
TO STUDY THE CONGRESS POLICY TOWARDS THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE PEASANTS

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ABSTRACTS

Congress had to work in favour of peasants because they were compelled to work accordance to the manifesto of peasants programme passed in 1937 before elections and to consider the peasant's problems two committees were formed. In this connection first committee had to enquire into the land rights and revenue; and was asked to advise on necessary amendments; while second committee was formed to look into the matters of rural indebtedness. And District Magistrates were asked not to take enhanced revenue; to avoid the hearings of the peasant disputes over taxes.

In addition, an increasing number of U.P. congress representatives in the latter half of 1931. On the agrarian problem, begin to adopt a more combative and radical line than before. They spoke of the need for urgent action, especially in Oudh, to alleviate the distress of tenants. They were forced to abolish intermediaries between the farmers and the states. In 1934, a group of intellectuals founded the Congress Socialist Party (C.S.P.) to radicalise the Indian National Congress and were determined to initiate a process that would eventually lead to the development of a socialist society. Yet it never actually left Congress.

INTRODUCTION

They rightly believed that at that point especially when Jawahar Lal Nehru had emerged as the foremost radical within the Congress, the Indian National Congress was in a position to usher in a social revolution. The C.S.P. was not a political party in the conventional sense; it was not a

separate political party, nor did it act as one. Its membership was open only to members of Congress. In the same way, Nehru raised his strong voice in support of the dispossessed, poor and marginalised sections of the peasantry. He did not distinguish between peasants who were wealthy, middle or poor. In North India, especially in Bihar and the United Provinces, the C.S.P. had a considerable following, where its leaders formed relations with the peasantry either by organising new kisan sabhas or by infiltrating those already operating under the banner of the Congress. While the C.S.P. rulers were similar to Marxism and Fabian socialism politically, they were equally influenced by Gandhism. The C.S.P's policies and programmes were definitely more progressive with regard to agrarian issues than those of the Congress and represented a better understanding; their resolutions and demands were on the abolition of zamindari, recognition of tenant occupancy rights in all areas of land lord-tenant. Nehru spoke almost the language of revolution later in his presidential address in Lucknow in 1936 and stressed the inclusion of the organisation of workers and peasants in the congress committee.

Nehru's suggestion worried the right wing elements in the Congress, who were very high in the Congress' central bodies and regional committees. A resolution of the agrarian programme drafted by J.L. All sections welcomed Nehru, who suggested the abolition of zamindari, a 50 per cent cut in rent and a moratorium on all agricultural debt. This resolution had to be revised, eventually leaving it to the Committee of Agrarian Enquiry of the Congress.

And to the U.P. The Congress Agrarian Committee (1935) called for the long-term abolition of the zamindari system; and proposed a large reduction in rent, exemption from all rent or property taxes for un-economic holdings. The abolition of all feudal dues and illegitimate demands, the tackling of the rural debt issue and the implementation of cooperative formation. The C.S.P.-led movement, under the leadership of J.H. Nehru, Sri Prakasa and Tandon were left-oriented,¹¹ but to achieve their goals they insisted on pursuing the path of non-violence.

The Mass Contact Programme

Jinnah checked the Mass Contact Programme launched by the Congress, especially among Muslims, by warning the Congress to "leave the Muslims alone." But when Congress and J.L.Nehru announced that India's ultimate destiny was to establish not only a democratic state, but also a socialist one, the Hindu and Muslim landlords felt threatened. The C.S.P. programme was radical enough at its formation in 1934. But how the C.S.P. would accomplish their goals was not clear. Some of the main elements of his programme were:—

1. Shift to the generating masses of all power.
2. The economic life of the nation should be designed and state-owned.
3. The direct control of the state should take over all the primary industries.
4. The monopoly of foreign trade by the state.
5. Without any compensation, all the princely states and land lords should be abolished.
6. Land redistribution among the masses.
7. On a functional basis, Adult franchise.
8. Debt liquidation for peasants and workers.

The plan for achieving these targets was not clear. On these questions, Congress itself was split. Sardar Patel described the socialists as suffering from brain fever and other eminent leaders of the congress like Rajendra Prasad, C. Rajagopalachari had little sympathy for the ambitious programme. They were against any such programme or policy which could led class conflict. They were also opposed to any strategy which evens a semblance of class conflict threatened to create. The C.S.P. programme appeared unworkable in the colonial climate, unless one was prepared to pursue the course of class struggle.

The state tried to pacify the tenants in several ways, bearing in mind the peasant issues that could benefit the peasantry. The increased debt burden in the united provinces had left the life of the peasant miserable. Thus the state introduced a mass of debt laws to improve the condition of the peasantry in debt. In the words of the agricultural tribunal, the key purposes of debt law were to relieve the debtor of what he could not pay; thus concentrating on paying the best he could within a reasonable time. He should be able to start a new life after he has paid the limit that he can with his money. And the United Provinces Agriculturists Relief Act was passed with these items.

In particular, the Act gave the agriculturist debtors the following facilities.

1. It provided for a legal mechanism by which an agricultural debtor could apply to a civil court to settle his account and to fix payment installments for the decree.
2. Under the act, the court was empowered to decide the future rate of interest that could be permitted under any decree.
3. It made it possible for a debtor to deposit an amount of money in a court to discharge his debt to his creditor for payment.
4. The period of usufructuary mortgages for a term not exceeding twenty years has been limited.
5. Every agriculturist debtor was entitled to demand from his creditor a complete and accurate declaration of the amount outstanding against him.
6. A penal offence was rendered for a borrower to reach an amount greater than that already borrowed in his account books. The borrower was also obliged to give a receipt to the debtor for any payment made by him. The Act has been used more widely than every other measure of debt relief. Most of the cases involved the granting of installments or the reduction of interest on decrees.

In addition to usurious loans, the United Provinces Reform Act of 1934 was passed in order to define the excessive interest rate. Had provided that in the act;

1. Interest above 12% per annum is unsustainable in the case of loans backed by a first mortgage.
2. The interest rate in the case of unsecured loans is unsustainable if it reaches 24 percent per annum.
3. In the case of secured loans, if the rate does not exceed 7% per annum, the court would not find the interest to be unreasonable.
4. In the case of unsecured loans, if the rate does not exceed 9 percent per annum, the interest is not unreasonable.

The act has given debtors of all classes great relief. In exparte cases, the relief under the act was also often given; and it has some effect in checking usury.

The government passed three other acts in addition to these two acts that were of lasting importance. Though in their application, these were temporary. They have been;

- (1) Encumbered by the United Provinces Estate Act and;
- (2) The Temporary Control of Execution Act of the United Provinces and the Third One
- (3) The Control of Sales Act of the United Provinces.

The Encumbered Estates Act of the United Provinces was to assist land owners, paying land income of more than ten rupees from being insolvent due to the downturn in prices. The act guaranteed the liquidation of the debt by equal payments over a period of years, combined, if they proved insufficient, with the transfer of the least possible land area. The time for the filing of applications under the Encumbered Estates Act was extended to 29 October 1936.136.13 to provide further opportunities to take advantage of the act.

A supplementary measure to the Encumbered Estates Act was the Provisional Control of Execution Act of the United Provinces. It offered relief to all land lords paying less than ten rupees of land income and to all growers. The Act was not promoted, so little use was made of it only a few were able to achieve a substantial reduction in interest rates. The purpose of the Regulation of Sales Act (1934) of the United Provinces was to avoid an excessive amount of land passing from the hands of the old land-owning classes.

The act was extended until 15 December 1936, saving a large number of debtors from losing most of their property and offering substantial relief.

On the other hand, in 1935, after many years of Commission Committees and discussions, the British Parliament passed the Government of India Act. The act consolidated the alliances in India between the British Government and the princes, land lords and other reactionary elements.

In the P.U. Congress Committee meeting of 15 March 1936 Congressmen agreed to begin a popular campaign and to demand a reduction in government revenue and to plan for the peasants a minimum program.¹⁴ The meeting of the C.S.P. in Merrut in 1936. Many Communist leaders participated in the meeting and discussed the problems of the peasant vividly, Swami Sahjanand Saraswati claimed that it was an important event in the history of kisan sabha and added that many Communist leaders gathered at Meerut addressed the urgent need for All India Kisan Sabha as a strong organization.¹⁵ Then on 11 April 1936 in congress Lucknow session congress agreed to take p p p. J.L.—J.L. Nehru, who chaired the Lucknow Congress, urged the delegates to embrace a new unified front programme of all national freedom movements.

In order to consolidate the mass base of the nationalist movement led by the Congress, Nehru proposed the affiliation of the peasant organisation (kisan sabhas) which had already sprung up in the country.

Under the leadership of Swami Sahajanand, Prof. Ranga and Indu Lal Yagmik, the Socialist Party was established within the Congress on the entire Indian basis and outside the Congress Kisan organisation with a programme of the abolition of landlordism and immediate demands for

tax, rent, and debt reduction. When the All India Kisan Sabha meeting was held in Lucknow, the influence of these forces was reflected. The key leaders who attended their conference were Nehru, Swami Sahajanand, Indul Yaznik, N.G. Ranga, J.P. Narayan, Ram Manohar Lohiya, where Swami Sahajanand addressed the wretched situation of the tenants and denounced the system of land revenue. He also spoke about the abolition of zamindari.¹⁶

However, half-heartedly, the Congress Party decided to direct the provincial committees to carry out inquiries into the agricultural situation in their respective provinces and to devise a provincial agricultural program. Kisan Sabha, all of India, agreed with the Congress and pressured the leaders of the Congress, particularly Nehru, to commit the Congress to a definite agrarian programme.

The All India Kisan Sabha passed the following resolution in Lucknow conference.

1. To give the peasants economic and political liberty and to fight against the exploitation of Kisan, to mobilise the peasants in order to train the peasants to fight for their rights.
2. To eradicate zamindari, real tenants should be granted taluqdari systems and all privileges.
3. The rent for areas in Rayatwari should be reduced.

All the delegates were keenly interested in improving peasants' conditions in zamindari estates and debated high rents, interest rates, illegal abuses.

The programme (including all the demands of the Lucknow session), including rural indebtedness, was debated by the Congress, and at the All India Peasants Committee meeting in Bombay in August 1936, some economic and political demands came forward. Such requests were-

1. 50% reduction in income and rent on land and irrigation methods.
2. Revenue deduction on unproductive ground.

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3. Income tax relating to zamindars.
 4. Leasing and salary exemption at a time of femininity or disaster.
 5. End of Bedakhali Unconstitutional.
 6. Reduction of taxes on agricultural and transportation infrastructure.
 7. Sugar, cigarettes and matchbox tax decreases.
 8. Checking the grain hoardings.
 9. Demanding a union of peasants to act to ensure the welfare of the peasants.
 10. Fixing minimum salaries, enhancing irrigation infrastructure.
 11. Availability of seeds of low and high yield varieties.
 12. They requested agricultural insurance.
 13. All peasants should be permitted to hold arms for private protection.

Swami Sahajanand Saraswati urged the peasants and kisan sabha workers to celebrate September 1 as the (Kisan Diwas) peasant's day after the meeting of the All India Peasants Committee; and to address the agrarian demands of the Bombay conference and the Lucknow conference with other peasants in the countryside. "An agrarian programme was adopted by the congress and peasant congress meeting, but much to the chagrin of A.I.K.S., it was not sufficiently radical as it did not include the "zamindari abolition.

And on the first of December 1936, 500 delegates from Manmad entered the A.I.K.S. conference, chanting the Kisan Sabha Slogans. They were received with great enthusiasm by J.L. Nehru, Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, Narendra Dev, Yagnik Ranga and J.P. Narayn.

A new constitution was declared at this meeting and the agricultural programme of the Congress was addressed. This agricultural programme was proclaimed as the manifesto of the Congress Party for the upcoming 1937 elections. The following key demands were included in the programme:

1. In view of the current circumstances, rent and income should be set and decreased by up to 50 percent .
2. There is a need to measure agricultural income and to place income tax on extra income.
3. Every kind of nazarana, a beggar, should be stopped.
4. Tenants must be entitled to property on the land.
5. Grazing grounds should be arranged for cattle.

In this way, the Congress Party accepted the peasants' demands and paid attention to the agrarian situation and these organisations. A note on the activities of the Congress and its agricultural programme was prepared by the government. The note claimed that the peasant committee is a socialist communist organisation in the United Provinces and the Congressman displayed a particular interest in agrarian problems. Swami Sahajanand Saraswati presided over their meetings and the issue of zamindari abolition was posed from time to time.²¹ In the U.P., the electoral campaigning began. It was a two-edged one. There was a familiar focus on nationalism, but as stated in its manifesto, a policy of moderate agrarian reform added a further dimension to the Congress' appeal.²² This was especially suitable for catering not only to the general interests of tenants and small zamindars, but also to gain even greater significance in view of their worsening economic condition. In the 1937 elections, A.I.K.S. over whelmingly endorsed the congress and the star was Swami Sahajanand Saraswati; campaigning for the Congress party. The older congressmen met the zamindars from urban and rural areas during the campaign. Congress staff announced the issue of peasant emancipation and promised a complete deduction in revenue after election in the Congress ministry programme. Especially in eastern Uttar

Pradesh, i.e. in the districts of Banaras and Gorakhpur, the peasants of congress did not pay their rents to influence these claims.

The younger congressmen, especially members of the Socialist Party of Congress, were quite different. They went to small villages where the zamindars, their agents and the accountants of the village were always antagonistic and aggressive at times. The tenants also met the congressmen outside the villages in Bareilly and told them that because of the animosity of the zamindars or their agents, they could not hold a meeting in the village, but that they would vote for the congress anyway. The so-called functional alliance thus benefited organizationally from the congress alone. The A.I.K.S. could not be stronger than its constituent provincial units as an All India agency. In addition to a nucleus of some office bearers, except in a few stronghold districts, a more elaborate party network probably did not exist.

Meetings, meetings, conferences, held from time to time, were conducted on an adhoc basis; the need to create a solid party apparatus was never given serious attention. Financial support was derived from some A.I.K.S. leaders especially Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, who were personal friends or wealthy well wishers.

In campaigning for the Socialist Congress, they also vowed that zamindars would be dispossessed of their land, obviously using the elections not only to attack the British through the zamindars, but also to build up support for radical agrarian reforms that would either weaken their congressional opponents or compel them to come to the Socialist Party of Congress. The peasants assumed that the Congress Party would do anything for their immediate income exemption, and the situation in the eastern districts was worse compared to the western districts. The Congressmen told them to pay rent and income according to their skills. 24 In the first month of May, 1937, Pt. Govind Ballabh Pant stressed the need for an agrarian programme and the work had to be undertaken by a seven-member committee. During the campaign, the Congress Party announced that the government is hampering the land legislation bills. All this led to conflict between tenants and zamindars in Gorakhpur district 25, according to the government report, and there was tension in rural society. Several peasant conferences were held

in several places in the United Provinces in the month of June. Swami Sahajanand Saraswati criticised the government in several areas.

CONCLUSIONS

Via the magnetic appeal of J.L., the other form of method used by Congress in election campaigning was Nehru. Nehru. J.L. Nehru believed that land lordism was and should be done away with as a relic of the past feudal system. J.L.—J.L. Nehru thought the agrarian problems would continue to haunt the country side as long as colonialism and feudalism continued in India. Ah, C.W. U.P. Chief Secretary, Gynanne. Nehru's appeal to the villages was stated to be very different, he was concerned to associate Swaraj (National Goal) with panchayat raj where the authorities would be the humble public servants and not the tiny tyrants who are often²⁷ with their direct voicing of the immediate demands of the peasants and industrial workers, played a major role in mobilising the overwhelming mass support. On arrival at the power congress, attention was paid to the poor state of the peasants and Pt. Govind Ballabh Pant made a statement to the Council that the government is concerned about the problems of agriculture.

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