Victories Reversed:
The 1938-9 Clash of Mohandas Gandhi and Subhas Chandra Bose

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I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on this work.
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# Table of Contents

Chronology 3

Dramatis Personae 4

Introduction 5

Overarching Disagreements Between Mohandas Gandhi and Subhas Chandra Bose 10

Immediate Causes of the 1938-9 Clash Between Gandhi and Bose 24

Repercussions of the Clash: Bose's Lingering Influence on INC Militancy 43

Afterword: Bose’s Legacy in Postwar India 61

Annotated Bibliography 67

Illustrations 72

Selected Primary Source Documents 74
Chronology

October 2, 1869 – Birth of Mohandas K. Gandhi
1885 – Founding of the Indian National Congress Party
Jan 23, 1897 – Birth of Subhas Chandra Bose
1920-22 – Gandhi leads his first India-wide satyagraha
1921 – Bose quits Indian Civil Service, joins Congress Party
1933-37 – Bose tours Europe
August 2, 1935 – Government of India Act (1935) approved
Early 1937 – Provincial elections take place under the 1935 Act
February 19-21, 1938 – Haripura session opens Bose’s first INC presidential term
July 9 and 15, 1938 – Bose issues controversial statements regarding the party leadership
Jan 21, 1939 – Bose announces intent to contest second INC presidential election
Jan 29, 1939 – Bose wins re-election
Feb 22, 1939 – Congress Working Committee resigns in protest of Bose’s re-election
March 10-12, 1939 – Tripura session opens Bose’s second term, Pant Resolution passed
April 29, 1939 – Bose resigns INC presidency amidst pressure from Gandhi and allies
May 3, 1939 – Bose founds Forward Bloc
August 12, 1939 – Bose banned from holding INC offices for three years
July 2, 1940 – Bose arrested over Holwell Monument protest
November 29-December 5, 1940 – Bose hunger strikes for his release
January 17, 1941 – Bose escapes house arrest and travels to Nazi Germany
August 8, 1942 – Launch of Quit India Movement, arrests of INC leadership next day
July 2, 1943 – Bose arrives in Singapore to take command of the Indian National Army
May 6, 1945 – Gandhi released from jail on health grounds
May 8, 1945 – German surrender ends WWII in Europe
June 15, 1945 – Remainder of top Congress Party leaders released from jail
August 15, 1945 – Japanese surrender ends WWII
August 18, 1945 – Bose dies from injuries sustained in an aircraft accident
November 5, 1945 – Red Fort trials of ex-INA soldiers begin in Delhi
August 15, 1947 – Partition and Independence of India and Pakistan
January 30, 1948 – Gandhi assassinated by a Hindu nationalist
Dramatis Personae

Mohandas K. Gandhi (1869-1948) – Known for his asceticism and devotion to his own type of non-violent resistance that he termed satyagraha, he was the single most prominent figure of India’s independence movement.

Subhas Chandra Bose (1897-1945) – A younger contemporary of Gandhi, Bose shared his nationalist cause, but differed from him in his socialist ideology and in his determination to achieve independence through the swiftest possible means.

Jawaharlal Nehru (1889–1964) – A moderate socialist who allied himself more closely with Gandhi than with Bose, he was to become the first Prime Minister of independent India.

Vallabhbhai Patel (1875/6–1950) – A key ally of Gandhi who was instrumental in marshalling support for his proposals within the Indian National Congress, he also took the lead in organizing a number of satyagrahas.

Rajendra Prasad (1884-1963) – Perhaps Gandhi’s closest supporter, he was a longtime member of the Congress Working Committee and took Bose’s place as party president after his resignation in 1939.

Bhulabhai Desai (1877-1946) – A Gandhian and member of the Congress Working Committee under Bose who later served as the lead defense attorney for ex-INA members during the Red Fort trials.

Pattabhi Sitaramayya (1880-1959) – An ally of Gandhi and the Congress Party’s historian, he was selected by Gandhi to stand as the Right Wing candidate against Bose in the party presidential election of 1939, where he was defeated.

Abul Kalam Azad (1888–1958) – A Gandhian and a Muslim who remained within the Congress Party rather than joining the Muslim League, Azad served as party president from 1940-1946, although nearly three of those years were devoid of party activity due to the wartime imprisonment of Azad and the rest of the party leadership.

Govind Ballabh Pant (1887–1961) – A Gandhian member of the Congress Party’s All-India Congress Committee, Pant gave his name to the resolution in 1939 that emphasized the continued strength of the party’s Right Wing and required Bose to name his Working Committee according to Gandhi’s wishes.

Sarat Chandra Bose (1889–1950) – Bose’s older brother and fellow Congress Party figure, he was the sole member of the Working Committee to stand by Bose in the wake of the contested 1939 party presidential election.

Muhammad Ali Jinnah (1876–1948) – A former member of the Congress Party who resigned in disagreement with Gandhi’s methods, he formed the Muslim League, which became the INC’s major internal antagonist, lobbying for the creation of Pakistan.

Lawrence John Lumley Dundas, Marquess of Zetland (1876–1961) – Lord Zetland was the Secretary of State for India from 1935-1940 and met with Bose in this capacity when Bose visited London in 1938.
Introduction

"MR. BOSE RE-ELECTED CONGRESS PRESIDENT: A Victory for Extremists," read the headline of the Hindustan Times on January 30, 1939.¹ The people of India were watching, as the Indian National Congress, a catch-all party that sought to serve as the unified representative of nationalists in India to the British Raj, underwent a severe test of its internal unity. Given the size and ideological breadth of the party’s membership, the Congress Party encompassed numerous intra-party blocs. These blocs grouped themselves broadly into the Left and Right wings, with the leftists including communists and socialists who hoped to encourage the industrialization and modernization of India and the Right Wing including traditionalists who aimed to stem the British-influenced Westernization of India.

The Indian National Congress had been founded in 1885 and was to build on its legacy to become the dominant political party in post-independence India. By the 1930s, however, the party had just begun to take on actual responsibilities for governance as a result of the provincial elections of 1937, which devolved some local powers to partially elected legislatures. Consequently, the INC remained primarily a political pressure group throughout this period, with mass support under the leadership of Mohandas K. Gandhi providing the necessary clout to set demands before the British colonial rulers, who retained the preponderance of power in India. These demands were formulated and publicized in resolutions issued by the party’s All-India Congress Committee, which was a large body of provincial party leaders that met regularly to approve and amend policies formulated by the Congress Working Committee, which consisted of approximately

¹ "Mr. Bose Re-Elected Congress President: A Victory for Extremists," Hindustan Times, January 30, 1939, microfilm.
fifteen members and constituted the upper leadership of the party. Together these two committees controlled the direction of Congress Party policy and provided the primary setting for resolving internal party disputes.

With the specter of global warfare looming, the Left and Right Wings of the Indian National Congress clashed over their reactions to both the likely conflict and to recent British attempts to restructure their governance of India. Mohandas Gandhi led the Congress Party’s Right wing and was generally accepted as the de facto leader of the Party as a whole, playing a large part in the selection of the Party’s annually elected president. Subhas Chandra Bose, a leader of the Party’s leftists, made an unprecedented contestation of the 1939 presidential election in opposition to Gandhi’s preferred candidate, Pattabhi Sitaramayya, defeating him and setting in motion a reaction by Gandhi and his supporters that eventually forced Bose’s resignation. While Bose's institutional influence on the Congress Party was put to an end by the 1939 dispute, the Party nevertheless enacted many of the policies sought by Bose in his absence, taking advantage of the wartime stresses put on the British imperial apparatus to push more strongly for independence. The dispute between Gandhi and Bose in 1938-9 was centered on the combination of their long-standing ideological differences with their immediate manifestations in debates on the Congress Party's position in the looming war and Bose's disregard for Party norms in pursuit of his second presidential term. The clash remains important to our understanding of final decade of the Indian nationalist movement for its impact on the careers of both Gandhi, who reasserted his dominance of the Congress Party, and Bose, whose ouster sparked his eventual rise to mythical status and paradoxically pushed the direction of Congress Party policy towards militant
resistance to British control even in the face of global war. The dispute between Gandhi and Bose appears at first glance to have resolved firmly in Gandhi’s favor, but a closer examination of the career of Bose and the subsequent direction of Congress Party policy rejects this assessment.

It is important to note the historiographical context of the relationship between Gandhi and Bose in this period and observe how biographers of both men as well as chroniclers of the history of the Congress Party have framed their dispute. This will demonstrate why the topic deserves further study. Following these explanations, discussion will turn to the overarching disagreements between Gandhi and Bose that defined their political relationship from Bose’s entry into the Congress Party in the 1920s onward until his death in 1945. These will be explained with the aid of their writings and speeches through Bose’s election to his first term as Congress president in 1938. Next, the specific issues that came to the fore in Bose’s contestation of the 1939 election and the subsequent political maneuverings by Gandhi and his allies will be explained. Once the overarching and immediate causes of the clash between Gandhi and Bose have been made clear, the clash itself and its repercussions will be described. It will be evident that the dispute had mixed results for both men. Gandhi reinforced his power within the Congress Party, but lost the opportunity to moderate the demands of Bose and the leftists by allowing them a share in the Party’s leadership, while Bose lost his influence within the Party, but was able to become a heroic figure for many Indians who was thereafter untainted by cooperation with the British. Finally, the conclusion will touch upon the importance of a proper understanding of this dispute to understanding the relative importance of Gandhi and Bose to the outcome of the Indian independence struggle.
The question of the impact of the 1938-9 Congress presidency dispute upon the influence of Bose and Gandhi is one that is both understudied and open to interpretation. Although there have been many biographies of Gandhi, there have been no major works explicitly linking the two men. Gandhi’s biographers often consider Bose to be a tangential figure whom they examine only briefly in the context of the open conflict between Gandhi and Bose in 1939. An early biographer of Gandhi, Louis Fischer, allows that Bose posed a serious challenge to the Gandhians’ hold on the Congress Party, but he still covers both of Bose’s terms as party president in a single paragraph. Following his resignation, Bose remains absent from Fischer’s account until after the conclusion of WWII. In a later profile of Gandhi, Geoffrey Ashe is more critical of Bose and similarly devotes only a small paragraph to the 1939 dispute. Ashe mentions Bose as a recurring thorn in Gandhi’s side in the 1920s and 1930s, but concludes that after Bose’s forced resignation, “most Congressmen disowned him” and he ceased to play an important role.

There have been many fewer scholarly biographies of Bose, with Leonard Gordon’s dual biography of Subhas Chandra Bose and his brother Sarat Chandra Bose, *Brothers Against the Raj*, as the dominant entry. Gordon’s book deals with the election of 1939 and its repercussions for Bose in a generally detached manner, providing a detailed account that refrains from making any explicit arguments about the prudence of Bose’s decisions. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Gordon’s account serves as the basis for David Arnold’s similarly even-handed portrayal of the crisis in his prominent biography of Gandhi. Arnold, like Gordon, declines to make a forceful argument in relation to the election, acknowledging Bose’s role in registering dissent with Gandhi’s tactics both

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before and after 1939 while noting that following the election Gandhi was “reinstated as
the supreme arbiter of nationalist politics.”\textsuperscript{4} This assessment squares with that of Anton
Pelinka, who goes somewhat farther by claiming, “In late 1940, Bose had hardly any
more opportunities to act in a political capacity in India. The British had isolated him. He
was further from the mainstream of the Congress than ever before.”\textsuperscript{5} Judging from Bose’s
decision to leave India in early 1941, Bose himself felt unable to exercise his power from
inside the country, but even if Bose was unable to directly influence the Congress Party
leadership, his pre-war stance on resisting the British during the conflict was largely
implemented in 1942 and Pelinka’s judgment therefore deserves some qualification.

If there is a measure of consensus on the outcomes of the events of 1938-9 among
recent Western biographers of Bose and Gandhi, their legacies evoke more debate in
India. This is clear from the official centenary history of the Congress Party, in which the
introduction, written by the editor, makes mention of every key party figure of Bose’s era
aside from Bose himself, while the short biographical entry on Bose, as one of the party
presidents, is written by a separate author and lauds the efforts of Bose in every way. In
this biographical sketch, Bose’s Forward Bloc, his attempt at forming a coherent Left
Wing opposition of Gandhi’s power in the INC, is characterized as a success, his flight
from India is not linked to political marginalization, and his radio broadcasts from abroad
are said to have “aroused tremendous enthusiasm in India.”\textsuperscript{6} Further indication of the
editor’s views on the relative importance of the legacies of Gandhi and Bose can be seen
in the choice of subjects for the drawings of key Congress Party figures on the inside

\textsuperscript{5} Anton Pelinka, \textit{Democracy Indian Style: Subhas Chandra Bose and the Creation of India’s Political
\textsuperscript{6} Rafiq Zakakria, introduction to \textit{100 Glorious Years: Indian National Congress, 1885-1985}, ed. Rafiq
Zakakria (Bombay: Reception Committee, Congress Centenary Session, 1985), 238-9.
covers in the front and back of the volume. Amongst these images, Bose appears only once while Gandhi is featured four times, where he is taking part in famous *satyagrahas* and consulting with Jawaharlal Nehru and other figures. The truth is that Bose certainly did have enough impact on the Congress Party to deserve mention alongside Gandhi and Nehru, although his ability to directly influence the nationalist movement was clearly curtailed after his loss of the presidency and subsequent ostracism from the party leadership.

These discrepancies in the treatment of Bose and Gandhi by different authors within the same volume illustrate the range of opinions about their legacies within India and give us a better sense of the debates about the place of each of them in the struggle for Indian independence. While some of the claims made about Bose’s direct impact within India following his ouster and flight abroad may be overblown, both the consensus amongst Western biographers and the official Congress Party viewpoint over-emphasize the defeat of Bose by failing to fully account for the persisting indirect influence of Bose’s ideas upon Congress Party policy in the wake of Bose’s resignation and eventual ban from Party posts.

**Overarching Disagreements Between Mohandas Gandhi and Subhas Chandra Bose**

The foundation for the numerous differences in opinion between Gandhi and Bose was their fundamentally different ideologies and corresponding visions for the future of an independent India. Bose deemed himself a socialist and expressed his views on his vision for the future of India with consistency from an early stage in his political career. In a 1928 speech, he outlined his ideas for an “independent Federal Republic” that he hoped would soon become a reality. Its constitution, he declared, would include a

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7 Zakakria, inside covers to *100 Glorious Years*. 
declaration of rights that would guarantee civil liberties and provide for “a system of joint electorate” wherein there would be no communal divisions by religion, class, or caste. He advocated a push towards a more egalitarian society regardless of religion or class and specifically mentioned an effort to boost the involvement of women in “public affairs.”

As a socialist, he tied all of this together with class-based rhetoric, arguing:

*The dawn of economic consciousness spells the death of fanaticism. There is much more in common between a Hindu peasant and a Muslim peasant than between a Muslim peasant and a Muslim zamindar. The masses have only got to be educated wherein their economic interests be, and once they understand it, they will no longer consent to be pawns in communal feuds.*

Bose was hopeful that a shift away from traditional society could be accomplished, bringing with it social equality and a unified Indian identity across religious groups.

Bose continued to hold similar views about his ideal for India throughout the next decade, as evidenced by his pronouncements in his opening speech as Congress Party president during his first term in 1938. In his address, Bose explicitly called for “revolutionary reconstruction” that would overcome India’s “chief national problems relating to the eradication of poverty, illiteracy and disease and to scientific production and distribution…along socialistic lines.” He provided more specificity as to his reconstruction plan, arguing for a federal system that would placate minority communities by allowing them some autonomy, which constituted a practical governing approach to fostering national unity in the face of communal divisions. His additional plan to boost unity across India was the proposed use of a hybrid official language that would combine Hindi with Urdu and use a Roman script. Beyond these cultural proposals, Bose’s economic ideas were most clearly socialistic. The key points of his

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long-term plan were to implement “A comprehensive scheme of industrial development under state-ownerships and state-control” and to “eradicate poverty” through “a radical reform of our land system, including the abolition of landlordism.”\(^9\) It is clear from this speech that Bose was quite open about his desire for significant reworking of the social, political, and economic order in the country, all of which he hoped would alleviate social ills and promote national unity in post-independence India.

In the course of his presidential term following his address at Haripura, Bose took concrete steps to organize the implementation of a socialistic reconstruction of the country. He formed a planning committee within the Party leadership to draw up ideas on this front and rather than heading it up himself, he set up Nehru as the chair.\(^{10}\) Nehru was a socialist as well, and therefore bought into the type of economic planning touted by Bose, but was generally more moderate and willing to compromise with the Right Wing of the Party. It seems likely that Bose hoped to deflect Right Wing criticism of this move with Nehru’s appointment and maintain the Party norm of reducing open internal dissension to a minimum in the face of the continuing challenges involved in ejecting the British from India. Bose was soon to breach this protocol with his divisive re-election bid, but for the time being he was in power and content to moderate his demands to retain party unity.

Although Gandhi shared Bose’s aim of ending British rule in India, he held a sharply contrasting vision for how an independent India should operate. He was decidedly not a socialist and put greater emphasis on maintaining traditional ways of Indian life. This was evident in his approaches to combating British rule, where his

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\(^{10}\) Leonard A. Gordon, *Brothers against the Raj: a Biography of Sarat & Subhas Chandra Bose* (New Delhi: Viking, 1990), 354.
rejection of British control also included a rejection of Western ways of life, including such aspects as modern medicine, industry and technology that stood at the heart of Bose’s socialist plan for India’s revitalization. On a personal level, Gandhi renounced European clothes while living in South Africa in 1912 and gave up his profession as a lawyer, for which he had studied in England, in order to take up resistance to the British through means beyond the legal system that they had imposed upon their colonies. The term for Gandhi’s preferred form of non-violent resistance combined the Sanskrit words for truth and struggle, satya and agraha, into the new word satyagraha. His political resistance operated outside of the conventional legal and political channels constructed by the British, which further emphasized Gandhi’s efforts to separate himself from Britain and return to Indian ways of life. By doing so, he defined his approach in an Indian context, rejecting the possibility of using the English language to define his anti-British tactics.

Perhaps the most clear contrast between Gandhi’s ideology and that of Bose is Gandhi’s ideal of a return to self-sufficient village life. In Gandhi’s doctrine of “trusteeship,” the existing social hierarchies would be preserved, with those at the top benevolently safeguarding the welfare of the rest. For him, this model of village life held the key to avoiding the modern class system, an assertion that Bose would surely have rejected, given his characterizations of peasants as a class that should band together to secure its own economic well being. Therefore, while Bose was pushing for economic reforms under a centralized socialist state, Gandhi was advocating a return to village life.

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11 Arnold, Gandhi, 67.
12 Arnold, Gandhi, 63.
13 Arnold, Gandhi, 57.
14 Arnold, Gandhi, 68.
and a rejection of industrialization and other aspects of modern society. This squares with Gandhi’s focus on improving the lives of “untouchables” within the framework of the Hindu caste system rather than, like Bose, advocating for the entire system to be dismantled.\textsuperscript{15} Gandhi’s affinity for traditional society may have had its roots in his rural upbringing, which contrasted with that of Bose, where his father, grandfather, and uncle were all advisors to local princely rulers.\textsuperscript{16} Whether or not Gandhi’s traditionalism began at a young age, it continued to shape his values later in his life, as demonstrated by his well-known decision to spin the thread for his own clothes and serve as an example for self-sufficiency rather than buy imported cloth.\textsuperscript{17}

A group of leftist historians, sparked by Ranajit Guha’s call for the creation of a new historiography focused on the role of subalterns in Indian history, has further emphasized Gandhi’s traditionalism. Guha argued in 1982 that the dominant strains of Indian historiography overemphasized the roles of both the British colonial elite and the Indian “bourgeois-nationalist” elite, which included Gandhi and the Congress party leadership.\textsuperscript{18} His response was to advocate for new studies of India’s peasants and workers, which sparked a number of articles concerning the relationship between Gandhi and the peasantry. One such article focuses on a peasant revolt in the region of Awadh in 1919-22, which happened concurrently with Gandhi’s first India-wide Non-Cooperation Movement. In the course of the revolt, the peasants reached out to Gandhi and the Congress Party leadership for support, but were denied on the grounds that the revolt was

\textsuperscript{15} Public and Judicial (S) Department, “SUBHAS CHANDRA BOSE,” 15 March 1934, IOR/L/PJ/12/214, File 1115/24, India Office Records (hereafter IOR), British Library (hereafter BL), London, 113.

\textsuperscript{16} Arnold, \textit{Gandhi}, 19.

\textsuperscript{17} Arnold, \textit{Gandhi}, 127-9.

harmful to the peasant-landlord unity that the Non-Cooperation Movement relied upon for its success. The author, Gyanendra Pandey, argues that since full cross-class unity was an unrealistic expectation, Gandhi’s refusal to aid the peasants was actually based in his own desire to avoid significant changes to the existing social structure, in line with his doctrine of trusteeship. This argument elevates the importance of Gandhi’s ideology in shaping his political decision-making and underscores his antagonism toward socialist ideals, which helps to explain the intensity of his later opposition to Bose.

The contrast between Gandhi’s traditionalist values and the modernizing, socialist values of Bose were highlighted by their policy differences in the period before the 1939 electoral dispute. Gandhi hoped that his ideal of a return to village life would ease the pressures of class conflict and foster harmony in place of India’s emerging class divisions. Bose instead saw these divisions as irreconcilable and hoped to harness the power of the rural and urban lower classes to bring about India’s economic and social transformation. This was clear from Bose’s proposal at the 1929 Lahore Congress meeting, where the party officially declared India’s full independence from Britain, rather than simply attaining Dominion status, as their ultimate objective. After this key decision was made, Bose proposed “that ‘Congress should aim at setting up a parallel Government in the country, and should take in hand the task of organising the workers, peasants and youths,’” in order to achieve the goal of independence. This resolution’s subsequent failure reinforced the ideological divide between Bose and Gandhi, for even when they

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19 Gyanendra Pandey, “Peasant Revolt and Indian Nationalism,” in Subaltern Studies, 276-8.
20 Arnold, Gandhi, 9-10.
had come to agree on their movement’s overarching goal, they retained widely divergent views on the specific ideal form of an independent India.

In addition to the basic ideological differences between Bose and Gandhi, the two men were separated by both their public images and the methods by which they hoped to win Indian independence. Gandhi’s approach of satyagraha mandated a strictly non-violent approach to resisting Britain’s colonial occupation of India. In the judgment of a retired Indian Army general, Gandhi’s insistence on non-violence was a sound strategy that accounted for the massive advantage of the British in terms of their supply of weapons. He termed Gandhi a “guerilla warrior” who knew how to tailor his methods to the situation. Bose would not have agreed. Although he acknowledged that Gandhi was making efforts to advance the cause of Indian independence, Bose believed that much more could be done and that Gandhi’s preferred strategies were a slow road to their ultimate end.

Bose’s acceptance of violence as a justifiable tactic of resistance to British rule was apparent from early in his political career. A native of Calcutta, he entered the leadership of the Congress Party as a member of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee. While serving with this body, he was part of a sub-committee tasked with suggesting revisions to the Congress Party creed, which reflected Gandhi’s preferred path to independence. In December 1923, the sub-committee requested “that the words ‘and peaceful’ be omitted from the sentence ‘the object of the Indian National Congress is the attainment of complete independence by all legitimate and peaceful means.’”

22 DK ‘Monty’ Palit (retired general in Indian Army), interview by Zareer Masani, BBC Radio, 1986, Catalogue Number 14662, recording, Sound Archive, Imperial War Museum (hereafter IWM), London.
then, violent resistance fell within the scope of legitimate tactics for achieving independence, which put him at odds with Gandhi, already the de facto leader of the Indian National Congress, long before their eventual open break in 1939.

Bose continued to advocate militant opposition to the British in the years leading up to his first election as Congress Party president. He served jail time for leading a protest march on what he had deemed “Political Sufferers’ Day” on August 11, 1929.24 The protesters belonged to a group called the Congress Volunteers, which was a body of uniformed Congress Party supporters organized in military fashion by Bose himself, who proposed their formation at the 1928 Congress Party session with the intent of raising a 2,000-strong force, trained by veterans of WWI, by the next year’s meeting.25 At the march the volunteers were armed only with banners, but ones that contained messages considered “seditious” by the authorities, including “‘Long live Revolution’, ‘Down with Imperialism’, ‘Liberty or Death’, ‘Up the Republic,’” and “‘From the Gallows we shall bring on Happiness.’”26 Similar slogans greeted Bose when he arrived by train in London’s Victoria station shortly before his first term as party president. A group of Indians had assembled to meet him and shouted, “Long live our Motherland” and “Up the revolution,” as Bose made his way to a waiting car.27 In India, these slogans had been enough to prompt his arrest and on the eve of his confrontation with Gandhi, nearly a decade following his protest with the Congress Volunteers, his reputation for militancy was apparently intact. It was not surprising that Bose would have received such a

24 Public and Judicial (S) Department, “The Case against Subhas Bose,” 33.
26 Public and Judicial (S) Department, “The Case against Subhas Bose,” 33.
welcome in London in 1938, for he had toured Europe in 1933-6, giving speeches and attempting to bolster both the cause of Indian independence in general and his own political fortunes. At one such speech in Vienna in 1933, he gave Gandhi credit for being the best person to lead non-violent resistance, but argued that India’s youth could have better results by abandoning non-violence and rejecting the possibility of compromise with the British.\textsuperscript{28} As with most of his speeches in the time before his falling out with Gandhi, Bose was careful not to criticize him directly, but rather attack his policies and suggest alternate tactics. Lakshmi Sahgal, who headed the women’s regiment of Bose’s Indian National Army during WWII, recalled that Bose’s speeches always began with him stressing, “that he was not in any way against Mahatma Gandhi and that he felt that Mahatma Gandhi was the person who first awoke the Indian people towards the necessity of freedom and the freedom struggle.”\textsuperscript{29}

This trend continued in a speech that Bose made in Ireland in 1936, when he was still barred from traveling to England. He discounted claims that Gandhi, who had voluntarily isolated himself and officially resigned from the Congress Party in 1934, was losing influence in India, arguing that Gandhi was still doing important work to better the condition of the Indian people and that his leadership would be needed in the future.\textsuperscript{30} However, the public softening of his criticisms did not reflect his private opinions on the work of Gandhi, as revealed in a pair of letters sent by Bose to A.R. Bhat, a political supporter who helped Bose organize the Maharashtra Youth Conference in 1931.\textsuperscript{31} In the

\begin{footnotes}
\item 28 Public and Judicial (S) Department, “Indian Activities in Vienna,” 12 June 1933, IOR/L/PJ/12/214, File 1115/24, IOR, BL, London, 66.
\item 29 Lakshmi Sahgal (wartime leader of INA Rani of Jhansi regiment), interview by Mark Tully, BBC Radio, January 14, 2005, Catalogue Number 28852, recording, Sound Archive, IWM, London.
\item 30 Arnold, Gandhi, 195; Public and Judicial (S) Department, “SUBHAS CHANDRA BOSE, Misc. 823,” 13 Feb 1936, IOR/L/PJ/12/216, File 1115/24, IOR, BL, London, 14.
\item 31 Public and Judicial (S) Department, “The Case against Subhas Bose,” 36.
\end{footnotes}
letter, Bose told Bhat “‘two great limitations imposed by Gandhi on Congress programme
are: (1) non-violence; (2) non-interference in vested interests. Within those restrictions
much scope does not exist for suitable plan of action.’” Bose continued, “‘We must fall
back on the support of the masses. The left wing of the Congress must immediately
organise itself as an all-India party with socialist programme and on militant plan of
action.’”32 This letter starkly reveals the major misgivings that Bose held about Gandhi’s
leadership, but was unwilling to fully detail in his public remarks. Bose again showed his
willingness to advocate violence as well as his continued commitment to socialist
ideology and his contempt for Gandhi’s traditionalism. While Bose did air milder
versions of these concerns in public, his letters to Bhat also revealed a direct
contradiction of his remarks in Ireland, where he had stressed the importance of Gandhi’s
efforts to improve Indian society. In his letters, he instead lamented that the Congress
Party had foundered since Gandhi had transformed it into a “‘social service league.’”33
This reveals Bose’s complete distaste for Gandhi’s methods, beyond his open
disagreements, and gives reason to discount the compliments that he was willing to make
of Gandhi and his approach to the independence struggle. It is therefore apparent that
Bose fundamentally disagreed with not only Gandhi’s underlying ideology, but with his
methods for resisting British colonial power as well. This was not a development recent
to their conflict in 1938-9, but rather a long growing dispute that simply remained out of
the public view until Bose made his unmistakable challenge to Gandhi’s authority by
seeking re-election as Congress Party president.

32 Public and Judicial (S) Department, “Telegram from Government of India to Secretary of State for India,
33 Public and Judicial (S) Department, “The Case against Subhas Bose,” 36.
In addition to their different approaches to achieving Indian independence, Bose and Gandhi adopted divergent public personas. From the end of his time in South Africa, where he transformed into a forceful advocate for the rights of Indians living there, Gandhi sought to present himself as a modest, self-disciplining, and ascetic leader who outwardly renounced the normal trappings of power. While Gandhi wore simple garments crafted from cloth that he had spun with his own hands, Bose at times donned fashionable European-style clothing and even occasionally made appearances in military uniforms, despite his own lack of military training or service. Furthermore, Bose had no qualms about self-promotion and sent, in 1933, an upbeat report on his activities in Europe to newspapers in India, pretending to be an anonymous “‘Correspondent in Berlin,’” prompting a member of the British colonial security apparatus to note that Bose “loses no opportunity of seeking publicity for himself.” Gandhi and Bose were, however, much more similar than a straightforward impression of their public personas would indicate.

First, when his public image is stripped away, Gandhi does not appear far from Bose’s attention hungry and power seeking personality. The Intelligence Bureau of the Government of India wrote a report in 1941 on relations between the Congress Party and the Muslim League that describes Gandhi and Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the leader of the League, in a way that could easily have characterized Bose as well. The assessment characterizes them as “vainglorious, determined, domineering men, impatient of opposition, clever in their various ways but completely obsessed with conflicting ideals which they are pursuing with an almost appalling relentlessness.” It is clear from this

34 See Bose in uniform in appendix of illustrations
portrayal, prompted by Gandhi’s interactions with another rival, that Gandhi shared Bose’s ego and stubborn single-mindedness, neither of which are traits that meshed with Gandhi’s preferred public image. The report goes on to argue, “Both Gandhi and Jinnah want power for themselves and are contemptuous of power exercised by a third party.”

This too captures Gandhi’s thirst for power and his desire to dispossess his rivals of the same, something that closely matches Bose’s image and is belied by his own. Therefore, it is apparent from Gandhi’s conduct in relation to Jinnah, when his power over the direction of the Indian independence movement was threatened from outside the Indian National Congress, that Bose’s challenge from within the Congress Party would not go unanswered and that Gandhi would display the political ruthlessness that he publically disavowed.

Another facet of Gandhi’s character, one that was publicly displayed many times throughout his life, was his self-discipline and readiness to undergo hardship for the sake of his cause. A biographer of Gandhi, David Arnold, argues that Gandhi’s imprisonments in South African jails, for his acts of civil disobedience there, first prompted him to practice a disciplined approach to life, which was forced upon him in jail, but which he willingly carried over following his release. This discipline formed the core of Gandhi’s later image as the primary leader of the Indian nationalist movement, as he sought to distance himself from the British colonial rulers most of all, but the rest of the Indian political class as well. Arnold characterizes Gandhi’s view as: “India's freedom demanded more than speeches: it called for personal self-sacrifice and a willingness to

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37 Arnold, Gandhi, 60-2.
suffer for the cause.”

Perhaps this view was shaped in part by Gandhi’s lackluster speechmaking abilities, which contrasted sharply with the powerful oratory of Bose, whose wartime speeches in Singapore to rally support and funds for his Axis-affiliated Indian National Army drove women in the audience to “simply remove the[ir] gold jewelry and throw [it] at his feet” as “…their contribution towards his war effort.”

Whether or not this was the reason for Gandhi’s emphasis on self-sacrifice over passion-stirring pronouncements, he demonstrated his willingness to lead by example on this front throughout his political career. He undertook numerous civil disobedience campaigns, such as his famous salt march, along with politically-driven fasts that threatened his health and required enormous discipline, whether it was to refrain from defending himself from police batons or to refuse to eat for days at a time.

However, Gandhi did not have a monopoly on self-discipline or on a willingness to undergo suffering for his beliefs. While Bose did not adopt the same ascetic lifestyle as Gandhi, he demonstrated a similar readiness to stand up to the British authorities at the cost of imprisonment, and like Gandhi, he used this to his political advantage. By the date of his first election as Congress Party president in 1938, Bose had, by his own account, been imprisoned nine times by the British Raj for terms ranging from less than a month to over two and half years. His first arrest had come in 1921, shortly after his return to India from his studies in England, and he spent at least six and a half of the following sixteen years behind bars, on multiple occasions being released only due to his declining health caused by prison conditions. He likely would have spent even more time in jail if it were

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38 Arnold, Gandhi, 70.
not for his time spent in Europe from February 1933, when he was released from jail as a bedridden medical patient, until March 1936, when he returned in good health and was immediately re-arrested by the British authorities. Politically savvy, Bose knew how to use his string of imprisonments to his advantage and won the 1930 election to be Calcutta’s mayor while in jail for leading an unauthorized protest march.\textsuperscript{40} He directly explained the political benefits of his run-ins with the Raj in a 1938 speech in London to the Indian Reception Committee, in which he reacted to the warm welcome he had received from Indians living there:

\begin{quote}
I would rather thank the British Government for making it possible for me to lay claim to your affection. I doubt if I would have received so much affection in your midst were it not for what I have gone through in my public life. It has been a stormy life, and I think there has been plenty of romance in it; and I can assure those of you who may be thinking of taking up a political or public career and pursuing it with determination you will find plenty of romance. There will be, however, plenty of affection waiting for you too. The greater your persecution at the hands of the foreign imperialists, the stronger is the affection in the hearts of your own countrymen. I am proud that, in spite of all I have been through, my backbone is still straight.\textsuperscript{41}
\end{quote}

Bose made clear in the speech that his political support in India was directly tied to his unyielding opposition, even in the face of extended imprisonments, to British colonial rule, and that each time he was able to provoke a response from the authorities, his power rose higher. Just as with Gandhi, Bose’s suffering was neither senseless masochism nor selfless martyrdom, but instead a series of politically motivated efforts to boost his influence and advance his ideals.

That the apparent differences in the public images of Bose and Gandhi masked important similarities in each of their personalities does not indicate that their relationship

\textsuperscript{40} Subhas Chandra Bose, “Biographical Sketch,” 6 Jan 1938, IOR/L/PJ/12/217, File 1115/24, IOR, BL, London, 15.

was any less likely to become a heated political rivalry. In fact, the similarities that they shared in their drives to increase their power and their willingness to put their safety and health on the line to do so only intensified the substantial disparities between their visions for India and their preferred methods for reaching those visions. As Leonard Gordon, a biographer of Bose, noted, “These were two stubborn men.”42 Prior to Bose’s contestation of the 1939 party presidential election, both had arrayed their steadfastness primarily against British colonial rule, but the election brought a reciprocal display of wills that heightened internal party tensions. With their shared deep commitment to their opposing ideologies, methods, and, perhaps most importantly, competing claims to power within the nationalist movement, it is not surprising that their contest for supremacy in 1939 was so hard fought.

**Immediate Causes of the 1938-9 Clash Between Gandhi and Bose**

According to Bose, the reason for his unprecedented bid for re-election as Congress Party president was that he stood as the uncompromising bulwark against implementation of the federalism provisions of the 1935 Government of India Act while Gandhi and his allies were willing to negotiate with the British on this new constitution that Bose felt would hamper the move towards full Indian independence. The Act instituted a revised system of colonial rule in India and sought to bring together in a federation the existing provinces of British India, which had elected legislatures underneath a British provincial governor, with the princely states, which were governed monarchically by local rulers beholden to the Raj.43 For Bose and others, the new constitution, while it offered the provincial legislatures more sway, was still a far cry

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42 Gordon, *Brothers against the Raj*, 403.
43 Ashe, *Gandhi*, 326.
from true independence and merely served to legitimize British colonial rule. Furthermore, the new system of rule aimed to bring the conservative-minded princes into the same governing structure as the rest of India, which would complicate Bose’s efforts at both accelerating the transfer of power to Indian hands and fostering socialist reforms.

Debates on the Act had been ongoing in the years prior to Bose’s first term as party president and the Congress Party’s position on the implementation of the Act had shifted over time, which opened up the party leadership to criticism. The Act was passed in Britain in 1935 and the Congress Party position until 1937 was to oppose the implementation of the Act entirely. However, elections were held in early 1937 in order to inaugurate the first part of the Act, which dealt with provincial autonomy and called for the creation of revamped legislatures in the provinces.\(^44\) Hedging their bets, Congress Party leaders decided not to boycott the elections, and declined to announce until the results were available whether they would allow party members to actually take office and participate in the first phase of new constitution. When the results emerged, the party had won 70% of the popular vote and 716 out of 1,585 seats in the provincial legislatures.\(^45\) For the first time in the party’s history, it had a share of real power, which the party leadership felt unable to refuse, despite their previous condemnations of the new constitution for allowing British provincial governors to retain extensive influence. In a meeting at Gandhi’s residence in Wardha that included Nehru and Right Wing members Vallabhbhai Patel, Bhulabhai Desai and Rajendra Prasad, it was decided that the party


\(^{45}\) Wolpert, *New History of India*, 323.
would step back from its stance of total rejection of the 1935 Act by accepting the seats that had just been won.\textsuperscript{46}

This mode of informal decision-making was common within the Congress Party during the 1930s, by which time Gandhi had established himself as the unofficial head of the party. The official leadership, the Working Committee, was staffed with his supporters and facilitated his command of the party. Among them was Rajendra Prasad, who a fellow Working Committee member described as the John to Gandhi’s Christ, and who resided with Patel in Gandhi’s innermost circle of unwavering allies.\textsuperscript{47} Patel was another key figure who was not only loyal in his service of Gandhi, but who was a formidable power broker and political organizer capable of delivering majority voting blocs in the Congress Party in support of Gandhi’s proposals.\textsuperscript{48} Together, along with other figures like Desai, these allies of Gandhi served for decades in the Working Committee.\textsuperscript{49} Their power became so entrenched that they were collectively referred to as the party’s “High Command.” They were to become Bose’s adversaries in 1939, with Bose’s rhetoric against them largely contingent on their purported willingness to negotiate with the British over the next stage of the new constitution.

After the provincial elections, the next step for the British colonial authorities was to enact their proposed changes to the structure of India’s central administration, which

\textsuperscript{48}Morarji Desai, “Sardar Vallabh bhai Patel,” in \textit{100 Glorious Years}, 234.
became collectively known as “Federation.” The Indian National Congress insisted that it remained firmly opposed to this aspect of the new constitution, despite their acceptance of provincial offices under the first phase of the Act. Beginning immediately after the announcement that the party would be accepting provincial offices and continuing through 1937 and 1938, leaders such as Nehru, Prasad and Desai issued denials in the press that the party was softening its position in reference to the new constitution and attempted to differentiate the provincial autonomy and federation sections of the Act.50 These denials were not enough to quell speculation that the party would simply repeat what it had done with provincial autonomy and yield to the British when the time came for elections to the new federal institutions. On the same day as Nehru’s first statement on the matter, an article published in The Times of India speculated, “that the Congress decision to co-operate in working the new constitution will facilitate the arrival of federation.”51 These questions continued, with some merit, for although the “High Command,” as the veteran Right Wing members were known, never publically wavered in their opposition to Federation, they acknowledged that it would be impossible for them to prevent its inauguration, even if they resigned their provincial posts en masse.52 Furthermore, lower-level members of the party were not united in their full opposition to the rest of the Act, as one member, S. Satyamurti, issued a statement detailing the

conditions upon which he would urge the party to accept Federation. Although it is uncertain whether the party’s Right Wing leaders would have eventually co-operated with the federal provisions of the constitution, as they were never implemented due to resistance from the princely states and the crisis caused by WWII, these repeated accusations and denials demonstrate that there were reasonable fears in 1937-9 that the party might once again abandon hard-line opposition to the Act in favor of some measure of co-operation.

These were the fears that Bose leveraged in his re-election rhetoric when he promised his own un-relenting opposition to the constitution’s federal scheme. It is important to note that he was not, by this time, still publicly critical of the decision to accept provincial offices. In a January 1938 speech in London, shortly before taking office for his first term as party president, Bose defended the party’s acceptance of legislative seats in the provinces, arguing that those offices afforded them some power, while those proposed under Federation would not be worth holding. He did admit in his first presidential address, “I am one of those who were not in favor of taking office,” but he continued on to note, “Opposing or resisting the provincial part of the Constitution will hardly be possible now, since the Congress Party has accepted office in seven out of eleven provinces.” This supports, as does the content of his later remarks, the judgment that his charges against the party’s Right Wing in the run-up to the 1939 party election dealt specifically with the federal provisions of the Act rather than the Act in its entirety.

By the time of Bose’s bid for re-election in January 1939, the decision to accept provincial offices was a year and a half old and no longer the center of public debate around the party. Bose, like the bulk of the party, turned his gaze ahead to the next stage of the constitution’s implementation, and the Federation scheme therefore became a natural talking point when it came time for him to differentiate himself from the party’s Right Wing.

Bose had clear opinions on the proposed Federation even before the start of his first term as Congress president. He had the opportunity to air his concerns to the Secretary of State for India, Lord Zetland, with whom he met in London during his visit in 1938. In a summary of their conversation, which lasted for well over an hour, Zetland recorded Bose’s particular objections to both the level of spending on the armed forces in India and the lack of any popular input on that spending under the Federation. Bose also raised with Zetland the issue of the power of the princes within the new system.56 Bose recognized the importance of the British Indian Army to the stability of colonial rule in India, as attested to by a speech that he wrote in 1933 that called for the nationalist movement to win over the support of the members of the military and bureaucratic organs of colonial rule.57 As a result, he was apparently hopeful that liberalizing concessions by the British would include limitations on their ability to wield repressive force against the nationalist movement. In a description that confirmed Bose’s steadfast character, Zetland concluded that Bose “had certain fixed ideas in his mind with regard to the immediate

future, the most prominent of which was that everything possible must be done to prevent
the inauguration of the particular form of Federation embodied in the Act.\textsuperscript{58}

In addition to his private misgivings, Bose’s public opposition to the federal
provisions of the 1935 Act was apparent before the start of his campaign for re-election.
In a speech on July 9, 1938, during his first term as Congress Party president, Bose
warned against allowing the British to fully implement the new constitution, arguing that
if “any effort to foist the Federal Scheme on the Congress” succeeds, “it will break the
Congress, because I do not see how those who are conscientiously opposed to the Federal
Scheme can take it lying down.” He backed up this claim by announcing that he would
“probably” be driven to resign as party president if the “monstrous” Federation was
implemented.\textsuperscript{59} Bose did not limit his attacks to the British or their new constitution and
used the speech to make thinly veiled warnings about the willingness of those in the
Right Wing of the Congress Party to negotiate with the Raj and perpetuate this system of
rule. In Bose’s short speech, he provocatively remarked, “Personally, I think that any
weakness shown by the Congress or any section thereof during this fateful hour in India's
history will amount to treachery of the first magnitude to the cause of India's freedom.”\textsuperscript{60}

While he was careful not to name the “section” in question, his rivals, the allies of
Gandhi, were clearly his targets. When this speech aroused indignant reactions from the
Right Wing, Bose gave a second, longer speech on July 15, ostensibly to clarify his
position. Although he began by backtracking on his previous insinuations and by making
assurances that the entire Congress was against the federal provisions of the Act, he soon
returned to his first theme, warning against any efforts by Gandhi or his allies to negotiate

\textsuperscript{58} Zetland, “Note of an Interview Between Lord Zetland and Mr. Subhas Chandra Bose,” 386.
\textsuperscript{60} Subhas Chandra Bose, “On the Federal Scheme,” in Congress President, 40.
with the British on the matter. Citing a measure passed at that year’s Congress Party
session, Bose announced:

Let me make it quite clear that the Congress resolution which was adopted
unanimously at Haripura leaves no room for equivocation and it is not open to
any Congressman, however highly placed he may be, to endeavour to weaken the
bold and uncompromising position of the Congress on this issue.61

Already, more than six months before his re-election, Bose was on the attack against the
Party’s Right Wing and offering himself as the uncompromising alternative who would
protect India against British efforts to extend their rule.

As the next election for Congress Party president neared in January 1939, Bose stepped up his rhetoric and made increasingly direct attacks on the leadership of the Right Wing, many of whom were serving with him in the Party’s Working Committee. He alleged that they not only were amenable to the Federation, but that they had already decided amongst themselves who would serve as ministers within the new scheme.62

Press reactions to the open conflict between Bose and the Right Wing detailed the type of claims that Bose was making. The Hindustan Times reported, “Mr. Bose, for his part, has raised another issue of public importance by arguing that vote for the Andhra leader [Pattabhi Sitaramayya, the candidate backed by Gandhi] is a vote for the Federal scheme and moderatism in Congress politics.” The article characterized the election as a referendum on the 1935 Government of India Act’s federal provisions, in line with the rhetoric of Bose. Painting Bose as an extremist, the article argued, “the election of the Congress President will clearly show the attitude of India towards Federation in particular and the Congress policy in general whether it is in favor of uncompromising extremism

While the report was not favorable to Bose, it seems that Bose had succeeded in defining the parameters of political debate surrounding the election by placing the proposed Federation front and center as the key differentiator between himself and the Right Wing, represented by Sitaramayya.

Sitaramayya became the Right Wing’s candidate only belatedly, after the presumed nominee, Abul Kalam Azad, withdrew his name from contention. This withdrawal prompted a scramble for another candidate, which culminated in the selection of Sitaramayya, who had even gone so far as to publicly withdraw his name from contention when he heard that he was still being considered. As he recounted in a statement before the election, Sitaramayya stood against Bose only because he felt it was his duty to abide by the wishes of Gandhi and his peers in the party leadership. Although he was a long-serving member of the Working Committee, his most prominent role was as the party’s historian, and he proclaimed that he had “never in the remotest recesses of my heart, so much as entertained any ambition.” While his avowed lack of enthusiasm for the office would have had little bearing on his ability to achieve a stage-managed unanimous election in the usual fashion, it is likely that the stark contrast between Bose’s zeal and his own indifference had a harmful effect on his chances in 1939.

Sitaramayya’s Right Wing allies in the Congress openly took issue with Bose’s accusations and countered that the Party was equally opposed to the planned federation across the ideological spectrum. The Hindustan Times reported, “the Right Wing has repeatedly protested that it is no less hostile to Federation and no more friendly to British Imperialism than Mr. Bose and his Left Wing followers,” while the Statesman noted

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Right Wing claims that “they are as far as Mr Bose from giving their approval to the scheme and the details of federation embodied in the Government of India Act.”

Gandhi and his supporters knew that Bose’s claims could have an effect on the Left Wing of the Party in particular and incite a backlash against the Party’s largely Right Wing Working Committee, which Bose was now using as a foil in his campaign. These concerns prompted rebuttals from the Right Wing members of the Working Committee in the days leading up to the election, including a statement by Rajendra Prasad on January 27, 1939.

Prasad argued in part:

*It is not fair to sidetrack the real issue by reference to an imaginary difference on the question of Federation between Subhas Babu and certain other members of the Working Committee. On this point there is absolutely no difference of opinion... It is easy to understand that there are differences between Subhas Babu and others on many questions. If the presidential election is to be made the basis of such differences in political opinion and programme, the points at issue should be clearly stated, and not to be befogged by putting forward an imaginary difference.*

In referring to Bose by a title of respect, Prasad may have been seeking to downplay any appearances of personal animosity between the party president and many members of his Working Committee, but there was no doubt that Bose had struck a nerve and forced Gandhi and his allies onto the defensive within their own party, which was not a position that they were used to occupying.

As Bose’s eventual victory would prove, the Gandhians had reason to fear the effects of Bose’s claims about their positions regarding the Government of India Act. An analysis of the events surrounding the election produced by the office of India’s Governor-General concluded that, among other factors contributing to Bose’s re-election,

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66 “B. Rajendra Prasad’s Appeal to Congress Delegates,” *Hindustan Times*, January 29, 1939, microfilm.
“Bose's claim to be whole-heartedly against the Federal scheme, and imputations that his colleagues on the Working Committee were unsound on this cardinal issue created prejudice which could not be dispelled.” Whether or not Bose’s claims were entirely true, as even his fellow socialist Jawaharlal Nehru, who was more closely aligned with Gandhi, openly dismissed them, they took hold amongst the Congress Party delegates enough to swing the election away from Gandhi’s chosen candidate. Bose had stressed the issue in his speeches and statements from the midst of his first term as Congress President onward to the election at the close of January 1939 and his claims became the public face of the dispute between the Gandhians and himself.

Bose had succeeded so well in bringing the issue of the Federation plan to the fore that Gandhi and his allies were forced to go beyond mere denials of Bose’s claims about their acquiescence to the new constitution. Gandhi openly criticized the leaders of the princely states for oppressing their people in an article in his newspaper Harijan in January 1939, thereby registering his opposition to the conservative powers who stood to gain from the proposed Federation. Gandhi’s public opposition to the power of the princely states under the new constitution as a politically calculated move by Gandhi and his ally Vallabhbhai Patel to harness the populist fervor that Bose had generated and “extend their political base” in advance of the coming election. Bose, then, was politically powerful enough to force Gandhi himself to adjust his public stance on the Federation issue through his relentless framing of the

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67 Public and Judicial Department, “Note on the Election of the President of the Indian National Congress,” 82.


70 Arnold, Gandhi, 206.
election as a referendum on the Congress Party’s position on elements of the new constitution.

Behind the central public debate on the Government of India Act’s plans for a Federation, there were other factors motivating both Bose and his opponents in their struggle for the party presidency. The Gandhians made efforts to absolve themselves of Bose’s charges that they were soft on the Federation issue, which led them to claim that the premise of Bose’s re-election run was fabricated, but they needed to go further to explain why Bose should not serve another term. Their first set of reasons stemmed from complaints that Bose was breaking party protocol and traditions. The party presidency had been seen as a largely ceremonial post, as the president was merely a first among equals inside the Working Committee that served as the party’s executive body. As a result, elections were held to be relatively low stakes affairs that had only minor effects on the direction of Congress Party policy and were used mostly to reward dedicated members of the party. In this context, terms lasted for only one year and it was generally understood that consecutive terms would not be served. Consequently, Bose’s intention to seek the presidency again in 1939 was unusual and was cited by his Right Wing critics as reason enough to reject his bid. In a statement on January 25, 1939, after it had become apparent that he was to be the candidate backed by the Right Wing against Bose, Pattabhi Sitaramayya concluded by claiming, “I would gladly have withdrawn, if I had not shared the opinion of my colleagues that there should be no consecutive re-election except under extraordinary circumstances.” For him, as the opposing candidate selected by the Gandhians and self-confessed “ardent devotee of the cult of Gandhism,” his most

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71 Public and Judicial Department, “Note on the Election of the President of the Indian National Congress,” 80-1.
powerful critique of Bose was not based on ideology but on the tradition of non-consecutive presidential terms.  

The second element of the unwritten party rules that Bose breached was the traditional role of Gandhi as kingmaker behind the scenes. Normally, party leaders met with Gandhi to gain a consensus on a candidate for the next year, who then ran unopposed and achieved a unanimous election by party delegates. The challenge by Bose in 1939 was therefore noteworthy and grabbed the attention of not only party members, but the press and colonial officials as well. In a column on the outcome of the election, *The Statesman* reported, “The contest, and the fact that there had to be a contest, are felt to be of significance.” While there had always been a system in place for a standard internal party election each year, party norms transformed the yearly contests into mere formalities and so while Bose’s decision to run again was within the official rules, even outside observers understood that he had broken a major unwritten code.

The Right Wing was not merely concerned with upholding tradition for its own sake, as these particular traditions played into their hands. Gandhi was their leader and the party norm against serving consecutive terms provided a useful excuse to rein in Bose, who had used his position as party president to aggressively promote his leftist views. In addition, as the *Hindustan Times* reported, “The contest between [Bose and Pattabhi Sitaramayya] involved the prestige of the inner Cabinet of the Congress, for they had, in unmistakable terms, supported the candidature of Dr. Pattabhi.” Accustomed to unofficially naming each president themselves, the Gandhians were keen to avoid the

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72 Pattabhi Sitaramayya, “Statement of Pattabhi Sitaramayya,” in *Congress President*, 76.
public embarrassment of losing the first contested election for party president and strongly resisted Bose’s challenge.

A further element of the Right Wing’s resistance to Bose’s candidacy was what they felt to be his disrespect for Gandhi and his allies. While Gandhi was never officially at the head of the Indian National Congress, his power had been largely unchallenged since his rise to prominence and Bose’s decision to run again was a confrontational act. As noted by *The Statesman*, the election was not simply about competing ideologies or methods. Referencing the public statements of the Right Wing leadership, the paper judged that Bose’s opponents “gave the impression that his personality had something to do with it.”

This was not a farfetched idea, as animosity between Bose and the High Command had existed at some level for the span of his Congress Party career.

Bose’s challenge to the party’s High Command in 1939 was a consistent extension of his earlier views on his place in the party. A decade before the contest, in 1929, Bose claimed to represent a youthful wave of party leaders who were in the process of supplanting the established leadership. He asserted, “on more than one occasion our leaders (at least some of them) made it clear that they have not the slightest objection to make room for younger people and they are even prepared to hand over the reins of the government to them.”

His caveat was certainly important, seeing as neither Gandhi nor his allies Patel, Desai and Prasad were amenable to seeing Bose threaten their hold on power in 1939. The direct antagonism between Bose and the leaders of the Right Wing came to light even before his bid for re-election, as his Working Committee during his

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1938 term was staffed largely with Gandhians. An internal report by the British colonial government observed:

His relationship with the Working Committee was never cordial from the very beginning save when he agreed with it. He resented Gandhi's watchful eye and was jealous of Nehru's growing influence; he suspected that Patel, as Chairman of the Parliamentary Sub-Committee, was making decisions without his knowledge and that Kripalani, the General Secretary, was not consulting him as he ought to, on procedural matters.\(^\text{77}\)

Given the mistrust and resentment that already defined Bose’s relationship with Gandhi and his allies, it seems that his decision to contest the 1939 election was notable more for bringing their conflict into the open than for poisoning an already uneasy alliance. When it came time for the election, it was publically known that Bose’s refusal to withdraw ran directly counter to Gandhi’s wishes, and their simmering rivalry burst into the public eye.\(^\text{78}\)

Among Bose’s critics was Nehru, whose ideological kinship with Bose failed to temper his frustration with his decision to run a second time. He issued a statement on January 27 that declared Bose’s potential second term counterproductive and in reference to the original candidate nominated by the Right Wing, who had by then withdrawn from the race and been replaced by Sitaramayya, he proclaimed:

*I was equally clear in my mind that the obvious person for the presidentship this year was Maulana Abul Kalam Azad. Every line of reasoning led me to this conclusion. He was peculiarly fitted to deal with some of our vital problems. He had that delicate insight and sensitiveness which understood and appreciated view-points other than his own.*\(^\text{79}\)


\(^{78}\) Public and Judicial Department, “Note on the Election of the President of the Indian National Congress,” 80.

\(^{79}\) Public and Judicial Department, “Mr. Nehru's Statement on Presidential Election,” 90.
Nehru’s description of Azad’s virtues reads as a stinging rebuke to Bose’s single-mindedness and conveys the personal frustrations of Bose’s Congress Party peers with his difficult personality. Given that Bose had managed to cause Nehru, the Working Committee’s most high-profile Left Wing member, such frustration with his insistence on contesting the election, chances are slim that he remained in the good graces of any of the Committee’s Right Wing members, which likely contributed to the scale of resistance that Bose faced in January 1939.

For Bose himself, a less prominent motivating factor for his re-election bid was his desire, in line with his general ideological differences with Gandhi, to increase the militancy of Congress Party resistance to British rule. For Bose, the Federation was the most immediate manifestation of the larger independence struggle and therefore formed the main avenue of his attacks on both the British and the Right Wing during his presidency and campaign. His remarks before and after the election reveal, however, that his aims were broader in scope than simply forestalling the Federation as long as possible. In his first presidential address, at the Congress Party’s Haripura session, Bose argued for seizing every opportunity to pressure the British in order to build on their movement’s momentum, thereby wresting independence from the British on their own terms rather than having their freedom given to them conditionally. In his initial statement announcing his intention to contest the election, while he stressed the Federation issue in a similar way to the rest of his election statements, he did not restrict the importance of the contest to Federation alone. He argued that an actual election, as opposed to a consensus nominating process, would clarify the party’s position on how to approach the anti-colonial struggle generally. He noted that it was particularly important

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80 Subhas Chandra Bose, “The Haripura Address,” in Congress President, 12.
that the party adhere to a unified and effective line in the coming year not only because of “the prospective fight over Federation,” but also due to “increasing international tension” that foreshadowed what became the Second World War. This makes it clear that Bose was not only concerned with the immediate issue of resisting the implementation of the Federation scheme, but was also attempting to lay the groundwork for the party’s strategies of resistance during the critical years of heightened international tensions and potential war.

He continued to stress these concerns in his second presidential address at the party’s Tripuri session in March 1939. Here he called for the party to issue an ultimatum to the British for full independence, which the party’s leaders had not yet attempted, backed by the threat of “an All-India Satyagraha” if not met.81 This was a much stronger stand than Gandhi or the Right Wing had been willing to take, given the massive amount of coordination involved in civil disobedience on a nationwide scale, and his aims clearly reached far beyond the delay of Federation. He appealed to his fellow party members, “If only we sink our differences, pool all our resources and pull our full weight in the national struggle, we can make our attack on British Imperialism irresistible.” In light of the international situation that he felt was weakening the British hold on its empire, he further called for “political foresight” and urged his peers not to miss “this rare opportunity in the life-time of a nation.”82 Bose seemed to believe that his re-election had placed him at the head of the party in an important historical juncture and that he could be instrumental in winning independence for India if only the party would follow his aggressive stance against tolerating any further colonial occupation.

81 Subhas Chandra Bose, “The Tripuri Address,” in Congress President, 92-3.
82 Subhas Chandra Bose, “The Tripuri Address,” in Congress President, 93.
Even within the confines of the central rhetorical issue of Bose’s re-election bid, he differentiated himself from the Right Wing by advocating for particularly aggressive resistance. While Desai and Patel came to the conclusion that the Congress Party was powerless to stop the implementation of the Federation scheme, Bose, in his first presidential address, advocated for full-scale struggle against the plan. He argued, using a phrase from the Congress Party creed, “We have to fight Federation by all legitimate and peaceful means—not merely along constitutional lines—and in that last resort, we may have to resort to mass civil disobedience which is the ultimate sanction we have in our hands.” Bose’s two presidential addresses, taken together, illustrate his willingness to advocate use of the party’s “ultimate sanction,” which he apparently believed had been unnecessarily withheld from the freedom struggle under the leadership of Gandhi and his followers. His aim was clear: to discard what he saw as the Gandhians’ timidity and bring the full weight of the party’s influence to bear against the British, thereby expediting the transition to a fully independent India.

A likely final motivation for Bose’s decision to seek re-election was his desire for power and recognition and his hope to remain at the peak of the Congress Party’s official pinnacle of influence for as long as possible. While it is impossible to fully characterize the degree to which this motivated him in this particular instance without the existence of a diary or other unfiltered first-person commentary on the events, this motivation seems likely when contemporary descriptions of Bose’s character are taken into account. Members of the British colonial administration described his traits in a number of memos, which referenced his “vanity,” his “insatiable desire for constant limelight” and

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83 Subhas Chandra Bose, “The Haripura Address,” in Congress President, 23.
“his bumptious manner.” Put together with Bose’s “great drive and political acumen,” he appears to have been irresistibly driven towards political advancement. In Nehru’s public statement in the days leading up to the election, he concluded with an apparent plea for Bose to prioritize the good of the party over his own aims: “The future is dark with conflict and we shall have to brace ourselves to meet it as a united people with courage and confidence, forgetting persons and remembering principles and our cause.” Bose countered with his own appeals to maintain party unity, but it seems doubtful that his continued refusal to back down convinced any of his peers that he was as disinterested a candidate, only running because he was nominated by various provincial councils, as he professed.

Opposed by the Gandhians for breaching Congress Party protocol by contesting the election and directly challenging their traditional primacy in selecting the party president, Bose was himself driven to remain in the race for a mix of reasons, only one of which was immediately obvious from his campaign rhetoric. The pending implementation of the system of Federation outlined in the 1935 Government of India Act was the central issue of Bose’s statements in 1938-9 and his charges that the Right Wing of the party was considering negotiations with the British on the scheme formed the rhetorical basis for his candidacy. Beyond the Federation issue, Bose was also motivated by longer-term and more ambitious goals of accelerating the process of attaining full independence for India by aggressively wielding every advantage at hand against Britain.

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In the course of this process, he was also keen to emerge as the leader of the party as it entered what he judged to be the final phase of the independence struggle, thereby securing his place in the hearts of his fellow Indians and in the annals of history.

**Repercussions of the Clash: Bose's Lingering Influence on INC Militancy**

In the immediate aftermath of the election there was no question that Bose had won a stunning victory over the established party leadership. As the self-proclaimed standard bearer for the Left, he was able to overcome the influence of the Right Wing leadership in a vote of 1,580 to 1,375 for Sitaramayya.\(^{87}\) Party delegates on the Left were apparently keen to display their dissatisfaction with the High Command’s jealous guarding of their power and they rallied behind Bose, illustrating a sharp internal cleavage that Congress Party leaders had long tried to keep hidden from view with repeated proclamations of unity. Bose waited out the results in his hometown of Calcutta and emerged to give a short victory speech thanking the party delegates and proclaiming his re-election to be a win for the anti-Federationists.\(^{88}\)

Just as the election appeared to be a clear victory for Bose, it also appeared to be a telling defeat for the Right Wing. The first seriously contested party presidential election had revealed that their hold on power was not as commanding as it had seemed to be when Gandhi and his allies handpicked each year’s party president without wider consultation. *The Statesman* concluded, “If it is possible to crystallize the election in a sentence; it can be read as a defeat for Wardha [i.e., Gandhi, as this was where he resided in his ashram].”\(^{89}\) Gandhi himself soon confirmed this idea by issuing a post-election statement that read in part, “since I was instrumental in inducing Dr. Pattabhi not to

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\(^{87}\) Wolpert, *New History of India*, 327.

\(^{88}\) “Mr. Bose Re-Elected Congress President,” *Hindustan Times*, January 30, 1939, microfilm.

withdraw his name as a candidate…the defeat is more mine than his. …[I]t is plain to me that the delegates do not approve of the principles and policy for which I stand. I rejoice in this defeat.”

Gandhi’s public admission of defeat was not a positive development for Bose, who soon realized that his presidential victory had not eliminated Gandhi’s significant influence in the upper circles of the party.

Bose knew that he could not lead the party in the face of opposition by Gandhi, who remained the de facto leader of the nationalist movement and most powerful rallying figure for India’s masses. He seemed to have grasped this immediately after the election and attempted to counter his previous deprecations of the High Command with assurances that aimed to prevent a complete break between the party’s Right and Left Wings. On the day after the election, Bose cautioned his supporters, “‘Do not criticize or condemn your elders needlessly unless you resolve to improve on their record by your service. In this hour of rejoicing do not utter a word or do anything which may hurt the feelings of anybody or cast reflection on any person.’” He had been engaging in precisely this type of criticism for the previous week, but he now rushed to make amends as he sensed that the Right Wing was not prepared to simply accept his victory and carry on with party business as normal. In what appeared to be an attempt to pre-empt coming Right Wing criticisms, he declared, “‘Unity and solidarity of all anti-Imperialist elements in the country is more needed to-day than ever in the past. We should not do or say anything which may disturb that unity and solidarity in the slightest degree.’”

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91 “Mr. Bose on Problems Ahead - No Criticism of Elders,” Hindustan Times, January 31, 1939, microfilm.
92 “Congress Stands United as Ever - Mr. Subhas Bose's Statement On His Re-election,” Hindustan Times, January 31, 1939, microfilm.
echoed statements by the Right Wing during Bose’s re-election bid and proved just as ineffective.

Less than a month after Bose’s re-election, each of the Right Wing members of the party’s Working Committee had resigned, followed soon by the apparent resignation of Nehru. Bose accepted the Right Wing members’ resignation on February 26, leaving his brother Sarat Chandra Bose and himself as the only non-resigning members.\textsuperscript{93} In a nominally conciliatory message written by Patel on behalf of the other eleven resigning members, they assured Bose, “You may trust us to give you all possible co-operation where we see eye to eye with you in the policies that you may put before the country.”\textsuperscript{94} Bose apparently had little trouble understanding that this meant they intended to oppose any of his proposals that met with disapproval from Gandhi, as he replied, “If I felt that there was the slightest chance of reconsidering your decision at this state, I would have certainly implored you to withdraw your resignation, but in the present circumstances, a formal request will not serve any useful purpose.”\textsuperscript{95} With less than two weeks remaining until the INC’s Tripuri session, Bose found himself without a Working Committee underneath him to manage the party. He scrambled to find a solution, writing Gandhi as well as Nehru, who Bose felt could use his stature among both wings of the party to bridge the gap.\textsuperscript{96} However, the time proved too short and no settlement was reached before the opening of the Tripuri AICC session on March 7.

\textsuperscript{93} Secretary to the Governor-General, “CONGRESS: Resignations from the Working Cottee,” 25 Feb 1939, IOR/L/PJ/8/639, IOR, BL, London, 73.
\textsuperscript{95} Subhas Chandra Bose, “Resignations Accepted,” 26 Feb 1939, IOR/L/PJ/8/639, IOR, BL, London, 71.
\textsuperscript{96} Gordon, Brothers against the Raj, 377.
The coordinated action of Gandhi and his allies on the Working Committee created an unmanageable situation for Bose. As *The Times of London* observed, “Mr. Bose, without Mr. Gandhi’s blessing, is shorn of all the power he was expected to achieve from his presidential victory.” This assessment was confirmed by the parliamentary maneuverings of the Right Wing at Tripuri, where a Gandhian named Govind Ballabh Pant moved a resolution that formally reasserted Gandhi’s primacy in the Congress Party. Known informally as the “Pant Resolution,” but titled “Reaffirmation of Congress Policy,” it read in part: “This Congress expresses its confidence in work of the Working Committee which functioned during the last year and regrets that any aspersions should have been cast against any of its members.” This was a direct refutation of Bose’s charges concerning the Federation plan and the inability of the Left Wing to block this language demonstrated that the Right Wing remained, despite its setback in January, in control of the direction of party policy. Nonetheless, the end of the resolution was the most critical to undermining Bose’s position. Party members were reminded, “Mahatma Gandhi alone can lead the Congress,” and that consequently, “the Congress regards it as imperative that its executive should command his implicit confidence and requests the President to appoint the Working Committee in accordance with the wishes of Gandhiji.” Bose was now officially at the mercy of Gandhi, as he was barred from forming his own replacement Working Committee and required Gandhi’s approval to move forward with his presidency.

In April, *The Statesman* judged that the “struggle” between the Left and Right Wings had been “carried to preposterous lengths at Tripuri” and demonstrated that “The Congress is split from top to bottom.”

Bose continued to correspond with Gandhi throughout March and April, but their letters consisted of continued requests by Bose for Gandhi to authorize a new Working Committee, which Gandhi repeatedly declined. In one such letter, Bose proclaimed, “My resignation would mean the beginning of a new phase in Congress politics which I want to avoid till the last. …It is in your hands to save the Congress and the country from this calamity.”

Gandhi refused to play the role of savior, as defined by Bose, and replied in his own letter, “The views you express seem to me to be so diametrically opposed to those of the others and my own that I do not see any possibility of bridging them.” He continued on to suggest that it was Bose, not himself, who held the solution to the impasse. He offered Bose the same impossible solution that he continued to repeat for nearly a month, that Bose should form his own Working Committee of Leftists.

Consequently, Bose was left with an unworkable situation as the next major Congress Party meeting approached.

With no Working Committee underneath him to run the party, and no possibility of assembling a replacement from either the Right or Left Wings, Bose was driven to offer his resignation at the opening of the AICC’s Calcutta meeting on April 29. He recounted his dilemma to the assembled party members and noted the constraints that the Pant Resolution imposed upon him, as well as the problem of Gandhi’s unwillingness to name a new Working Committee. He concluded, “it may possibly be easier for the A.I.C.C. to settle the matter if it can have a new President,” and announced “in an

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entirely helpful spirit I am placing my resignation in your hands.”¹⁰² Bose’s struggle to retain his hold on the party presidency was over.

Bose was shortly thereafter replaced as president by Rajendra Prasad, one of his key antagonists in his re-election bid who was among those Working Committee members who had resigned in order to foil Bose’s ability to manage his duties.¹⁰³ In another blow to Bose and the Left Wing, the new Working Committee formed in the wake of his departure was staffed fully by Right Wing leaders, as Nehru passed up the opportunity to serve and two Gandhian Bengalis were nominated to replace Bose and his brother.¹⁰⁴ Gandhi and the Right Wing had muscled their way back into power and firmly established that they intended to uphold the precedent of Gandhi’s unofficial supreme leadership of the party. Completing Bose’s reversal of fortune, the new Working Committee retaliated for his continued open questioning of party policy by removing him as the president of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee and banning him for three years from “any elective Congress Committee.” The Working Committee was intent on making an example of Bose. Their resolution declared that they could not allow breaches of party discipline and that other wayward party members under the influence of Bose would be spared disciplinary action only if they ceased their activities and repented.¹⁰⁵

Contemporary observers judged that the Gandhians had now returned the pre-existing balance of power within the party, with their key rival, who had only months before publicly defeated them, now banned from meaningful political activities within the

Congress Party. *The Statesman*, which had earlier declared the January election a blow to Gandhi, now argued in May, “Certain forces have now won a decisive victory and certain other forces have lost out. Mr. Subhas Chandra Bose was made the standard-bearer of the forces which have lost…” Bose had, in less than a year, been transformed from the rising leader of the Left Wing to the failed challenger of the Congress Party’s status quo, now forced to fight to retain his relevancy to the nationalist movement. *The Times* (of London) added to the speculation with a column that pointed out in the wake of his three-year ban, “some think that his career as a political leader has ended.” Bose’s position in the nationalist movement had been compromised, and on the eve of what Bose had judged in his campaign to be a “momentous” period in India’s “national history,” it could have hardly been more ill timed.

In light of this fact, Bose began significant efforts to maintain his standing in the public eye and advance his preferred methods for pressuring the British. He organized and attended a number of political events that advocated taking a harder line against the colonial authorities, including an “Anti-Imperialist Conference” in October 1939, an “All-India Student Conference” in January 1940 and an “Anti-Compromise Conference” in March 1940. The first and last of these conferences were purposefully scheduled to coincide with meetings of the Congress Party and were designed to pressure Bose’s former peers to resist colonial rule more stubbornly. It was a continuation of his party presidential campaign and pre-resignation proposals by other means. At the “Anti-Compromise Conference,” Bose appealed to the rank-and-file of the Congress Party to

pressure for change in policy, issuing a resolution that assured them the domestic and international situation favored stepped up resistance, but that the party leadership was holding back. The only sanction left for Bose’s opponents on the Working Committee was to bar him from the party outright, but that would have meant little in comparison to the three year leadership ban that they had already imposed, given that it would keep him out of office for the likely start of Britain’s embroilment in the growing international conflict. Consequently, Bose had little to lose in maintaining his pressure in the hopes that he could bring the party leadership around to his viewpoint.

In addition to his efforts at the conferences, Bose attempted to bring together the different Left Wing groups inside the Congress Party in what he called the Forward Bloc. His goal was again to pressure the Congress Party leadership, but from within the party, taking on an unofficial coordinating role for the groups opposed to the direction of party policy. The Forward Bloc never attained its original goal of integrating internal party resistance to the Right Wing leadership, but it did provide Bose with an alternate base of support in his home province of Bengal, where the organization was based. The organization published an eponymous newspaper that Bose used to advocate for more militant resistance to the Raj, which led the provincial government to fine the paper in May 1940. The next month, Bose published an article declaring July 3, 1940 as the date for a civil disobedience movement calling for the removal of the Holwell Monument in Calcutta. The monument was a source of discontent as it honored soldiers from the

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109 Indian Political Intelligence, “THE ALL-INDIA FORWARD BLOC,” 5.
British East India Company who had died in the jail of a local Indian leader in what became known as the “Black Hole of Calcutta” incident. Sensational accounts of the barbarity of the Indian leader and his soldiers provided the East India Company with the rationale for expanding its role in governing the region, setting the stage for British colonization of India as a whole. Unable to orchestrate civil disobedience on a national scale after his resignation as party president, Bose was turning to more local issues with the same fervor. After declaring the monument “the symbol of our slavery and humiliation,” Bose announced in his article that he had “decided to march at the head of the first batch of volunteers on that day.”

On the day before the proposed march, three days after the article’s publication, British authorities detained Bose preemptively for an indefinite term, citing various provisions of the Defence of India Rules on account of the ongoing war. He would be imprisoned for just over five months.

His release on December 5, 1940 came only as a result of a hunger strike that Bose began on November 29, which he had announced in a letter to the Governor of Bengal in a tone indicative of his steadfastness and militancy. He explained his hunger strike by announcing, “To purchase one’s continued existence by compromising with illegality and injustice goes against my very grain. I would throw up life itself, rather than pay this price.” While he was quickly released on health grounds related to the hunger strike, the Bengal authorities had no intention of allowing him to resume his agitations in the midst of WWII and placed him under house arrest while he recovered.

112 Subhas Chandra Bose, “My Political Testament,” in Essential Writings, 263.
113 Sisir K. Bose and Sugata Bose, introduction to Essential Writings, 14.
This effort had been Bose’s first major attempt to implement the type of militant resistance to British rule that he had been advocating while INC president and while the monument was eventually removed, it failed to rebuild Bose’s following or shift the policy of the Congress Party. Although Bose’s hunger strike and his letters of protest to the Governor of Bengal demonstrated that he hadn’t intended to be detained for such a long period, it seems likely that he was purposefully courting imprisonment in order to boost publicity for his efforts because he named a successor as leader of his Forward Bloc party in the days immediately before the proposed march. 115 Neither the march nor Bose’s imprisonment gave him the recognition or influence that he desired, as the Bengal Government banned press coverage of the protest and Gandhi publicly refused to protest Bose’s imprisonment, writing in his newspaper, “Subhasbabu did not defy the law with the permission of the Congress. He has frankly and courageously defied even the Working Committee. …Hundreds of issues of greater importance can be discovered.” 116 Thus Bose’s own effort at civil disobedience had not merely been the target of censorship, stifling its publicity value, but those who did know about it were left without a doubt that Bose was far from any type of reconciliation with Gandhi.

With his ultimate post-resignation political effort an apparent failure, Bose decided on taking a massive gamble. In January 1941, he escaped from house arrest to start a journey to Nazi Germany with the idea that his chances of effecting Indian independence would be better if he worked from the outside with Axis help than if he continued his struggle against both the British authorities and the Congress Party

leadership from within India. Bose spent the entire war, which constituted the rest of his life, abroad in Axis-occupied territory, so his direct influence on Congress Party policy had come to an end. Conventional opinion went further and judged that Bose had fallen from failure to failure after his re-election bid and had finally become, after his flight from India, almost irrelevant to the Indian independence struggle, despite his propaganda efforts abroad.\footnote{Intelligence Bureau, Government of India, “Career of Subhas Bose,” 1-2.}

While the Congress Party leadership politically isolated Bose to the degree that he was driven to flee India, distinct traces of Bose’s ideology and preferred methods soon reappeared in Congress Party policy with the Quit India movement in 1942. While the scheme for a Federation under the 1935 Government of India Act was the central issue touted by Bose in his re-election campaign, continued opposition by the princes and the onset of WWII had caused the shelving of the plan by the time Bose exited India in 1941. As a result, it is difficult to evaluate any effects of Bose’s agitation on the outcome of the plan. However, the conduct of the Congress Party in 1942 provides an opportunity to determine whether Bose’s attempts both before and during his presidential terms to encourage militant resistance to the British had lasting effects on party policy.

The Quit India movement arose broadly out of building resentment of Britain’s continued refusal to offer a fixed timetable for a transition to an independent India, even amid self-imposed limits by the Congress Party on the scale of civil disobedience actions and efforts to minimize disruptions to the Allied war effort. The movement exploded into a period of unrest throughout India that often went beyond the non-violent measures touted by the party’s leaders. Beginning shortly after the promulgation of the Quit India resolution by the Congress Party on August 8, 1942, nationalists carried out attacks on
vulnerable manifestations of British rule. Though they may have been far from the center of the Raj administration in New Delhi, agitators sabotaged train tracks and telegraph lines, destroyed mail, and even attacked police stations amid frustration with their colonial occupiers. This initial wave of unrest, which strayed so far from the tenets of satyagraha in part because of the British decision to imprison Gandhi and the rest of the INC leadership in the wake of the resolution, was largely suppressed in a matter of months. The containment of the movement, paired with the continued detention of the Congress Party leadership until mid-1945, marked the end of the party’s political effectiveness for the duration of the war. Therefore, when attempting to gauge Bose’s influence on the INC’s wartime policies, the only clear measure is the rhetoric of Gandhi and the party’s resolutions issued in advance of the Quit India movement.

Scholars of colonial India often cite Gandhi as the driving force behind the movement’s inception, although he was not in a position to lead the outcome as he was imprisoned with the rest of the Congress Party leadership in response to the passage of the Quit India resolution. Gandhi’s leadership is referenced frequently across a range of works on the movement. S. D. Muni, in an article on the movement as a whole, states unequivocally, “Mahatma Gandhi was the principal force and figure behind the movement,” and credits his writings in early 1942 with building support for the coming campaign. K. Venugopal Reddy echoes both of these ideas in a more recent article on the role of the working class in the movement, arguing that the “Quit India” movement

[was] fashioned by Gandhi in May–June 1942 and put into shape by the Working Committee by its Wardha resolution of 14 July [and] launched by the AICC by its famous resolution of 8 August.”121 Other authors who consider Gandhi to be the key originator of the movement include Bidyut Chakrabarty, who labels Quit India “the culmination of the Gandhi-led nationalist campaign,” and Gandhi biographer Geoffrey Ashe, who explains that it was Gandhi who “unleashed” the movement and who “challenged the Englishman with the simplest and most tremendous of all his slogans: Quit India.”122 None of these authors mentions a role for Bose in the movement aside from a secondary one raised by Chakrabarty, who posits that the controversy surrounding Bose’s re-election and subsequent ouster may have played a role in the declining membership of the Congress Party, which in turn could have driven party leaders to take drastic measures to solidify their base of support.123

Although the significance of Gandhi’s role in starting the movement is unassailable, as he drafted the original resolution outlining the struggle, the degree to which Bose influenced the origins of the Quit India movement has been overlooked.124 The first aspect of the Quit India movement that displays Bose’s likely influence is the ideological slant of the rhetoric that Gandhi and the Working Committee employed to justify their proposed campaign. By the middle of 1942, the official Congress Party line was hardening against the continuation of British control in India, as reflected in the resolutions passed at the All-India Congress Committee meeting that year in Allahabad, where the Party officially rejected the proposals of a British commission led by Sir

122 Chakrabarty, “Defiance and Confrontation,” 76; Ashe, Gandhi, 349.
123 Chakrabarty, “Defiance and Confrontation,” 77.
124 Ashe, Gandhi, 349.
Stafford Cripps, who had arrived in India with the aim of securing Indian cooperation in the war effort. The AICC went further and made demands for Indian control over its own defense, arguing that the current situation of foreign occupation rendered the Indian people “chattels to be disposed of by foreign authority.” This stand against foreign control of India’s military was directly in line with Bose’s remarks in the time leading up to his terms as party president in reference to continued centralization of military control in the 1935 Government of India Act and it reflected a new emphasis on an issue that had previously been the purview of the Left Wing.

Additionally, the resolutions later in the year that specifically laid the groundwork for the movement contained socialist language that would have fit well among Bose’s rhetoric. The Working Committee resolution of July 14 envisioned the future of India after the achievement of freedom as a haven of economic equality where the masses would hold power:

For the first time in India's history, realisation will come home that princes, jagirdars, zamindars and propertied and monies classes, derive their wealth and property from the workers in the fields and factories and elsewhere, to whom essentially power and authority must belong.

It appeared that the party leadership was now challenging, at least rhetorically, the very “vested interests” that Bose had earlier criticized them for protecting. The next month’s AICC meeting reaffirmed the July 14 resolution and added additional language on the future of India. Once again, the resolution advanced a vision that was strikingly

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126 Lord Zetland, “Note of an Interview Between Lord Zetland and Mr. Subhas Chandra Bose at 88 Eaton Square, S.W.1,” 383-5.
128 Public and Judicial (S) Department, “Telegram from Government of India to Secretary of State for India, No. 675,” 62.
more amenable to Bose’s ideology than that of Gandhi, one which called for a
provisional government whose “primary functions will be to defend India and resist
aggression with all the armed as well as the non-violent forces at its command, together
with its allied powers, to promote the well-being and progress of the workers in the fields
and factories and elsewhere...”

Although the resolution presumed that an independent India would enter the war on the side of the Allies, which Bose, by virtue of his association with the Axis powers, was clearly not behind, the ranking of violent resistance to occupation as the first function of a new government was significant.

Although the proposed campaign was pledged to be nonviolent, the possibility that the party might organize armed resistance in the future must have been an exciting prospect for Bose’s allies in the Left Wing. Bose had earlier outlined the goals of the Forward Bloc, writing, “Our immediate task was to fight the increasing drift towards Constitutionalism, reconvert the Congress into a revolutionary organisation and bring it back to the path of national struggle...”

Whether or not the agitation of the Forward Bloc was directly responsible for pressuring the party leadership, it appeared that by 1942 its goal had been achieved, particularly because the Forward Bloc later joined the movement despite its difficulties with the Congress Party leadership.

Another aspect of the Quit India movement that fit with Bose’s proposals in 1939 and earlier was the proposed scope of the effort. In reaction to the British Government “White Paper” that outlined what was to become the 1935 Government of India Act,
Bose advocated a plan of resistance. He cited the new constitution proposal as another example of British intentions to disregard Indian opposition and extend their rule, which drove him to conclude, “India therefore must resolve to launch another fight on a bigger and more intensive scale.”\(^{132}\) In the same period, Bose expounded upon the key steps necessary for a successful movement to eject the British and argued for activities to be spread over wide geographic areas, both rural and urban.\(^{133}\) The August 8 resolution of the AICC, which explained the final outline of the movement, provided for this type of large spread, as the committee called for “the starting of a mass struggle on non-violent lines on the widest possible scale, so that the country might utilise all the non-violent strength it has gathered during the last 22 years of peaceful struggle.”\(^{134}\) The party was abandoning targeted and individual satyagraha for a nationwide campaign of civil disobedience in the model of what Bose had been advocating since at least 1933.

A final key similarity between the Congress Party plan for the Quit India movement and the methods urged by Bose was the struggle’s timing, amidst a global war that threatened not just Britain, but India itself. As Gandhi recalled after Bose’s arrest over the Holwell Monument protest in 1940, “He honestly thinks that the Working Committee’s way is wrong, and that nothing good will come out of its ‘procrastination.’”\(^{135}\) Bose confirmed Gandhi’s characterization of his views in 1941 when he explained that the Forward Bloc’s aim was to prevent the stagnation of the Congress Party and instead drive it “to take the initiative” against the British.\(^{136}\) With the


\(^{133}\) Public and Judicial Department, “Subhas Chandra Bose,” undated, IOR/L/PJ/12/217, File 1115/24, 70.

\(^{134}\) Indian National Congress, “All-India Congress Committee: Bombay, August 7-8, 1942,” in vol. 4 of *INC: The Glorious Tradition*, 165.

\(^{135}\) Gandhi, “Subhashbabu,” in vol. 8 of *Harijan*, 208.

Quit India resolution, Gandhi and his allies put a definite end to their “procrastination,” directly challenging the British to undertake an immediate withdrawal and “Leave India to God,” as Gandhi wrote in late May 1942.\(^{137}\) It seemed that the Congress Party leadership was not only belatedly considering Bose’s pleas, but throwing their full weight behind his model of struggle.

The justification for the party leadership’s increasing militancy arose out of the changing political situation brought on by the intensification of WWII and the stagnant British attitudes towards granting India its independence. The Congress Party, after rejecting Bose’s calls for direct action in 1939, had deliberately curtailed its active opposition to the British in order to prevent frustrating the Allied war effort. It was hoped that the British would recognize this as an act of good faith and respond accordingly in negotiations on the future of India. However, the major opportunity for wartime reconciliation, the Cripps mission, faltered in early 1942 after nationalist leaders rejected any deal that failed to guarantee outright independence after the war.\(^{138}\) In the wake of this breakdown of negotiations, Congress Party leaders came to realize that their accommodating strategy was bringing them no closer to independence. In late June, Gandhi cited these concerns and hinted at the movement to come: “‘We have followed the non-embarrassment policy so far... we will follow it even now. But we cannot allow the British Government to exploit it in order to strengthen the strangle-hold on India. And today it amounts to that.’”\(^{139}\) The tipping point came less than a month later, when the Working Committee publicized the proposed Quit India resolution, and when it came


\(^{138}\) Indian National Congress, “All-India Congress Committee: Allahabad, April 29-May 2, 1942,” in vol. 4 of INC: The Glorious Tradition, 158.

\(^{139}\) Candidus [pseud.], “Indian Political Notes: Mr. Gandhi Modifies Original Stand,” The Times of India, June 24, 1942, in PQHN (accessed January 31, 2012).
time to defend their position in front of the AICC, the party leadership relied in part on this argument. In addition, they pointed to the fate of Britain’s neighboring colonies in Southeast Asia, where the Japanese had swiftly overrun the British-organized defenses, leaving the civilian populations in dire conditions.\footnote{\textit{“Need Of Hour Is Action By Britain, Not Promises’}: Congress Leaders Explain New Move,” \textit{The Times of India}, August 8, 1942, in PQHN (accessed January 31, 2012).} Taken together, the increasingly threatening war situation and the stalling of negotiations on independence convinced Congress Party leaders that their “non-embarrassment policy” in regards to the war effort had shown few results. They were no closer to independence than at the start of the war and it appeared that the military with which they had vowed not to interfere might be scant protection against a Japanese invasion. Therefore, they set upon a new course of action, one that closely resembled Bose’s plan for resistance at the start of the war.

The parallels between Gandhi’s proposal in 1942 and Bose’s earlier arguments are brought into greater focus by the examining the wording of the Quit India resolution passed by the AICC in August 1942. The AICC urged in part, “the immediate ending of British rule in India is an urgent necessity,” continuing later to add, “No future promises or guarantees can affect the present situation or meet that peril. ...Only the glow of freedom now can release that energy and enthusiasm of millions of people which will immediately transform the nature of the war.”\footnote{Indian National Congress, “All-India Congress Committee: Bombay, August 7-8, 1942,” in vol. 4 of \textit{INC: The Glorious Tradition}, 161-2.} For the Congress Party and its leadership, any willingness to accept compromises with the British was over, even if such a compromise promised to bring them in time to their ultimate goal. This was the same attitude that Bose had been striving to enshrine in Congress Party policy during his presidential terms, when he moved a resolution calling for the party to issue the British a
six-month ultimatum that was defeated by the Right Wing, as well as before his ascension to the party presidency, when he declared, “compromise is not possible. A political compromise is possible only when there is some community of interest. But in the case of England and India there are no common interests...” Further anticipating the AICC resolution more than nine years following, Bose wrote in 1933, “The only solution of the present deadlock that is possible is through the attainment of India’s freedom.”

When, in the midst of WWII, Congress Party leaders concluded that they needed another approach to winning independence, the natural alternative to their existing methods was already present in party discourse, thanks to Bose’s agitation since he first joined the party in 1921. Accordingly, the leadership’s final proposals for Quit India borrowed heavily from his previously developed plans of action. Gandhi, recalling in 1940 his correspondence with Bose after his resignation as party president, wrote in his newspaper, “I told him that, if at the end of his plan there was Swaraj [i.e., independence] during my lifetime, mine would be the first telegram of congratulations he would receive. ...But I told him he was wrong.”

Two years after the article’s publication, it seemed that Bose was on his way to earning such a telegram, thanks not to his personal wartime efforts, but because Gandhi and the party leadership had adopted key aspects of Bose’s methods as their own.

**Afterword: Bose’s Legacy in Postwar India**

By the start of the Quit India movement, Bose had been in Nazi Germany for months, organizing propaganda efforts against the continued British presence in India.

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He eventually travelled to Japanese-occupied Singapore, where he raised a force called the Indian National Army, composed of surrendered members of the British Indian Army who were interned as POWs there. The INA was largely a propaganda outfit and faced only limited action in Burma and the eastern fringes of India just as the Japanese Empire in Southeast Asia began to collapse, and they engaged mostly in an extended retreat with the rest of the Japanese forces in the region. His wartime efforts did, however, gain great renown in nationalist circles at the end of the war, when the press blackout on his activities came to an end, simultaneously bringing news of his death, which occurred only days after the Japanese surrender in an airplane crash on current-day Taiwan.

The degree to which Bose’s wartime efforts propelled the growth of his legacy is evident in the reactions of Congress Party leaders to British attempts to try returned INA members for treason at what became known as the Red Fort trials. Party leaders, although they had clearly demonstrated their antipathy towards Bose in 1939, had no choice but to account for the passionate reactions by their supporters in the nationalist movement to both accounts of the activities of the INA and reports of Bose’s death. Even Indian expatriates living in London found the news of Bose’s death greatly moving. One declared Bose to be “one of the greatest patriots India had ever produced,” while another closed his restaurant upon hearing the news. Just as in India, many aired doubts that Bose had really died and expressed hope that he would return for the final phase of the independence struggle. In one such example, a former member of the INA sent a letter to the Punjab Provincial Congress Committee that declared of his fellow soldiers, “We are his time bomb, and will burst when the right time comes. Our Leader will return to

lead us.”  

Even those who were skeptical of Bose’s decision to court Axis support during WWII were largely opposed to any prosecution of returned INA members, believing that even potentially misguided efforts were still important contributions to the cause of Indian independence.  

The Congress Party leadership was swift to sense the power of the resurgent popularity of Bose and quickly acted to put itself on the right side of Bose’s supporters. Abul Kalam Azad, the sitting party president, sent a letter to the Viceroy on July 15, 1945, exactly a month following his release from jail in June with the rest of the party leaders, that requested the unbanning of the Forward Bloc, which had been outlawed during the war. Given that the Forward Bloc had consistently opposed the Right Wing party leadership, of which Azad was a member, from its founding under Bose, this was a significant step. The Congress Party continued to maneuver itself to take advantage of Bose’s postwar image as the possibility of trials for INA members was raised. The leadership trumpeted the return of former INA soldiers, largely ignoring the Indian Army POWs who had declined to join up with Bose. In addition, the AICC passed a resolution condemning the continued imprisonment of ex-INs members, arguing that they should be released like any other POWs now that the war had concluded.  

Furthermore, when it came time for the Red Fort trials, Congress Party leaders flocked to be among the defense lawyers. The Working Committee had officially set up a

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149 Muhammad Ismail Khan (British Indian Army POW in Singapore), interview by IWM, December 6, 1990, Catalogue Number 11748, recording, Sound Archive, IWM, London.
defense team for the soldiers in September, which was soon followed by an “I.N.A. Inquiry & Relief Committee,” which promised to aid ex-INa personnel and the dependents of their dead comrades.\textsuperscript{151} Perhaps most strikingly, the lead defense attorney for the INA soldiers was Bhulabhai Desai, a key Right Wing leader who ranked among Bose’s clear enemies within the party.\textsuperscript{152} Desai had demonstrated his disdain for Bose as early as 1934, when he withheld a pledged £200 donation to an India-focused newspaper in Europe after he learned of the publisher’s links to Bose.\textsuperscript{153} Desai showed no signs of warming up to Bose in the following years, as he was a member of the Working Committee in 1939 and joined the bloc of Right Wing members who resigned as part of the effort to force Bose’s ouster. That Desai was compelled to defend Bose’s soldiers in court illustrates the growth of Bose’s importance after the war. Gandhi and his allies realized that in the critical transition period between British rule and independence, they could not afford to remain aloof from the memory of their primary intra-party rival, as his wartime exploits and complete refusal to compromise with the British, both encouraged by his marginalization from the party at their hands in 1939, had amplified Bose’s legacy to staggering heights.

It is clear from the continued importance of Bose’s ideology, methods, and legacy to the Indian National Congress during and after WWII that his influence on the party and the direction of the independence struggle inside India did not cease with his resignation from the party presidency in 1939. Bose never gained the direct control over


\textsuperscript{152} Sukdev Singh (Prosecutor at Red Fort trials), interview by Mark Tully, BBC Radio, January 14, 2005, Catalogue Number 28853, recording, Sound Archive, IWM, London.

\textsuperscript{153} Indian Political Intelligence, “SUBHAS CHANDRA BOSE,” 24 July 1934, IOR/L/PJ/12/214, File 1115/24, IOR, BL, London, 124.
the nationalist movement that he desired and, as he discovered in 1939, his presence within the party leadership had always been at the sufferance of Gandhi, who was in many ways his ideological antithesis. However, the degree to which Gandhi and his allies, in the years following their bitter political battle with Bose, were compelled to adopt elements of his rhetoric and methods demonstrates that the Gandhians’ efforts at monopolizing their power through Bose’s marginalization were not as successful as they first appear. While Bose himself was never to rejoin the upper echelons of the Congress Party, the consistency of his passionate campaigning for his approach to the independence struggle ensured that his ideas never left.

It is hoped that this research will provide a launching point for further examinations of the persisting effects of Bose’s pre-1939 political career on wartime Congress Party policy in the final years of the Indian independence struggle. While biographies of Bose naturally shift their focus to his noteworthy activities abroad during 1941-1945, biographies of Gandhi often leave out any treatment of Bose’s influence on the decision-making of Gandhi or his allies during this period. Given the parallels between the rhetoric of Bose and that of Gandhi and the Congress leadership leading up to the Quit India movement, it seems likely that additional research into how Bose’s thought prepared the way for increasingly militant party policy would be fruitful. Rather than searching for Bose’s significance in his time as head of the Indian National Army, which ultimately had little effect on the outcome of the war or the pace of the transfer of power, scholars should instead trace the evolution of the Congress Party’s role in India’s independence struggle with Bose’s direct and indirect influence in mind. If this approach
is taken up, Bose’s historical importance may come to be understood in an entirely
different light.
Annotated Bibliography

Primary Sources:
I. Archives:


These files, originally held separately from the rest of the British colonial government’s law enforcement files on account of their sensitive nature, formed the bulk of my archival source material. They included reports on the activities of Bose and other nationalist leaders both inside India and abroad, thanks to Indian Political Intelligence, an international arm of the British Indian police. IPI reports were particularly useful in providing summaries of Bose’s speeches in Europe in the mid-1930s, just before his terms as Congress Party president.


Records of Special Operations Executive: Far East. The National Archives, Kew, UK.

Records of War Office: Directorate of Military Intelligence: India. The National Archives, Kew, UK.

The War Office files, along with the SOE files mentioned above, provided background on Bose’s wartime activities after his escape from house arrest and flight from India in early 1941. They proved less useful than the British Library files, given my eventual decision to narrow my focus on Bose’s influence vis-à-vis the INC, rather than his activities abroad. They did, however, supply some useful analysis of the legacy of the INA in India at the end of the war.

Sound Archive. Imperial War Museum, London.

Oral history recordings from the Imperial War Museum offered personal views of Bose’s character and influence from his time as leader of the Indian National Army. As the time period covered by these interviews falls after the clash at the center of this paper, they helped to illustrate Bose’s relationship with Gandhi in its aftermath. These personal impressions were also helpful in understanding how Bose and Gandhi were able to attract their supporters.
II. Newspapers:


The Hindustan Times was useful for filling in the details of the events of 1938-9 and giving alternate third-party perspectives on the actions of Bose and Gandhi beyond those of British officials. The newspaper also laid out the specific sequence of events from Bose’s election to his resignation, with the claims of Bose and the counter-claims by his Gandhian opponents featured prominently, along with each wings’ reactions to the outcome.


The Times of India was similarly useful for providing a detailed chronology of the events surrounding Bose’s second election and subsequent resignation. As an online resource, it was particularly accessible and facilitated searches across wide ranges of time, in contrast to working with microfilm. Consequently, it was simple to turn to this newspaper whenever my writing called for additional background information or chronological clarification.

III. Edited Collections:


Along with the rest of the Netaji Collected Works, this volume was immensely useful in my research. This was my most consulted volume of the set, as it covered the period of the clash most closely. Not only does it collect all of Bose’s available public statements and correspondence from this period, but it often matches them with responses from Gandhi, Nehru and others. Although it might be difficult to gain a complete picture of Bose’s life from this micro-view, paired with context from secondary and other primary sources, Bose’s Collected Works provide wonderful insight into his political life.


*This volume contains the full text of all resolutions issued by the Congress Party and its governing bodies, the Working Committee and the All-India Congress Committee, from 1939-1950. These were valuable for chronicling both Bose’s fall from power and the lead up to the Quit India movement, which was sparked by resolutions contained in this book. Similar to my experience with Bose’s Collected Works, I would not have fully understood the maneuverings behind these resolutions without additional context, but as part of a full understanding of the INC’s functioning during the period, they are a vital record.*


**Secondary Sources:**

**I. Books:**


*A concise, balanced, and chronological portrayal of Gandhi’s life, this book was my central resource on understanding his evolution as an Indian nationalist leader. It was particularly useful for illustrating his life before the 1930s, as the primary source material that I consulted was narrowly focused on the 1930s and*
1940s. As a result, I particularly relied on this book in my differentiation of Gandhi and Bose’s ideologies.


*Gordon’s biography of Bose and his brother remains the most complete account available of Bose’s life and character. It provides a detailed account of his entire life, both before and after the 1939 crisis, and was helpful for contextualizing the period of his life at the center of this thesis.*


**II. Articles:**


*This article, in the style of “subaltern history” touted by Ranajit Guha, provided an alternate view of Gandhi, his ideology, and his leadership of the nationalist movement. Rather than a top-down view from the perspective of colonial officials or other nationalist leaders, as largely provided by my primary source material, this attempted to link Gandhi to the average Indian peasant and how they conceived of his image. While I decided to focus my thesis on the interplay*
between Bose and Gandhi at the top level of Indian nationalist politics, it would be intriguing to understand the different relations that Bose and Gandhi had with the peasantry.


Illustrations

Political Map of British India, 1931

Mohandas Gandhi, Subhas Bose and Vallabhbhai Patel at the Congress Party’s Haripura Session


Subhas Chandra Bose in Uniform as Commander of the Indian National Army

Selected Primary Source Documents

Statement on the Federal Scheme issued by Subhas Chandra Bose on July 9, 1938:

There have been from time to time statements or insinuations in the British press to the effect that some influential leaders of the Congress have been negotiating with the British Government over the Federal Scheme as envisaged in the Government of India Act. I believe that the last statement which I noticed was that of the Manchester Guardian to which I gave an immediate and emphatic denial. In the absence of any proof, I cannot and do not believe that any influential Congress leader has been negotiating with the British Government with a view to arriving at a compromise behind the back of the Congress.

I may add that there is no analogy between Provincial Autonomy and the Federal Scheme and the acceptance of office in the provinces by the Congress should not be construed as a stepping-stone towards the acceptance of the Federal Scheme at the Centre. I have no doubt in my mind that any effort to foist the Federal Scheme on the Congress will inevitably fail. If unfortunately it succeeds, it will break the Congress, because I do not see how those who are conscientiously opposed to the Federal Scheme can take it lying down.

Personally I think that any weakness shown by the Congress or any section thereof during this fateful hour in India’s history will amount to treachery of the first magnitude to the cause of India’s freedom. We are in such a sound strategic position today that if only we could unite and speak with one voice, we should be able to induce the British Government to concede the whole of our national demand. The slightest weakness in our attitude towards the Federal Scheme is bound to weaken our hands and strengthen those of the British Government.

So far as I am concerned, should the unthinkable contingency arise of the Federal Scheme being adopted by a majority within the Congress, it would probably be my duty to relieve myself of the trammels of office so that I would be free to work for what I consider to be the best interest of the country, namely, open, unmitigated and unrelenting opposition to the monstrous Federal Scheme.154

The Pant Resolution, issued March 12, 1939 by the Indian National Congress:

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.

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 govern the Congress programme in future. This Congress expresses its confidence in the work of Working Committee which functioned during the last year and regrets that any aspersions should have been cast against any of its members.

In view of the critical situation that may develop during the coming year and in view of the fact that Mahatma Gandhi alone can lead the Congress and the country to victory during such crisis, the Congress regards it as imperative that they the Congress executive should command his implicit confidence and requests the President to nominate the Working Committee in accordance with the wishes of Gandhiji.155

The Quit India Resolution, issued August 8, 1945 by the All-India Congress Committee:

The All India Congress Committee has given the most careful consideration to the reference made to it by the Working Committee in their resolution dated July 14, 1942, and to subsequent events, including the development of the war situation, the utterances of responsible spokesmen of the British Government, and the comments and criticisms made in India and abroad. The Committee approves of and endorses that resolution and is of the opinion that events subsequent to it have given it further justification, and have made it clear that the immediate ending of British rule in India is an urgent necessity, both for the sake of India and for the success of the cause of the United Nations. The continuation of that rule is degrading and enfeebling India and making her progressively less capable of defending herself and of contributing to the cause of world freedom.

The Committee has viewed with dismay the deterioration of the situation on the Russian and Chinese fronts and conveys to the Russian and Chinese people its high appreciation of their heroism in defence of their freedom. This increasing peril makes it incumbent on all those who strive for freedom and who sympathise with the victims of aggression, to examine the foundations of the policy so far pursued by the Allied Nations, which have led to repeated and disastrous failure. It is not by adhering to such arms and policies and methods that failure can be converted into success, for past experience has shown that failure is inherent in them. These policies have been based not on freedom so much as on the domination of subject and colonial countries, and the continuation of the imperialist tradition and method.

The possession of empire, instead of adding to the strength of the ruling Power, has become a burden and a curse. India, the classic land of modern imperialism, has become the crux of the question, for by the freedom of India will Britain and the United Nations be judged, and the peoples of Asia and Africa be filled with hope and enthusiasm. The ending of British rule in this country is thus a vital and immediate issue on which depend the future of the war and the success of freedom and democracy. A free India will assure this success by throwing all her great resources in the struggle for freedom and against the aggression of Nazism, Fascism and Imperialism. This will not only affect materially the fortunes of the war, but will bring all subject and oppressed humanity on the side of the United Nations, and give these Nations, whose ally India would be the moral and spiritual leadership of the world. India in bondage will continue to be the symbol of British imperialism and the taint of that imperialism will affect the fortunes of all the United Nations.

The peril of today, therefore, necessitates the independence of India and the ending of British domination. No future promises or guarantees can affect the present situation or meet that peril. They cannot produce the needed psychological effect on the mind of the masses. Only the glow of freedom now can release that energy and enthusiasm of millions of people which will immediately transform the nature of the war.

The A.I.C.C. therefore repeats with all emphasis the demand for the withdrawal of the British Power from India. On the declaration of India's Independence a Provisional Government will be formed and Free India will become an ally of the United Nations, sharing with them in the trials and tribulations of the joint enterprise of the struggle for freedom. The Provisional Government can only be formed by the co-operation of the principal parties and groups in the country. It will thus be a composite government, representative of all important sections of the people of India. Its primary functions must be to defend India and resist aggression with all the armed as well as the non-violent forces at its command, together with its Allied powers, to promote the well-being and progress of the workers in the fields and factories and elsewhere, to whom essentially all power and authority must belong.

The Provisional Government will evolve a scheme for a Constituent Assembly which will prepare a constitution for the Government of India acceptable to all sections of the people. This constitution according to the Congress view, should be a federal one, with the largest measure of
autonomy for the federating units, and with the residuary powers vesting in these units. The future relations between India and the Allied Nations will be adjusted by representatives of all these free countries conferring together for their mutual advantage and for their co-operation in the common task of resisting aggression. Freedom will enable India to resist aggression effectively with the people’s united will and strength behind it.

The freedom of India must be the symbol of and prelude to the freedom of all other Asiatic nations under foreign dominations. Burma, Malaya, Indo-China, the Dutch Indies, Iran and Iraq must also attain their complete freedom. It must be clearly understood that such of these countries as are under Japanese control now must not subsequently be placed under the rule or control of any other colonial power.

While the A.I.C.C. must primarily be concerned with the independence and defence of India in this hour of danger, the Committee is of opinion that the future peace, security and ordered progress of the world demand a World Federation of free nations, and on no other basis can the problems of the modern world be solved. Such a World Federation would ensure the freedom of its constituent nations, the prevention of aggression and exploitation by one nation over another, the protection of national minorities, the advancement of all backward areas and peoples, and the pooling of the world’s resources for the common good of all. On the establishment of such a World Federation, disarmament would be practicable in all countries, national armies, navies and air forces would no longer be necessary, and a World Federal Defence Force would keep the world peace and prevent aggression.

An independent India would gladly join such a World Federation and co-operate on an equal basis with other nations in the solution of international problems.

Such a Federation should be open to all nations who agree with its fundamental principles. In view of the war, however, the Federation must inevitably, to begin with, be confined to the United Nations. Such a step taken now will have a most powerful effect on the war, on the peoples of the Axis countries, and on the peace to come.

The Committee regretfully realises, however, that despite the tragic and overwhelming lessons of the war and the perils that overhang the world, the governments of a few countries are yet prepared to take this inevitable step towards World Federation. The reactions of the British Government and the misguided criticism of the foreign press also make it clear that even the obvious demand for India’s independence is resisted, though this has been made essentially to meet the present peril and to enable India to defend herself and help China and Russia in their hour of need. The Committee is anxious not to embarrass in any way the defence of China or Russia, whose freedom is precious and must be preserved, or to jeopardise the defensive capacity of the United Nations. But the peril grows both to India and these nations, and in action and submission to a foreign administration at this stage is not only degrading India and reducing her capacity to defend herself and resist aggression, but is no answer to that growing peril and is no service to the peoples of the United Nations. The earnest appeal of the Working Committee to Great Britain and the United Nations has so far met with no response, and the criticisms made in many foreign quarters have shown an ignorance of India’s and the world’s need, and sometimes even hostility to India’s freedom, which is significant of a mentality of domination and racial superiority which cannot be tolerated by a proud people conscious of their strength and of the justice of their cause.

The A.I.C.C. would yet again, at this last moment, in the interest of world freedom, renew this appeal to Britain and the United Nations. But the Committee feels that it is no longer justified in holding the nation back from endeavouring to assert its will against an imperialist and authoritarian government which dominates over it and prevents it from functioning in its own interest and in the interest of humanity. The Committee resolves, therefore, to sanction for the vindication of India’s inalienable right to freedom and independence, the starting of a mass struggle on non-violent lines on the widest possible scale, so that the country might utilise all the non-violent strength it has gathered during the last twenty-two years of peaceful struggle. Such a
struggle must inevitably be under the leadership of Gandhiji and the Committee requests him to take the lead and guide the nation in the steps to be taken.

The Committee appeals to the people of India to face the dangers and hardships that will fall to their lot with courage and endurance, and to hold together under the leadership of Gandhiji, and carry out his instructions as disciplined soldiers of Indian freedom. They must remember that non-violence is the basis of this movement. A time may come when it may not be possible to issue instructions or for instructions to reach our people, and when no Congress Committees can function. When this happens, every man and woman, who is participating in this movement must function for himself or herself within the four corners of the general instructions issued. Every Indian who desires freedom and strives for it must be his own guide urging him on along the hard road where there is no resting place and which leads along ultimately to the independence and deliverance of India.

Lastly, whilst the A.I.C.C. has stated its own view of the future governance under free India, the A.I.C.C. wishes to make it quite clear to all concerned that by embarking on mass struggle it has no intention of gaining power for the Congress. The power when it comes, will belong to the whole people of India.\footnote{Indian National Congress, “All-India Congress Committee: Bombay, August 7-8, 1942,” in vol. 4 of \textit{INC: The Glorious Tradition}, 161-2.}