CHAPTER – IV

BOSE AS CONGRESS PRESIDENT

The office of the President of Indian National Congress is very important in the organizational structure of the party. The President holds the top position in the pyramid of the party set-up. In its early days the party had only two permanent functionaries, the President and the General Secretaries. The President then was called as 'Rashtrapati' or the 'holder of the Crown' and his working committee as his cabinet. Usually the top national public personalities used to occupy this high office. Dada Bhai Naoroji, Surendra Nath Banerjea, G. K. Gokhale, Madan Mohan Malaviya, C. R. Das, Moti Lai Nehru, Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Patel, Rajindra Prasad, Subhas Chandra Bose etc. were few among the occupants of the office.

Soon after Gandhi joined Indian National Congress, a strange development took place. Though the President was still supreme in the party, the real position and power shifted from President to Gandhi. It is generally held that while the President became the de jure head, Gandhi occupied the position of the de facto head.

Gandhi really entered the Congress at its Amritsar session in December 1919, and by the time of the Nagpur session in December 1920, he had acquired great hold over it, which he maintained with varying degrees till the end of his life in January, 1948. Since his entry into the organization, the Congress began to preach his doctrines and a large number of Congressmen accepted him not merely as a political leader but also a religious preceptor. No doubt the Congress could boast
of having many able and farsighted leaders capable of guiding it. But when Gandhi took over the leadership, it is stated that many were content to fall in line and nod to whatever he said and hardly thought it necessary to do their own thinking. Dr. Rajindra Prasad has admitted that "ever since Gandhiji entered the political arena in India, other leaders were completely eclipsed by his magnetic personality".  

Gandhi came to be looked upon by the Indian masses as a Mahatma much before he became the undisputed political leader of the country. So great was the enthusiasm and respect among the people for Gandhi that when in All India Congress Committee session at Nagpur in 1920, "M. A. Jinnah who was still then a nationalist leader, addressed him as Mr. Gandhi, he was shouted down by the thousands of the people, who insisted that he should address him as Mahatma Gandhi".  

The Indian National Congress of those days were largely Gandhi's creation. From a talking body he had transformed the Congress into a living and fighting organization. It had its ramification in every town and village in India and the entire nation had been trained to listen to one voice. No doubt Gandhi had been a far bigger person in the Congress than any of its Presidents. Invariably his suggestions were followed. Repeatedly he refused to preside over the sessions and preferred that some of his colleagues and lieutenants should do so. When he accepted, the office of Presidentship of the Congress in 1924, Jawaharlal Nehru commented, "For him to become the Congress President was something in the nature of an anti-climax, for, he had been the permanent super

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President.\textsuperscript{3} The object of this essay is to examine how far it is true to say that Gandhi always held this position. In other words, is it correct that the office of the President was Gandhi’s gift to his lieutenants and faithful disciples?

From Calcutta session in 1920, till his death in 1948, there were 20 sessions of Indian National Congress. Hence 20 persons became Presidents of the party during this period. Out of these 20 sessions, 2 were special sessions. Before critically examining the role Gandhi played in the election of President, let us first of all see the constitutional provisions regarding the election of the President as given in the various constitutions of the Congress.

The constitutional provisions regarding the elections of President, according to constitution of 1908, which was followed till it was replaced by Nagpur constitution in 1920, was the privilege of the reception committee. Article XXIII of this constitution states that in the month of June, the Reception Committee shall consult several provincial Committees as to the selection of the President for the year's Congress. The Provincial Congress Committees shall make their recommendations by the end of July; and in the month of August. Reception Committee shall meet to consider the recommendations. If a person be recommended by a majority of members of the Reception Committee present at a special meeting called for the purpose, that person shall be president for the next Congress. If, however, the Reception Committee is unable to elect the President in the manner mentioned above, the matter shall forthwith be referred by it to the AICC whose decision shall be arrived at as far as possible before the end of September. In either case the election shall be

\textsuperscript{3} Nehru, Jawaharlal, An Autobiography (New Delhi: Oxford University Press), 1984, p. 132.
final. Provided that in no case shall the person so elected President, belong to the Province in which the Congress is to be held. The clause B of the same article further clarifies that there shall be no formal election of the President by or in the Congress but merely the adoption of a formal resolution requesting the President, already elected in the manner herein above, laid down, to take the chair.\textsuperscript{4}

But the prerogative of suggesting the name for Presidentship was transferred from Reception Committee to the Provincial Congress Committees by the Nagpur constitution of the Congress in 1920. According to this constitution, "the several provincial Congress Committees shall, as far as possible by the end of June, suggest to the Reception Committee the names of the persons, who are in their opinion eligible for the Presidentship of the Congress and the Reception Committee shall, as far as possible, in the first week of July submit to all provincial committees the names as suggested for final recommendations provided that such final recommendation will be of any one but not more of such names, and the Reception Committee, shall, as far as possible, meet in the month of August to consider such recommendations. If the person recommended by a majority of the Provincial Congress Committees is adopted by a majority of the members of the Reception Committee that person shall be President of the next Congress. The remaining provisions of the election are same as in 1908 constitution. Regarding the Presidentship of special or extraordinary session the constitution states, "that the President of a special or extraordinary session shall be elected by A.I.C.C. subject to the same proviso".\textsuperscript{5}

\textsuperscript{4} Rao Ramana, M. V., Development of Congress Constitution (New Delhi: All India Congress Committee), 1958, p. 17
\textsuperscript{5} Ibid., pp. 38-39.
But the role of the Reception Commute was passed on to the Working Committee after the introduction of the constitution of 1934. Now, the delegates of the provincial Congress Committee were directed to propose the names to the Congress Working Committee. According to the Article IX (f) (1) of this constitution, "As soon as may be, after the receipt of the report by the working committee of the names of the Presidents proposed by delegates of various provinces, and the number of votes recorded in favour of each, the Working Committee shall announce as President elect the name of the member obtaining the largest number of votes". The prerogative of selecting a President during extraordinary conditions also passed from A.I.C.C. to the Working Committee as envisaged in the sub-clause II of the clause "In the event of an emergency arising by reason of any cause, such as the death or resignation of the President-elect in this manner, the Working Committee shall not later than a fortnight after the emergency, elect as President the person standing next in order".6

But the actual practice was that in every elections of the President there used to be to three candidates in the fray. Usually Gandhi would decide who should contest election and others would withdraw from the contest willingly and faithfully.7

The first challenge to Gandhi's supremacy in the organization of Congress was from Subhas Chandra Bose. The fifty-first session of the Congress met at Haripura in February 1938. The growing influence of the younger and more radical section of Congress was indicated by unanimous election of Subhas Chandra Bose as the President of the

6 Ibid., p. 58.
session. There were certain differences between Subhas Chandra Bose and Gandhi. Gandhi gave clear indication of his feeling to Sardar Patel in a letter on November 1, 1937 in which he wrote, "I have observed that Subhas is not at all dependable. However, there is nobody but he who can be the President." Thus he did not oppose the election in 1938.

Subhas Chandra Bose having become the executive head of the Congress, the difference between the radical section of the Congress led by him and the other section led by Gandhi became irreconcilable. The real trouble began when Subhas Chandra Bose sought the second term for Presidentship of the Congress for Tripuri session in March 1939.

The name of Maulana Azad too was proposed by some members of Congress Working Committee. Pattabhi Sitarammayya was a covering candidate. Seeing that Subhas Chandra Bose was determined to contest for the second time, Maulana Azad withdrew his name and made an appeal to delegates to vote for Dr. Sitarammayya. In his first statement on election debate on January 21, 1939, Bose advocated that he had not received any suggestion or advice from a single delegate asking him to withdraw from the contest. "On the contrary, I have been nominated as a candidate from several provinces without my knowledge and consent and I have been receiving pressing requests from Socialists as well as non-Socialists in different parts of the country urging me not to retire". The prominent members of the Congress Working Committee including Sardar Patel, Rajindra Prasad, Jai Ram Das, Doulat Ram, J. B. Kriplani, Jamna Lal Bajaj, Shankarro Deo and Bhullabhai Desai criticised Bose for contesting the election and appealed to the delegates to vote for

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8 Ibid.
Dr. Sitarammayya. Their argument was that hitherto Presidential elections have been unanimous and appealed to Bose to withdraw from the contest". In another statement on 25.1.1939, Bose took these members of the Working Committee to task, saying, "If the Presidential election is to be an election worth the name, there should be freedom of voting without any moral coercion, but does not a statement of this sort tantamount to moral coercion? If the President is to be elected by the delegates and not be nominated by influential members of the Working Committee, will Sardar Patel and other leaders withdraw their whip and leave it to the delegates to vote as they like?"

The victory of Subhas Bose in the presidential race came as a surprise to Mahatma Gandhi and his closest colleagues. The leftists throughout India had backed Bose. This was the high-watermark of their unity in the twentieth century, perhaps a modest accomplishment. Bose also had considerable backing in some regions of India (e.g., the Punjab) and strong support from his home province, then one of the most populous areas of India. In addition, there was anti-Sitaramayya feeling in Tamilnadu, and some impatience with the Gandhian high command in other areas. So Bose, the much-better known and more charismatic candidate, won through in this round by 1,580 votes to 1,375 and was to be Congress president for 1939.

The victory for a candidate opposing his own choice, however, awakening Gandhi from his somnolence and he issued a hostile and self-accusatory statement from Bardoli two days later. In part, the Mahatma said:

10 Ibid., pp. 89-90.
11 Ibid., pp. 90-91.
“Shri Subhas Bose has achieved a decisive victory.... I must confess that from the very beginning I was decidedly against his re-election.... I do not subscribe to his facts or the arguments in his manifestos. I think that his references to his colleagues were unjustified and unworthy. Nevertheless, I am glad of his victory. And since I was instrumental in inducing Dr. Pattabhi not to withdraw... the defeat is more mine than his... it is plain to me that the delegates do not approve of the principles and policy for which I stand.

I rejoice in this defeat.... Subhas Babu, instead of being President on the sufferance of those whom he calls rightists, is now President elected in a contested election. This enables him to choose a homogeneous cabinet and enforce his programme without let or hindrance.... After all Subhas Babu is not an enemy of his country. He has suffered for it. In his opinion his is the most forward and boldest policy and programme.... The minority may not obstruct on any account. They must abstain when they cannot cooperate.”

Here Gandhi gives hints of what is to come. He says the vote was a defeat for his principles and for the rightist team of Gandhians who had long run for the Congress organization. And it was a sign of strength for those whom Bose called the left and for a program of resolute opposition to the Raj, and issuance of an ultimatum to the rulers by nationalist insurgents. But even more than these suggestions in Gandhi's words, it is a challenge to Bose to man the Congress executive and run it according to his principles and program. Gandhi had maintained since he came to force in Indian politics after the First World War, that executive bodies had to be homogeneous.

Immediately after the election and throughout the next few months, Bose was conciliatory towards Gandhi. In response to Gandhi's statement, Bose did not express the bitterness he felt about Gandhi's words ('not an enemy of his country'), but rather said, "I do not know what opinion Mahatmaji has of me. But whatever his view may be, it will always be my aim and object to try and win his confidence for the simple reason that it will be a tragic thing for me if I succeed in winning the confidence of other people but fail to win the confidence of India's greatest man."14

The Close Associates of the Mahatma were preparing to teach Bose a lesson. On February 22, all the Working Committee members—except the Bose—and seemingly including leftist Jawaharlal Nehru, resigned, leaving the Congress with a president marked for the helm, but without a crew to run the ship.

Bose wanted Gandhi's approbation. He wanted the satisfaction of victory over confining authority, but he wanted approval from the defeated party as well. Bose met with Gandhi on February 15, and thought he would have Gandhi's support, but the resignations were a warning. He had castigated the 'Old Guard' in his book and taunted them as compromisers, and yet he wanted them to continue to run the Congress organization with him. 'He was,' J.B. Kripalani told me, 'living in a fool's paradise.'15

M.N. Roy, now leader of the League of Radical Congressmen, suggested a homogeneous leftist Working Committee with himself as the general secretary. Giving his interpretation, Roy wrote to Bose: "... there is absolutely no reason for you not to assert yourself... The significance

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of the result of this year's presidential election has been correctly. .. characterised by Gandhiji himself; he has been defeated.... The Congress must be given a new leadership, entirely free from the principles and preoccupations of Gandhism which until now determined Congress politics. Gandhist principles cannot be reconciled with honest anti-imperialist politics ... the new leadership of the Congress should have the courage and conviction of acting independently even of the wishes of Gandhiji, when these run counter to the objective revolutionary urge of the movement.16

The leftists in the CSP, CPI, Royists, Kisan Sabhas, and those not in a formal group, had voted solidly for Bose; now the consequences were upon him. The CPI is said to have wanted a group in the executive, while the CSP thought a majority of leftists would do.17 But Bose had said even before the action that the leftists were disorganized and occasionally irresponsible. They were also a minority in the Congress. Bose did not want a split in the Congress. He wanted to serve as president again, and he wanted all groups with him as he tried to push the Congress towards a confrontation with the Raj. Could he have his rossogolla and eat it too?

While the Gandhi group was determining its course of action, Bose was reaching out to the Congress Socialists, to Gandhi himself, to M.N. Roy, and especially to Jawaharlal Nehru. He knew that Nehru was crucial, for the latter was the one person who talked like a socialist but was trusted by all sides. Nehru later wrote about this time, 'I decided to devote my energies towards bridging the gulf between the old leaders and the new socialist group.'18 However, as Nehru explained to Bose, he

16 Roy, M. N. Papers, Dehradun, Indian Renaissance Institute.
did not have the same sharp view of two opposed camps, one left, one right. Nehru wrote: “... there seemed to me no valid reason why there should not be the fullest cooperation between the two in the struggle against imperialism. The old leaders were tried men with prestige and influence among the masses and the experience of having guided the struggle for many years. They were not rightists by any means; politically they were far more left and they were confirmed anti-imperialists. Gandhiji ... continued to dominate the Indian scene and it was difficult to conceive of a big struggle without him. The socialists, though a small group and speaking for a minority, represented a vital and growing section...”19

Nehru told Bose that he had learned to work with the older leaders and that they were real fighters. Nehru did tend to be vague and vacillate upon occasion, but he never questioned the anti-imperialist devotion of the Gandhians and did not think they were ready to compromise on the federation issue. Nehru had warmth and respect for some of the Gandhians like Maulana Azad, and beyond this, Nehru had a relationship of mutual love and trust with Gandhi. Bose did not have such a relationship with the Mahatma. Gandhi did not fully trust him. Gandhi and his 'deputy' for Congress organizational matters, Sardar Patel, were angry, but as past masters of political maneuver they knew that careful planning and calculated moves were preferable to emotional gestures. Gandhi said that the minority—meaning his forces for the moment—must not 'obstruct' and must 'abstain when they could not cooperate.' The resignations from the Working Committee were the first indication to Bose what this was to mean.

The Congress session for 1939, was held in Tripuri in the Central

19 Ibid., pp. 495-96.
Provinces, opening on March 10. Compared to the previous Congress session in Haripura, where Subhas Bose had made a triumphal entry and a lengthy speech, this was a much more somber occasion. First, there was the dilemma of choosing a new Working Committee. The Working Committee had been scheduled to meet at Wardha on February 22, but since Subhas Bose had fallen seriously ill, he had asked other committee members through Sardar Patel to postpone the meeting until Tripuri. This postponement of ordinary and important Congress business simply because the president was ill angered some Working Committee members. They took it as yet another insult from Bose, i.e., that he could not trust them to conduct any Congress business without his presence. This helped to precipitate their resignations. So for the moment there was no Working Committee. Normally the Congress president would nominate the new committee at the end of the upcoming Congress session.

Second, war clouds were darkening in Central Europe and East Asia. The Germans were in the process of dismembering Czechoslovakia, the Japanese were advancing into China, and Franco’s insurgents were triumphant in Spain. Through 1935 to 1938, the British and the French Governments had assiduously followed the policy of appeasement, much to the horror of Winston Churchill and of Nehru, among others. As the Germans seized the Rhineland, pushed their rearmament program rapidly forward, and swallowed Austria and now Czechoslovakia, it was ever clearer that even these steps would not placate Hitler. The Japanese, now allied to the Germans and Italians through the Anti-Comintern Pact, were set on the conquest of China and on access to all the necessary resources for building a mighty empire.

Third, Bose had fallen seriously ill after meeting Gandhi in mid-
February. His recovery was slow and irregular. Doctors recommended that he not undertake the long journey and ardors of the meeting where controversy was sure to erupt. He ignored their warnings. He felt that even with a dangerously high fever and incapacitated as he was, he had to attend. So Bose, with a temperature of 104° F, was taken by ambulance, with his niece Ila Bose as nurse, and attended by Dr and Mrs Sunil Bose and his mother, from his Elgin Road house to Howrah Station.20 Gandhi, however, decided not to come to Tripuri, insisting that activities in the princely state of Rajkot were a more important claim on him at the moment. The Gandhians, though, were there and were a formidable group. They knew their strengths and they knew Bose's weaknesses. His support was soft and not well organized; theirs was firm and much better marshaled.21

The crucial conflict at Tripuri revolved around the Pant Resolution. This was the Gandhians' initiative in round two. In the closed Subjects Committee meeting, Pandit Pant, an able Gandhian leader from UP, resolved that: “In view of various misunderstandings that have arisen in the Congress and the country on account of the controversies in connection with the Presidential Election and after, it is desirable that the Congress should clarify the position and declare its general policy.

(i) This Congress declares its firm adherence to the fundamental policies which have governed its programme in the past years under the guidance of Mahatma Gandhi and is definitely of opinion that there should be no break in these policies and they should continue to

21 Gandhi wrote to Nehru on February 3, 1939; ‘After the election and the manner in which it was fought, I feel that I shall serve the country by absenting myself from the Congress at the forthcoming session.’ The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. LXVIII, op. cit., p. 368.
neutrality on the Pant Resolution. Since the CSP constituted the largest organized bloc of leftists, their neutrality was a mortal blow to Bose.

Some in the CSP group were unhappy with this decision. Within the CSP bloc were some members of the CPI. Although General Secretary P.C. Joshi was ready to abstain, some Bengal communists would not give way without a further fight. They insisted on a meeting of the CPI Executive Committee. This body decided to vote against the Pant Resolution. Niharendu Dutt-Mazumdar claims that Joshi said, 'Our throat is cut.' Dutt-Mazumdar says he responded to Joshi, 'Your masters in the Communist Party of Great Britain may be annoyed, but this will save India's throat.'

M.N. Roy and Dutt-Mazumdar among others, offered compromise resolutions in an effort to dilute the Pant Resolution. Dutt-Mazumdar said that the resolution showed 'a spirit of vindictiveness on the part of the members of the Working Committee.' He regarded it as a 'back door method' of attacking the Congress president. All the amendments failed by a margin of about 218 to 135. Though Bose had some leftist support from the Royists, the CPI, and even some CSP members sufficiently disaffected by Narayan's stand to vote against the Pant Resolution, they were outmanned.

Several of the Gandhians spoke effectively for the resolution and C. Rajagopalachari, or Rajaji as he was popularly known, is reported to have said, in part, 'The Nirmada is a very deep river. We can't trust

Gordon, Leonard, a., Bothers Against the Raj, op. cit., p. 379.
govern the Congress programme in future. This Congress expresses its confidence in the work of the Working Committee which functioned during the last year and regrets any aspersions should have been cast against any of its members.

(2) In view of the critical situation that may develop, . . Gandhi alone can lead the Congress and the country to victory during such a crisis, the Congress regards it as imperative that the Congress executive should command his implicit confidence and requests the president to nominate the Working Committee in accordance with the wishes of Gandhiji."22

Bose supporters, principally those from the left, offered amendments and asked that the resolution be postponed because of his ill health. The Gandhians would have none of this. They were set on a test of strength.

As the forces for each side caucused, it soon became clear that the left was now seriously divided. The largest left grouping was the CSP, and they had endeavored to bring as large a delegation to Tripuri as they could. Their foremost leader, Jayaprakash Narayan, was disturbed by Bose's insistence on the issuance of a timed ultimatum to the British. Personally friendly with Gandhi, Narayan now also found himself on the same side of the political fence as the Mahatma on this issue: nationalist India was not ready. Narayan and many other top CSP leaders also felt that Gandhi was the essential man in the national movement. They hoped to make him a socialist, but they, like Nehru, could not conceive of a mass movement in the country without Gandhi. After some indecision, Narayan got a majority in the CSP to opt for a national demand to be put before the British without the terminal date which Bose wanted, and

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ourselves in a leaky boat." Pandit Pant also spoke strongly for his resolution. He said that if the delegates wanted Gandhiji back they had to prove it to him. The Indian Annual Register reported,

"... Pandit Pant said that wherever nations had progressed they had done so under the leadership of one man. Germany had relied on Herr Hitler. Whether they agreed with Herr Hitler's methods or not, there was no gainsaying the fact that Germany had progressed under Herr Hitler. Similarly, Italy had risen because of Signor Mussolini and it was Lenin that raised Russia." 

Pandit reminded the delegates that 'we have Gandhi.... Then why should we not reap the full advantage of that factor?' Pandit Pant denied suggestion that the resolution savored of vendetta and he disarmed some of the opposition by saying, in effect, that the resolution was for Gandhi, not against Bose. Meanwhile it was reported that, 'When the discussion on the resolution was going on in the Subjects Committee a news [report] appeared that through telephonic communication the approval of Gandhiji had been secured for it.' This event may have been stage-managed, since Gandhi later said that he had not participated in the formulation of this resolution. In any case, all amendments failed and the resolution was passed by the Subjects Committee. Then it was brought before the open session of the Congress.

In the open session, there was some rowdiness and Nehru was heckled while speaking. Sarat Bose had to quiet the crowd. However, with most of the Congress Socialists abstaining, the Pant Resolution

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28 Mitra, N. M. (ed.), Indian Annual Register, op. cit.
29 Ibid.
30 Ibid., 51.
was passed. The Gandhians agreed to pass the national demand resolution in the 'form desired by the Congress Socialists.'

The left, which had united in electing Bose, was now divided, with some of the left agreeing with Nehru that national unity took priority and Gandhi was the leader of that unity of nationalists. In the Marxist terminology of that time: national unity before class unity. Bose, who like Nehru and the CSP, did not want to split the Congress, was put in a tenuous position as to choosing the Working Committee. He now had to select a committee 'in accordance with the wishes of Gandhiji.'

The European press, represented by the Calcutta Statesman, identifying the Gandhians, had its own interpretation of the conflict:

“The issue at Tripuri can, we think, be reduced to simple language by saying that it is between those who recognize where the menace to India's freedom comes from and those who do not. The 'Left' wish to go on believing or pretending that Britain is the enemy. The 'Right' know that to throw away self-government after it has been won in the Provinces, and undertake a struggle with Britain at a moment when the only issue left between Britain and India is the regulation of the time programme as regards full status, and when free institutions alike in Britain and India are in grave danger, is to work for Hitler, Mussolini and the Japanese War Lords. Every vote given against Pandit Pant's resolution at Tripuri was a vote for the Axis and the defeat of Democracy.”

This complacent attitude about the ease of the path to self-government and about how Indians interpreted the world conflict was to be tested and changed by events to come. But it did indicate how much

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Bose went into seclusion with relatives at Jealgora near Dhanbad in Bihar to try to recover his health. While he remained in Jealgora, he carried on a heavy correspondence with Jawaharlal Nehru, Mahatma Gandhi, and others. Sarat Bose also wrote a number of letters to Gandhi and Nehru, the first of these to Gandhi, filled with bitterness against some of Gandhi's associates for the way they had behaved at Tripuri. The manifest topic was the resolution of the Congress crisis created by the passage of the Pant Resolution. But into this tumbled all kinds of related and unrelated issues, grievances, and feelings.

For his part, Subhas Bose addressed Nehru and Gandhi in very different ways. Gandhi was the movement elder and some believed the main partisan of the opposite point of view, but Bose wrote,

“People who are bitterly opposed for various reasons to Sardar Patel and his group, still have confidence in you and believe that you can take a dispassionate and non-partisan view of things. To them you are a national figure—above parties and groups—and you can therefore restore unity between the warring elements. If for any reason that confidence is shaken ... and you are regarded as a partisan, then God help us and the Congress.”

Throughout the extended series of exchanges in March and April 1939, Bose wrote to Gandhi most respectfully. And he begged, he

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34 Sarat Bose's letter is in Bose, Sarat Chandra, Commemoration Volume (Calcutta: Netaji Research Bureau), 1968, 243-47.
impled, Gandhi to compromise. Did Bose really believe that the Mahatma had no hand in the counterstrike of the old guard against the insurgent Bose and his supporters? Hadn't Gandhi said that the victory of Bose over Sitaramayya was his defeat? In light of the Pant Resolution, however, Bose knew that he had to have some input from Gandhi to form the Working Committee, and so whatever he might have suspected about Gandhi's role, he continued to write to Gandhi in a humble and tactful way. He had had his election victory; now he needed Gandhi's support or at least acquiescence if he was to serve out his second term in office.

The letters to Nehru were a different matter. They were blunt; they were bitter; they were often rude and nasty. Bose claimed that he had been respectful to Nehru in the past,

"...ever since I came out of internment in 1937, I have been treating you with the utmost regard and consideration, in private life and in public. I have looked upon you as politically an elder brother and leader and have often sought your advice. When you came back from Europe last year, I went to Allahabad to ask you what lead you would give us."36

But when the crunch came, when Bose decided to challenge the Gandhians at the end of 1938, he found that his socialist colleague, his 'political elder brother', was not with him. Nehru did not view the Congress in quite the same left versus right terms as Bose, and thought Gandhi was the vital heart of the movement. Nehru felt that Bose's 'aspersion' against the old guard was wrong and unwarranted. Even Sarat Bose is reported to have said privately that Subhas should not have made suggestions which

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36 Ibid., 112.
he could not prove."

Why was Nehru against Bose's re-election? He wrote,

"I was against your standing for election for two major reasons: it meant under the circumstances a break with Gandhiji and I did not want this to take place.... It would mean also, I thought, a set-back for the real Left. The Left was not strong enough to shoulder the burden by itself and when a real contest came in the Congress; it would lose and then there would be a reaction against it.... I saw also that you were closely associated with a number of odd individuals who were apparently influencing you considerably.... I call them adventurist in the technical political sense.... The fact that in international affairs you held different views from mine and did not wholly approve our condemnation of Nazi Germany or Fascist Italy added to my discomfort.... I felt all along that you were far too keen on reelection."

Nehru also said that he felt that Bose did not stand for any definite program, that Bose's leftism was rather vague. It consisted of loud slogans, not an alternative approach to that of Gandhi. He added that he thought that the Congress organization and secretariat had declined during the Bose regime, that Bose had been a passive executive. In contrast to his experience of learning to work with the Gandhians, Nehru said that Bose had not changed and some of Bose's actions made him realize 'how difficult it was to work together with you.'

Nehru's charges against Bose were blunt, but not spiteful. Nehru was sure enough of himself, of his position in the Congress, and of his

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39 Ibid., pp. 350-63.
ideological stance that he did not evince the rancor that Bose—who believed that he was the one who had been wronged and maligned. Before examining Bose's charges against Nehru and others, it must be made clear that from the time of Bose's re-election, through the Congress session, into the following period, Nehru wanted a compromise between Bose and the Gandhians. As he wrote to Gandhi in April 1939,

“Subhas has numerous failings but he is susceptible to a friendly approach. I am sure that if you made up your mind to do so you could find a way out... I think now, as I thought in Delhi, that you should accept Subhas as president. To try to push him out seems to me to be an exceedingly wrong step. As for the Working Committee, it is for you to decide. But I do think the idea of homogeneity, if narrowly interpreted, will not lead to peace or effective working.”

Nehru's concerns were: to prevent a serious split in the Congress, and to keep it working as an effective organization. From his perspective, therefore, it was necessary to have Gandhi and the Gandhians in the leadership, and desirable to have Bose and other socialists. Enforcing a 'narrow' homogeneity might lead to the very cleavage which Nehru wished to avoid. Nehru urged Gandhi to compromise with Bose and to actively help the latter form the Working Committee. But Gandhi had his own perspective on these matters and furthermore, Bose was in a raging mood, especially vis-a-vis Nehru, after Tripuri.

As indicated in the quotation from Bose above about Nehru as his 'elder brother' in politics, Bose expected much from a brother—his real elder brother Sarat was his main supporter in life and politics—and when he felt let down, the bitterness was most profound. In the course of his very

40 Nehru, Jawaharlal, Selected Works, Vol. 9, op. cit., pp. 553-54.
long and revealing letter to Nehru of March 28, 1939, Bose said to him,

"... for some time past you have become completely biased against me... since the Presidential election, you have done more to lower me in the estimation of the public than all the twelve ex-members of the Working Committee put together. Of course if I am such a villain, it is not only your right but also your duty to expose me before the public."\(^{41}\)

In the course of this letter, Bose dissected and attacked Nehru as Congress president, and Nehru's approach to international affairs, Nehru's logic, Nehru's contribution to the Indian left, and tried to show Nehru how cleverly Sardar Patel toyed with the former in Working Committee meetings.

Boxed into a corner as he was by the Pant Resolution, by his lack of allies, and by Gandhi's unwillingness to compromise, Bose struck hard at person he thought could have and should have helped him the most. In response to Nehru's charge that he had no program, Bose answered that Nehru's contribution to the left had lately become nil and he had become merely a smooth-talking apologist for the dominant right in the Congress. Bose said he was for a 'dynamic move from our side—for an ultimatum to the British Government demanding Puma Swaraj,' and could not understand why Nehru was not with him.\(^{42}\)

Bose agreed that their approaches to the international context were different. In part, Bose wrote,

"In international affairs, your policy is perhaps even more nebulous. I was astounded when you produced a resolution before the

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\(^{42}\) Ibid., p. 127.
Working Committee some time ago seeking to make India an asylum for the Jews. Foreign policy is a realistic affair to be determined largely from the point of view of a nation's self-interest. Take Soviet Russia, for instance. With all her communism in her internal politics, she never allows sentiment to dominate her foreign policy.... Even today, Soviet Russia is anxious to enter into a pact with British Imperialism. Now, what is your foreign policy, pray? Frothy sentiments and pious platitudes do not make foreign policy. It is no use championing lost causes all the time and it is no use condemning countries like Germany and Italy on the one hand and on the other, giving a certificate of good conduct to British and French Imperialism.... I have been urging ... everybody ... including Mahatma Gandhi and you, that we must utilise the international situation to India's advantage and . . . present the British government with our National Demand in the form of an ultimatum, but I could make no impression on you or on Mahatmaji, though a large section of the Indian public approved of my stand. . . .”

Nehru, of course, defended his approach. He said that he wanted to offer asylum to a few well-qualified Jewish refugees and not open the gates of India wide to all Jewish refugees. He did not mention his staunch defense of Republican Spain, but he certainly saw no reason to go back on this use because they had lost. Nehru felt a solidarity with certain groups and 'lost causes' in other countries. Bose gave priority to Indian nationalism and to the vanquishing of British imperialism in India that crowded out other concerns. Bose could see the connection of the plight of colonial people throughout Asia and Africa and even comment on it as he did when he was in Europe in 1936 and 1938. But he was an Indian-firster, more narrow and focused in his vision than Nehru. If Bose had some

43 Ibid., 117.  
points in common with Nehru, he had fewer points in common with Gandhi.

Gandhi was a political master. Combining native intelligence with legal training and long experience, he was a formidable opponent. Bose tried to persuade Gandhi that the latter was above mere politics, and that Bose accepted him as the leader. Gandhi would not bend. He said he bore no ill-will towards anyone, but he had some anger at Bose, hardly even hidden. Seeing the strengths and weaknesses of each side, understanding Bose perhaps better than Bose understood himself, Gandhi offered Bose a challenge in every communication from the election to the end of April. What Gandhi was saying to Bose was: show me your team; show me your program; show me that the country supports your approach rather than mine. If you have no adequate team, if you have no workable program, if you have limited support, get out of the way, and let my men get on with my program. For example, as the correspondence continued, sounding like a broken record, Gandhi wired Bose on April 19:

"Despite many suggestions contained in your letters, I feel helpless, carry out terms of Pant's Resolution in this atmosphere of mutual distrust, suspicions and in face of marked differences between groups. I still maintain you should boldly form committee. It would be unfair to you with the views you hold."

And, in a letter written about the same time to confidante Amrit Kaur, Gandhi said, 'Here is a copy of further correspondence with Subhas Chandra Bose. What is one to do? Resoluteness seems to be the only answer if one has faith in one's judgment.'

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45 The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. LXIX, op. cit., p. 186
46 Ibid., p. 131.
Was Bose lacking in 'resoluteness'? Why did he not pick up Gandhi's repeated challenge and name his own homogeneous Working Committee composed of the ablest among the Indian left? Although there was a great outpouring of letters from Bose at this time, it is difficult to answer these questions. However, it does seem that although Bose believed that the Pant Resolution was ultra vires and unconstitutional, he felt that when it was brought up, he could not rule it out of order. And once it was passed by the annual Congress session, he had to do his best to abide by its provisions. So he needed Gandhi's approval of whatever Working Committee, he as president, might name. Gandhi would surely not approve a committee of leftists opposed to his program. Bose hoped that Gandhi would eventually shift ground enough to agree to a committee half from the right (named by Patel) and half named by himself.

Second, after the fiasco at Tripuri, Bose had lost faith in many on the left and may even have agreed with Rajaji that such a group could make a sound boat into a leaky one. About the same time that Bose wrote a letter to Gandhi begging him to compromise, he wrote a letter to a relative in which some opinions about stalwarts of the left were expressed. To Amiya Nath Bose, he wrote, in part:

“Our defeat [at Tripuri] was due further to the betrayal of the C.S.P. leadership and some bungling in tactics on our side. The C.S.P. is now being shaken to its foundations owing to revolt among the rank and file against the Tripuri policy of the leaders. The Communist Party was also sailing with the C.S.P. but at the last moment, the revolt of the rank and file brought about a reversal of the policy decided by the C.S.P. leaders. Nobody has done more harm to me personally and to our cause in this crisis than Pandit Nehru. If he had been with us—we would have had a majority.... The immediate future is very uncertain... It is even possible
that ultimately I may have to resign.

The C.S.P. has gone down in public estimation, but that does not mean that M.N. Roy has gained.... He is too individualist and cannot go in for team-work. That is a great drawback for him.47

So where were the leaders of the left? The CSP had betrayed him, Nehru had done him the greatest damage, and M.N. Roy could not work in a team. By this accounting, Bose was left with very few nationally-known and accepted leaders from the socialist tendency of the Congress to pluck for his Working Committee.

Third, Bose was a devoted Congressman. He joined the Congress as a full-time political worker in 1921, and this remained his party. He differed with Gandhi, he wanted to move in different directions at certain times, and he usually wanted to move more rapidly, but he wanted to move with the Congress. He did not want to see it split and he knew that however, he had castigated the older 'reactionaries' of the Congress, he needed Gandhi and he needed Patel and his men to run the Congress organization. But they would not serve with Bose. Why were they so adamant? Why was Gandhi unwilling to compromise as even Nehru wanted him to?

Gandhi felt that violence was spreading in India, in the air, and on the ground. He wrote in Harijan, in January 1939:

“Strife at Congress elections is becoming a common occurrence. The indiscipline of Congressmen is on the increase everywhere. Many of them make irresponsible, even violent, speeches.... Bihar Ministers live

in perpetual dread of kisan risings and kisan marches... Rome's decline began long before it fell. The Congress ... need not fall at all, if the corruption is handled in time.... Out of the present condition of the Congress I see nothing but anarchy and red ruin in front of the country. Shall we face the harsh truth at Tripuri?48

Subhas Bose as Congress president had not stopped the diffusing corruption and incipient violence. Indeed, one of Gandhi's men, J. B. Kripalani, has said that Gandhi knew a lot more about Bose's connections to men of violence and to plans for potential violence than he ever let on in public.49 Gandhi may well have known of Bose's meeting with German officials in Bombay in December 1938. The compilers of the Indian Annual Register argued at the time that the release in 1938 to the Indian public of Bose's Indian Struggle was a crucial factor. Previously, the work had been banned in India. Now all of the old guard could learn for themselves how little Bose thought of them. Although there is no direct testimony to it, it may be that, 'The book stood in the way.'50 Furthermore, Gandhi likely understood that Bose did believe in trying mass non-violent struggle first, but, if it did not work, if it did not bring freedom for India. Bose was prepared to use other means. As the fuse of the world crisis burnt down to the end, and as he saw increasing violence and corruption around him, Gandhi was less willing to have Bose at the helm in 1939. So Gandhi would not compromise and the matter of the Congress executive was coming to a boil as its leaders came to Calcutta in late April for a meeting of the AICC.

Through these weeks of letter and telegram exchanges between the Bose, Gandhi, and Nehru, others also put forth their suggestions.

50 Mitra, N. N. (ed.), Indian Annual Register, op. cit, I, 1939, p. 53.
M.N. Roy, following the line he had taken after Bose's election, wanted Bose to go ahead and form a left Working Committee. When Bose hesitated, Roy is reported to have said that a Roman general who won't take advice was not worth fighting for. \(^5\) The CSP was in turmoil and some members, particularly in the small Bengal cadre of the party resigned. Tridib Chaudhuri and several others eventually formed the Revolutionary Socialist Party. \(^52\) Hiren Mukherjee, a young Communist member of the CSP, all at the time of the Tripuri Congress, says that he sent J.P. Narayan a telegram: 'Congratulations party contemplating posterior of Jawaharlal Nehru.' \(^53\) Sharp criticism of Bose was made by ex-revolutionaries now running the Calcutta newspaper, Forward, who said that 'the real revolutionary elements in the country' offered Bose advice on whom he should put on the Working Committee. They continued,

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"But Subhas Babu, having revolted for nothing other than the Presidentship, carried a blank mind as far as a plan or a programme was concerned.....He had not the courage to accept the plan of action placed before him.....When asked why he was not acting in this situation he replied that his supporters were shaking in their shoes,...The fact of the matter....is that Subhas Babu is no radical.... When it became obvious that he had no lead to give and no plan of action to put forward, he could no longer keep his supporters together." \(^54\)
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Although Bose insisted that ninety per cent of the left was still with him, it was so fragmented that it did not offer him any solid backing. The left forces could carry on some valuable local

\(^{51}\) Ibid.  
\(^{52}\) Ibid.  
\(^{53}\) Ibid.  
\(^{54}\) Ibid.
organizing, write ideological critiques, and contribute to electing Bose Congress president, but they could not gather under Bose's leadership, and run the Congress organization. Nehru was correct in recognizing that the left was too weak for this. Bose learned it as well.

Near the fag end of the negotiations, just before the AICC was to convene in Calcutta on April 29, Bose and Nehru met. Although some nasty charges had been exchanged, Nehru said the meeting was quite amicable. Gandhi was the only one who could resolve the conflict so that Bose and the left and the Gandhians would work together and have representation on the Working Committee. Gandhi also met with Bose just before the AICC conclave, but still, nothing was resolved.

When the AICC met, Bose described his inability to work out a compromise formula with Gandhi and laid a letter to this effect from Gandhi before the assembly. Then he tendered his own resignation, saying, in part,

"Mahatmaji's advice to me is that I should myself form a Working Committee leaving out the members who resigned from the previous Working Committee.... If I formed such a committee ... I would not be able to report to you that the Committee commanded his implicit confidence.

... my own conviction is that in view of the critical times that are ahead of us in India and abroad, we should have a composite Cabinet commanding the confidence of the largest number of Congress possible.... I could only repeat my request that he should kindly shoulder the responsibility vested in him by the Tripuri Congress....

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55 Nehru, Jawaharlal, Selected Works, Vol. 9, op. cit., p. 561.
“As a last step, I tried my best to arrive at an informal solution of the above problem. Mahatmaji told me that the prominent members of the previous Working Committee and myself should put our heads together and see if we could arrive at an agreement.... Unfortunately ... we could not arrive at a settlement....

I have been pondering ... what I could do to help the A.I.C.C. in solving the problem.... I feel that my presence as President at this juncture may possibly be a sort of obstacle or handicap in its path. For instance, the A.I.C.C. may feel inclined to appoint a Working Committee in which I shall be a misfit. I feel ... that it may possibly be easier for the A.I.C.C. to settle the matter, if it can have a new President. After mature deliberation, therefore, and in an entirely helpful spirit I am placing my resignation in your hands.”

Bose did not really want to resign and others, particularly, from the left, were not happy with this solution.

Now Nehru, who all along had been arguing privately with Gandhi and others for a compromise arrangement, offered a motion calling for Bose to withdraw his resignation. Nehru said that the Working Committee from the previous year should be renamed and the slots of two members shortly to resign because of ill health should be filled by Bose's choice. In contrast to Gandhi, Nehru maintained that, '...there is no difference between Mr Subhas Bose and Mahatma Gandhi on any issue involving principles.' Like Rajaji, Nehru did not want, 'to change horses in mid-stream,' but in the group that Nehru wished to retain, Congress-president elect, Bose, was included. Rafi Ahmad Kidwai and Jayaprakash Narayan rose to support Nehru's

57 Nehru, Jawaharlal, Selected Works, Vol. 9, op. cit., pp. 562-64.
motion. The meeting was then adjourned for the day.

The following day, Bose said that he was honored that Nehru had asked him not to resign, but wanted greater consideration for his views about a composite Working Committee than he found in Nehru's proposal. He did not withdraw his resignation, but made it clear that he did not want to resign if he could work with a more 'representative' Working Committee. Leaving the matter, he said, in the hands of the AICC, he sat down. The chairperson of the meeting, Sarojini Naidu, an experienced Congress leader and former president, found Bose's statement too vague. Also feeling that there had not been a clear response to his motion, Nehru withdrew it. Naidu now pushed the gathering to elect a new president. Niharendu Dutt Mazumdar and K.F. Nariman objected, but she overrode them and the AICC elected Rajendra Prasad to finish the presidential term until the next full Congress session.

Bose was manifestly unhappy and frustrated, and privately bitter at the course of events. The defeat at Tripuri had been followed by an even more ignominious debacle in Calcutta. Local supporters of Bose greeted Nehru, Pant, and Kripalani with a hostile demonstration as they exited the AICC pandal. They had to be protected by Congress volunteers. Nehru was staying with Sarat Bose at Woodburn Park during these meetings. Sarat Bose's daughter, Gita, had to serve the guest tea after her uncle's resignation. Her father instructed her to do it with utmost politeness, for he said that politics should not affect personal relations.58

The new president named the Working Committee as Bose and Nehru declined to serve, he filled their positions with Dr. B.C. Roy and Prafulla C. Ghosh, Bengal Congressmen. The latter was a 'pure khadi'.

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58 Mitra, N. N. (ed.), Indian Annual Register, op. cit. 138
Gandhian, the former, once close to the Boses, had now moved closer to Gandhi and had the respect of the Gandhians and of Nehru. The choice of two non-Bose men from Bengal for the Working Committee indicated that the Gandhians meant to keep Bengal Congress affairs more directly under their control.

In a question-and-answer session at the Gandhi Seva Sangh meeting in Brindaban a few days later, Gandhi made it quite clear that he thought there were fundamental differences in principle with Bose. He said,

“I think he still holds the view he had expressed at Jalpaiguri.... It includes giving an ultimatum to the Government. He holds that we possess enough resources for a fight. I am totally opposed to his views. Today we possess no resources for a fight. Today the whole atmosphere is so steeped in violence that I cannot think of fighting.... This is a great and fundamental difference of opinion. We differ in our ideas of the resources needed for the struggle. My conception of satyagraha is not his.... The same is true of the corruption in the Congress ... sometimes even the difference of degree becomes a fundamental difference.”

There are hints here, but not an explicit statement, that Bose was not only willing to act in an atmosphere surcharged with violence (as Gandhi assessed it), but also to use violence. Gandhi also insisted that the socialists did not support Bose and did not want to issue an ultimatum to the government. He went on, 'The differences between me and the socialists are widely known.... But even so the socialists are coming nearer to me every day.' And of Nehru: 'There are certainly differences between Jawaharlal and me. But they are not significant. Without him I

feel myself a cripple. He also feels more or less the same way. Our hearts are one."^{60}

Gandhi wondered whether anyone or any group supported Bose in his call for an ultimatum. He said that Gandhians, the socialists, and Nehru were not with him. What he said here and what he and his group demonstrated in the machinations of the first half of 1939 was that the Gandhians, those imbued with his views, still controlled the Congress. Bose had challenged them by standing for election and winning the presidential chair. But when the Gandhians concentrated their efforts and made Congressmen see that the choice was Gandhi or Bose, it was not a close contest.

Subhas Bose and those closely associated with him had suffered a major setback. But as Gandhi was later to say of Bose, he was ‘irrepressible’. Within a week of his resignation as Congress president, Bose announced in Calcutta on May 3, the formation of a new grouping within the Congress to be called the ‘Forward Bloc’. He said that the object was to ‘rally all radical and anti-Imperialist progressive elements in the country on the basis of a minimum programme, representing the greatest common measure of agreement among radicals of all shades of opinion.’^{61} When he moved to form the Forward Bloc, Bose hoped that all 'radicals,' presumably meaning Socialists, Communists, Royists, Kisan Sabhaists, et al., would join in this Bloc. However, those in other functioning organizations would not give up their identities. Some of the left elements were agreeable to joint activities and actions, but Bose was not able to gain members for the Forward Bloc except from among his close associates and those who believed that he stood—before all other

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^{60} Ibid., p. 211.

alternatives—for the right path of action.

Some six weeks later, the first All-India Forward Bloc Conference was held in Bombay. Seeing that most other leftists would not join the bloc itself, the conference approved the formation of a 'Left Consolidation Committee,' which would be a looser grouping. The aim was to swing the Congress program to what Bose conceived of as the left, the ultimatum to the Raj, the exploitation of the international situation as it unfolded, and after independence, steps to make a socialist India.62 The Left Consolidation Committee was to have an equal number of representatives from the CSP, Royists, CPI, and Forward Bloc. Although there were some preliminary meetings and negotiations, the whole idea was, at this juncture, something of a pipe dream. The CSP and the CPI were at each other's throats for control of regional branches of the CSP, and the CSP purge of all communists was in the works. M.N. Roy was critical of the CSP and these ties were far from harmonious. The weak showing of the leftists at Tripuri and at the AICC meeting in Calcutta at the end of April demonstrated that little could be expected from this Left Consolidation Committee, and little was achieved. By the time Bose called for mass rallies against certain restrictive Congress policies in July, the brief life of the body was over. An organized, concerted challenge to Gandhi and his program was not forthcoming from a unified left within the Congress. Many of the leftists were moving closer to Gandhi just at the time that Bose was calling for them to rebel against Gandhi's program and the Gandhian leadership. Those leftist elements most cooperative to Bose, and his Forward Bloc were in the provincial and All-India Kisan Sabhas

62 Ibid., p. 32.
In early July, Bose announced the personnel of the Forward Bloc Working Committee. It included: Subhas Bose, President; Sardar Sardul Singh Caveeshar (Punjab), Vice-President; Lal Shankarlal (Delhi), General Secretary; Pandit Biswambhardayal Tripathi and Mr K.F. Nariman (Bombay), Secretaries. Other prominent members included Mr Annapurniah (Andhra), and Senapati Bapat, and H.V. Kamath (Bombay). In the Bengal Provincial Forward Bloc, Satya Ranjan Bakshi, long-time confidant of Bose, was appointed secretary. It was the skeleton of an all-India party with large aspirations, but with hardly any prominent figures in the leadership, in contrast to the Swarajya Party of C.R. Das and Motilal Nehru some sixteen years earlier. By early August 1939, the Forward Bloc had a weekly paper of the same name, for which Bose regularly wrote editorials. A good part of Bose's energy during the fourteen months following his Congress presidential resignation was spent trying to whip up support for his party and views within the Congress. He toured throughout India, drawing large audiences, however, these crowds of listeners did not signify that the Forward Bloc had become powerful force on the Indian political scene, though Bose himself believed that he was going from strength to strength.

In his writings and speeches of this period, Bose portrayed himself as courageous rebel, a challenger of the status quo in the country and in the Congress. He contrasted his 'fighting mentality' with the

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63 Ranga, N. G., Fight for Freedom (Delhi: S. Chand & Sons), 1968, pp. 219-40.

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'constitutional mentality' of the Gandhians. Proudly, he proclaimed himself an adventurer, a darer, a rebel. In retrospect, he said that, 'The decision to offer myself for re-election was an act of dare devilry...'. He called the young to join him in his manly fight against all the reactionary forces of imperialism and within the nationalist camp.

Some left voices in the Congress were quite critical of his course, and Nehru went so far as to call the Forward bloc an 'evil'. Jayaprakash Narayan opposed forming factions in the Congress. He called for socialists to march 'shoulder to shoulder in our common fight against Imperialism.' S. Satyamurti, a member of the Central Legislative Assembly, said that the Bloc was 'not helping the struggle against British Imperialism. It is only helping the enemies of the Congress and of the country.' When Bose visited his boyhood hometown of Cuttack in August to preside over the All-Orissa Youths' Conference, Hare Krishna Mahatab, a member of the Congress Working Committee, and Biswanath Das, premier of Orissa, asked him to give up his 'rebelling against the Congress,' for they believed it was disruptive to the nationalist movement. These dissident voices did not slow Bose down, for he firmly believed that he was right and other Congress leaders were wrong on the issue of maximum pressure on the Raj at its time of weakness.

Subhas Bose continued to be in conflict with the powers in his own party, the Congress. The June meeting of the AICC passed two resolutions which Bose and some other leftists fought. One related to

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67 Ibid., p. 229.
68 Mitra, N. N. (ed.), Indian Annual Register, op. cit., II, 1939, p. 27.
69 Ibid., p. 5.
70 Ibid., p. 13.
'satyagraha in provinces,' the other to relations between the Congress ministries and the PCCs. Both were resolved by large majorities.

In response to these setbacks, Bose decided to hold large demonstrations around the country on July 9, 1939 against the resolutions, and in effect, against the majority in his own party. As the fated day approached, allies jumped from the good ship Bose, and the Working Committee pressed him to respect the authority and decision-making process of the Congress organization. These cautionary words had no effect, they spurred the rebel on. Insisting that he was simply exercising his democratic rights and not resisting the lawful and necessary authority of his party, Bose held his meetings, backed by a vote of the BPCC. He said he was ready to follow any discipline 'cheerfully'. He was not pleased, however, with next step,

"The Working Committee considered the situation.... It came to the conclusion that in his explanation, Shri Subhas Bose had wholly missed the main point which was that as an ex-President of the Congress and as President of the B.P.C.C. he should have realised that after having received instructions from the President, it was his clear duty as a servant of the nation to obey them implicitly even though he differed from the ruling of the President. It was open to him to appeal afterwards if he so desired to the A.I.C.C. or open session. If Subhas Babu's contention that every member is free to interpret the Congress Constitution prevails and if every member were to act on that interpretation, contrary to the decision of the President, there will be perfect anarchy in the Congress.... The Working Committee ... decided that for the grave act of indiscipline, Shri Subhas Babu be declared disqualified as President of the Bengal P.C.C. and to be a member
of any elective Congress Committee for three years as from August 1939.\textsuperscript{72}

This was a harsh step which Bose did not accept 'cheerfully'. Bose now saw himself as a martyr in the cause of freedom and revolution, sacrificed on the altar of constitutionalism and reformism by Chief priest, Congress President Prasad, and his assistants, the rightist Working Committee. Bose, said, in part, "I welcome the decision of the Working Committee virtually expelling me from the Congress for three years. This decision is the logical consequence of the process of 'Right-consolidation' which has been going on for the last few years.... The action of the W.C. has served to expose the real character of the present majority party in the Congress.... By trying to warn the country about the continued drift towards Constitutionalism and Reformism, by protesting against resolutions which seek to kill the revolutionary spirit of the Congress, by working for the cause of Left-consolidation and ... by consistently appealing to the country to prepare for the coming struggle—I have committed a crime for which I have to pay the penalty. The sentence meted out to me may have come as a shock to the vast majority of our countrymen, but not to me."\textsuperscript{73}

He concluded by appealing to the leftists to fight to restore the spirit of struggle and revolution to the Congress. While Bose had succeeded in calling attention to himself and his actions, he had further isolated himself from the Gandhian center of nationalist power. Though the Congress Socialists and other leftists were unhappy at the rigorous sentence which Bose had received—and did protest—they had not


\textsuperscript{73} Bose, Sisir, K., Crossroads The Works of Subhas Chandra Bose, op. cit., p. 200.
participated in the demonstrations. Maulana Azad had warned the left about disrupting the Congress. The Congress Socialists were listening, but Bose was not. And other leftists did not see why Bose should waste so much time and energy fighting resolutions of his own party. Was Bose losing sight of the main enemy in his reaction to ejection from the presidential chair?

At the same time that Subhas Bose was disputing with the Working Committee over demonstrations he had called as leader of an all-India Bloc within the Congress, he was also intimately involved with the struggle between the Working Committee and the BPCC. Following the placement of Dr B.C. Roy and P.C. Ghosh on the Working Committee, the minority factions in the Bengal Provincial Congress worked together to challenge the Boses (Subhas & his brother Sarat) with the powerful assistance of the central Gandhian leadership. Bose had been forced to resign as Congress president. He was suspended from holding any elective Congress office and so had lost his post as president of the BPCC. Now he and those close to him were faced with the prospect of fighting for their position of dominance in the provincial Congress.

The Boses, holding a majority in the BPCC, called a requisition meeting. The minority factions of P.C. Ghosh and the pure khadi-wallahs, of K.S. Roy, of the former Jugantar revolutionaries, and Dr Roy, said that proper notice was not given. At the meeting the Executive Committee of the BPCC was dissolved and reformed, giving them an even smaller place. They protested to the Working Committee.

The Working Committee declared the proceedings of the meeting

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of July 26, 1939, 'null and void,' and called for the BPCC to elect a new president. The Bose-dominated BPCC responded by unanimously re-electing Bose as president, deliberately defying the Working Committee. The Working Committee condemned this action and appointed an election tribunal to deal with district matters. The central executive also appointed an auditor to go into financial irregularities. By the end of 1939, the Working Committee, with B.C. Roy and P.C. Ghosh sitting as members, decided that it had had enough of the Bose BPCC. It listed a number of charges and then called upon Subhas Bose, the president of the BPCC, to answer them. He again, he could not attend. In his stead Sarat Bose and Satya Ranjan Bakshi went to Warha to answer. Dissatisfied with the response, the Working Committee dismissed the standing BPCC and appointed a small committee headed by Maulana Azad to be the new, ad hoc BPCC. Sarat Bose prepared an elaborate reply to all the charges, similar to a lawyer's brief, claiming that the central executive was acting undemocratically and unconstitutionally. However, his appeal was made to the same judges who had made the ruling, and who did not intend to overrule their own handiwork. Thus Bengal from late 1939, had two BPCCs, the official or Bose Congress, and the ad hoc BPCC. This split later touched the Bengal Legislative Assembly where Sarat Bose headed the Bose Congress group, and Kiran Sankar Roy the ad hoc Congress group. The Amrita Bazar Patrika, with which Sarat Bose had been feuding for some years and which he had accused of collusion with the Government of Bengal, was a loud voice for the ad hoc side. In 1940, the ad hoc BPCC had a new president, Surendra Mohan Ghosh, a long-time member of the Jugantar Party. Once a revolutionary and on the side of the Boses, 'Modhu' Ghosh and his Jugantar colleagues had switched to

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76 Ibid.
the other side. They were now linked to Dr B.C. Roy, Kiran Sankar Roy, P.C. Ghosh and the Gandhian high command. Though some Bengal leftists like Gopal Halder and Niharendu Dutt-Mazumdar remained with the Boses, they were seriously weakened at the provincial level. Sarat Bose still insisted that his brother Subhas was "by far the most prominent person in the public life of Bengal, not to speak of the position he holds in the other Provinces of India." 77

Through the series of controversies in which Subhas Bose had been involved from late 1938 through late 1939, one prominent figure, the giant of India's cultural life, Rabindranath Tagore, supported him stoutly. As he explained, Tagore had had his doubts about Subhas, but now, with Subhas besieged, the Poet spoke eloquently for him and to him in an essay entitled, 'Deshanayak' [The Leader of the Country]. He said, in part:

"As Bengal's poet, I today acknowledge you as the honored leader of the people of Bengal. The Gita tells us that from time to time the eternal principle of the good arises to challenge the reign of the evil.... Suffering from the deadening effect of the prolonged punishment inflicted upon her young generation and disintegrated by internal faction, Bengal is passing through a period of dark despair .... At such a juncture of nation-wide crisis, we require the service of a forceful personality, the invincible faith of a natural leader, who can defy the adverse fate that threatens our progress .... I have ... witnessed the beginning of your political sadhana. In that uncertain twilight there had been misgivings in my heart.... Today you are revealed in the pure light of the midday sun which does not admit of apprehensions.... Your strength has been sorely taxed by imprisonment, banishment and disease, but rather than impairing these have helped to

77 Ibid.
broaden your sympathies.... You did not regard apparent defeat as final; therefore, you have turned your trials into your allies. More than anything else Bengal needs today to emulate the powerful force of your determination and self-reliant courage.... Let Bengal affirm in one united voice that her deliverer's seat is ready, spread for you.... Long ago ... I sent out a call for the leader of Bengal who had yet to come. After a lapse of many years I am addressing ... one who has come into the full light of recognition. My days have come to their end. I may not join him in the fight that is to come. I can only bless him ... knowing that he had made his country's burden of sorrow his own, that his final reward is fast coming as his country's freedom.78

Privately as well, Tagore had made every effort to help Bose, asking Gandhi and Nehru in late 1938 and early 1939, to accept Bose as Congress president again without a squabble. In December 1939, Tagore asked Gandhi to have the ban on Subhas lifted and his cooperation cordially invited in 'supreme interest of national unity.'79 They declined his advise throughout. At the end of 1939, after all the arguments with Bose, they had quite a different view of him from that of Tagore. Writing in Harijan in early 1940, Gandhi said,

“'The love of my conception, if it is as soft as a rose petal, can also be harder than flint. My wife has had to experience the hard variety. My eldest son is experiencing it even now. I had thought I had gained Subhas Babu for all time as a son. I have fallen from grace. I had the pain of wholly associating myself with the ban pronounced on him.'”80

80 Ibid., p. 94.
In Gandhi's ever-expanding network of familial relations, Subhas had been taken in like a son. But his rebelliousness led to his rejection. Like Gandhi's own sons, he had to feel the 'flint' side of Gandhi's love. Shortly thereafter, writing to C.F. Andrews, Gandhi mentioned Tagore's wire asking that the ban on Bose be lifted, and told Andrews,

“If you think it proper tell Gurudev that I have never ceased to think of his wire and anxiety about Bengal. I feel that Subhas is behaving like a spoilt child of the family. The only way to make up with him is to open his eyes. And then his politics show sharp differences. They seem to be unbridgeable. I am quite clear the matter is too complicated for Gurudev to handle. Let him trust that no one in the Committee has anything personal against Subhas. For me, he is as my son.”

So Subhas remained the son, but he was the spoilt child who had to have his eyes opened by his elders in the Working Committee. However, though Bose had been repeatedly punished and even humiliated, he had not been brought to heel. Gandhi said that he had to see the error of his ways and apologize for his indiscipline. Bose thought that he was on the right path. These were two stubborn men. So perhaps the chasm was 'unbridgeable,' and Bose could never be reclaimed by the Gandhians as an honoured son of India.

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81 Ibid., pp. 113-14.