CONCLUSION

During the years discussed in this thesis, certain subtle but vital changes took place in the power equation in India. The fibre of British authority was eroded by the functioning of the Congress Ministries -- "not wholly or in full measure, but very substantially." The Congress Ministries had shown themselves capable, not just of functioning, but in certain respects of acquitting themselves quite favourably. Moreover, participation in the provincial autonomy experiment had made the Congress more popular and, for the ordinary Indian, association with this vehicle of nationalism became almost a compulsion.

For the steel frame of British rule in India -- i.e., the bureaucracy -- the experiment of provincial autonomy had been an extremely difficult one. Congressmen, whom they had been used to treating as law-breakers and agents of sedition, had suddenly become their masters. The period of Congress in office gave many Indian bureaucrats their first glimpse of an alternative future. Their growing pro-nationalist sympathies caused much alarm to the Viceroy and his superiors.¹ The changed relationship between the

¹. The Secretary of State, Lord Zetland, in a letter to the Viceroy on 29 November 1938, expressed concern at contd...
Congress and the bureaucracy was also a source of much uneasiness to the British throughout the war period. Numerous were the occasions and varying the contexts in which the question: how willing would the officials be to take action against the Congress in the eventuality of a mass movement, was posed.  

The very fact that there was the continued possibility of a mass movement was the ultimate reminder to the British that the 1935 constitutional experiment had not succeeded in weakening the Congress. Indeed, the episode of Congress in

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fn.1...contd...

the tendency for some Indian officials to turn pro-Congress in the execution of the Congress Ministry's policies. Linlithgow Papers, F.125/8, p.140.

It may be recalled that two years earlier the Viceroy had observed that "the success of the constitutional experiment on which we have embarked depends in a very large measure on the extent to which we can preserve the integrity of the public services, that is to say, secure their immunity from political influences or interference...." Linlithgow to Haig, 15 Nov. 1937, Haig Papers, Roll 2.

2. Home Poll 3/11/40, pp.28-36, contains summaries of replies by Governors to questions such as "How far can Government servants be expected to go in dealing with the Congress, if likely to return to power?"

Hallett in his note on the Individual Satyagraha Movement dt. 22 April 1941 observed that many Government officials, especially those in the police, found it embarrassing to take action against ex-Congress Ministers. Linlithgow Papers, F.125/104.
office had only widened the contradiction between imperialism and the nationalist forces.

The Ministry period certainly had a profound effect on the lives of the Indian people. In October 1937, Jawaharlal Nehru observed that "the country is pulsating with a new life and a new vision." For the peasantry and industrial labour these years meant a new forging of class identities and a new expression of confidence. Landlords and capitalists were compelled to realise that their vested interests would not always remain safeguarded. Students and the youth came into the forefront of political activity, at least in the U.P. This enabled them to play a crucial role in the Quit India Movement. Our study has shown how the students of the Benares Hindu University, in particular, had become adept at handling Congress affairs even earlier, i.e., during the Individual Satyagraha campaign.

On the other hand, Ministerial politics did involve


4. For statistical evidence of the predominance of youth and men in their prime in the Quit India Movement, see Max Harcourt, 'Kisan Populism and Revolution in Rural India: The 1942 Disturbances in Bihar and East United Provinces' in D.A. Low (ed.), *Congress and the Raj*, (Delhi, 1977), p.322.
Congressmen in the somewhat unfortunate exercise of balance and counterpoise. Some interests had to be conciliated, so as to effectively oppose others. In U.P., it was the money-lender lobby which was conciliated so that the landlords' objections to the Tenancy Bill could be countered. This exercise resulted in an inability to honour some of the promises made in the Congress election manifesto. Thus, debt legislation in U.P. had to be sacrificed at the altar of tenancy legislation. Likewise, budgetary constraints prevented certain cherished Congress ideals, such as that of prohibition, from being carried through.

There were other Ministerial programmes which had consequences far removed from the intentions of the Congress. One such was the literacy programme, certain nuances of which were picked up by the Muslim League to fan the communal fire. Indeed, the increased communalisation of politics in the province, which took place during the Ministry period, was the one singularly unfortunate fallout. To some extent it was inevitable -- the new power equation that had emerged with the Congress success in the 1936-37 elections gave rise to a greater sense of urgency in the camp of those who wanted to create a different power equation, i.e., Jinnah and the Muslim League. But the Congress failure to mobilise the Muslims more effectively in this period, all efforts at Muslim mass contact

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notwithstanding, also remained significant. In Chapter VI we have recorded the depressingly low figures for Muslim membership in several districts of the U.P., at a point of time when the overall Congress membership figures were recording an unprecedented rise.

If we look at the Ministry period carefully, two phases can be discerned -- one from the beginning of provincial autonomy until September-October 1938 and the second from the latter date until the resignation of the Ministries. In the former period, the Left attack on Gandhi and the constitutionalists was not very pronounced -- nor did the latter feel compelled to curb the activities of the critics. Communal riots were also not very frequent in the province. In the latter phase (which begins roughly from the time of the Munich agreement), Congress-Kisan Sabha relations were exacerbated; Subhas Chandra Bose was suddenly struck with the notion that Gandhi had turned into a compromiser and would launch no further struggle against British Imperialism and the Muslim League went on a strident anti-Ministry campaign, resulting in a greater incidence of communal riots. The Congress High Command retaliated with a series of resolutions in the Working Committee and the AICC, which were intended to discipline the Congress by laying down stringent norms. It also tried to check the growing communal forces and to weed out the undesirable elements. It was
also in this latter phase that the Congress Ministries tended to become more conscious of the need to impose law and order as well. This brought a chorus of complaints from the Left camp about the repressive tendencies of the Congress legislators.

The post-1934 period had also witnessed the emergence of several "alternatives" to Gandhism, which have been discussed in this thesis. What happened to these alternatives? Most of them remained at the level of rhetoric. Besides, the ad hocism of the groups responsible for these alternatives, namely the Royists, Subhashites, the Kisan Sabhaites and the Communists and their lack of a sophisticated understanding of the nature of British rule and the national movement in India cost them dearly. From November 1939 onwards these critics of Gandhi were left floundering in a sea of uncertainty and wartime repression. The Congress Socialists were the only exception, as we have noticed in Chapter IV. As for the masses, they so clearly looked to Gandhi for guidance that Subhas Bose and his strategy of outright confrontation with the authorities could strike no responsive chord in U.P.

For Gandhi himself, the early years of the war were a hard struggle to devise an alternative role for the Indian people from that laid down by the British. If the Viceroy had declared India a belligerent country without even con-
sulting the representatives of the Indian people, Gandhi in turn declared that India could never be a participant in a war which had resort to violence. But mere statements were not enough -- how could the Indian people be actively mobilised and public opinion aroused against participation in the British war effort? The Mahatma's search for a new type of movement led him first to Individual Satyagraha and later to the no-holds-barred campaign of Quit India. 5

The widespread response to Gandhi's Quit India call largely owed itself to the newly-acquired confidence of the Indian people in the 1937-39 period. Though not all parts of U.P. participated in this movement, there is a rough correlation between the storm-centres of 1942 and the areas of energetic mass activity in the Ministry years. Ballia is a case in point -- both in terms of the volunteer effort and Kisan Sabha activities, it had been in the forefront of popular activity during 1937-38. Azamgarh had also witnessed a strong agrarian movement and Youth League activity. Even Kanpur, despite the strong Communist influence, witnessed a goods train derailment and a serious riot in 1942. Other parts of the province provided tacit

support for the movement by giving shelter to the Quit India activists, by disseminating information and by setting up underground bomb-manufacturing centres. There was no fear of British reprisals if the movement were to fail.

Finally we might add that if we were to look at the Ministry phase of Congress activity, not merely to tabulate achievements and failures, but as part of the ongoing strategy of anti-Imperialism, then a very different understanding emerges. For any people to have faith in a movement it is necessary that they should believe that the movement is capable of a constructive role in the future. That expectation was fulfilled by the twenty-eight months of Congress rule. No small wonder then, that when the activists of the Quit India movement succeeded in displacing colonial power in certain pockets of the country, they did not try to "replace the infrastructure of the Raj with traditional models of authority" as in 1857 but rather,

6. Many Congressmen we interviewed in Rae Bareli, Lucknow and Unnao gave details of the supportive role that they had played in the Quit India Movement. Aligarh provided infrastructural support for the 1942 activists. It was a bomb-manufacturing centre, which deliberately chose to stay away from overt acts of defiance which would draw attention to the underground activities. See U.P. CID File RR No.28, relating to the Aligarh Bomb Case.
"Ruling in the name of Congress... [they] aimed at carrying out all the functions of the modern state and were structured into departments of 'justice', 'health', 'agriculture', 'education', 'propaganda', 'war', etc." Obviously the memories of Congress in office were still fresh in their minds!