.89. In late July 1938, Kisan Sabhaite in Benares, in an attempt to rally numbers round the Kisan Sabha, criticised the Congress Party and its workers. *PAI UP* No.31/1938, 23-30 July, p.188.
155. *PAI UP* Nos.42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48 and 49/1938 for October-November.
at their best in the second half of 1938.

The Kisan Sabha conference held at Ayodhya, along with the U.P. Political Conference in December 1938, went some way towards bridging the gap. Jawaharlal Nehru, the President of the Political Conference, had appealed to the kisans to accept the Tenancy Bill as the first instalment of their rights. Acharya Narendra Dev, who had taken over as President of the UPKS, pleaded for greater unity between Congress and the Kisan Sabha and regretted the friction between the two. The spirit of reconciliation at the Conference had the desired effect, at least temporarily. Police reporters at kisan meetings noted that anti-Ministry rhetoric was less in evidence in early 1939 and anti-zamindar and anti-British speeches assumed preponderance. Since the Tenancy Bill was making good progress in the Legislative Assembly, impatience on this score was also reduced.

156. Sangharsh, 8 January 1939, p.13.


158. PAI UP No.17/1939, 15-22 April, pp.88 & 95. It was noted, for instance, that Raj Deo Singh's speech at a Kisan Sabha meeting in Kheri was "confin(ed)ing" to "criticism of the local zamindars". Similar observations were made about meetings in Rae Bareli, Unnao, Fatehpur and Meerut.
But from mid-May onwards Kisan Sabha feelings towards the Ministry once again became negative.\(^{159}\) Two reasons can be cited: one, the Tenancy Bill was once again threatened with landlord opposition, this time in the Legislative Council, where they were in a majority. The Bill was once again referred to a Select Committee of the Council and faced with further delay.\(^ {160}\) The other cause for misgivings was a circular issued by the U.P. Chief Secretary to all District Magistrates recommending the same kind of punitive action against those preaching "class hatred" as was proposed for those indulging in communal propaganda.\(^ {161}\) Following these instructions there were a number of arrests in the months of June, July and August 1939.\(^ {162}\)

The issue of Subhas Bose and the stiff attitude of the


\(^ {160}\) Sangharsh, 9 Jul, 1939, p.10.

\(^ {161}\) Sangharsh, 25 Jul 1939, p.10. See also Chapter 3. Also AIICC PL2/1939

\(^ {162}\) Rajdeo Singh and some others were arrested in Jaunpur on 20 June. Searches were also conducted in this district. Sangharsh, 25 June 1939, p.16. On 19 June, the police conducted searches in Gorakhpur, Azamgarh, Bareipura, Benares and Gonda, though these were supposed to be in connection with dacoities. Sangharsh, 2 July 1939, p.20. Keshav Prasad Varma of Lucknow complained that he was being tailed by three CID officers when he toured Mirzapur, Gorakhpur and Basti. Sangharsh, 20 August 1939, p.22.
AICC on questions like satyagraha in mid-1939 left the Kisan Sabha leadership dismayed and critical of the Congress leadership. In August 1939, a joint statement issued by Mohanlal Gautam, B.P. Sinha and Jogesh Chatterji, all important U.P. kisan leaders, stated that the present leadership was leading the Congress on to the path of constitutionalism. They expressed their determination to fight the attempt to impose ahimsa.163

Swami Sahajanand Saraswati's twelve instructions to kisans planning to launch satyagraha (presumably in defiance of the Congress resolution banning indiscriminate use of satyagraha June 1939) make interesting reading. Issued in August 1939, they emphasised the need for peaceful methods including restraint from abuses of the police, the need to ascertain the kisan's real rights on the land from which he was evicted, etc.164 The instructions were intended for Bihar but could apply to the U.P. as well. They would have been more useful, however, had they been issued a few months earlier. Talk of satyagraha had subsided in the U.P. by this time. Sahajanand's last tour of the Province in the Ministry phase had been undertaken in May 1939 and the

163. Sangharsh, 20 August 1939, p.3.
164. Ibid., p.4.
sectarian spirit had been in evidence.\textsuperscript{165}

The AIKS was moving closer to the Forward Bloc in June-July 1939. Sahajanand, who first felt that Subhas Bose should be restrained from forming a separate party, later acquiesced and envisaged a link between the "Kisan movement in the villages" and the "Forward Bloc in the towns".\textsuperscript{166} Meanwhile, his disgust with the Congress Ministries was becoming stronger. There was no more talk of Congress-Kisan Sabha unity. He suggested that 9 July be observed as "All India Kisan Prisoners Day" to protest against the arrests of kisan leaders.\textsuperscript{167} As for the AICC decision to disallow satyagraha unless sanctioned by the PCC, his comment was:

\begin{quote}
The initiative of direct action or Satyagraha is the very breath of the nostrils of these organisations.... If the zamindars came to know that the kisans have become Congress-minded and they cannot take to direct action without the permission of the Congress they will
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{165} The main themes of the Swami's speeches were: the Ministry was not truly representative of peasant interests, kisans must not listen to the Premier, for their interests lay with the Kisan Sabha; the kisans must try to finish the zamindari system. \textit{FAT UP} No.21/1939, 13-20 May, p.118. Also \textit{Sangharsh}, 28 May 1939, p.16.

\textsuperscript{166} Sahajanand to Indulal Yagnik, 17 July 1939 and Yagnik to Sahajanand, 26 July 1939, \textit{Indulal Yagnik Papers}, Subject File 11, pp.275 & 287 respectively.

\textsuperscript{167} Sahajanand to all Provincial Secretaries, 1 July 1939, \textit{Indulal Yagnik Papers}, Subject File 11, p.269.
make simultaneous attacks not only on the fields, but the ready crops of the kisans.168

Considering that satyagraha had actually been resorted to only by one Kisan Sabha unit in the U.P., this reaction seems a little exaggerated.

By August-September 1939, the Kisan Sabha movement in U.P. had taken a back seat. Damodar Swarup Seth chided the Kisan Committees for not doing any work.169 This was not true of all district-level units however. Unnao, Gorakhpur and Fatehpur maintained a respectable level of work.170 But these were islands in an ocean of kisan inactivity and lethargy.

The looming shadow of a Second World War also diverted kisan activists' attention to larger political issues, such as non-participation in the War. There were a large number of anti-war and anti-recruitment speeches in August 1939.171

169. Sangharsh, 20 August 1939, p.16.
170. PAI UP Nos.38 & 39/1939 for weeks 9-16 September and 16-23 September respectively.
1939 was thus an indeterminate and unsatisfactory year for the U.P. Kisan Sangh, despite its affiliation to the AIKS. The peak had been reached in 1938. Yet even that effort could not compare with the movement of 1920-21 or the 1930-32 movement. On both those occasions the kisans had been on the offensive; now, during the Ministry period they were only on the defensive most of the time, warding off acts of aggression by the zamindars. This made us go back to the postulation that the agrarian movement flourished in a larger political context. Since the Congress itself was in a phase of less active conflict with the forces of Imperialism, did the agrarian movement also tend to reflect the same spirit?

The Kisan Sabha effort in U.P. was a highly uneven one. Where the leadership was strong, the peasants were able to put up stiff resistance to the landlords; where the organisation was weak, peasants continued to be oppressed.172

There were at least three levels of leadership in the U.P. Kisan movement, each with an ideology of its own. At the

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172. There were reports from Fyzabad, as late as in August 1939 of oppression of tenants in various ways by zamindars. Sangharsh, 13 August 1939, p.16. This is not to imply that there was no kisan organisation in Fyzabad, or that zamindar oppression ceased to exist in areas of militant kisan activity. The difference was one of degree.
district level there was a motley collection; of semi-religious figures, Socialists, Communists, Gandhian-type Congressmen, ex-revolutionary terrorists etc. At the provincial level there was a broad Socialist stream that tried in vain to shape and regulate the movement. At the All-India level there was a partly Socialist, partly non-Socialist leadership, which, despite its professions of Congress-Kisan Sabha unity tended to berate and run down the Congress in an effort to shine by comparison. Perhaps the U.P. alone had to contend with such a wide variety of leaders for its Kisan movement, since in Andhra and Bihar the Provincial and All-India levels would at least be homogenous.

The AIKS Report for the year 1939-40 declared the U.P. kisan movement to be behind that of Bihar, Andhra and Punjab.173 The Provincial Kisan Sangh was held responsible for not being able "to consolidate effectively the movements and activities going on in various districts."174 Somewhat belatedly, it acknowledged the worth of the U.P. Tenancy Act which was described as "a decided advance on previous ones"


and which "goes a long way in securing the overdue rights of the kisans of that Province." 175

To the query why was the kisan movement relatively weak in the U.P., we can offer two tenative answers. One, that the other Provinces mentioned above were witnessing a powerful agrarian movement for the first time, whereas the U.P. was going through a third agrarian upheaval. A movement in its first stage always draws upon greater reserves and vigour, which is also necessary to face the greater odds. We have seen how, within the U.P. itself, some districts which had not participated in the earlier no-rent campaigns but had been awakened in 1938-39, produced a more vigorous movement.

The second reason seems to be the greater receptivity of the existing Congress organisation in U.P. to the Kisan Sabha movement, so that a separate movement was not always necessary. In a few cases the district Congress unit itself became a Kisan Sabha. In western U.P., Rae Bareli and Benares, however, the two organisations were not on good terms with each other. In some districts kisans distrusted the Sabha and indicated their preference for the Congress. Given a Congress organisation with a two-decade old associa-

175. Ibid.
tion with peasant problems, it must have been rather difficult for the Kisan Sabha to establish a separate identity in the Province.

Was the Congress Ministry or the PCC responsible in any way for the weakness of the Kisan movement? Did the preventive arrests act as a dampener? If that were so, then the Bihar Kisan Sabha would have been extinguished in 1937 itself. As for the UPCC, despite moves against the Sabha such as denial of the use of Congress offices to them, it did not either prevent Congressmen from working in the Kisan Sabha nor did it debar active Kisan Sahaites from the Congress.