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PROTEST AND CONTROL IN NORTH BIHAR, INDIA, 1917-1942.
A STUDY OF CONFLICT AND CONTINUITY IN A COLONIAL
AGRARIAN SOCIETY.

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy by

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April 1978

DECLARATION

This thesis is my own original work.

Stephen Henningham
STEPHEN HENNINGHAM

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ABSTRACT

IN THE INDIAN REGION OF NORTH BIHAR DURING THE 20TH CENTURY A GREAT POTENTIAL FOR MASS AGRARIAN AND NATIONAL PROTEST EXISTED. THE BIHAR CONGRESS, AN ORGANIZATION CONTROLLED BY CONSERVATIVE, LOCALLY DOMINANT PEASANTS, HARNESSSED AND DIRECTED THIS POTENTIAL TO ITS OWN CONSERVATIVE ENDS. THE SUCCESS OF THE BIHAR CONGRESS IN DOING SO RESULTED FROM THE GUARDED TOLERANCE ITS ACTIVITIES RECEIVED FROM THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT OF THE REGION AND FROM BRITISH POLICIES WHICH SOUGHT TO MINIMIZE DISRUPTION TO THE EXISTING SOCIAL ORDER. UNDER THE DIRECTION OF THE BIHAR CONGRESS MASS PROTEST ERODED THE EXTERNALLY IMPOSED STATE STRUCTURE WITHOUT AFFECTING THE GROSSLY UNEQUAL DISTRIBUTION OF WEALTH AND POWER WITHIN NORTH BIHAR SOCIETY.

EARLY 20TH CENTURY NORTH BIHAR HARBOURED AN IMPOVERISHED, RIGIDLY STRATIFIED POPULATION DEPENDENT FOR ITS LIVELIHOOD ON AN INEFFICIENT SYSTEM OF AGRARIAN PRODUCTION OPERATING WITHIN A COLONIAL ECONOMIC FRAMEWORK. CONFLICTS WITHIN NORTH BIHAR SOCIETY WERE CONTAINED BY BOTH FORMAL AND INFORMAL MECHANISMS OF CONTROL. THE BRITISH SPENT LESS ON THE GOVERNANCE OF NORTH BIHAR THAN ON ANY OTHER REGION IN BRITISH INDIA AND HENCE THE 'FORMAL' (I.E. POLICE AND ADMINISTRATIVE) CONTROL APPARATUS WAS WEAK. MUCH WAS LEFT TO THE 'INFORMAL' CONTROL OF THE GREAT LANDLORDS, EUROPEAN PLANTERS AND LOCALLY DOMINANT PEASANTS WHO COMPRISED THE LANDED INTEREST IN THE REGION.

IN NORTH BIHAR BETWEEN 1917 AND 1922 MOUNTING POPULATION PRESSURE AND THE ECONOMIC DISRUPTION CAUSED BY THE FIRST WORLD WAR INCREASED THE POTENTIAL FOR POPULAR TURBULENCE. THIS POTENTIAL WAS VARIOUSLY CHANNELLED INTO A LANDLORD/TENANT CONFLICT OVER TENANTS' RIGHTS; INTO A STRUGGLE BY PEASANTS AGAINST EXPLOITATION BY EUROPEAN INDIGO PLANTERS; AND INTO AN EXTENSIVE CAMPAIGN, LED BY THE BIHAR CONGRESS OF NON-COOPERATION WITH ALIEN RULE. MASS PROTEST IN THE 1917-1922 PERIOD STRONGLY TESTED THE FORMAL APPARATUS OF CONTROL AND REVEALED ITS FRAGILITY.

IN THE EARLY 1930s THE CONGRESS DREW ON NATIONALIST SENTIMENT AND ON POPULAR ANTAGONISM TO THE POLICE AND ADMINISTRATION IN ORDER TO MOUNT AN INTENSE, EXTENSIVE CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE BRITISH. DESPITE ITS PUBLIC ESPOUSAL OF THE DOCTRINE OF NON-VIOLENCE, CONGRESS MADE A CAREFULLY CIRCUMSCRIBED USE OF VIOLENCE TO RALLY WAVERERS AND TO INTIMIDATE ITS OPPONENTS.

BY LIMITING THE USE OF VIOLENCE CONGRESS ENSURED THAT IT CONTROLLED THE DIRECTION AND CHARACTER OF PROTEST. ULTIMATELY, THE BRITISH REPRESSED THE CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE CAMPAIGN BUT DURING ITS COURSE CONGRESS VIOLENCE SHOOK THE FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH RULE OVER NORTH BIHAR. THE LIMITED USE OF VIOLENCE ACHIEVED THIS RESULT BY CONTRIBUTING GREATLY TO THE IMPETUS OF A PROHIBITION CAMPAIGN WHICH DIMINISHED THE REVENUE THE GOVERNMENT EARNED FROM EXCISE DUTIES AND BY INTIMIDATING MANY VILLAGE WATCHMEN (WHO COMPRISED THE FOUNDATION OF THE REGION'S SYSTEM OF FORMAL CONTROL) INTO TEMPORARILY ABANDONING THEIR POSTS.

LATER IN THE 1930s AGRARIAN PROTEST CHALLENGED THE SYSTEM OF POLICE AND ADMINISTRATIVE CONTROL. AT THIS TIME A RECENTLY ELECTED PROVINCIAL CONGRESS GOVERNMENT WAS CHALLENGED BY A SMALL GROUP OF LEFT-WINGERS WHO DEMANDED AGRARIAN REFORM AND WHO HAD PUT THEMSELVES AT THE HEAD OF A PEASANT MOVEMENT MOTIVATED BY THE IMPACT OF THE GREAT DEPRESSION ON PRIMARY PRODUCE PRICES. THE CONSERVATIVES WHO DOMINATED THE CONGRESS GOVERNMENT AND THE CONGRESS PARTY SUCCESSFULLY CONTAINED THE LEFT-WING CHALLENGE. THE SUCCESS OF THE CONSERVATIVE CONGRESSMEN IN MAINTAINING STABLE GOVERNMENT AFFECTED THE MORALE OF INDIAN OFFICIALS AND POLICEMEN. OFFICIALS AND POLICEMEN CAME TO REGARD THE CONGRESS AS THE LEGITIMATE AND SOON TO BE ESTABLISHED SUCCESSOR TO THE BRITISH REGIME. AFTER THE CONGRESS MINISTRY LEFT OFFICE IN LATE 1939 THEY WERE RELUCTANT TO CARRY OUT BRITISH ORDERS DIRECTED AGAINST THE CONGRESS. IN ADDITION, THE POLICE LOST POPULARITY BECAUSE OF THEIR PART IN CURBING PEASANT PROTEST.

IN AUGUST 1942, IN REACTION TO HARSH BRITISH REPRESSION OF A CONGRESS MASS CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE CAMPAIGN, THE PEOPLE OF NORTH BIHAR ERUPTED INTO INSURRECTION. THE INSURRECTION COMBINED A 'NATIONALIST PROTEST' BY HIGH CASTE, CONGRESS SUPPORTING, LOCALLY DOMINANT PEASANTS AND A 'REBELLION OF DESPERATION' BY POOR AND LANDLESS LOW CASTE AND HARIJAN VILLAGERS. THE INSURRECTION TEMPORARILY DEMOLISHED THE STATE STRUCTURE. IN THE INTERIM BEFORE THE BRITISH RE-ESTABLISHED FORMAL CONTROL AN OPPORTUNITY EXISTED FOR THE INITIATION OF AN ANTI-LANDLORD MOVEMENT. HOWEVER THE HIGH PRICES PREVAILING IN THE EARLY 1940s BENEFITED MIDDLE PEASANTS AND MADE THEM DISINCLINED TO ENGAGE IN AGRARIAN PROTEST. THE REVOLT OF AUGUST 1942 MARKED THE CULMINATION OF THE INTERRELATED PROCESSES WHEREBY IN THE POST-1917 PERIOD THE BIHAR CONGRESS EFFECTIVELY HARNESSSED THE POTENTIAL FOR POPULAR TURBULENCE TO ITS OWN CONSERVATIVE ENDS AND EMPLOYED MASS PROTEST TO ERODE THE FORMAL CONTROL

APPARATUS. THE BRITISH RULERS OF NORTH BIHAR HAD TREATED THE ACTIVITIES OF THE BIHAR CONGRESS WITH GUARDED TOLERANCE AND HAD MINIMIZED SOCIAL CHANGE, THUS PROTECTING THE POSITION AND INTERESTS OF THE CONSERVATIVE, LOCALLY DOMINANT PEASANTS WHO CONTROLLED THE CONGRESS. HENCE THE 1942 REVOLT DISSOLVED THE STRUCTURE OF THE IMPERIAL STATE BUT ISSUED NO CHALLENGE TO THE SOCIAL ORDER.

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INTRODUCTION

Early one morning in October 1976, accompanied by two friends, I set out from the small north Indian town of Darbhanga on a journey into the countryside. It was Sunday, interview day, and I was glad to have a change from the Monday to Saturday routine of work in the archives of the formerly extensive landed estate known as the Darbhanga Raj. We reached our destination, a small village, at about 11 a.m. The prosperous landholder whom I had come to interview, and whom I will call R.L. Sinha, stood waiting in the shade of a mango grove to greet us. Sinha, a tall, distinguished man in his late sixties, welcomed us warmly before escorting us to the verandah of his house. There we were glad to sit down, being weary after a journey that had begun at first light. We had travelled most of the way by horse-cart, first along a main highway, and then along a narrow, winding and bumpy village track. Eventually the progress of the horse-cart had been blocked by an irrigation ditch cut across the track, so we had completed our journey on foot.

I was keen to begin questioning Sinha about his experiences as a member of a powerful landholding family and as a supporter of the Bihar Congress Party, but before our interview began certain formalities had to be observed. We sat exchanging pleasantries while in the courtyard in front of the house a group of curious villagers made my companions and me the subject of careful inspection. Sinha's house, the biggest in the village, was a large rambling brick structure with a tiled roof. It stood on a slight eminence, commanding a view of the surrounding plain. At my request Sinha pointed out the main features of the village. Directly in front of the verandah, on the other side of several yards of open ground, lay a large rectangular 'tank' or pond. To one side of the tank stood the village temple, an imposing building which, Sinha informed us, his grandfather had had built on the site of the temple which had been destroyed in the great earthquake of 1934. The village, a loosely knit collection of hamlets rather than a concentrated settlement, straggled away on

three sides of the tank. To the left of the tank, beyond the temple, stood a small hamlet of large, sturdily built houses, some of mud brick and some of bamboo and thatch, but all roofed with tiles. In this hamlet, Sinha told us, the higher caste and more prosperous villagers lived. To the right and at some distance away began a large hamlet which curved in an irregular crescent around to and along the opposite side of the tank. Here the middle caste villagers lived; their medium sized houses were constructed of thatch and bamboo. Some of these houses had tiled roofs but most were roofed with thatch. Beyond and partially obscured by the middle caste hamlet were two smaller hamlets, both consisting of small, ramshackle straw and bamboo dwellings. Here, Sinha told us, the low caste and Harijan villagers lived. Beyond the hamlets of the village lay rice fields, green and sparkling in the sun, stretching as far as the eye could see. In the midst of the fields thin, wiry labourers worked at a steady, rhythmic pace, sweat glistening on their bent backs.

At this point we were served with a huge meal, containing many delicacies, which had obviously required considerable advance preparation. While we ate our host sat nearby, making frequent enquiries to ensure that the repast was to our satisfaction. Everything served to us, he told us proudly, had been grown on his own lands, either in the extensive garden that surrounded his house or in the fields that surrounded the village. We worked our way through the meal, at first with relish and later, as fresh dishes kept appearing, with dogged determination. Meanwhile an electric fan on a long extension cord cooled us from the midday heat. Frequently, however, the power failed, and whenever the whirring of the fan died away two servants, bearing large palm leaves, sprang forward and began fanning us. After we had eaten our fill and more Sinha excused himself from our company on the verandah and retired into the house to take his own meal, avoiding our company so as to preserve his ritual purity.

Soon he returned, and he and I settled to the business of the day.

I had many questions to ask, and we talked into the late afternoon. Sinha, a plump, genial man of considerable education and much experience, answered some of my questions in great detail, others in a brief sentence or two, and some with polite but definite evasion. As might have been expected, he declined the opportunity to enlarge upon his own financial and social position, other than commenting that he held a substantial portion of the village lands and that he also held lands in neighbouring villages. He also had little to say about inter-group relations within the village, and did not wish to discuss the landless labourers' and sharecroppers' protest movement which had developed in the area from the late 1960s onwards. He gave only brief answers to questions about the effect of zamindari abolition on his family's fortunes, and did not enlarge upon the history of landlord/tenant conflict in the region during the pre-independence period. He was more willing, however, to talk about the nationalist movement, and how it had gone from strength to strength from around 1920 onwards. He himself had briefly left school in 1921 in support of the non-cooperation movement, and he had participated in the civil disobedience campaign of the early 1930s. Subsequently, having taken employment in the bureaucracy of the Darbhanga Raj, he had been unable to take an active role in nationalist activity. But he had continued to be sympathetic with the nationalist movement and its guiding organization, the Indian National Congress, and had been moved deeply by the events of the Quit India Revolt in August 1942.

After several hours I reluctantly brought the interview to an end. Sinha had tea served to us and the conversation became general. He questioned me about the Australian cricket team and the current test series, but found, to his evident surprise, that his knowledge and interest concerning this subject outstripped mine. Having finished our tea, we rose to leave, and

Sinha escorted us to the outskirts of the village. As we strolled he commented on how little the village had changed during his lifetime. There was the electricity of course, made available since the coming of independence. But his was the only household in the village which could afford to pay the electricity rates, so the coming of electricity had not made much difference to the general pattern of living. We reached the village track, thanked Sinha for his hospitality and made our farewells. In his parting remarks to us he commented that he had been glad of our company as a relief from the tedium of life in the countryside. Day by day, year by year, he told us, life went on in the village much as it always had. In his lifetime, he said reflectively, the only really dramatic event had been the revolt of August 1942.

* * * *

The village in which I interviewed R.L. Sinha in October 1976 was typical of the 20,000 or so villages which are scattered across the Indian region of north Bihar. North Bihar lies in north-eastern India. (Please refer to map 1). I chose this region for study because it comprises a relatively distinct and a hitherto neglected area, because it has been a centre for extensive political turbulence for a significant portion of this century, and because the hitherto little used archives of the Darbhanga Raj offer valuable insights into its history and society. The region extends 80 miles from north to south and 250 miles from east to west and covers an area of 20,400 square miles. In approximate terms, it is twice the size of Belgium, four-fifths the size of Tasmania, two-thirds the size of Scotland, and half the size of Tennessee. North Bihar is incorporated with the regions of south Bihar and Chota Nagpur into the present day state of Bihar. In the mid-18th century Bihar was a province of the Mughal Empire, but from the time of the battle of Buxar (1760) it became part of the British administered Bengal Presidency. In 1911 the British separated

Bihar from the Bengal Presidency and united it with Orissa (the area that adjoins south Bihar and Chota Nagpur), to form the separate province of Bihar and Orissa. In 1936 Bihar and Orissa were separated, and the province of Bihar came into existence. With the coming of Indian independence in 1947, Bihar became a state within the Indian Union.

* * * *

In August 1942, led by the Bihar branch of the Indian National Congress, the people of north Bihar rose in revolt. Militant street demonstrations, attacks on policemen and police stations, extensive sabotage of road, rail and telegraphic communications, and attacks on officials and government buildings comprised an insurrection which temporarily demolished the structure of imperial rule. For two or three weeks the formal apparatus of police and administrative control over the region disintegrated. Only by importing large bodies of troops did the British manage to re-establish their rule.

The 1942 revolt marked the culmination of two processes which began in the first decades of the 20th century, namely the increasingly successful harnessing, by the Bihar Congress Party, of north Bihar's potential for mass protest, and the progressive erosion by this protest of police and administrative control. This thesis examines these interrelated processes during the 1917 to 1942 period, focusing especially on particular protest movements and the response they elicited. It should be borne in mind that, though the period was one of unusual turmoil, one year out of every two passed without major protest movements developing. And even in the years when major protest did erupt, it was most often sporadic, short-lived, and concentrated within a limited area. Thus the thesis deals only with certain aspects of the modern history of north Bihar. Nonetheless, on the assumption that societies, like individuals, reveal much of themselves when undergoing periods of stress, the

thesis hopes to contribute to the analysis of the dynamics of continuity and change in the region.

The thesis begins with a descriptive analysis of north Bihar society and politics in the early 20th century. At this time north Bihar harboured a numerous, rigidly stratified population which depended for its livelihood on a backward, inefficient system of agrarian production. Bihar, the province of which north Bihar formed a part, was the poorest province in British India, which meant that the provincial administration had only limited funds at its command. The administration's financial problems were much increased through its continuing support of the politically expedient but economically disastrous system of zamindari landholding, under which intermediaries known as zamindars collected the agrarian surplus of the province but paid only a small proportion of it to the administration as land revenue. The impoverished provincial government could only afford to maintain a skeletal police and administrative apparatus with which to exercise formal control over north Bihar society. In protecting its authority the government benefited from the limitations that prevailing social, economic and cultural conditions imposed on the organization and expression of protest. And to maintain its rule the government relied on the effective informal control exercised by those groups which comprised the 'landed interest' in north Bihar, namely the great landlords, the European indigo planters and the locally dominant peasants. To ensure the continuation of effective informal control by members of the landed interest, the administration sought to avert and minimize any social change which might endanger the established order.

From the second decade of the 20th century the structure of formal and informal control established by the British in north Bihar began to disintegrate. Mounting population pressure on a static agrarian base combined with pervasive inequality to create a potential for popular protest. The disastrous economic

aftermath of the First World War increased this potential, and in the 1917-23 period extensive popular protest crystallized around a variety of grievances. Members of the landed interest led these movements, and succeeded in commanding extensive support from people lower down in the social scale. The Bihar Congress, an organization which from 1920 onwards came under the control of locally dominant peasants, played a leading part in the coordination and direction of protest. During the 1917 to 1923 period, the extent and intensity of popular protest revealed the fragility of formal, police/administrative control over north Bihar.

In the early 1930s the Congress-led civil disobedience campaign heightened popular antagonism to the police and to the British administration and seriously strained the formal system of control. During this campaign Congress combined espousal of its official policy of non-violence with an implicit, covert policy of 'limited violence'. By the limited use of violence, the Congress put effective pressure on the imperial administration while yet retaining control over the character and direction of protest.

Later in the 1930s formal, police/administrative control was again tested when a recently elected provincial Congress government encountered a challenge from a group of left-wing Congressmen who demanded agrarian reform and who assumed leadership of a peasant movement motivated by the impact of the great depression on the prices of agrarian produce. The conservatives who dominated the Congress government and the Congress organization contained the left-wing challenge and maintained police and administrative control. Because of their success in doing so Indian officials and policemen came to think of the Congress as the legitimate, and soon to be established, successor to the British regime. After the Congress Ministry relinquished office in October 1939 Indian policemen and officials lacked enthusiasm in their carrying out of the orders of their British superiors.

In the early 1940s the erosion of formal control reached its zenith, and the Bihar Congress launched a revolt which temporarily demolished the state structure. In the interim before the British re-established formal control an opportunity existed for the initiation of an anti-landlord movement. However the high prices prevailing at this time benefited middle peasants and made them disinterested in agrarian protest. The intellectual and social dominance of the conservative, big peasant-dominated Bihar Congress also helped ensure that the struggle proceeded along strictly nationalist lines. At a more fundamental level, moreover, the success of British efforts to minimize social change and maintain the established order had made it unlikely that radical initiatives would emerge from within north Bihar society. Given the existing configuration of social and political forces, therefore, the revolt of August 1942 dissolved the structure of the imperial state but issued no challenge to the social order.

* * * *

The extensive protest which erupted in north Bihar between 1917 and 1942 resulted from conflicts between nationalists and their opponents, from conflicts between distinct interests and between different strata within the agrarian hierarchy, and from conflicts between distinct communal groups. The thesis concentrates on protest associated with the nationalist movement and with agrarian tension rather than on that associated with communal conflict. Communal conflict and protest receive only passing mention because, though a recurrent feature of north Bihar life, they were relatively unimportant in their effects on the operation of police and administrative control. Hindu/Muslim tension frequently manifested itself, and when on certain days of the year one or the other group engaged in the public espousal of its religion violence erupted with monotonous regularity. In part because the occasions

for eruption could be predicted in advance, and in part because Hindus and Muslims directed violence against one another, rather than against the authorities, the administration and police found that communal turbulence could be contained. Agrarian and nationalist turbulence, in contrast, could not always be dealt with so easily. In north Bihar eruptions of communal turbulence functioned as a "safety valve", allowing the dissipation of tensions, whereas agrarian and nationalist turbulence threatened existing governmental/administrative arrangements and challenged the prevailing social order.

* * * *

The thesis draws on files held in the Bihar State Archives and the National Archives of India, on the contents of the two leading Bihar newspapers, the *Searchlight* and the *Indian Nation*, and on materials held in the archives of the Darbhanga Raj, formerly the largest landed estate in Bihar. Research employing these resources was supplemented by several interviews and discussions and by work at the Nehru Memorial Library on the papers of Rajendra Prasad, Jay Prakash Narayan, Swami Sahajanand, and the All-India Congress Committee.

The records of the British administration supply extensive information about the occurrence and character of agrarian and nationalist protest and the official response it elicited. But unfortunately for the historian, British administrators tended to treat any protest movement primarily as a threat to the maintenance of law and order, without enquiring overly much into its wider context and implications. This narrowness of vision was combined with the distortion inseparable from their means of collecting information. Two groups of people renowned for their lack of education, partiality, unreliability, and corruption, namely the chaukidars or village watchmen and the lower ranks

of the police force, held the major responsibility for collecting and supplying information on popular disturbances. Members of these groups, it seems certain, often suppressed, slanted, or exaggerated certain aspects of the information they collected either to please the locally influential or to pander to the preconceptions of their superiors.

Nor do the *Searchlight* or the *Indian Nation* provide ideal hunting grounds for the student of popular protest. Both newspapers concerned themselves much with international, national, and provincial news, often to the neglect of their coverage of events at the local level. The *Searchlight*, as the mouthpiece of the Congress party, fully supported the ideal of non-violent protest: when the *Searchlight* dealt with violence it generally concentrated on the excesses of the police, or the activities of non-Congress activists, rather than with the actions at times taken by Congress supporters. The bias of the *Indian Nation* derived from its ownership by the Maharaja of Darbhanga and its commitment to the landed interest and to constitutional politics. Landlords often became the targets for militant and violent political activity, and the *Indian Nation*, as for instance concerning the agrarian disturbances in Darbhanga district in 1938-40, often preferred to present a polemical account rather than give a full coverage.

The third major body of material consulted resides in the archives of the Darbhanga Raj, which in mid-1976 were taken over by the Government of Bihar. These archives have not previously been used for research into the political history of north Bihar during the post-1920 period.¹ Much of the material held

1 My only predecessor in using the Darbhanga Raj archives for a major research project is Jata Shankar Jha, whose major publications are a collection of readings on education in north Bihar from 1860 to 1930 and a biography of Lakmeshwar Singh, who reigned as Maharaja of Darbhanga from 1879 until his death in 1898. For details of Jha's publications and for further information about the Darbhanga Raj and its archives see the materials listed, (and particularly the review article by Clive Dewey), in notes 12 and 15, pages 62 and 63 below.

in the Raj Darbhanga Archives deals with the strictly technical, administrative and economic problems of administering a vast estate covering 2,400 square miles whose holdings were scattered over most of north Bihar. But there is also much to interest the historian of conflict, protest, and control. The material available is written from the point of view and in the light of the interests of the estate and its owner, but there was frequent discussion between members of the Darbhanga Raj management both over matters of policy and over details of policy implementation. This continuing debate is preserved in conference proceedings, in annual reports on the administration of the dozen or so 'circles' which comprised the basic units in the Raj's administration, and in the correspondence between the head office of the estate and its managers and sub-managers. These materials illuminate the local-level relationships between social conflict, popular protest, and formal and informal means of control.

NOTE ON SPELLING AND CONVENTIONS

Proper names appear in the form usually employed by the person to whom they refer, and place names are spelt in the accepted modern form. Indian words are not italicized but are briefly explained on their first usage and are more fully defined in the glossary. Confusion may arise because in Bihar the same name is often applied to more than one geographical unit. Bhagalpur, for example, is the name of a town, a district, and a division, while Muzaffarpur is the name of both a town and a district. In the text a name on its own is only employed to refer to a district. Thus Darbhanga means Darbhanga district, and the town of the same name is referred to as Darbhanga town. Similarly the text refers to Bhagalpur town and Bhagalpur division, but refers to the district of that name as Bhagalpur. The only exception to this usage concerns the city of Patna, the provincial capital. The name Patna is used on its own to refer to the city of Patna, and the text refers to Patna district, as well as to the Patna subdivision and the Patna division.

* * * *

ABBREVIATIONS

AAR	- Annual Administrative Report
AICCP	- All-India Congress Committee Papers
BSA	- Bihar State Archives
C	- Collection
f	- file
F	- Fasli
FMP	- Freedom Movement Papers
FR	- Fortnightly Report
FR(1)	- Fortnightly Report for first half of month
FR(2)	- Fortnightly Report for second half of month
G	- General Department, Raj Darbhanga Archives
GGB	- Government of Great Britain
GB	- Government of Bihar
GBEN	- Government of Bengal
GBO	- Government of Bihar and Orissa
GOI	- Government of India
HP	- Home Political Department [of the Government of India]
JPNP	- Jay Prakash Narayan Papers
L	- Law Department, Raj Darbhanga Archives
LR	- Land Revenue Proceedings
NAI	- National Archives of India
NML	- Nehru Memorial Library
PP	- Rajendra Prasad Papers
PS	- Political Special Department [of the Government of Bihar (and Orissa)]
RDA	- Raj Darbhanga Archives
WBA	- West Bengal Archives

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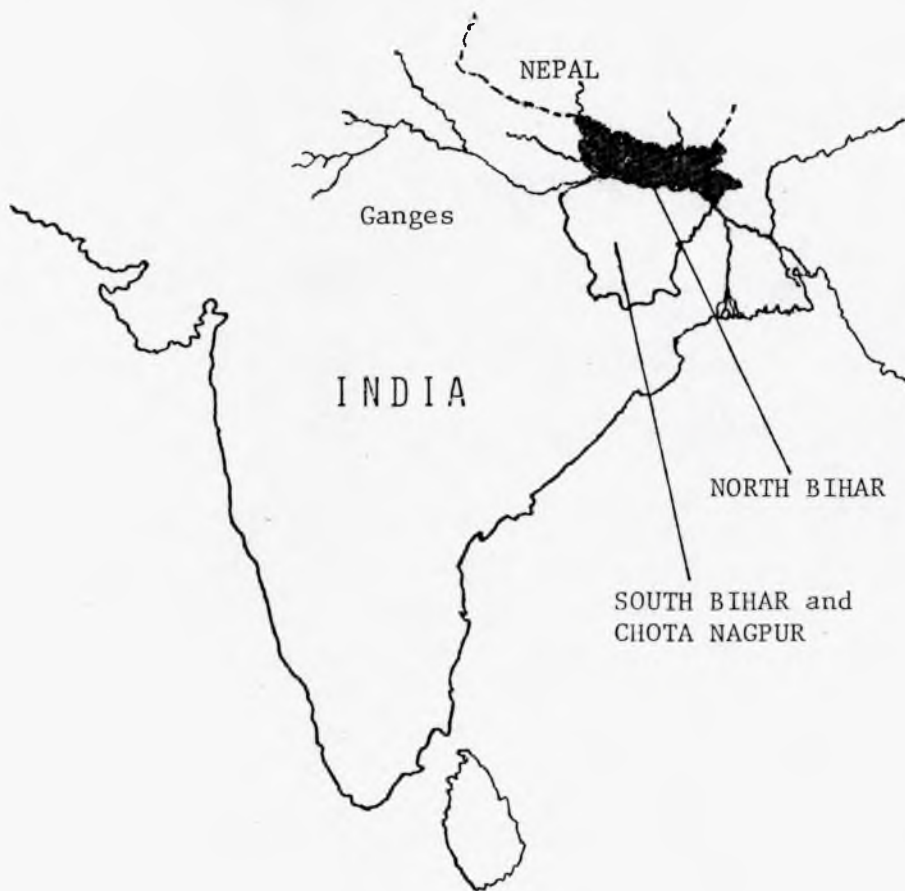
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MAP 1

Location of north Bihar in Indian subcontinent



Source: F. Tomasson Jannuzi, *Agrarian Crisis in India. The Case of Bihar.*

MAP 2

Divisions, districts and subdivisions of north Bihar

Source: F.Tomasson Jannuzi, *Agrarian Crisis in India.*
The Case of Bihar.



TIRHUT DIVISION		BHAGALPUR DIVISION	
<i>Subdivision.</i>	<i>District.</i>	<i>Subdivision.</i>	<i>District.</i>
1 Bettiah	Champaran	12 Beguserai	Monghyr(northern section)
2 Motihari		13 Monghyr	
3 Gopalganj	Saran	14 Supaul	Bhagalpur(northern section)
4 Siwan		15 Madhepura	
5 Chapra		16 Bhagalpur	
6 Sitamarhi	Muzaffarpur	17 Araria	Purnea
7 Muzaffarpur		18 Kishanganj	
8 Hajipur		19 Purnea	
9 Madhubani	Darbhanga		
10 Darbhanga			
11 Samastipur			

MAP 3

Towns and important villages in north Bihar

Source: F. Tomasson Jannuzi, *Agrarian Crisis in India.*
The Case of Bihar.



CHAMPARAN: 1 Bagaha. 2 Narkatiaganj. 3 Dhanaha. 4 Bettiah.
 5 Raxaul. 6 Motihari. 7 Kesari. 8 Madhuban.

SARAN: 9 Bhokey. 10 Gopalganj. 11 Raghunathpur.
 12 Chapra. 13 Garkha. 14 Sonpur.

MUZAFFARPUR: 15 Sonbarsa. 16 Sitamarhi. 17 Belsand.
 18 Muzaffarpur. 19 Hajipur.

DARBHANGA: 20 Madhubani. 21 Phulparas. 22 Pandoul. 23 Jhanjharpur.
 24 Darbhanga and Laheriasera. 25 Samastipur. 26 Mohiuddinnager.

MONGHYR: 27 Teghra. 28 Barauni. 29 Beguserai. 30 Narayanpur.

BHAGALPUR: 31 Nirmali. 32 Supaul. 33 Saharsa. 34 Bihpur.
 35 Sonbarsa.

PURNEA: 36 Basantpur. 37 Purnea. 38 Rupauli. 39 Katihar.

Chapter 1

CONFLICT AND CONTROL IN EARLY 20TH CENTURY NORTH BIHAR

Introduction; The region of north Bihar; Control over land, social structure and the pressure of population growth; The operation of social control : the administration, the police and the landed interest; Conclusion.

Introduction

In the early 20th century north Bihar harboured a numerous, impoverished, and rigidly stratified population which depended for its livelihood on a traditional, inefficient system of agricultural production. In north Bihar, those with control over land held the premier position. At the regional level, the great landlords dominated, while at the local level European indigo planters, small landlords and well-established tenants held sway. By the beginning of the 20th century mounting population pressure had begun to exacerbate social conflicts and tensions, but until the second decade of the century these conflicts and tensions only expressed themselves in small scale, localized clashes. Almost all of these clashes arose out of disputes within or among the groups which made up the 'landed interest' of north Bihar, namely the great landlords, the European indigo planters, and the locally dominant peasants. Tensions and conflicts were contained by the limitations that prevailing social, economic and cultural conditions imposed on the organization and expression of protest, by the formal control exercised by the administration and the police, and by the informal control exercised by the great landlords, the European indigo planters, and the locally dominant peasants. The following chapter introduces the region of north Bihar, describes its social structure and the impact upon this structure of mounting population pressure, and examines the expression and control of conflict in north Bihar society in the pre-1917 period.

The region of north Bihar

The visitor arriving in north Bihar in October or November discovers, at least upon first acquaintance, a green and pleasant land.¹ The nights are cool and crisp; the days, warm and sunny. If the June to September monsoon rains have been good the ripening rice crop spreads like a rich green quilt over the surface of the earth. The land stretches flat to the horizon, but streams, tanks and ponds, clean and full after the rains, and groves of mango and other fruit-bearing trees rescue the scene from monotony. As November turns into December and December into January the weather becomes colder. In colonial times British officials and planters delighted in this winter season. The mornings are superb, bright and crisp and sunny, ideal, or so the British found, for riding out on hunting expeditions. There would be crocodiles and waterfowl to shoot at and pigs to be stuck; occasionally an unwary leopard might find himself in the hunter's sights. Until about 1920 hunters set out after the tigers that roamed in the swamps and jungles of the district of Purnea or in the jungles fringing the north of Champaran district. But during the course of this century the jungles have all but disappeared, encroached upon by the spread of cultivation and devastated by the demand for building timber and firewood, and the tigers have either been slaughtered or have fled north to the safety of the forests of the Kingdom of Nepal. The nights of the north Bihar winter are cold, and for a few weeks around Christmas homesick Britishers could sit nostalgically around cheerful fireplaces, warming themselves and dreaming of cosy cottages 'at home'.

Not all the population regarded the winter so favourably. The poor, inadequately supplied with fuel, warm clothing and blankets, and crowded into unlined mud or bamboo huts, have always found winter a harsh season. At this time in north Bihar pneumonia, tuberculosis, and other

bronchial ailments take a heavy toll. Fortunately, the cold, dry conditions lessen the incidence of typhoid, cholera and malaria, the chief ailments of the hot and wet seasons. Inevitably, the health and welfare of many people depends much on the quality of the aghani or winter rice crop, harvested in late November and early December. Harvest time is exciting, and often turbulent, as villagers swarm into the fields to cut and gather the region's main and staple crop. Agricultural labourers, chronically underemployed for most of the year, for this brief period find themselves much in demand, and villagers compete keenly for the services of cartmen and of carts and bullocks. Sharecroppers and landholders dispute over the division of the crop, and peasants quarrel over the ownership of plots of land and the crops thereon.

After the excitement of the winter rice harvest comes a slack period in the agrarian cycle.² The next major agricultural event is the harvesting of the rabi or spring crop, sown the previous October, of wheat, gram and pulses. The rabi crop is harvested in late spring/early summer. For eight or nine months, from October to May, scarcely any rain falls; from February the temperature begins to rise. The transition to summer occurs by early March, about the time of the rabi harvest and of the Holi festival, at which rigid social distinctions are, temporarily, in part forgotten while inferiors and children delight in throwing coloured mud and water over their elders and superiors. By late March the daytime temperature rises to over 100 degrees on the Fahrenheit scale; by May it reaches 110 degrees. The heat is unremitting; at night temperatures are not significantly lower than during the day. From early March the heat and the absence of rain begins to dry up the tanks and the creeks and the rivulets and the rivers; all foliage wilts and the landscape, formerly so green, assumes a dull brown hue. As the summer reaches its height, hot dust-laden

winds blow, obscuring visibility and making movement outside difficult and extremely uncomfortable. Fire becomes a constant hazard to thatch-roofed and grass-walled huts, and disease runs riot. (In colonial times, during this period of the year, British planters and officials used to send their wives and children off to the safety and the comfort of Ranchi, Darjeeling and other hill stations. Nowadays, some Indians do the same.) At this time of the year the rich retreat during the heat of the day into the relative coolness of their stone or brick houses. Their houses have high ceilings and wide verandahs, and their punkah wallahs (or often, nowadays, their electric fans), work unceasingly to bring some movement into the air. The poor seek what shade they can in the shelter of their miserable huts, and avoid physical activity as much as possible. But coolies, rickshaw pullers, palanquin bearers and other labourers who survive from day to day by the sweat of their backs must work no matter what the conditions, no matter how grave the risk of heat exhaustion.

And then, usually in June, comes the monsoon. In the south-west corner of the region, with its rich, loamy soil, the coming of the rains permits the sowing of lucrative cash crops. In the less fertile north-east, in contrast, the arrival of the monsoon marks the occasion for the sowing of winter rice.³ For weeks before its arrival the monsoon has been a recurrent theme of conversation among a population whose members, almost without exception, depend on agriculture. Would the monsoon come early, or would it come late? And when it came, how would it manifest itself? Everyone hopes that the rain will fall slowly and steadily, drumming persistently into the parched earth. But often the rain comes in torrential outbursts, waterlogging the soil or carrying it away in flash floods. North Bihar consists of a vast plain, bounded on the south by the east/west course of the Ganges and on the north by the Nepal frontier,

which runs parallel to and about 10 miles to the south of the foothills of the Himalayas. From the Himalayas the Gandak, the Bagmati and the Kosi and their tributaries flow southwards to the Ganges. These rivers, slow and lethargic during much of the year, become raging torrents once the monsoon arrives, carrying all before them. Almost every year, most parts of the region experience minor flooding; in most years, in some parts of the region, major flooding occurs.⁴ The floods disrupt communications, and isolate large tracts for months at a time. In many areas during the monsoon period crudely fashioned boats provide the only means of transportation, and every year people drown when these boats capsize. Villagers sow the rice crop early in the monsoon because it needs much water, but often flooding brings an over-supply of water and destroys the crop. Rivers change course, sweeping away huts and villages, ruining some people by destroying their crops but enriching others by leaving behind rich deposits of silt. Fish teem in the waters that spread across the land, ready to be caught and to provide a valuable dietary supplement. At this time of year, according to one observer

...the whole country is...a perfect network of streams. Every rice field is a shallow lake, with countless thousands of tiny fish darting here and there among the rice stalks. Every ditch teems with fish, and every hollow in every field is a well stocked aquarium.⁵

During the monsoon flood waters spread rotting animal and vegetable matter, bacteria multiply rapidly in the heat and humidity, and malarial and filarial mosquitoes breed in flooded tanks and fields. Every year, many people fall prey to disease.

By late August/early September, about the time of the bhadoi or autumn harvest of the cash crops sown in the previous June, the monsoon is over and the villagers set to to repair the damage done. In early October, if all goes well, comes a brief downpour which keeps the water level high in

the aghani rice fields and prepares the ground for the sowing of the rabi crop. From now on, as the weather becomes colder, people's thoughts turn towards the forthcoming harvest in December. Thus is the yearly cycle completed.⁶

In north Bihar the livelihood of all depends upon the vagaries of the climate, and all hope for a good harvest. The risks of a bad harvest and the benefits of a good harvest are not, however, distributed evenly among the members of the population. The harsh natural environment and unpredictable natural calamities bring misery and insecurity to the lives of many. But the social environment, the environment of interactions between men and between their institutions is at least equally harsh. Throughout the region the rich and the powerful move in the midst of the poor and the powerless.

Control over land, social structure, and the pressure of population growth

In 1901, four out of every five members of the north Bihar population depended directly on agriculture for their livelihood. The region had no significant industries, and less than 3 per cent of its population lived in towns.⁷ Nor were the towns of north Bihar much more than overgrown villages. Patna, the nearest large urban centre, itself scarcely a thriving metropolis, lay south of the broad stream of the Ganges. Throughout the 19th century the size of this overwhelmingly agrarian society had been steadily increasing. In the 18th century famine, and the recurrent warfare during the final decades of Mughal rule, had kept the population down, but during the 19th century the Pax Britannica combined with effective famine relief measures to permit steady population growth. In 1800, vast tracts of north Bihar had been jungle or savannah, but by 1900 most of the previously uncultivated land had been brought under the plough. In 1881, the first year for which reliable census figures are available, north Bihar, in an area of 20,400 square miles, had a population of just over 13,000,000 and a population density of 638 per square mile. In the ensuing decades, as Table 1 illustrates, population growth continued. Between 1881 and 1921, to judge from the figures established by each of the decennial censuses, the total size of the region's population remained relatively constant. Rather than a decline in the birth rate, however, these figures reflected the substantial inroads, during inter-censal years, of poverty and disease into the numbers of the population.⁸ In the period from 1920, during which the administration brought infectious diseases more effectively under control, the population expanded rapidly. Population growth resulted in an especially high density of population in Saran, Muzaffarpur and Darbhanga, all districts in which political turbulence became particularly frequent during the 20th century. "Although exceeded

by the figures for a few individual districts such as Howrah and Dacca," one British official commented,

...the portion of north Bihar which comprises the three districts of Saran, Muzaffarpur and Darbhanga has a more teeming population than any other tract of equal size in Bengal or Eastern Bengal.⁹

TABLE 1

Population and population density of north Bihar, 1881 to 1971

YEAR	POPULATION	POPULATION PER SQUARE MILE
1881	13,038,132	638
1891	13,841,489	678
1901	13,553,733	663
1911	13,841,072	678
1921	13,820,537	677
1931	14,920,351	731
1941	16,445,112	805
1951	17,896,799	877
1961	21,594,650	1,058
1971	26,198,681	1,283

Sources: *Census of India, 1961*, Volume IV, Bihar, Part 1-A(i), p. 49; 1951 *District Census Handbooks* for Champaran (p. xi) Saran (pp.xiv-xvi) Muzaffarpur (pp.xiv, xv) Darbhanga (pp. xii, xiii) Monghyr (pp. xii, xiii) Saharsa (pp. ix, x) and Purnea (pp. xv, xvi); *Census of India, 1971*, Series 1, Paper 1, 1972, p. 9.

Within the populous, agrarian society of north Bihar the relationship between an individual and the land and its produce determined his social, economic and political position. The zamindars or landlords occupied the top end of the social scale, while landless labourers occupied the bottom. Even those engaged in non-agricultural occupations

also often had control over land. Temple priests were given small land grants by zamindars seeking to gain religious merit; lawyers and merchants invested their profits in land; and traders and artisans combined small holder cultivation with the pursuit of their occupations. The most significant indigenous non-agriculturalist group were the lawyers, who made a living out of fighting complex agrarian cases through the labyrinthine legal system imposed by the British administration. Lawyers, like the other groups engaged in non-agricultural occupations, held a position in the social scale commensurate with the usefulness and prestige of their vocation as judged by the zamindars. (For a summary depiction of the social structure, see Diagram 1.)

The zamindars¹⁰ owned all the land in north Bihar except for small portions held by the government, by temples and by charitable organizations. The zamindars, who comprised about 5 per cent of the region's population,¹¹ rented nine-tenths of their land to ryots or occupancy tenants, who, under the law, held hereditary rights in their tenancy holdings. The zamindars held the remainder of their land under direct control, and either supervised its cultivation by labourers or rented it out year by year to sharecroppers or short term tenants. A small part of this directly controlled land was zirat, a classification of land in which no rights other than those of the owner could exist, and the remainder was bakast, a term which denotes land under the direct control of a landlord but in which, under certain legally defined conditions, occupancy tenancy rights could become established. (For a depiction of the tenurial system on ryoti lands and on zirat and bakast lands please refer to Diagrams 2 and 3).

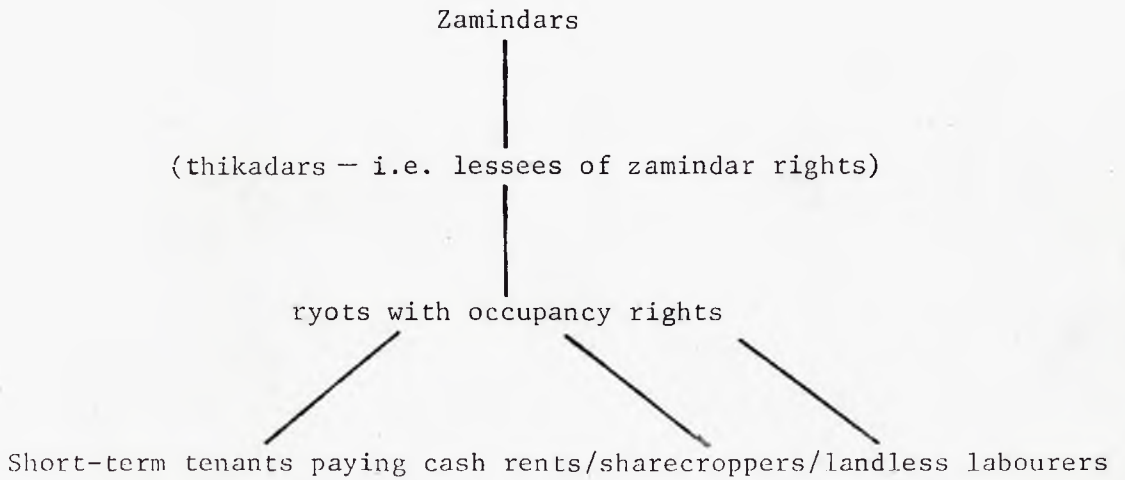
DIAGRAM 1

The social hierarchy in north Bihar, circa 1900

AGRICULTURAL OCCUPATIONS	NON-AGRICULTURAL OCCUPATIONS
1. The great landlords (high caste)	
1(a) European indigo planters	
2. The locally dominant: small landlords and big tenants (high caste)	1. Brahman priests 2. Lawyers, teachers, doctors and other professionals; money-lenders and big traders (high and middle caste)
3. Middle and small tenants (middle and low caste)	3. Artisans and small traders (middle and low caste)
4. 'Dwarf' holders and landless (low caste, Adivasi and Harijan)	4. Servants (low caste)
	5. Scavengers (Harijan)

DIAGRAM 2

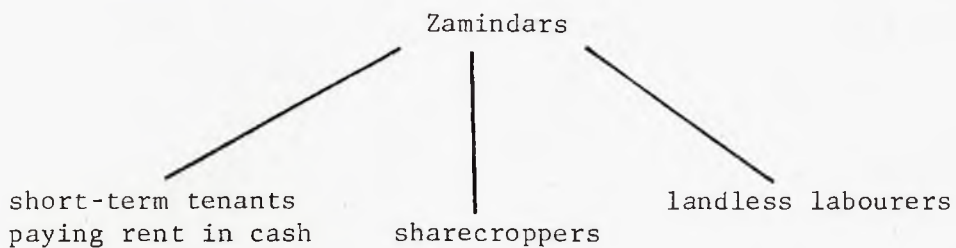
Tenurial structure on Ryoti lands in north Bihar circa 1900



(Note: Most ryots held small holdings which they tilled with family labour but there were some big ryots who had all or part of their lands tilled by the poor and the landless.)

DIAGRAM 3

Tenurial Structure on Zirat and Bakast lands in north Bihar circa 1900



In 1901 the premier zamindar in north Bihar, and indeed in Bihar as a whole, was Rameshwar Singh, Maharaja of the Darbhanga Raj, 18th in a line of landed magnates that had come to power in 1556 and head of the Maithil Brahman community, the elite religious community of Bihar.¹² Rameshwar Singh's property covered some 2,400 square miles, which was slightly more than 12 per cent of the total area (20,400 square miles) of north Bihar. Rameshwar Singh received, from land rents, an income of approximately 2,000,000 rupees. He paid about 12 per cent of this income as land revenue and cess to the provincial government, and spent another 10 to 15 per cent in the administrative costs of running holdings spread over a wide area and staffed by about 3,000 people.¹³ The remainder, supplemented by the proceeds from investments in industrial undertakings and real estate, formed a substantial sum, much of it spent in a manner befitting a Maharaja of ancient line. It paid for the upkeep of the three palaces in Darbhanga town, and for the residences in Muzaffarpur, Patna, Calcutta, Darjeeling, Delhi and Simla. It supported a string of 30 race-horses, and fed and maintained the 40 elephants kept for ceremonial purposes. It was eventually to pay for a fleet of motor cars, at a time when the motor car was a rare sight in north Bihar, and it paid for two lavishly appointed railway carriages, which were hitched onto a special train when the Maharaja wished to travel long distances.¹⁴ Considerable sums were also spent for religious purposes: Rameshwar Singh, the rigidly orthodox head of a rigidly orthodox community, fulfilled his obligations scrupulously, paying for the upkeep of temples and their attendants, awarding stipends to scholars of Sanskrit, endowing religious schools and spending generously on the rituals of traditional Hinduism as practised in north Bihar.¹⁵ From this position of social and religious eminence the Maharaja supported and was in turn supported by the British administration. He served in the Bihar and Orissa Legislative Council, and exerted strong

influence over the Darbhanga Municipality and over the Darbhanga District Board. He also participated in a variety of voluntary associations including the Bihar Landholders' Association, the Benares Hindu University Committee, and the Maithil Mahasabha.¹⁶

The position of Rameshwar Singh and his fellow zamindars had been guaranteed when the British administration implemented the Permanent Settlement of 1793 within the vast area incorporated within the then "Bengal Presidency", which consisted of the modern-day regions of Bangla Desh, West Bengal, Bihar, a substantial portion of Orissa and of parts of modern day Uttar Pradesh. The British imposed the Permanent Settlement in an unstable, fluid context of land holding in an attempt to ensure economic and administrative stability by (a) vesting proprietary rights in the possession of established land controlling families and (b) declaring that the land revenue levied from those certified as zamindars would not be increased.¹⁷ The British administration exacted the land revenue demand according to a rigid timetable, irrespective of whether the harvest was good or bad, and in some areas social disruption occurred when established land controllers, unable to meet their revenue payments, had to sell their land to urban-based speculators.¹⁸ In north Bihar, however, British revenue officials underestimated the productivity of the land and hence demanded only a moderate land revenue, which made it possible for most of the land controlling families to adapt effectively to the new order.¹⁹

The British calculated that, by holding the land revenue demand constant, they would ensure that any increase in the output of the land, and thus its rental value, would benefit the zamindars. The British hoped that the zamindars would improve agricultural techniques and increase production in order to be able to demand higher rents.²⁰ This hope met with disappointment. Zamindars, Walter C. Neale points out, operated within a

social and cultural context entirely different from that in which the British "improving landlord" had emerged. To maintain and advance their local political position zamindars sought to increase the number of people under their control. Hence they had no interest in new techniques and technologies which would enable them to employ less labour, and instead of re-investing their profits in capital improvement they used them to service extensive patronage networks and to bolster their prestige by means of conspicuous consumption.²¹ The zamindars had no desire to become improving landlords, and British policy inhibited indigenous industrial development which might have galvanized the agrarian economy.²² The zamindars found, moreover, that because of steady population growth they could increase their profits without changing their style of land management. As population grew, zamindars profited as formerly uncultivated lands came under the plough.²³ The growing demand for land meant that rents could be raised, even though no improvement in agricultural techniques occurred. Most of the rising profits from land rent stayed with the zamindars. In the district of Darbhanga, for example, the designers of the Permanent Settlement intended that nine-tenths of the rent collected from the tenants by each zamindar should be passed onto the government as land revenue. By the end of the 19th century this officially approved ratio had become reversed, and one-tenth of the rental income went to the government while the remaining nine-tenths stayed with the zamindars.²⁴

Zamindars swelled their profits with illegal and quasi-legal exactions. From their tenants they levied salami, a tenancy transfer and settlement fee. In Champaran, according to one British official, this fee was "... levied with the stereotyped regularity of rent."²⁵ Salami often amounted to several years rent. In 1918-19, in the Alapur administrative circle of the Darbhanga Raj in north-east Darbhanga, the average rental was less than

4 rupees per bigha, but the rate of salami ranged, depending on the quality of the land, from a minimum of 25 rupees per bigha to a maximum of 160 rupees.²⁶ In 1910-11, in the Naredigar circle in north-west Bhagalpur, the Darbhanga Raj demanded an average rental for newly settled land of 5¼ rupees per bigha, and an average salami of 20 rupees. In the same circle 30 years later the Darbhanga Raj demanded a slightly lower rental of just over 4 rupees per bigha for newly settled land, but levied higher salamis at the average rate, per bigha, of just under 31 rupees.²⁷ Zamindars also imposed abwabs, which were illegal but customarily sanctioned additional dues levied on the tenant. In some parts of Champaran, Settlement Officer J.A. Sweeney informed the Agrarian Enquiry Committee in 1917, abwabs amounted to 120 per cent of the rent charges.²⁸ Zamindars also profited from money lending and grain dealing. Many tenants, needing credit to meet social and religious obligations and to tide themselves over the lean periods of the agrarian cycle became hopelessly indebted to zamindar money lenders.²⁹ When dealing in grain, zamindars bought cheap at harvest time and sold dear later in the year when prices had risen.³⁰ Through their rental, commercial, customary and illegal earnings the zamindars cornered much of the agrarian surplus. Unfortunately for the welfare of the region, however, they showed little interest in agricultural improvement or industrial investment, and generally spent their profits in non-economic ways. As Barrington Moore, Jr., comments, the "...peasant was suffering many of the pains of primitive capitalist accumulation, while...society reaped none of the benefits."³¹ The British administration had hoped for "improving landlords" on the English home counties model, but had got rack-renting landlords on the Irish colonial model instead.

The tendency of zamindars to rack-rent increased as population growth fragmented their holdings. When the Permanent Settlement formalized the zamindars' position there was already considerable variation among them in the size of their estates and the extent of their wealth and influence. This differentiation increased rapidly during the 19th century. It was only among those few families that had enjoyed quasi-regal status under the Mughals — the families of the Hathwa Raj, the Bettiah Raj and the Darbhanga Raj — that the tradition of primogeniture had become established. Among the rest of the zamindar population property was divided equally among the male heirs, while among Muslims both males and females inherited equally.

The 19th century increase in the number of zamindars broke up zamindari holdings and made it harder for those dependent on them to maintain their position. By the early 1880s, Gordon Johnson points out, "...less than one zemindar in two hundred in Bengal and Bihar held really large estates, and 88.4 per cent held estates of less than 500 acres."³² By 1900, with the exception of the Maharaja of Darbhanga and a few other large and middle range zamindars, most zamindars held only small properties.³³ In Darbhanga circa 1900 each zamindar, on average, held 15 acres and had an annual rental income of 85 rupees. These averages, however, overstate the size of the property and the income of most of the zamindars of the district, because the Maharaja of Darbhanga owned nearly a third of the district while some middle range zamindars held properties covering 100s of acres.³⁴ In the final decades of the 19th century, as Table 2 illustrates, the number of zamindari estates in Darbhanga had increased rapidly.

TABLE 2
*Officially registered zamindari estates
 in Darbhanga, 1878 to 1905-06*

YEAR	NUMBER OF ESTATES
1878	7,962
1889-90	10,813
1899-1900	13,400
1905-06	14,183

Source: O'Malley, *Darbhangha*, pp. 119-20

The figures given in this table, dramatic as they are, do not reflect accurately the true extent of the subdivision of proprietary rights, because zamindars, to avoid the registration fee, often divided their property privately without having the division recorded legally. By 1905-06, the number of proprietors in the district totalled approximately 135,000 out of a population of just under 2,900,000. Except in the Madhubani subdivision in the north of the district, where the Darbhanga Raj had a predominant interest, there was "a host of petty proprietors".³⁵ In Samastipur subdivision in the south of Darbhanga each individual zamindar held an average of about eight acres, which meant that the average zamindar "was little more than an ordinary cultivator".³⁶ Private partitions had also been common in the district of Saran, and except in the areas held by a few big zamindars rights of ownership had been subdivided to "a most extraordinary extent".³⁷ The fate of many zamindari families was typified by the history of a Rajput family which migrated into Saran in 1788, and acquired control of the villages of Gangapur and Bhagar. During the 19th century the property of the family became dissipated "as

successive generations of descendants inherited smaller and smaller shares."³⁸ In Saran by 1906-07 the average area held by each zamindar was 14 acres, and the district had "a vast army of landlords, ranging from the Hathwa Raj in the north, sole owner of over 1,000 villages, down to the peasant proprietor of four acres".³⁹ In Muzaffarpur, the number of estates had increased from 13,001 in 1879 to 21,050 in 1904-05, and private partitions had been frequent. By 1905, "there were on the average $5\frac{1}{2}$ estates and 37 proprietors to each village, each holding 12 acres."⁴⁰ In north Monghyr, the number of estates on the official revenue roll increased by 100 per cent between 1874-75 and 1907-08, and during these years private partition had "gone to extreme lengths".⁴¹ By 1907-08 an average village of around 600 acres was usually divided among some 51 zamindars, giving them an average share of about 12 acres.⁴²

As the subdivision process continued, generation by generation, small zamindars competed keenly amongst themselves and with tenants to get control over more land. A zamindar who inherited only a small portion of what formerly had been an extensive property usually set out to acquire more land and to bring as much as possible of his property under direct cultivating control. Zamindars favoured direct control because share-croppers and labourers, working on land under zamindari control, occupied a more precarious position than tenants with occupy rights and hence could be squeezed more.⁴³ In Darbhanga, the Settlement Officer commented in 1903,

...the increasing subdivision of proprietary rights, which is going on over a large part of the district, has made it necessary for the petty proprietors to resort to direct cultivation to a much greater extent than was formerly the case. The manner in which this tendency works is illustrated...in the fifty villages in which...it has been found possible to compare the statistics of the resumption proceedings of 1840 with those of the present operations. The selected villages are scattered all over the district and may be taken as fairly representative. In them the occupied area has, within the last sixty years, increased from 20,218 acres to 27,959, or by 38 per cent. The area in the

occupation of raiyats has increased from 18,436 acres to 22,966 acres, or by 24 per cent, but the area in occupation of landlords has gone up from 1782 acres to 4,993 acres, or by 180 per cent.⁴⁴

The strength of kinship loyalties, and in particular the institutions of the joint family and the proprietary brotherhood, worked against the effects of property fragmentation through inheritance.⁴⁵ Frequently, two or three generations of zamindars held land in common, profiting jointly from its proceeds. But such units displayed a proneness to internal strife, particularly when they grew large, and tended to split up.⁴⁶ Kinship bonds slowed but could not stop or reverse the trend to fragmentation of holdings.

By the late 19th century population growth had also begun to pressure the ryots, or "occupancy tenants" of north Bihar. During the first three-quarters of the century ryots had been able to take up the cultivation of lands previously held by zamindars as jungle or wasteland.⁴⁷ At the start of the century Darbhanga, for example, included large tracts of uncultivated land. One official, writing in 1802, estimated that the ratio of cultivated to uncultivated land was three to two, and pointed out that "For miles and miles are plains with only here and there a few bighas in cultivation, and the uncultivated land surrounding it apparently as well worth the trouble of agriculture as any part I have seen".⁴⁸ The area in the vicinity of Alapur, later to become one of the most productive parts of the district, was at this time "the haunt of wild elephants", who did great damage when they ventured out of the grass jungle and preyed on the crops.⁴⁹ Over the ensuing decades the area under cultivation greatly expanded. By 1850, three-quarters of the total area of the district and by 1875 just under four-fifths of the total area was being cultivated. Of the land that had not been brought into cultivation, one quarter was devoted to mango groves and grazing, one quarter was unculturable waste, and half

consisted of roads, rivers, house sites and tanks.⁵⁰ In Darbhanga, the Settlement Officer concluded in 1903, "...there is very little room for the extension of cultivation."⁵¹ By the beginning of the 20th century, among the seven north Bihar districts, only Purnea, north Bhagalpur and Champaran had arable land not yet under cultivation. But Purnea was an endemic malaria and cholera area and thus was not attractive to potential cultivators. "Don't take poison," the proverb ran, "You have to die so go to Purnea."⁵² The western portion of Purnea, and much of north Bhagalpur, moreover, were subject to the depredations of the torrential river Kosi, the Hwang-Ho of India, which changed its course frequently, ruining land by burying it in deposits of sand and endangering the lives and property of any foolhardy enough to attempt to establish permanent settlements in its basin. And in Champaran, much of the land not yet brought under the plough provided indispensable grazing land both for local cattle and for cattle brought in from the overcrowded neighbouring districts of Muzaffarpur and Saran and the adjacent United Provinces' district of Gorakhpur.⁵³

The drying up of the supply of surplus land boded ill for the future. Admittedly, as Table 3 illustrates, most ryots held, according to official estimates, slightly more land than the minimum necessary for the subsistence of an 'average family'. This extra land gave ryots some reserves with which to cope with bad seasons, but did not allow for the subdivision of holdings among descendants into economically viable units. In the most overcrowded districts, Muzaffarpur and Saran, emigration to Calcutta and further afield had become common.⁵⁴ In Saran, according to the Settlement Officer, "the land can no longer support the population, and in most families the young men must, and do go forth to seek their living elsewhere".⁵⁵ Not infrequently a ryot mortgaged part of his holding to

raise money to give the young emigrant "a start in life"; subsequently, the mortgage could be redeemed from the remittances sent home by the absent son.⁵⁶ Temporary, seasonal migration occurred even more frequently. From Saran, Anand A. Yang points out, emigration overseas only amounted to a trickle compared with the massive exodus to Bengal and elsewhere, involving more than 10 per cent of the population, which occurred during the slack period of the agrarian cycle.⁵⁷ The landless formed the bulk of the migrants but with increasing population pressure on a static agrarian base many cultivators also found themselves obliged to emigrate permanently or to leave their homes temporarily in search of work.⁵⁸

TABLE 3

*Average and Subsistence holdings in Saran,
Darbhanga and Champaran, circa 1900*
(Areas given are in acres)

DISTRICT	SUBSISTENCE HOLDING	AVERAGE HOLDING
Saran	2.5	3.8
Darbhangha	2.5	3.5
Champaran	4.0	5.0

Sources: O'Malley, *Saran*, pp. 89-90; O'Malley, *Champaran*, p. 97; Kerr, *Darbhangha Settlement Report*, pp. 128-9.

Population pressure and the disappearance of the land frontier threatened the position of the tenantry as a whole but some tenants, by determination and good fortune, managed to protect and advance their

interests and to retain or achieve a position of local power. Often such men were the descendants of families that had long held sway; sometimes, however, they had only recently risen to eminence. Characteristically, they engaged in money lending and grain dealing in addition to cultivating their lands.⁵⁹ Often, for the sake of status and for financial advancement, they acquired zamindari holdings. At the village level, they shared or competed for dominance with small zamindars. One typical 'big' tenant was Mithan Prasad Kuar, who held land near Sonbarsa, on the north bank of the Ganges in Bhagalpur district. In 1922 he held about 28 bighas. In the ensuing years he expanded his possessions and by 1936 held 116 bighas. In addition he had obtained some zamindari property in which, his opponents alleged, he dealt harshly with his tenants.⁶⁰ Another prosperous tenant was Khendar Prasad Rai, an inhabitant of Champaran. Rai, a Rajput by caste, told the Champaran Agrarian Enquiry Committee of 1917 that he held 100 acres of land and had a "money-lending business to the extent of a lakh".⁶¹

Below the big tenants in the social scale came a group of middle range tenants. Below them came tenants who had just sufficient land to meet their needs; and finally below them came tenants whose holdings were too small to sustain them and who had to supplement work on their own holdings with labour for others. In 1890 a survey carried out among the 190 ryot households of Dalsingserai village in Darbhanga categorized 12 of them as "well-to-do", 50 as "comfortably off", 54 as "dependent on the outcome of the year" and 74 as "poor".⁶² In Muzaffarpur in 1899 there was an average of 667 ryots per square mile, of whom 496 had sufficient land to support themselves, while 171 supplemented cultivation on their own land with work as labourers.⁶³ The position of these ryot-labourers did not differ greatly from that of landless labourers, and they faced a crisis

whenever there were "short crops or high prices".⁶⁴ Only marginally better off than the ryot-labourers were ryots cultivating at subsistence level. One such ryot was Ghuna Sinha, of village Bhataura, Saran district. Ghuna Sinha's 18 bighas of land produced just enough, in favourable seasons, to support the 18 members of his joint family. But when times were bad he was forced into debt: in 1918, for example, after flooding which resulted in a crop failure, he had to borrow 181 rupees.⁶⁵ In 1900 the ryots who lived at or above subsistence level made up just under half of the population of the region. Below them in the social scale came those who could unequivocally be described as poor.

The poor made up about one-third of north Bihari society.⁶⁶ They included both landless labourers and 'dwarf holders', i.e. holders of tiny, non-economic plots of land. Some dwarf holders held their plots as ryots, while others had the status of sharecroppers, or of short-term tenants paying an annual cash rent. Some of the landless labourers were attached, as bonded servants or 'debt slaves', to big tenants and zamindars.⁶⁷ Of the labourers who were not thus bonded, some engaged in non-agricultural occupations on a seasonal basis, and returned to their village during the peak work periods of the agrarian cycle.⁶⁸ The most secure among the poor were those with steady employment as servants, government coolies and palanquin bearers.

North Bihar ~~harboured~~ a predominantly Hindu population, and the hierarchy of caste mirrored, reinforced and was reinforced by the hierarchy of economic, social and political power. Muslims, who totalled, according to the 1901 census, 15.4 per cent of the population, were the only substantial non-Hindu group.⁶⁹ Within the Muslim community great economic and social differentiation existed. A small number of Muslims — the

descendants of the members of the landed aristocracy in Mughal times — were notable as middle-range zamindars,⁷⁰ while the rest of the community was dispersed through the middle and lower ranks of society.

Among the Hindus, and within society as a whole, Brahmans, Rajputs, and Bhumihars (also known as military Brahmans and Babhans) predominated. These groups all but monopolized land-owning and held first place among the tenantry. Brahmans, Rajputs and Bhumihars, as Table 4 illustrates, only comprised a small proportion of the population of the region. Particular high caste groups were concentrated within particular areas. In a village studied by Ramashray Roy, more than one-fifth of the population were Brahmans, while in the Beguserai area in north Monghyr around one-fifth of the population were Bhumihars. In Saran, Rajputs comprised 10 per cent of the population.⁷¹ In a context in which, with the exception of the Yadavs, the other groups in the social hierarchy were also small, the local concentration of Brahmans, Rajputs and Bhumihars contributed to their social and political pre-eminence. Members of the Kayasth caste also had great influence. Traditionally, Kayasths had functioned as a literati. They monopolized the post of patwari, or village accountant, occupied many positions in the lower ranks of the bureaucracy, and outnumbered others in the legal profession. The Yadavs (also known as Goalas and Ahirs), and the Koeris and the Kurmis predominated in the middle range of the social hierarchy. The Kurmis and the Koeris had a reputation as skilful, hardworking cultivators, while the Yadavs, the most numerous caste group in north Bihar, combined their traditional occupation of cow-herding with tenancy cultivation. At the bottom of the social hierarchy low caste and Harijan groups predominated. Members of these groups generally worked as dwarf holders or landless

labourers. Among the lower castes the Dusadhs and the Dhanuks formed the largest groups.

TABLE 4

Community and Caste groups in north Bihar circa 1900

CLASSIFICATION	GROUP	PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION
High caste	Brahman	4.6
	Bhumihar	4.4
	Rajput	4.1
	Kayasth	1.4
Total high caste groups:		<u>14.5</u>
Middle caste	Yadav	12.2
	Koeri	4.9
	Kurmi	2.8
Total middle caste groups:		<u>19.9</u>
Low caste	Dusadhs	4.9
	Dhanuks	3.2
	Telis	2.8
	Others (all less than 2 per cent of population)	20.2
Total low caste groups:		<u>31.1</u>

.../cont'd

CLASSIFICATION	GROUP	PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION
Harijan	Chamars	4.0
	Musahars	2.7
	Others (all less than 2 per cent of population)	9.4
Total Harijan groups:	<u>16.1</u>	
Adivasi		2.5
Non-Hindu groups:	Muslim	15.4
	Miscellaneous	0.5
TOTAL OF ALL GROUPS:		100.0

Sources: Calculated from figures given in Byrne, *Bhagalpur*, pp. 43, 46-8; and in O'Malley gazetteers for *Champaran*, pp. 36, 40, 46; *Saran*, pp. 32, 39, 43; *Muzaffarpur*, pp. 26, 32, 37-40; *Darbhanga*, pp. 23-36; *Monghyr*, pp. 50, 55, 62 and *Purnea*, pp. 1, 58, 61; and in the Statistical Appendices to the above. (Calcutta, 1908-12). pp. 1, 58, 61; (Please note: figures have been adjusted to allow for south Gangetic portions of of Monghyr and Bhagalpur).

Harijans comprised one-sixth of the north Bihar population. Characteristically, they were segregated into one of the three or four hamlets that made up the north Bihar village, and suffered discrimination in every aspect of their lives. The Chamars and the Musahars were the two largest Harijan groups. In 1909 one official described the Musahars as

...field labourers, whose wages are paid in kind...
 They live in a kind of social thralldom, sometimes
 selling themselves, their wives, and children to
 lifelong servitude for paltry sums.⁷²

And in 1911, another official commented that the Musahars lived "... a life very near the margin of subsistence and eat rats, snails, snakes, or anything else they can find."⁷³ Harijan and low caste dwarf holders and landless labourers held an unenviable position in the north Bihar agrarian hierarchy. By the turn of the century, because of population pressure on an inefficient agricultural system, their prospects, and the prospects of the larger society within which they lived, seemed to be becoming increasingly bleak.

The expression of conflict and the limitations on protest

The people of north Bihar competed over resources and their use and over produce and its distribution. Competition became bitter because of a medley of demographic, economic, social and cultural reasons. By the end of the 19th century the region was entering a period of demographic crisis. In the ensuing decades steady population growth continued, bringing increasing pressure on the land. North Bihar's inefficient, subsistence agriculture could not effectively meet the challenge of providing for these numbers. Most of the actual work of cultivation was done on a small scale by tenants, sharecroppers and labourers. Those in a financially strong position, among the zamindars and the better established tenantry, showed little inclination to invest in technical innovation and organizational modernization. The agrarian economy of north Bihar stagnated within the restrictive, conservative framework maintained by India's colonial rulers, yet by virtue of its inclusion in an imperial system was vulnerable to fluctuations within the world economy.⁷⁴ Apart from encouraging, without notable success, the siphoning off of excess population by migration,⁷⁵ British administrators had no solution to north Bihar's agrarian problems. The British realized that the zamindars had failed to become improving landlords and to galvanize rural society, but because of their respect for private property, and because they relied on the zamindars for social and political support, they did nothing, (apart from some largely ineffectual legal measures intended to protect the ryots from the zamindars' worst excesses)⁷⁶ to alter the social structure and the distribution of wealth within it so as to promote greater agricultural efficiency and to encourage agricultural reinvestment. So crucial, indeed did the

British regard the support of the zamindars that they propped up the existing order whenever it came under challenge. One example of this policy is their handling of the affairs of the Darbhanga Raj after the death of Momeshwar Singh, who was Maharaja of Darbhanga from 1829 until his death in 1860. During his reign Momeshwar Singh supported a host of kinsfolk, lived in great state, and spent lavishly on ceremonies. Many of his relatives held posts in the administration of the Darbhanga estates, and displayed an inefficiency only surpassed by their venality. When Momeshwar Singh died, leaving behind a minor heir, the Darbhanga Raj was verging on bankruptcy. But the provincial government stepped in, took over the administration of the estates and, by careful management, restored prosperity before handing them back to the heir, Lakmeshwar Singh, when he came of age in 1879.⁷⁷ Similarly, as Anand A. Yang details, the British protected many other zamindari estates from bankruptcy and disintegration.⁷⁸ The contradiction between economic rationality and political expediency could not have been more complete.

Within this stagnant agrarian system most north Biharis found life insecure and unpredictable. Economic fluctuations particularly affected the poor. In 1915 and 1919, for example, and to a lesser extent in 1920, widespread distress resulted from scarcity and high prices.⁷⁹ Many people were driven to crime in order to survive.⁸⁰ In 1915, the number of burglaries increased by more than 20 per cent and the number of thefts rose more than 17 per cent over the annual average figures for the 1911-1914 period. In 1919, the increases over the 1911-1914 figures for burglary and theft were, respectively, 60 and 52 per cent. During 1919, 37 per cent of all convictions were for one month or less, and 64 per cent of all prisoners were serving sentences of three months or less.⁸¹ One

British official concluded that "A very large proportion of these short term convicts are men and women, driven, more or less directly by want of food to the commission of petty theft."⁸² Within this harsh economic context, tensions and conflicts emerged, and became heightened and intensified by the fragmented and rigidly hierarchical character of north Bihari society.

People in north Bihar felt loyalty first to their immediate kinship group and second to their caste group. The embryonic quality of wider loyalties reflected itself in the neglect of civic duties,⁸³ in the widespread incidence (and general acceptance) of 'corruption',⁸⁴ and in the failure of attempts to create cooperative credit institutions. Groups competed bitterly against one another, and even those which had become well established could not relax in the enjoyment of their position. The strength of kinship bonds meant that people, to the limit and beyond of their capacity to do so, provided for their poorer relatives.⁸⁵ And to enhance and uphold their social prestige, established and aspiring groups spent lavishly on social ceremony, and particularly on weddings.⁸⁶ Nor, because of considerations of social prestige, did more established groups make effective use of their labour power. Among lower caste families large numbers could be

...not a hindrance but a source of profit: the children tend the cattle and do the weeding, while their mothers work with the men."

But in contrast,

...if a Rajput, Babhan or Brahmin have a large family, there are simply more mouths to feed and fewer hands to work: their womankind do not work out of doors and they [i.e. the men of the family] will not, from caste pride, dig or till themselves.⁸⁷

Established individuals and groups, moreover, operating within the fluid

context of village and factional politics, had to extend their patronage as widely as possible in order to guarantee their political position.⁸⁸

In north Bihar, even established groups found themselves under pressure, and had to live in constant competition with their peers and in constant exploitation of their inferiors.⁸⁹

The conflicts between individuals and groups manifested themselves in both litigation and direct action. The courts handled a large number of disputes, but did not effectively redress grievances and smooth tensions. Judicial processes moved at a snail's pace, the law was complex and, too often, vague and internally inconsistent, and the lower ranks of the legal profession were riddled with corruption. The rich and the influential exerted undue influence, and the tactic of harassing an enemy by "getting up" a false case against him was much used. The enemy might, if all went well, be convicted, and at the very least, he would be put to the inconvenience of attending at court to defend himself. The plaintiff's kinsmen and servants could be called upon to perjure themselves, and if their testimony proved inadequate, there were always professional witnesses hanging about the law courts, ready, for a small fee, to present whatever evidence was required.⁹⁰ In 1908 F.E. Lyall, the Bhagalpur District Officer, commented in his official annual report that

No one who has not heard at first hand such tales as I have, can imagine the utter and cruel injustice now habitually worked in the name of justice through our Civil Courts, simply because all this tangled web of procedure has put the poorer man, the less educated, at the mercy of any unscrupulous man who chooses to ruin him by litigation. The fact that our courts are here to administer justice seems to be lost sight of by almost every officer presiding in them, and their eyes are rivetted only on questions of whether some rule of procedure has been transgressed or not.⁹¹

In north Bihar the laws were "...cobwebs for the rich and chains of steel for the poor."⁹²

In part because of the failings of the legal system, people tended to take the law into their own hands. If there was a dispute over the right to some trees, or the possession of a plot of land, or the division of a crop, or the payment of rent, why not turn out against one's opponent with a body of men bearing spears and lathis? North Bihar had a consistently high incidence of rioting over agrarian disputes.⁹³ In the late 19th and early 20th centuries most of these riots developed between rivals for influence at the local level. "...any unlawful assembly involving force," Anand A. Yang points out, "required at least two antagonists with sufficient economic and social standing to mobilize a few clubmen and other supporters."⁹⁴ In north Bihar intense and often violent conflict developed over positions of local control, and "factionalism," in the sense of the crystallization of two distinct groups competing for local power frequently manifested itself within village society.⁹⁵ Both factions would usually be led by high caste men, sometimes from the same caste group and occasionally from the same family group. Faction leaders relied primarily on their kinsfolk for support and secondly on their retainers and clients within village society. Inter-factional struggle performed a 'safety-valve' function, allowing the expression of tensions without threatening the stability of the social order: when an 'out' group triumphed over its rival it merely took over and duplicated its functions, while the defeated 'in' group assumed the former role of the 'out' group. And often, anyway, the results of conflict were not clearcut: disputes and conflicts between factions could and did simmer on for decades and generations.⁹⁶

In north Bihar circa 1900 conflict characteristically developed along vertical rather than horizontal lines. Clashes frequently erupted

between rivals for local influence, but only infrequently between distinct social strata, between the people whom Anand A. Yang describes as "subordinates and superordinates."⁹⁷ The subordinate/superordinate clashes that did occur took place between distinct components of the landed interest of north Bihar, and occurred when locally dominant peasants differed with indigo planters and with great landlords. Except for the communally based anti-cow-killing riots of 1893, which drew on Hindu religious beliefs to break down caste barriers and to coordinate the activities of large numbers of people over a wide area, most incidents involved only a few people and occurred in a geographically limited area.⁹⁸ Overall, the mass of the population took little part in these affrays. In impoverished, inequalitarian north Bihar prevailing social, cultural and economic conditions, namely poor health, inadequate communications, illiteracy, linguistic diversity and the caste system, did much to limit the expression of conflict.

The poor health of the mass of the population greatly limited the extent of popular protest. Inadequate diet, low in proteins and vitamins, caused malnutrition, endangered the intellectual development of children⁹⁹ and made people easy targets for the impact of disease, an impact greatly facilitated by the insanitary, overcrowded conditions in which most people lived.¹⁰⁰ Every year, cholera and typhoid took their toll. Recurrent intestinal infections and hookworm,¹⁰¹ which could be caught merely by walking in bare feet over open ground, were widespread, and adversely affected peoples' vitality. Malaria was widely prevalent: a survey done in the 1920s on children under 10 years of age revealed that 7 per cent of them had an enlarged spleen as a result of malarial infection.¹⁰² Good health rarely existed among the poor and downtrodden,

among those who were worst fed and worst housed and most exploited on the labour market. Those with the most reason to protest and rebel often had the least physical capacity to do so. One European indigo planter, describing the workers employed in indigo concerns, concluded that the "type of feature" was "as a rule a very forbidding and degraded one."

They are mostly of the very poorest class. Many of them are plainly half silly, or wholly idiotic; not a few are deaf and dumb; others are crippled or deformed, and numbers are leprous and scrofulous. Numbers of them are afflicted in some districts with goitre, caused probably by bad drinking water; all have a pinched, withered, wan look, that tells of hard work and insufficient fare.¹⁰³

Inadequate education, by circumscribing the horizons of the people, also limited the expression of conflict and tension. Only the landed could afford to educate their children. Illiteracy was all but universal; in 1921, less than 5 per cent of the population could read and write.¹⁰⁴ Though well versed in the long established (if not markedly efficient) methods of winning a living from the soil, villagers knew little of book learning and of life and circumstances outside their immediate locality, and thus tended to accept existing circumstances as the only ones possible. Poor communications increased the villager's parochialism. During the monsoon, movement became extremely difficult,¹⁰⁵ and even during the dry seasons the railways were overburdened and the road system inadequate. As late as 1944 a British administrator commented, "It seems incredible. ...there is not one pukka P[ublic] W[orks] D[eartment] road in the whole of the Tirhut division."¹⁰⁶ Linguistic diversity also helped limit the widespread expression of conflict. Most people spoke, as their first language, a distinctive village dialect current only in a limited geographical area.¹⁰⁷ In central and eastern north Bihar these dialects were part of the Maithili language, while in the west they formed the

Bhojpuri language.¹⁰⁸ Both languages were variants of Hindi, the lingua franca of the region. People from different areas could interact by means of Hindi, but often communication was less than perfect.

The caste system compounded the limits resulting from linguistic diversity. The basic unit of the caste system, the jati or sub-caste, comprised an endogamous group whose members usually lived within a circumscribed geographical area. Fine distinctions existed even between groups of a broadly comparable status. Thus the various distinct Brahman jatis could be ranked, by subtle criteria, into an order of prestige. With loyalty to the family and to the jati the ultimate loyalty, with people consciously limiting and directing the range of their social interaction, many obstacles stood in the way of the organization of broadly based protest movements. Of course, caste loyalties themselves operated to mobilize support. During day to day life in the village, and when tension threatened to erupt into a clash, jati-fellows rallied in mutual support. But relative to the total population jati groups were small, and not infrequently they were riven with internal conflict. Jatis, moreover, comprised "social pyramids" which were internally differentiated economically, and which thus fitted neatly into the prevailing factional, patron/client pattern of politics.¹⁰⁹ The ideology of the caste system, furthermore, only sanctioned political initiatives among high caste groups. The ideology of caste presented society as innately and unchangeably hierarchical, and insisted that the only legitimate course open to the individual was to accept without complaint his position in the social order and to fulfil the duties and obligations implied by that position. This ideology had been made concrete in an elaborate etiquette of day to day behaviour which, Barrington Moore Jr. points out, had decisive political results. "Make a man feel

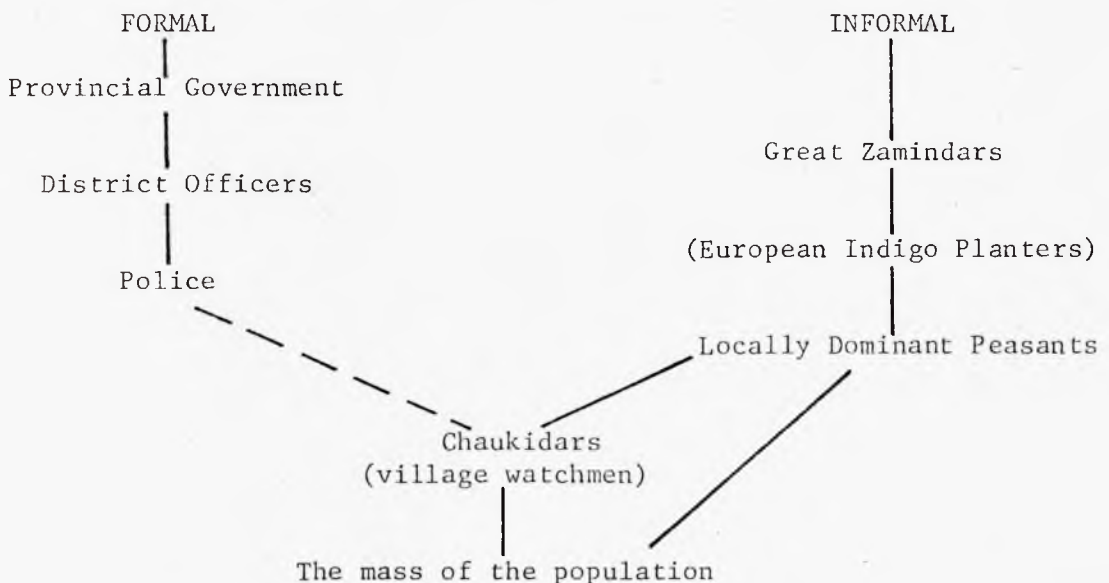
humble by a thousand daily acts and he will act in a humble way."¹¹⁰ The long established patterns of social deference which formed the backbone of the caste system had to weaken before the mass of the population could express the tensions arising from life within the social hierarchy of north Bihar.

The operation of social control: the administration, the police, and the landed interest

Over the impoverished, illiterate and diverse population of north Bihar the administration, the police force, the big zamindars, the European indigo planters, and the locally dominant small landlords and big tenants exercised social control. Formally, the police and the administration held the responsibility for the maintenance of order, but because of the impoverishment of the provincial government the apparatus of police/administrative control was skeletal. This meant that much of the work of maintaining order was performed by an informal system of control operated by the groups which comprised the landed interest of north Bihar, namely the big zamindars, the indigo planters, and the locally dominant peasants. (For a depiction of the formal and informal systems of control in north Bihar, please refer to Diagram 4).

DIAGRAM 4

Formal and informal systems of control in north Bihar circa 1900

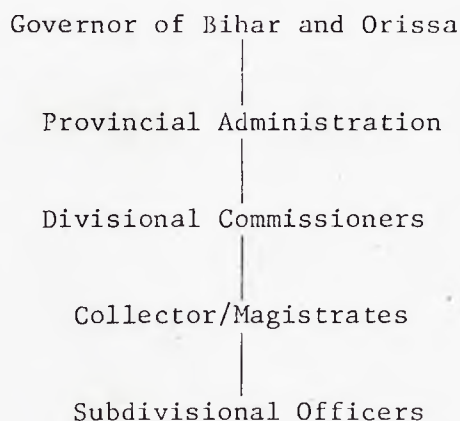


The administrative structure established by British rule over-arched north Bihar society (please refer to Diagram 5). The Collector/Magistrates or District Officers held the routine responsibility, on behalf of the government of the British province of Bihar and Orissa, for the administration of north Bihar. The Collector/Magistrate, according to one official who had served in the post, functioned as

The pivot on which the whole administration turns; all those below him are under his orders and engaged in assisting him; all those above him depend upon him for information and are engaged in giving him orders and instructions.¹¹¹

Within each district junior officials known as Subdivisional Officers assisted the Collector/Magistrate and held responsibility for one of the two or three subdivisions.

As map 2 illustrates, north Bihar incorporated seven districts.¹¹² Darbhanga lay in the centre of the region, and extended from the Nepal frontier on the north to the Ganges on the south. On the east, Darbhanga bordered on that half of the Bhagalpur district which lay north of the Ganges. To the south-east, Darbhanga adjoined the north gangetic section of Monghyr district, while on the west it bordered on the district of Muzaffarpur. On the further side of Muzaffarpur lay Champaran to the north-west and Saran to the south-west. Both Saran and Champaran adjoined, on the west, with the neighbouring United Provinces. On the opposite frontier the district of Purnea lay between north Bhagalpur and the border with Bengal.

DIAGRAM 5*Administrative structure in Bihar and Orissa*

Above the level of the district the division, supervised by a Divisional Commissioner, comprised the next unit of organization. The Tirhut division comprised the central and western districts of north Bihar — Darbhanga, Muzaffarpur, Saran and Champaran, and had its headquarters at Muzaffarpur town. The remainder of the region — consisting of north Monghyr, north Bhagalpur, and Purnea — lay within the Bhagalpur division, which also included territory in south Bihar, and which had headquarters at Bhagalpur town on the southern bank of the Ganges. The Divisional Commissioners reported to the provincial government, which was stationed at Patna during most of the year and at Ranchi, in the hill country in southern Bihar, during the hot weather. The officials in charge of Divisions, Districts and Subdivisions usually came of British stock and supervised a staff of Indian assistants and clerks.

District officials carried out the day to day work of administration. They held responsibility for the maintenance of law and order,

for the collection of the land revenue from the zamindars, for the well-being of the population and for the successful completion of a variety of miscellaneous administrative duties. They sought to minimize social conflict by mediating between conflicting groups, using their authority to bring about a mutually acceptable settlement. District and Subdivisional Officers carried a heavy burden, working in large, thickly populated areas in which communications were very poor. In the neighbouring provincial jurisdiction of the United Provinces, Elizabeth Whitcombe points out,

It was an easier matter for European officers in the later nineteenth century to leave a district for another or for a sanctioned spell abroad than it was for them to move about within one during the performance of their duties.

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Local officials in Bihar found it even harder to keep up with developments in their districts.¹¹⁴ The Bihar districts were twice as large as those in the United Provinces, and because of its financial weakness the Bihar and Orissa government spent less than other provincial governments on the maintenance of administration.¹¹⁵

Bihar and Orissa, as Table 5 illustrates, was the poor relation among the provinces of British India. Each year the province, from land revenue and other sources, raised 1,669 rupees per thousand head of population, which was less than half the average amount (4,084 rupees) raised by the other provinces.¹¹⁶ Unlike most of the other provinces, Bihar and Orissa could not profit by increasing the amount levied in land revenue.¹¹⁷ In common with the other areas subject to the Permanent Settlement, the receipts of Bihar and Orissa from land revenue had been settled in 1793 and had only been subject to marginal increases. But even in comparison with the rest of the Permanent Settlement region the province, as Table 6 illustrates, was disadvantaged.

TABLE 5

*Income and Expenditure (1927-28 Budgets) per 1,000 inhabitants
of each province of British India*

JURISDICTION	REVENUE	EXPENDITURE
	Rs	Rs
<i>Bihar and Orissa</i>	1,669	1,766
Bengal	2,295	2,372
United Provinces	2,848	2,513
Assam	3,503	3,679
Madras	3,911	3,690
Central Provinces	4,036	4,229
Punjab	5,380	5,258
Burma	7,824	9,156
Bombay	8,003	8,277

Source: Adapted from table in GGB, *Statutory Commission*,
XII, p. 388.

TABLE 6

*Land Revenue Demand in relation to area of estates in
Bihar and Orissa and in Bengal, 1927-28*

	LAND REVENUE DEMAND		AREA IN SQUARE MILES
Bengal	21,600,000	Rs	60,000
Bihar & Orissa	10,600,000	Rs	67,000

Source: GGB, *Statutory Commission*, XII, p. 387.

Bihar and Orissa had an overwhelmingly agricultural economy but because of the Permanent Settlement the government of the province could not command, by means of land revenue exaction, more than a small portion of the agrarian surplus. Because of the agrarian character of the provincial economy only limited funds could be raised from other sources,¹¹⁸ and the Government of India, itself subject to fiscal difficulties,¹¹⁹ was not willing to give Bihar and Orissa special financial aid. The provincial government had extremely limited funds, yet had to provide administrative services to a dense and rapidly increasing population. Before 1911, when Bihar and Orissa were still incorporated into the Bengal Presidency,

...the standard of expenditure in Bengal was lower than in any other province in India; and in Bengal the standard in ... Bihar and Orissa was little more than half of what it was in the rest of the province.¹²⁰

This unfortunate situation continued, as Table 7 illustrates, into the post 1911 period.

TABLE 7

Expenditure (1927-28 Budgets) on administrative services per 1,000 inhabitants of each province of British India.

JURISDICTION	EDUCATION	MEDICAL	PUBLIC HEALTH	AGRICULTURE	INDUSTRIES
	Rs	Rs	Rs	Rs	Rs
Bihar & Orissa	256	88	44	45	26
Bengal	305	128	72	52	29
United Provinces	392	77	58	68	29
Assam	382	157	160	76	25
Madras	514	179	82	82	49
Central Provinces	407	114	28	127	21
Punjab	753	229	101	264	42
Burma	1,040	370	268	158	34
Bombay	1,073	260	128	150	5

Source: Adapted from table in GGB, *Statutory Commission*, XII, p. 377.

In the administration of Bihar and Orissa, the government of the province commented in 1929, "...there has never been enough money in time past to provide anything like an adequate standard."¹²¹

Because of financial stringency, the provincial administration could hold only a light rein over the people under its jurisdiction. In 1921, the management of affairs at the local level was in the hands of less than 100 district officials, spread thinly throughout the 21 districts of the province. In north Bihar less than 40 district officials held responsibility for the government of 20,400 square miles inhabited by nearly 14,000,000 people.¹²² Perforce, the provincial administration found itself limited to the fulfilment of its minimal tasks of collecting the land revenue and other taxes, and of quelling riots and containing crime. Because of the great disparity between the amount the zamindars collected in rent and abwabs and the amount they paid to the administration in land revenue, the collection of land revenue tended to look after itself. The collection of revenue by excise, stamp and other duties also proceeded smoothly. But the frequency of riots arising out of agrarian disputes and the high incidence of crime, much of it poverty induced, sometimes posed more serious problems. For the handling of these problems the administration depended on the police force. In north Bihar the core of the police force consisted of about 3,000 trained career policemen. An auxiliary body of 26,000 chaukidars, or village watchmen, acted in support of the trained force.¹²³ The administration recruited an average of one chaukidar for each 500 members of the population, and stationed, in proportion to the number of its inhabitants, one or more chaukidars in each village.¹²⁴ The chaukidars operated in the village from which they came. They usually belonged to the Dusadh caste, and often inherited their post from their father or uncle. Their duties included guarding villagers' crops, houses,

and possessions against theft, reporting deaths, births, crimes, and unusual events to the local police station, and assisting the police in the investigation of crime and the apprehension of criminals. In payment they received a miserly wage of three to five rupees a month, raised by a levy on the inhabitants of the village. An officially appointed committee drawn from among locally influential zamindars, European indigo planters, and big tenants, known as a *chaukidari panchayat* or union, held the responsibility for levying the *chaukidari* fee from the villagers and for recruiting, directing, and paying the *chaukidars*. Because of their low pay *chaukidars* tended to be inefficient and corrupt.¹²⁵ Not infrequently, they operated in collusion with local criminals. Their local residence, and their employment by a committee made up of local notables, meant that often they had to perform their duties in a manner consistent with the wishes of these notables. The *chaukidars*, Anand A. Yang comments, "... were never successfully incorporated into the official system". Instead, they operated as the "functionaries of the landholders' systems of control."¹²⁶ The best that the author of the official 1921 Bihar and Orissa yearbook could find to say of them was that "... a large minority of *chaukidars* do their work with remarkable efficiency," and that "... no other class could perform these duties as cheaply."¹²⁷

The basic unit of police operations was the police station or *thana*. These two terms were used interchangeably, and denoted both the actual police station/*thana* building and the territory over which it had jurisdiction. Each district had some 10 to 20 police stations, which meant that each station held jurisdiction over areas of tens of square miles populated by thousands of people. In Darbhanga in 1901, for example, there were 12 police stations and 10 police outposts, manned by a total of 492 policemen. This police force held responsibility for law and order in an area of 3,348 square miles inhabited by 2,912,611 people. In Darbhanga,

there was one policeman for every 6.7 square miles of area and for every 5,919 members of the population.¹²⁸ The staff of each thana consisted of a dozen or two constables under the direction of a 'Writer Head Constable', so called because of his literacy, and under the overall control of a Sub-Inspector. The constables were unarmed except for lathis, while the Sub-Inspector carried a revolver. Often, a couple of old shotguns lay about the thana, for use against bandits and rioters. The thana staff, with the assistance of the local chaukidars, handled the routine police business of the locality. When a situation threatened to get out of control the local police could call for reinforcements from the Armed Reserve, a unit armed with muskets and made up of men seconded from the main force for a two-year period of special training. In 1921 this unit consisted of 1,286 officers and men, of whom 400 were stationed in north Bihar.¹²⁹ Help could also be requested from the Bihar and Orissa Military Police, an elite police unit of well-armed, highly-trained men divided into four companies, two of which were mounted. One company, the ~~Gurkha~~ Military Police Company, consisted of 111 officers and men stationed at Muzaffarpur town; the other three companies were stationed south of the Ganges, delegated to protect the provincial capital, Patna, and the valuable south Bihar coal fields in the event of serious trouble.¹³⁰ These units recruited from among ex-army men, and were under the command of the provincial Inspector General of Police. The military provided the last resort. From 1922 a company of British infantry was based at Muzaffarpur town; before then the nearest military help was south of the Ganges at Dinapur town, four miles west of Patna, the home base of a British infantry battalion.¹³¹

In north Bihar, a policeman's lot was not a happy one. It involved night duty, travel over difficult country, and physical danger.

Because of its financial difficulties the provincial government kept the wages of the police to a minimum. Constables, who usually came from low status groups, earned a wage, in 1921, of 15 rupees per month. Unskilled labourers earned about the same; and rank and file railway and postal employees earned more.¹³² Most constables compensated themselves for their poor pay and hard working conditions by extorting money and by accepting bribes. Indeed the opportunity to profit by corrupt practices helped greatly to attract recruits to the police force.¹³³ The constable stationed in the towns, the Bihar and Orissa Chief Secretary commented in 1929, had more possibilities of corruption open to him than a rural constable. A rural constable

"may be a 'free feeder', but the town constable, with the whole range of opportunities which section 34 of the Police Act gives him, will have no enthusiasm for an increase of pay of one or two rupees a month. A town constable takes his toll from the toddy shop keeper, the bullock cart driver, the Marwari, the shopkeeper and the prostitute. Unlike a mufassal constable a town constable's fees are probably as regular as his pay."¹³⁴

Nor was corruption limited to the lower ranks of the police force. Writer Head Constables earned twice the amount of constables but had a better education, came from a higher social stratum, and were accustomed to a higher standard of living. A Writer Head Constable could not live on his pay and even if he wished "to run straight" he found himself "driven to dishonesty."¹³⁵ The Writer Head Constable, according to Inspector General R.J. Hirst, was "the cancer of the force, spreading his evil influence above and below him."¹³⁶ The rank above the Writer Head Constable was that of the Sub-Inspector. Hirst, in his special secret report of 1929, commented that "some of our Sub-Inspectors enter the service with the desire to earn an honest living and some of that number contrive to keep their honest purpose."¹³⁷ During the 1920s, Sub-Inspectors began on a salary of 80 rupees a month which rose,

over a period of 25 years, to a maximum of 135 rupees. This salary compared unfavourably with those given in Bengal and the Punjab, but should have allowed its recipient to live in reasonable comfort without resorting to corruption. But the social pressures on a Sub-Inspector to support distant relatives and to spend large sums on religious and social ceremonies usually obliged him to live beyond his income.¹³⁸ Only among the highly paid higher ranks, the Inspectors and the District Super-intendents of Police, who included a large proportion of Britons,¹³⁹ was corruption infrequent, though here it also existed. When Police Superintendent Frank Lockwood Bussell was accused, in 1919 and 1920, on multiple charges of taking bribes, the administration definitely established after investigation that four Inspectors, as well as four Sub-Inspectors and three Head Constables had participated in the network of corruption that Bussell had set up in Darbhanga and adjoining districts. The official investigation also revealed the collusion of a large number of other policeman.¹⁴⁰ The Bussell case created a dilemma for the administration. Some of the suspected policemen refused to give any evidence to the investigation committee, while others came forward with full details of what had occurred, thus providing strong evidence against themselves. Would it be fair to punish those who had given information, and who "had the grace to admit their misconduct", while those suspects who had refused to cooperate escaped punishment because there was insufficient concrete evidence against them? Eventually, in a decision which reveals official acceptance that a certain level of corruption was unavoidable, the administration only dismissed Bussell and his closest accomplice, and merely subjected the other culprits to departmental disciplinary action.¹⁴¹

The police supplemented dishonesty with brutality. Adept at extracting confessions from people they had arrested, they reacted swiftly

and violently to any threat to their authority.¹⁴² This aspect of the popular image of the police is illustrated by an item printed in the *Indian Nation* on 30 September 1938, relating that in Siwan, the chief town of Saran, a cow owned by a policeman had run amok, injuring seven people, one seriously and six slightly. This proved, commented the reporter, that "a policeman's cow may by long association develop a policeman's traits ... like the class which owned the animal it was no respecter of persons."

Policemen found that their reputation for dishonesty and brutality handicapped them in their task of maintaining law and order. People feared and distrusted them, and did not assist them in the execution of their duties.¹⁴³ Their work also suffered because of their sparse numbers. As table 8 illustrates, the province of Bihar and Orissa spent the least on police per head of population and had the lowest proportion of police to population of any of the provinces of British India. And only the jurisdiction of the Central Provinces, with its low population and hilly terrain, had a lower proportion of police to total area.¹⁴⁴

TABLE 8

Ratio of people to police and cost of police in provinces of British India, 1929

JURISDICTION	PEOPLE TO EACH POLICEMAN	COST PER 1,000 OF POPULATION
		Rs
<i>Bihar and Orissa</i>	2,372	236
Bengal	1,853	314
Assam	1,772	303
United Provinces	1,343	328
Madras	1,526	370
Central Provinces	1,259	424
Punjab	1,053	481
Bombay	776	700
Burma	954	893

Source: Adapted from table in GGB, *Statutory Commission*, XII, p. 389.

Policemen were part of a garrison dotted across the countryside, rather than active participants in the day to day life of the people. Policemen depended on the information supplied by the chaukidars, and frequently only arrived on the scene well after serious trouble had erupted. Sometimes, the police did not even get wind of serious disturbances. On 16 June 1923 a group of ryots clashed with servants of the Darbhanga Raj near the Bahora indigo concern in Purnea. The ryots, incensed by their grievances over the cultivation of indigo, assaulted several men, injuring one of them very seriously. But the local Darbhanga Raj manager did not report the incident to the police because, he explained to his superiors, " ... the Sub-Inspector of Pirpainti is exorbitant in his demands."¹⁴⁵

In north Bihar the British maintained only a skeletal apparatus of police/administrative control. District officials and regular policemen, the main representatives of the State in north Bihar, were so thin on the ground that peasants, at least until their perspectives changed in response to the rise of the nationalist movement from circa 1920 on, tended to perceive "... the State as a distant entity to which they attached both their hopes and fears."¹⁴⁶ The British administration of north Bihar operated, to use Anand A. Yang's perceptive phrase, as a "Limited Raj"¹⁴⁷ which left much of the routine work of social control in the hands of the locally influential private citizens who comprised the landed interest.

Within the landed interest the great landowners exerted much influence. The Maharaja of Darbhanga owned properties scattered across Muzaffarpur, Darbhanga, north Bhagalpur and Purnea; the Maharaja of Hatwa owned most of the northern half of Saran; and between them the Maharani of Bettiah, the Maharaja of Ramnagar and the zamindar of Madhuban

owned most of Champaran district.¹⁴⁸ These great landholders, in return for loyalty to the British administration and donations to public charities, received knighthoods and other honours, seats on district boards and in the Legislative Council, the right to surround themselves with pomp and ceremony, and privileged access to the highest circles of officialdom. To run their estates they generally employed hundreds of people ranging from chief managers and head office clerks and accountants through assistant managers and their establishments to peons and lathials.¹⁴⁹ Lathials were strong-arm men adept in the use of the lathi, the north Indian equivalent of the English quarter-staff, while peons operated, in the words of an indigo planter, as the landlord's "... unofficial police."¹⁵⁰ At the village level, the estate bureaucracy meshed in with the locally dominant peasants who occupied the posts of jeth ryot and patwari. The jeth ryot held responsibility for collecting the rents due from the ryots, while the patwari acted as the 'village accountant' in charge of the records of rent payment and land holding.

Rather than having all their property concentrated into one or two large blocks, the great zamindars generally held a number of distinct holdings dispersed over a wide area. The mauza or revenue village formed the basic unit of ownership. (The mauza, which was often loosely referred to as a "village", consisted of an area of land which might or might not be co-incident with a residential village and its surrounding fields). Often, great zamindars shared proprietary rights in a mauza with one or more small zamindars. The great zamindars, P.J. Musgrave has argued, had their power limited, particularly vis-a-vis locally dominant peasants, because their lands were not concentrated within a limited geographical area and because they often shared ownership of a mauza with

other landlords.¹⁵¹ But despite these limitations on their power the great landlords possessed pervasive influence throughout the broad areas within which their properties lay.¹⁵² Because they lived in grand style, in a luxury and splendour that created wonder among poor villages, and because of their high ritual status within the hierarchy of Hinduism, the great landlords of north Bihar helped maintain the raja/praja (king/subject) mentality of the mass of the population. Villagers looked to a remote, distant Maharaja, a figure hedged with divinity, with loyalty and deference, and hoped for his help in times of need. This attitude persisted because usually, after flood or famine, the great zamindar dispensed relief; and because occasionally, he punished the misdeeds of his servants and retainers.¹⁵³

More concretely, locally dominant small landlords and substantial tenants looked to the great zamindar's estate as a valuable economic and political resource. The great zamindar dispensed patronage and had the ear of high level officials. In his properties he employed large numbers of people, most of whom came from the ranks of the locally dominant or their clients. In the property of both great and small zamindars the collection of rent was supplemented with the levying of abwabs from the tenantry. But whereas small zamindars benefited from both sources of income, great zamindars found that while their rental income passed on up to them through their managing bureaucracy, most of the money earned from abwabs lined the pockets of estate managers, jeth ryots, patwaris, retainers and servants. The great zamindar, moreover, provided funds for the institution of law suits, supported village schools, and had retainers and lathials at hand who could be used by a small landlord or big tenant to gain leverage in local factional struggles.¹⁵⁴

Admittedly, conflicts occasionally erupted between the locally dominant and the estate bureaucracies. But such conflicts characteristically resulted from attempts by the locally dominant to advance particular interests and gain particular concessions, and usually consisted merely of a show of force and dissidence in order to gain bargaining leverage. Opposition of this kind could generally either be intimidated or bought off, and these conflicts were short lived and localized, and did not challenge decisively the continuing influence of the great zamindars.

In the middle range between the great zamindars and the locally dominant peasants came the European planters and entrepreneurs. These men had originally been attracted to north Bihar by the profits to be made from indigo planting.¹⁵⁵ Later when in the early decades of the 20th century indigo manufacturing ceased to be profitable, they and their descendants turned their attention to sugar manufacture and to the cultivation of cash crops. They acquired control over land by various means. In some instances they purchased proprietary rights from zamindars, while in others they rented out lands and established ryoti rights. Generally, however, they became thikadars or lessees by leasing out property rights from zamindars who wished to be freed the tedious, exacting business of rent collection. The European planting and business community in north Bihar numbered only a few hundreds, but because of its unquestioning loyalty and its dispersal across the region it served to bolster Imperial rule and acted as a useful intelligence network for the provincial administration.

In north Bihar big landlords and European planters exercised influence in interaction with locally dominant small landlords and big tenants. In areas where big landlords owned most of the land, big tenants

tended to dominate local society. One locally dominant tenant in the early years of this century was Pandit Palat Mishra, a Maithil Brahman and Darbhanga Raj jeth ryot who farmed, jointly with his younger brother, about 30 bighas of first class land in Satlakha village in the Madhubani thana in the north of Darbhanga.¹⁵⁷ Babu Lal Chand of Dharampur in Purnea was another substantial tenant. Babu Lal Chand rented a large area of land from the Darbhanga Raj. In March 1920 the Dharampur circle manager described him as

... a reasonable man but never a friend of the [Darbhanga] Raj. He avoids open fight but covertly instigates tenants to challenge the Raj. His father Raja Chand (deceased) moved the whole Pergunnah [i.e. locality] against the Raj in the time of [the previous manager] Mr Mayer. He has great influence and cultivates Raj parta land [i.e. land lying fallow] without settlement [i.e. without paying rent].¹⁵⁶

In areas where small landlords held the land, they held sway over local society. Circa 1900, in the village of Radhanagar, a Brahman family owned nine-tenths of the land and also owned land outside the jurisdiction of the village. This Brahman family exercised dominance as the only employer of the labour and services of the local non-Brahmans.¹⁵⁸ Not infrequently locally dominant peasants had dual status. Circa 1910 Ram Sakhi Tewari, a Brahman of Dumari village in Darbhanga, was "both a ryot and a zamindar." He held about 50 acres in the Dumari village and a larger area scattered through two neighbouring villages. He held some of this land as a zamindar, and rented the rest from the Darbhanga Raj.¹⁵⁹

A man who acted as a 'boss' over a village or group of villages might be a zamindar, or a well-established tenant, or perhaps both of these things. To put it more simply: he would be someone who held control over a large portion of the village's lands. Almost always he would come from one of the higher castes. Often, like the Rajput ryot Khendar Prasad Rai,

who held 100 acres of land in Champaran and had a lucrative money-lending business, he would combine money lending with landholding.¹⁶⁰ Through money-lending, locally dominant peasants could profit politically as well as economically. Circa 1900, when the Brahman extended family that dominated Radhanager village split up into two rival family groups, both the new groups

... began to consolidate their position in the village. As they were the richest families in the village, they had certain advantages in their favour ... they could lend money to the needy villagers and thus claim their support in return ... there began a period ... in which both the families were actively competing at money-lending business. Both the families could also give out lands to their friends, supporters and retainers on sharecropping basis and, consequently, make them politically subservient to their aspirations.¹⁶¹

Locally dominant peasants kept retainers of lathials to help protect their property and prestige; in times of trouble they could also call upon their kinsmen, their clients and their low caste bonded servants. Locally dominant peasants exacted feudal dues from those subordinate to them: begari or forced labour,¹⁶² and concessional rates for food and handicraft products.¹⁶³ They arbitrated in local and petty disputes, and spoke for the local society in its interactions with the outside world. They exerted influence over the village chaukidars, and in some instances acted as the patrons of dacoit gangs which operated outside their immediate locality. They had an ambivalent relationship with the regular police: they resented their intermittent interventions into the world of the village but also colluded with them. Locally dominant peasants contributed generously to the upkeep of the village temples, and also donated to other charities. Not infrequently they might ameliorate the rigours of their control by taking a paternal interest in the welfare of their subordinates.¹⁶⁴ The locally dominant occupied a pivotal role¹⁶⁵ because of their control over

land, the major source of subsistence; because through money lending they tided poor peasants over during the lean periods of the agrarian cycle, because they provided payment in kind, and thus the right to live for their servants and bonded labourers; and because, from their position of local power, they provided the only channel of communication between local society and those who held power and dispensed resources beyond the narrow confines of the world of the village. Locally dominant peasants both conflicted and collaborated with the other groups, namely the big zamindars and the European indigo planters, who made up the landed interest of north Bihar. Those who made up the landed interest had a common interest in retaining dominance and extracting wealth from the mass of the population, but they found much to quarrel about over the distribution of wealth and the exercise of power. Locally dominant peasants maintained control at the local level in collaboration with big zamindars and European planters, but they also competed with these two groups and amongst themselves.

"Indeed," as Anand A. Yang points out, "at the fundamental level of agrarian society, also the immediate area of action for any raiyat, the village-level controller was the key to both control and conflict."¹⁶⁶

Conclusion

In the late 19th and early 20th century north Bihar was part of the poorest province in British India. The poverty of the province meant that the local administration had only limited funds at its command with which to maintain control and to provide administrative services. Financial difficulties were further exacerbated by the administration's continuing support of the politically expedient but economically disastrous system of zamindari landholding. Because of this financial weakness the formal apparatus of police and administrative control was weak. To maintain control over north Bihar society the provincial administration benefited from the limitations that prevailing social, economic and cultural conditions imposed on the organization and expression of protest and relied on the informal control exercised by the great landlords, the European indigo planters, and the locally dominant peasants. Until the second decade of the 20th century, despite the existence of great poverty and oppression, tension and conflict did not erupt other than in faction fights for local dominance and in clashes between the different components of the landed interest. Between 1917 and 1923, however, intense turbulence erupted, extending over broad areas and involving large sections of north Bihari society. In this turbulence locally dominant peasants assumed a leading role. They coordinated their activities with members of a newly emergent regional intelligentsia, and looked for support to their clients and retainers within the middle levels of village society. Once protest got under way, however, opportunities arose for people lower down in the social scale to participate. The following chapter examines this intense and extensive popular turbulence, analyses its causes and significance, and assesses its impact on the north Bihar apparatus of police and administrative control.

- 1 The following descriptive account draws on personal observation and on J. Byrne, *Bengal District Gazetteers: Bhagalpur* (Calcutta 1911); Sir John Houlton, *Bihar: The Heart of India* (London, Calcutta 1953); Maori (pseudonym for James Inglis), *Sport and Work on the Nepaul Frontier* (London 1878); L.S.S. O'Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteers for Champaran* (Calcutta 1907), *Saran* (Calcutta 1908), *Muzaffarpur* (Calcutta 1907), *Darbhanga* (Calcutta 1907), *Monghyr* (Calcutta 1909), and *Purnea* (Calcutta 1911); O.K.H. Spate, A.T.A. Learmonth and B.H. Farmer, *India, Pakistan and Ceylon: The Regions* (London, 3rd ed. 1967); and Minden Wilson, *History of Behar Indigo Factories etc.* (Calcutta, 1885 and 1908).
- 2 Anand A. Yang, "The Optimizing Peasant : a study of Internal Migration as an Option in a north-east Indian district", paper presented at a workshop on the Effects of Risk and Uncertainty on Economic and Social Processes in South Asia, University of Pennsylvania 10-12 November 1977, pp. 22, 24.
- 3 For a lucid discussion of soil types and associated cropping patterns in north Bihar, with particular reference to the central and western parts of the region, see C.M. Fisher, "Indigo Plantations and agrarian society in North Bihar in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries", (Cambridge University D. Phil. thesis 1976) pp. 8-13. For further details about the eastern part of north Bihar see Byrne, *Bhagalpur* and O'Malley, *Purnea*.
- 4 Occasionally, however, the rains fail, and not infrequently their distribution and timing have an adverse effect on crop yields. In 1897, 1911 and 1967 drought resulted in serious famines. P.C. Roy Chaudhury, *Bihar District Gazetteer for Muzaffarpur* (Patna, 1958) p. 178,

Purnea (Patna 1963) p. 222, and *Darbhanga* (Patna 1964) p. 215;

Wendy and Allen Scarfe, *Tiger on a Rein* (London 1969).

- 5 Maori, *Nepaul Frontier*, pp. 48-9. Spate et al. comment that " ... northern Bihar has India's biggest output of freshwater fish, half the catch being sent to Calcutta ...", *India*, p. 565.

- 6 My account of the north Bihar agrarian cycle has left out much detail. For information on particular parts of the region see the district gazetteers listed in note 1. For a discussion of the agrarian cycle in one north Bihar district in relation to patterns of migration and labour supply see Yang "Internal Migration", pp. 22-4.

- 7 Among the people who were not entirely dependent on agriculture for their livelihood there were many who combined some other activity with cultivation. Most of those who were not directly involved in agriculture were engaged in herding or else were involved in the processing of agricultural products. Government of Great Britain [hereafter GGB] *Indian Statutory Commission* (12 volumes London 1930) XII pp. 2-3; Byrne, *Bhagalpur*, pp. 45, 123; O'Malley, *Champaran*, pp. 39, 101; Saran, pp. 34, 93; *Muzaffarpur*, pp. 28-9; *Monghyr*, pp. 52, 132; *Purnea*, pp. 55, 117.

- 8 Before 1921, Walter Hauser points out, population "... pressure is not so apparent from decennial census figures which do not record the ravages of inter-censal famine and epidemic ..." Famine in 1897-98 and scarcity and epidemic in 1918-19 took the lives of millions. See Walter Hauser, "The Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha, 1929-1942. A Study of an Indian Peasant Movement", (University of Chicago Ph.D. thesis, 1961), p.7, note 2. See also Ira Klein, "Population and Agriculture

in Northern India, 1872-1921", *Modern Asian Studies*, 8, 2, 1974, pp. 191-216.

- 9 O'Malley, *Muzaffarpur*, p. 27.
- 10 The following discussion employs, with a number of qualifications, the tenurial categories established by British legislation. These categories must be used with caution. Within each category, as will be detailed in the text, there was great differentiation. It was often the case, moreover, that villagers fitted into more than one tenurial category. John Broomfield comments that in Bengal

Ambitious cultivators with good land invariably used their surpluses to make loans to their neighbours, and, if successful in accumulating more capital, they would most commonly invest in rent-producing or share-cropped lands. In favourable circumstances they would rapidly combine all three roles of peasant, moneylender and landlord, and sustain those roles indefinitely. Moreover, the level of the tenure which they purchased depended less on its rank in the legal hierarchy, than upon the access which it gave to good land and control of people on the land. In one instance it might be best to buy a raiyati tenure, in another a zamindari. It all depended on the quality of the land and the human entanglements involved. This is why the legal categories can be so misleading, and why it is equally misleading to attempt to draw a line across the rural social order, and declare that those above it ... were powerful, and those below ... powerless. Big men and little there were; fat cats and thin - but they were not ranked and neatly ordered.

For the historian of Bengal, Broomfield argues, the tenurial categories are "... a snare and a delusion. The social realities of the ... countryside are obscured rather than illuminated by these legal classifications". Bengal society was too complex to be described in terms of British tenurial categories. In Bengal, there was extensive absentee landlordism and sub-infeudation, commercial activity offered an important supplementary and alternative resource to land holding, and in the middle ranks of the social hierarchy power relations were fluid and

ill-defined. In north Bihar, in contrast, the tenurial categories can be used to describe the social structure. In north Bihar there was little absentee landlordism and sub-infeudation, land was the only effective social and political resource, control over land was highly concentrated and those who controlled land held a commanding political and social position. North Bihar society was thus less complex and more rigid than Bengal society, and hence can be described, though of course with a number of qualifications, in terms of the tenurial categories established by the British. See J.H. Broomfield, "Twentieth-Century Bengal: Peasant Mobilization in an Asian Region", forthcoming, pp. 1-27, pp. 6, 9-10. The distinction made here between north Bihar and Bengal has been inspired by the contrasts suggested in David Washbrook, "Country Politics: Madras 1880 to 1930", in John Gallagher, Gordon Johnson and Anil Seal (eds.), *Locality, Province and Nation: Essays on Indian Politics, 1870-1940* (London 1973), pp. 155-211, pp. 209-11.

- 11 This estimate is based on the available information. British records give only an imperfect guide to the proportion of the population of north Bihar which can be grouped under the heading of zamindar. Proprietary divisions were not always recorded, multiple status (i.e. the holding of both zamindari and other tenurial rights) was common, and many people held their land benami. (Benami means, literally, "without name", and refers to the practice whereby an individual, in order to place himself in an advantageous position in legal disputes, would record his land in the name of a relative, client, or fictitious person). The 1901 census findings, as recorded in the district gazetteers, indicate that zamindars by occupation made up less than 2 per cent of the regional population. Drawing on the 1931 Census,

Walter Hauser comments that 4 per cent of the population could be described as "non cultivating proprietors", but also highlights the inadequacies of the census figures. A 1940s estimate contained in the Jay Prakash Narayan Papers suggests that zamindars and their families contained 10 per cent of the regional population. Byrne, *Bhagalpur*, p. 122; O'Malley, *Champaran*, p. 101, *Saran*, p. 93, *Muzaffarpur*, p. 89, *Darbhangha*, p. 110, *Monghyr*, p. 132, *Purnea*, p. 117; Hauser, "Bihar Kisan Sabha", p. 20; "The Land System of Bihar", p. 12, Land Reform Files, f.227, 1947, Jay Prakash Narayan Papers [hereafter JPNP] Nehru Memorial Museum Library [hereafter NML].

- 12 The history of the Darbhanga Raj and its rulers is given in Qeyamuddin Ahmed, "Origin and growth of the Darbhanga Raj (1574-1666), based on some contemporary and unpublished documents", *Indian Historical Records Commission Proceedings*, XXXVI, Part II, 1961, pp. 89-98; Clive Dewey, "The History of Mithila and the Records of the Darbhanga Raj", *Modern Asian Studies* 10, 1976, pp. 453-60; Jata Shankar Jha, *A History of Darbhanga Raj*, (Patna, 1968) and *Biography of an Indian Patriot, Maharaja Lakmishwar Singh of Darbhanga* (Patna, 1972); O'Malley, *Darbhangha*, pp. 143-6; Ishvari Prasad Singh, *The Youngest Legislator of India: The Biography of the Hon'ble Maharajadhiraja Sir Kameshwar Singh, Bahadur, K.C.I.E. of Darbhanga* (Patna, 1936); and Shyam Narayan Singh, *History of Tirhut from the earliest times to the end of the nineteenth century* (Calcutta, 1922). See also the Maharajadhiraj Dr Kameshwara Singh Memorial Volume, *Journal of the Bihar Research Society*, XLVIII, 1962. For information about the Maithil Brahman Community, see Paul R. Brass, *Language Religion and Politics in North India* (London, 1974) and Hetukar Jha, "Nation Building in a north Indian region. The Case of Mithila", unpublished manuscript. (I am grateful to Hetukar Jha

of the Sociology Department, Patna University for allowing me to use this manuscript.)

- 13 O'Malley, *Darbhanga*, p. 145; "Extracts from the Annual Report of the Officiating Manager", Government of Bengal [hereafter GBEN], Land Revenue Proceedings [hereafter LR], 48-49, May 1878, p. 7, Bihar State Archives [hereafter BSA]; "Report on the Administration of the Durbhanga Raj, 1914/1915", Collection [hereafter C] XXXIV, General Department [hereafter G] 1915-16, Raj Darbhanga Archives [hereafter RDA]; *Raj Darbhanga Directory, 1941* (Darbhanga, 1941) RDA.
- 14 Subsequently, in the 1950s, Rameshwar Singh's successor Kameshwar Singh acquired three Caravelle aircraft. For information about the Darbhanga Maharajas' property and about their means of travel I am grateful to Buddhikar Jha, a senior officer in the Raj administration.
- 15 For details on the family's patronage of religion see Dewey, "History of Mithila"; Jata Shankar Jha, *Darbhanga Raj and Beginnings of Modern Education in Mithila, Selections from Educational Records of the Darbhanga Raj, 1860-1930*, (Patna, 1972). For details on Rameshwar Singh's activities as a leader of orthodox Hinduism, see Richard Gordon, "The Hindu Mahasabha and the Indian National Congress, 1915 to 1926", *Modern Asian Studies*, 9, 2, 1975, pp. 155, 160, 181.
- 16 Rameshwar Singh, *Collected Speeches* (Calcutta, 1931); Sachchidananda Sinha, *Some Eminent Behar Contemporaries* (Patna, 1944), pp. 50-55.
- 17 B.H. Baden-Powell, *The Land-Systems of British India* (3 volumes London 1892) I, pp. 389-442; Ranajit Guha, *A Rule of Property for Bengal. An Essay on the Idea of Permanent Settlement* (Paris 1963); Sir William Wilson Hunter, *Bengal MS. Records* (2 volumes London 1894) I, pp. 74-84.

- 18 Baden-Powell, *Land-Systems*, I, p. 440; Hunter, *Records*, I, pp. 89-104.
One of the "new men" who acquired extensive zamindari property in Bengal was Jay Krishna Mukherjee. Nilmani Mukherjee, *A Bengal Zamindar, Jay Krishna Mukherjee of Uttarpara And His Times, 1808-1888* (Calcutta, 1975). For a perceptive account of the effects, which varied greatly depending on particular local circumstances, of the imposition of the Permanent Settlement in the Benares area in the United Provinces, see Bernard S. Cohn, "Structual Change in Indian Rural Society 1596-1885", in Robert Eric Frykenberg, (ed.), *Land Control and Social Structure in Indian History* (London, 1969), pp. 53-121.
- 19 O'Malley, *Champaran* p. 125, *Muzaffarpur* p. 114, *Purnea* pp. 116-17; J.H. Kerr, *Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations in the Darbhanga District 1896 to 1903* (Patna, 1926).
- 20 Guha, *Rule of Property*, pp. 167-86; Hunter, *Bengal Records*, pp. 74-84.
- 21 Walter C. Neale, "Land Is to Rule", in Frykenberg, *Land Control*, pp. 3-15, pp. 9-15.
- 22 Guha, *Rule of Property*, pp. 185-6.
- 23 Maori, *Nepaul Frontier*, p. 217.
- 24 Similarly, in north Monghyr circa 1900, the zamindars retained 85 per cent of their rental income. A. Earle, Resolution 147T-R, 20 June 1904, appended to Kerr, *Darbhanga Settlement Report*; O'Malley, *Monghyr*, p. 159; Baden-Powell, *Land-Systems* I, pp. 438-40.
- 25 Subdivisional Officer W.H. Lewis, report dated 1 June 1917, quoted in K.K. Datta, *History of the Freedom Movement in Bihar* (3 volumes, Patna 1957), I, p. 227.
- 26 Annual Administration Report [hereafter AAR] for Alapur, 1326 Fasli

- [hereafter F], 1918-19, C XXXIV, G 1919-20, RDA. (Please note: The Darbhanga Raj used both the western calendar and the indigenous Fasli calendar. The Fasli year begins in late September/early October of the western calendar year. Where it is necessary to quote a Fasli year I have given the equivalent western calendar period beside it).
- 27 Naredigar AAR, 1318 F, 1910-11 and statement of 17 July 1942, C Naredigar, G 1941-42, RDA.
- 28 Government of Bihar and Orissa [hereafter GBO], *Report of the Committee on the Agrarian Conditions in Champaran*, (2 volumes, Patna 1917), II, pp. 9-12; J.A. Sweeney, *Final Report on Survey and Settlement (Revision) Operations in the District of Champaran 1913-1919* (Patna, 1922). For vigorous criticism of the behaviour of north Bihar zamindars in the late 19th century see Byrne, *Bhagalpur*, pp. 115-19; J. Byrne, *Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations in the District of Purnea* (Calcutta, 1901), pp. 43-4; A. Earle, Resolution 147T-R, 20 June 1904 appended to Kerr, *Darbhanga Settlement Report*; C.J. O'Donnell, *The Ruin of an Indian Province: An Indian Famine Explained* (London, 1880); C.J. Stevenson-Moore, *Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations in the Muzaffarpur District, 1892-1899* (Calcutta, 1901), pp. 197-8, 209-10.
- 29 Lila Rai to the Editor, *Searchlight*, 24 Sep. 1922; Ramashray Roy, "Conflict and Co-operation in a north Bihar village", *Journal of the Bihar Research Society*, XLIX, 1963, pp. 297-315, p. 303.
- 30 Fisher, "Indigo Plantations", pp. 157, 161; Interview, Ramnandan Misra, Laheriasera town, 1 Nov. 1976. For details of an attack by a crowd of peasants on a grain hoarder see *Searchlight*, 27 Aug. 1922.

- 31 See his *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy. Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* (London, 1967), p. 360.
See also Daniel and Alice Thorner, *Land and Labour in India* (London, 1962) p. 109.
- 32 "Partition, Agitation and Congress: Bengal 1904 to 1908", in Gallagher et al., *Locality, Province and Nation*, pp. 213-68, p. 217.
- 33 At the turn of the century the three largest zamindars in north Bihar were the Maharaja of Hathwa, the Maharani of Bettiah, and the Maharaja of Darbhanga. They held respectively, 561, 1,824 and 2,400 square miles of property and paid 250,000, 500,000 and 725,000 rupees in land revenue. O'Malley, *Saran* p. 153, *Champaran* pp. 151-2, *Darbhangha* p. 145.
By 1907, in the north Bihar districts of Saran, Champaran, Muzaffarpur, Darbhanga and Purnea, there were only 74 estates which paid more than 5,000 rupees in land revenue. Only six of these estates paid more than 100,000 rupees; 20 paid between 15,000 and 100,000 rupees, and 48 paid between 5,000 and 15,000 rupees. In the Bengal Presidency as a whole by 1907 only 590 estates paid more than 5,000 rupees in land revenue. The ownership of these 590 estates was shared between 11,378 people, of whom only 504 paid, as individuals, more than 5,000 rupees per year.
GBEN, LR, 19 S/4, B 107-10, July 1907, West Bengal Archives (hereafter WBA).
- 34 "Bihar Land System", p. 8, Land Reform Files, f 227, 1947, JPNP, NML.
- 35 O'Malley, *Darbhangha*, p. 119-20.
- 36 *Ibid.*
- 37 O'Malley, *Saran*, p. 120.

- 38 James R. Hagen and Anand A. Yang, "Local Sources for the Study of Rural India: The 'Village Notes' of Bihar", *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, XIII, Number 1, 1976, pp. 75-84, p. 78.
- 39 O'Malley, *Saran*, p. 120.
- 40 O'Malley, *Muzaffarpur*, p. 115-16, 118.
- 41 O'Malley, *Monghyr*, p. 159.
- 42 *Ibid.*
- 43 O'Malley, *Darbhanga*, p. 120; Interview, Ramnandan Misra, Laheriasera town, 1 Nov. 1976. See also Fisher, "Indigo Plantations", pp. 175-80.
- 44 Kerr, *Darbhanga Settlement Report*, p. 101; See also O'Malley, *Darbhanga*, p. 120.
- 45 For a lucid discussion of patterns of ownership see Fisher, "Indigo Plantations", pp. 17-24.
- 46 Interview, Jageshwar Mishra, Darbhanga town, 12 October 1976. In his study of Radhanager village, Ramashray Roy dates the beginning of conflict between two lineages to the time, circa 1900, when "... the members of the then undivided family decided to divide their ancestral estate." It seems more likely, however, that the decision to divide the estate was the result rather than the cause of intra-familial strife. See Roy, "North Bihar village", p. 302.
- 47 The "cushioning" effect of the extra land available had only been partial because small zamindars wished to expand the area they held under direct cultivation and were competing keenly for land with the ryots. Maori, *Nepaul Frontier*, p. 219; Kerr, *Darbhanga Settlement Report*, p. 101.

- 48 Kerr, *Darbhanga Settlement Report*, p. 84.
- 49 *Ibid.*
- 50 *Ibid.*, pp. 81, 85.
- 51 *Ibid.*, p. 80.
- 52 O'Malley, *Purnea*, p. 72.
- 53 Spate et al. *India*, pp. 564, 565, 569; O'Malley, *Champaran*, p. 75.
- 54 O'Malley, *Muzaffarpur*, pp. 87-8 and *Saran*, p. 92. C.M. Fisher points out that the cropping pattern in particular areas combined with population pressure to affect the tendency to migration. In particular, areas of extensive wet rice cultivation displayed an "... ability to absorb vast amounts of labour ... and had low migration rates". See his "Indigo Plantations", pp. 246-7. My colleague, Brij V. Lal is currently researching into emigration from U.P. and Bihar to Fiji in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. His research, which will be partly based on a computer analysis of the total body (45,000) of emigration passes of north Indian immigrants into Fiji, will throw valuable light on the social bases of emigration from north India and on agrarian relations in Bihar and the United Provinces circa 1900.
- 55 O'Malley, *Saran*, p. 124.
- 56 *Ibid.*
- 57 Yang, "Internal Migration", pp. 12, 15, 31.
- 58 In *Saran* in 1903 "... only 64 per cent of the district's population ranged above the minimum subsistence level of 2.5 acres for a family of five". Many dwarf cultivators thus had to migrate in search of work. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

- 59 Parihar AAR, C XXXIV, G 1919-20, RDA.
- 60 Coombe to Prasad, 26 Sept. 1936, Prasad Papers [hereafter PP], f XII 1936, NML.
- 61 GBO, *Champaran Committee Report*, II, p. 70; B.B. Misra, (ed.), *Select Documents on Mahatma Gandhi's Movement in Champaran, 1917-18*, (Patna, 1963), p. 567.
- 62 F.C. Harrison, "The Behar Ryot at Home", *Calcutta Review*, Oct., 1890, pp. 274-305, p. 303. Harrison's findings were based on a study of the village rent rolls, supplemented by personal observation and by the cross-questioning of accountants, headmen, and "... leading men of all castes."
- 63 O'Malley, *Muzaffarpur*, p. 86.
- 64 Kerr, *Darbhanga Settlement Report*, p. 128-9.
- 65 Hagen and Yang, "Village Notes", p. 81.
- 66 The proportion of the population who were landless labourers varied from district to district. In Purnea labourers were least numerous, whereas in Champaran they numbered 30 per cent of the population. In other districts labourers numbered between 10 to 15 per cent of the population. Another 10 to 15 per cent of the population consisted of sharecroppers and occupancy tenants who farmed tiny plots of land, the proceeds from which were insufficient to raise them to subsistence level. This meant that they had to sell their labour to supplement their incomes. The 'labouring poor' numbered overall about 30 per cent of the population. O'Malley: *Purnea* p. 116, *Champaran* p. 97, *Darbhanga* p. 88, *Saran* p. 91, and *Muzaffarpur* p. 87. C.M. Fisher draws on different sources but reaches similar conclusions on the number and

- composition of the 'labouring poor' group. See his "Indigo Plantations" pp. 239-40.
- 67 Roy, "North Bihar village", pp. 299, 303; Fisher, "Indigo Plantations", pp. 248-53.
- 68 Yang, "Internal Migration", pp. 12, 22, 30.
- 69 In all of the north Bihar districts except Purnea, Muslims formed around 12 per cent of the population. In Purnea, they comprised 43 per cent of the population, and were particularly numerous in the eastern half of the district. O'Malley, *Purnea*, pp. 58, 60. Centuries of Mughal rule had helped shape one aspect of north Bihar social life: the subjugation of women. Bihar was "the most Pardah ridden province in India" and women from better off families rarely moved outside their homes. Women were treated as second class citizens, and any initiative to improve their lot was likely to elicit a violent reaction. In January 1930, for example, there was a disturbance at the village of Majholia in Darbhanga during which villagers demanded that the Magan Ashram, which had been engaged in anti-purdah work, be closed down. Sexual exploitation was allied with social and economic exploitation and poor and low caste women were preyed on by money lenders, zamindars and locally dominant peasants. Circular from Ramnandan Mishra, All India Congress Committee Papers [hereafter AICCP], G 43(Kwi) (Kwii) 1935, NML; *Searchlight*, 24 Jan. 1930; Jha, "Nation Building in Mithila", p. 94-5.
- 70 Muslims owned nine of the 74 estates in the districts of Saran, Champaran, Muzaffarpur, Darbhanga and Purnea that paid more than 5,000 rupees in land revenue. GBEN, LR 19S/4, B107-10, July 1907, WBA.

- 71 Roy, "North Bihar village", p. 298; Bihar Government Communique, *Searchlight*, 10 Feb. 1931; O'Malley, *Saran*, p. 32.
- 72 O'Malley, *Monghyr*, p. 63.
- 73 Byrne, *Bhagalpur*, p. 52.
- 74 For fruitful discussion on this point I am grateful to Roger Stuart.
- 75 Harrison, "The Behar Ryot", pp. 289; *Behar Times*, 25 Jan. 1900.
Anand A. Yang points out that local land controllers, anxious to keep a ready supply of cheap labour on hand, discouraged distant and permanent migration. "Internal Migration", pp. 29-30.
- 76 Fisher, "Indigo Plantations", pp. 109-110.
- 77 J. Burn, "Report on the Administration of the Darbhanga Estates, 1860-1879", GBEN, LR 49-53, August 1880, BSA.
- 78 The British employed the institution of the Court of Wards to take over and run any estate whose owner, by virtue of age, ill health, irresponsibility or insanity, was incapable of managing it effectively. See Anand A. Yang, "An Institutional Shelter: The Court of Wards in late Nineteenth Century Bihar", *Modern Asian Studies*, forthcoming.
- 79 G.E. Owen, *Bihar and Orissa in 1921* (Patna, 1922) p. 100.
- 80 For discussion of the relation between economic conditions and the crime rate see GBO Fortnightly Report Number Two [hereafter FR(2)], Aug. 1920; Political Special Department [hereafter PS] f 8, 1920 BSA; G.E. Owen, *Bihar and Orissa in 1928-29*, (Patna, 1930), p. 61.
- 81 Owen, *Bihar 1921*, pp. 100, 109.
- 82 *Ibid.*, p. 109.

- 83 The indigo planter James Inglis remarked that when a fire began in a north Bihar village "... each only thinks of his own goods; there is no combined effort to stay the flames", *Nepaul Frontier*, p. 137.
- The extension of trial by jury in Bihar was hampered by difficulty in securing the required number of jurors. One judge reported that "A great number of medical certificates are filed and one receives the impression that about half the jurors ... are invalid", H.C. Prior, *Bihar and Orissa in 1922* (Patna, 1923) p. 1.
- 84 'Corruption' is a value laden term. Payment for services by means of tips and gifts is part of the normal functioning of many traditional societies. When, however, a traditional society is incorporated into an imperial system, distortion occurs. It can be suggested that in north Bihar the imposition first of Mughal and then of British rule, followed by the increasing pressure of population on a static agrarian economy, eroded the traditional sanctions which kept the exchange of gifts for services within acceptable limits without establishing an effective new set of constraints on the behaviour of officials. Nor did the British offer their Indian assistants any incentive to refrain from corruption. The British kept the wages of Indian officials at a minimal level, which meant that the temptation to engage in corrupt practices was great. For a perceptive discussion of corruption in modern India, see W.H. Morris-Jones, "India's Political Idioms", in Thomas R. Metcalf (ed.), *Modern India. An Interpretive Anthology* (London, 1971) pp. 273-91, pp. 281-3. For helpful discussion on this point I am grateful to Jeanette Hoorn.
- 85 "Secret Report by Mr R.J. Hirst", PS f 159, 1929, BSA [hereafter Hirst Report] pp. 17-18.

- 86 See the comments of District Officer Norman quoted in *British Parliamentary Papers*, 1890-91, volume 59, paper 157, p. 13.
- 87 Harrison, "Behar Ryot", pp. 275-6.
- 88 Roy, "North Bihar village", pp. 301-3; Walter C. Neale, "Land is to Rule" in Frykenberg, *Land Control*, pp. 3-15, pp. 12-14.
- 89 The social pressure to engage in conspicuous consumption helped impoverish zamindars and obliged some of them to accept the protection of the Court of Wards. See note 78 above.
- 90 Byrnes, *Bhagalpur*, pp. 115-19; Maori, *Nepaul Frontier*, pp. 152-3, 163, 165; Owen, *Bihar 1921*, p. 113; Parihar AAR C XXXIV, G 1915-16, RDA; letter 4, C IX, G 1921-22, RDA; Alapur Manager, Diary 9 May 1923, C XXV, G 1922-23, RDA; District Magistrate Johnson to Bhagalpur Commissioner 21 February 1921, GBO PS f 66, 1921, p. 3, BSA.
- 91 F.E. Lyall, quoted in Byrne, *Bhagalpur*, p. 117. In the passage cited, Lyall refers to a number of cases in which the processes of the law failed to ensure that justice was done.
- 92 The words are those of Pierre Proudhon, as quoted in Barbara W. Tuchman, *The Proud Tower: A Portrait of the World Before the War, 1890-1914* (New York, Bantam ed. 1970, first pub. 1966), p. 74. For discussion of the relationship between the failings of the British Indian legal system and Indian attitudes and values see Walter C. Neale, *Economic Change in Rural India. Land Tenure and Reform in Uttar Pradesh 1800-1955* (London, 1962) pp. 192-7. Neale concludes (p. 195) that "... English legal proceedings have no moral foundation and thus no effectiveness in India."
- 93 Owen, *Bihar 1921*, p. 100.

- 94 Anand A. Yang, "Dissidence and Collective Violence in an Agrarian Society: A study of Riots in Saran District, 1866-1920", paper presented at the 20th annual meeting of the Association for Asian Studies, New York, 25-27 March 1977, p. 11.
- 95 In "North Bihar village" Ramashray Roy examines the history of factionalism in the village of Radhanager from 1900 to 1960. For details about two factional conflicts in areas under the control of the Darbhanger Raj, see "Brief of case of Chiranjib Jha versus Naubat Jha", f 10E, C V (Criminal), Law Department [hereafter L], 1920-21, RDA; Alapur Manager, Diary 28 May 1923, f 5, C XXV, G 1922-23, RDA. For a perceptive analysis which relates factionalism in village India to "the discontinuity in the distribution of power and the privileged position of the political class", see A.T. Carter, "Political Stratification and Unstable Alliances in Rural Western Maharashtra", *Modern Asian Studies*, 6, 4, 1972, pp. 423-42, p. 442.
- 96 Roy, "North Bihar village", pp. 301-4.
- 97 "Saran Riots", p. 12. It could well be, however, that our knowledge of subordinate/superordinate clashes is limited because, as Frank Perlin points out, "Only that conflict interfering with administration or manifested on such a scale as to be noticeable outside, is likely to be recorded, while conflict within the village, between castes or privileged and under-privileged landholders, is only too likely to escape the accounts". See his "Cycles, Trends and Academics among the Peasantry of North-West India", *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 2, 3, April 1975, pp. 360-70, p. 367. Walter Hauser refers to an area in Patna district, south Bihar, where disputes within zamindari estates did not usually reach the courts because the zamindars decided the

disputes and enforced their decisions with the aid of lathials.

"Bihar Kisan Sabha", p. 52.

98 "Saran Riots", pp. 17-19.

99 This problem has not yet been resolved. In 1975 and 1976, UNICEF was engaged, in selected flood devastated areas in north Bihar, in supplying protein supplement to young children who faced the risk of intellectual retardation because of their inadequate diet. I am indebted for this information to Mr Martin Stamp, a UNICEF field officer whom I met in April 1976, while he was stationed in Darbhanga town. On the general subject of health among the villagers in present day north Bihar, see M.N. Karna "Health, Culture and Community in a North Bihar village", (Patna University Ph.D. thesis 1970).

100 Parihar AAR, C XXXIV G 1919-20, RDA; Maori, *Nepaul Frontier*, pp. 137-8.

101 Owen, *Bihar 1921*, p. 142.

102 *Ibid.*, p. 144; see also Naredigar AAR, f 10J4, G 1937-38, RDA.

103 Maori, *Nepaul Frontier*, p. 21.

104 Nor was the extent of literacy increasing very rapidly. As of March 1921 "... only 4.27 percent of the male, and 0.65 percent of the female, or 2.43 percent of the total population of the province was undergoing instruction." Owen, *Bihar 1921*, p. 112.

105 Aman's Diary July, August 1922 and letter 5, f 5, C XXV, G 1922-23, RDA.

106 R.F. Mudie, Note of 19 Sept. 1944, Government of India [hereafter GOI] Home Political [hereafter HP] f 3/15/1944, National Archives of India [hereafter NAI]. When the first post Second World War Bihar Congress government came to power it outlined a programme for

"... the improvement and construction of about 900 miles of roads which includes National Highways, Provincial Highways, and Major District roads in North Bihar because the want of communication facilities in that area is more marked than in other places, particularly in the matter of metalled roads."

"Bihar Ministry at Work", f ED1(KW3), part II, 1946-47, All India Congress Committee Papers [hereafter AICCP], NML.

- 107 In his *Language, Religion and Politics*, p. 25, Paul R. Brass refers to the evidence presented by John Gumperz showing that "... an ordinary villager may have command of two or three forms of speech, including his village dialect; a dialect of the region ... and ... the regional language ..."
 - 108 This generalization is not correct when applied to the eastern portion of Purnea, adjacent to Bengal, where most of the people speak a form of Bengali. For a map showing the regional distribution of languages in Bihar see George A. Grierson, *Bihar Peasant Life* (London, 1885) facing title page.
 - 109 Ravinder Kumar, "The Political Process in India", *South Asia*, 1, 1971, pp. 91-108, p. 99.
 - 110 *Lord and Peasant*, pp. 383. Moreover, because there were subtle gradations of inequality, many of the oppressed got some satisfaction out of the system. As Broomfield suggests, though "... every ... peasant has someone's boot on his neck, many have the concurrent satisfaction of stepping on someone else's face. Inequality, the bane of the hierarchical society, is also its chief delight."
- "Bengal Peasant Mobilization", p. 24. See also Moore, *Lord and Peasant*, pp. 335-40.

- 111 J. Beames, *Memoirs of a Bengal Civilian*, (London, 1961), p. 134.
- 112 In the immediate post-Independence period the district jurisdictions established by the British continued to apply, except that in 1952 most of the northern part of Bhagalpur, hitherto part of the Bhagalpur district, became the new district of Saharsa. In 1973 most of the north Bihar districts were upgraded into divisions, and their former subdivisions were upgraded into districts.
- 113 See her *Agrarian Conditions in Northern India. Volume One: The United Provinces under British Rule, 1860-1900*, (Los Angeles, London, 1972), p. 241.
- 114 For an intriguing picture of a District Officer's life in the late 19th century, see Beames, *Memoirs*.
- 115 GGB, *Statutory Commission*, XII, p. 388.
- 116 *Ibid.*, p. 372.
- 117 *Ibid.*, p. 385.
- 118 *Ibid.*, pp. 372-5.
- 119 D.A. Low (ed.), *Congress and the Raj. Facets of the Indian Struggle, 1917-47* (London, New Delhi, 1977), "Introduction", pp. 1-45, pp. 12-13.
- 120 GGB, *Statutory Commission*, XII, p. 375.
- 121 *Ibid.*, p. 391.
- 122 Secretary of State for India, *India Office and Burma Office List, 1922*, (London, 1922) pp. 40-41.
- 123 Byrne, *Bhagalpur* p. 147; O'Malley, *Champaran* p. 139, *Saran* p. 136, *Muzaffarpur* p. 126, *Darbhanga* p. 129, *Monghyr* pp. 182-3, *Purnea* p. 147; *Owen Bihar 1921*; H.C. Prior, *Bihar and Orissa in 1923* (Patna, 1924), p. 75.

- 124 Maori, *Nepaul Frontier*, p. 156; Owen, *Bihar 1921*, p. 103; Byrne, *Bhagalpur*, p. 52.
- 125 Infanticide was common among the poor, but very few cases were reported to the police because chaukidars were bribed to suppress information about the crime. Owen, *Bihar 1921*, p. 101.
- 126 Yang, "Saran Riots", pp. 3, 7.
- 127 Owen, *Bihar 1921*, p. 103. For perceptive comments on the inadequacies of chaukidars as public servants, see Clive Dewey, "The Agricultural Statistics of the Punjab, 1867-1947", *Bulletin of Quantitative and Computer Methods in South Asian Studies*, 2, March 1974, pp. 3-14, p. 3-4.
- 128 O'Malley, *Darbhanga*, pp. 1, 129.
- 129 Rainey to Secretary, GOI, 29 May 1921, PS f 29, 1921, BSA; Dundas to GBO, PS f 218, 1922, BSA.
- 130 E.L.L. Hammond to Army Secretary, 10/11 March 1922, HPf 49, 1921, NAI; PS f 572, 1921, BSA.
- 131 Memorandum, HP f 49, 1921, NAI; GBO to Scroope, Tirhut Commissioner, 17 April, 1922, PS f 29, 1921, BSA.
- 132 Owen, *Bihar 1921*, p. 99; Hirst Report, pp. 14-15; Special Branch Inspector's report 21 June 1930, PS f 140, 1930 BSA. David Arnold comments "The British demanded obedience and loyalty from their Indian constables; in return they gave them contempt and a minimal wage. It is remarkable that there was not more police disaffection". See "The Indian Policeman", a chapter in his forthcoming "*Law and Order*". *Essays on the Policing of Colonial Madras, 1858-1947*.

- 133 *Searchlight*, 20 December 1922; Report of the Committee appointed to devise measures to deal with corruption in the Police, p. 10, PS f 159(B) 1929, BSA [hereafter Corruption Report].
- 134 Chief Secretary's note on the Hirst report, PS f 159, 1929.
- 135 Corruption Report, p. 6.
- 136 Hirst Report, p. 6.
- 137 *Ibid.*, p. 28.
- 138 *Ibid.*, pp. 17, 18.
- 139 Up until 1921 very few Indians held superior posts but from then on, as part of the "Indianization" programme, one-third of the positions open each year for the Imperial police service were reserved for Indians. G.E. Owen, *Bihar 1921*, pp. 99.
- 140 "There can be no doubt that corruption was rife among the subordinate police, and that a large number of officers and men were guilty of misconduct", GOI to GBO and Rainey to GOI, PS f 140 1920, BSA.
- 141 Dundas, Inspector General of Police to GBO, and Rainey to GOI, PS f 140 1920, BSA. In 1929, Hirst commented "if a cure for corruption could be devised, dissatisfaction would be prevalent and seduction by the agitator might become easy", Hirst Report, paragraph 2.
- 142 HP f A 159-170, August 1910 NAI; Gertrude Emersen Sen, *Voiceless India* (Benares rev. ed. 1946), pp. 169-82; Maori, *Nepaul Frontier*, pp. 161-9.
- 143 Prior, *Bihar 1922*, pp. 89-92.
- 144 Owen, *Bihar 1921*, pp. 99-100.

- 145 C.S. McDonald, Bahora Division Manager to Chief Manager 19 June 1923, f 20, C XXV G 1922-23 RDA. Details about this incident are given in chapter 2 below.
- 146 Yang, "Saran Riots", p. 13.
- 147 *Ibid.*, 7.
- 148 O'Malley, *Champaran* p. 127, *Saran* p. 153, *Darbhangra* p. 145.
- 149 The Darbhanga Raj and the Hathwa Raj were run by estate bureaucracies, but the properties held by the Bettiah Raj, the Ramnager Raj and the Madhuban estate were let out to thikadars (rent farmers). Details about the Darbhanga Raj bureaucracy may be found in the *Raj Directory 1941*, held in the RDA, which lists the positions and numbers of staff in each of the Raj administrative circles.
- 150 Maori, *Nepaul Frontier*, p. 147.
- 151 See his "Landlords and Lords of the Land: Estate Management and Social Control in Uttar Pradesh, 1860-1920", *Modern Asian Studies*, 6, 3, 1972, pp. 257-75, 261-5, 270-73. On the subject of landlords and politics in the United Provinces during the 20th century, see also P.D. Reeves, "Agrarian legislation and rural society in Uttar Pradesh, India - An historical study with especial reference to the period 1921-1958", (University of Tasmania M.A.thesis 1959), "The Landlords' Response to Political Change in the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, India, 1921-1937", (Australian National University Ph.D. thesis 1963), "The Politics of Order. 'Anti-non-co-operation' in the United Provinces, 1921", *Journal of Asian Studies*, XXV, 2, Feb. 1966, pp. 261-74, and "Landlords and Party Politics in the United Provinces, 1934-7", in D.A. Low, (ed.) *Soundings in Modern South Asian History*, London, 1968, pp. 261-93.

- 152 On this subject I have learnt much from discussion with P.D. Reeves.
- 153 Because the great landlords dispensed charity and patronage and because great social distance lay between them and the peasants, the peasants tended to think that their landlord was on their side and that oppression and exploitation was entirely a result of the greed and arrogance of the landlord's agents and retainers. During one dispute that arose on his estates in the 1930s the Maharaja of Darbhanga, Kameshwar Singh, at least according to the report of the *India Nation*, was able to placate the discontented peasantry merely by arriving on the scene and enquiring personally into their grievances. *Indian Nation*, 2 Oct. 1962. C.M. Fisher comments that the employment by a landlord of a staff of amlas insulated him from his tenants. Landlords, he points out, "... could vicariously use illicit means of compulsion through their amlas and refuse responsibility for such acts by claiming that the amlas were acting on their own initiative ... [A landlord] ... could even be seen as a protector from the wickedness of the amlas, thus allowing him to wield both the carrot and the stick." In the passage quoted Fisher is referring specifically to the activities of European planter-landlords, but his analysis is also applicable to the great landlords. See his "Indigo Plantations", p. 108. For insights and information on the raja/praja mentality of the north Bihar peasant I am grateful to Walter Hauser.
- 154 The voluminous Darkasht or Petition files, held among the General Department papers in the Raj Darbhanga Archives, include numerous petitions from villagers seeking Raj patronage and protection and soliciting Raj intervention in local factional struggles. See also Musgrave, "Estate Management", pp. 273-5.

- 155 For the history of the indigo industry in north Bihar and for an analysis of the relationships between the planters and the local population please refer to the following chapter.
- 156 Interview, Jageshwar Mishra, Darbhanga town, 23 Sept. 1976.
- 157 The Dharbhanga Raj head office found it difficult to maintain effective control over the Dharampur circle because of the shifting course of the torrential river Kosi, whose depredations completely disrupted east/west communications. Dharampur AAR 13 March 1920, f 2, C XXXIV, G 1919-20, RDA.
- 158 Roy, "North Bihar village", p. 298.
- 159 Interview, Umarpathi Tewari, Dumari village, Darbhanga 17 Oct. 1976. O'Malley comments "... it frequently happens that a cultivator holds land both as a proprietor and a ryot ..." *Saran*, p. 123.
- 160 GBO, *Champaran Committee Report*, II, p. 70. For the money lending activities of other locally dominant peasants see Lila Rai to the Editor, *Searchlight*, 24 Sept. 1922; Parihar AAR, C XXXIV, G 1919-20, RDA; Alapur Manager, Diary, 7 Feb., 1923, C XXV, G 1922-23, RDA.
- 161 Roy, "North Bihar village", pp. 302-03 (Punctuation as in original).
- 162 Sometimes subordinate villagers were obliged to work for no wage at all, whereas in other instances they were paid at a rate well below the market value for their services. Fisher, "Indigo Plantations", pp. 253-63; Maori, *Nepaul Frontier*, p. 22; Rohika Manager to Chief Manager, 22 May 1920, f 14H, C XXVI, G 1919-20, RDA: Sunder to Monghyr Magistrate, 4 Sept. 1916, f 66, C XXVI, G 1915-16, RDA; Sen, *India*, pp. 145-8.

- 163 Raghunandan Sahu and others, Petition, March 1922, f 5C, C X, G 1921-22, RDA.
- 164 The claim that they took paternal care of the interests of those subordinate to them was frequently made by representatives of the landed interest. It seems probable that local controllers acted more responsibly towards their dependents in the period before population increase began to pressure all members of the population and weakened the bargaining position of dependents, and before the (predominantly post-Independence) intrusion of capitalist agriculture into the countryside weakened traditional structures. It should also be borne in mind that in the context of village and factional politics it was necessary for power-holders to treat their subordinates with at least minimal consideration lest they desert to a rival factional alliance. For accounts of the steady disappearance over the last few generations of the paternal elements in superordinate/subordinate relationships, see Jan Bremen, *Patronage and Exploitation. Changing Agrarian Relations in South Gujarat, India*. (Berkeley, 1974) and D.B. Miller, *From Hierarchy to Stratification: Changing Patterns of Social Inequality in a North Indian Village* (London 1975).
- 165 Gertrude Emerson Sen's *Voiceless India* (Benares, rev. ed. 1946) gives a lucid, detailed account of life in a north Indian village in the 1930s, and throws much light on the rule exercised by the locally dominant. Sen's book, which was first published in 1930, deals with a village in the Balrampur zamindari estate in the north-eastern United Provinces, an area adjacent to and very similar to north Bihar.
- 166 "Saran Riots", p. 22.

Chapter 2

1917 - 1922 : POPULAR TURBULENCE AND POLICE/ADMINISTRATIVE CONTROL

Introduction; The first phase of the anti-indigo movement, 1917-19; The tenants' rights movement, 1919-20; The second phase of the anti-indigo movement, 1919-22; Nationalist Protest, 1920-22 : The non-cooperation movement as a vehicle for popular discontents; Conclusion : Police/administrative control, 1917-22.

Introduction

On 10 January 1921, in the Sonbarsa police circle of Bhagalpur, 200 villagers attacked 37 Gurkhas who had been employed by a European landlord to protect his interests in a land dispute. The Gurkhas, heavily outnumbered, were massacred; after the battle was over seven were dead and 14 were missing, presumed dead. In the first weeks of the same month, numerous outbreaks of market looting occurred in various parts of north Bihar. Some 10 months later, on 1 November, 5,000 villagers attacked the Chauterwa indigo factory in the north of Champaran. They assaulted the factory amlas, looted the manager's bungalow, and set the bungalow alight and watched it burn to the ground. Two months later on 30 December a group of 200 demonstrators invaded a police station in the north of Muzaffarpur near the border with Nepal. They occupied the building for several hours, disrupting police work and making speeches in favour of independence for India. Four months later, on 22 April 1922, Police Constable Gudar Chaubey quarrelled with picketers at a liquor shop in Barabigha village, Purnea district. The quarrel intensified and led to blows, and Chaubey was beaten up. In retaliation, he opened fire with his shotgun, wounding three people.

These incidents were the more dramatic events in a wave of popular turbulence which developed in north Bihar between 1917 and 1922. During this period the anti-indigo movement, the tenants' rights movement and the non-cooperation movement emerged. These three overlapping but distinct movements created considerable anxiety among officials and placed great strain on the apparatus of police/administrative control. British officials, thinking a large scale rising imminent, arranged the posting of troops at Muzaffarpur town and critically scrutinized contingency plans for civil defence. Locally dominant groups led the three movements, and much of the initiative within

them was exercised at the local level. The movements had only limited organization above the local level, but despite this they had developed great impetus, not least because people from the middle and lower sections of north Bihar society became involved in protest.

The wave of popular turbulence between 1917 and 1922 can be related to prevailing economic conditions. In the second and third decades of this century many people suffered because post-war economic dislocation increased the price of consumer goods and because a succession of bad seasons resulted in food grains being in scarce supply and highly priced. Scarcity and high prices prevailed in 1915, 1919 and 1920, and relatively high prices continued throughout the 1920s.¹ Most people had few reserves with which to tide themselves over for even one bad year, and suffered greatly from a recurrence of bad seasons. The wages for labour remained relatively steady, but from them labourers had to pay higher prices for food. Fortunately, it was customary for them to get part of their wages in kind. Tenants with marginal holdings found themselves in a precarious position: to pay their rent they had to sell much of their produce at harvest time, when prices were at a seasonal low, and later in the year, had to buy their food at a time when prices had risen. Sharecroppers, lacking storage facilities, had to sell much of their crop cheap at harvest time, and then had only limited cash with which to contend with high commodity prices. The more strongly established members of society, however, found higher food prices of great benefit. People with sufficiently large holdings generally hoped to produce both enough for their own subsistence and a surplus to be sold on the market. Higher food grain prices meant that rent could be paid more easily, and that more money remained for the purchase of consumer items. Zamindars also benefited: they earned more from the produce of the land over which they exercised direct control, and found that they could collect their rents

relatively easily. Not infrequently, zamindars and rich tenants profited as grain dealers, buying cheap at harvest time and selling dear later in the year. The overall result, in short, was that while the poor were under serious pressure, those who were better established found themselves in a favourable position. Even better established people, however, suffered from the ecological effects of population pressure.

North Bihar reached the verge of demographic crisis in the late 19th century. Because of large numbers of deaths from scarcity and famine this crisis did not crystallize until 1920.² From 1920 onwards, however, population pressure and land shortage pressed on north Bihar society like, to use a regional saying, "an oil press on an oil seed". Population pressure and land shortage greatly intensified landlord/tenant conflict. In the late 19th century there had been a shortage of land, of timber, and of grazing areas for cattle. By the first decades of the 20th century shortage had become acute scarcity. Land, timber and grazing rights became increasingly contentious issues. The worsening land - man ratio affected all sections of society, but those who took a leading part in reacting against pressure came from locally dominant groups. Such people had both a substantial position to protect and substantial means with which to protect it. Some people from among the locally dominant reacted to pressure by oppressing, in their capacity as zamindars, amlas or servants, those beneath them in the agrarian hierarchy even more strongly than hitherto. Such activity helped intensify discontent throughout society. Other people from among the locally dominant took a leading part in organizing the tenants against their landlords, in an effort to force the redress of their grievances. Within the area controlled by the Darbhanga Raj, an extensive tenants' rights movements developed in 1919 and 1920 under the leadership of Swami Vidyanand, an activist who combined traditional religious appeal with an

ability to operate in the modern political arena.

Turbulence also erupted in areas where European indigo planters held sway, and particularly in the district of Champaran. From the late 1890s indigo prices slumped, gravely threatening the position of the European entrepreneurs who had invested in the cultivation and production of the crop. The European planters tried to pass the burden of the slump in indigo prices onto the shoulders of the peasantry. Because planter oppression weighed down upon a broad spectrum of north Bihar society, anti-indigo agitation attracted wide support. Because the indigo planters came of European stock and were closely identified with local British officials the excitement generated by the anti-indigo planter agitation spilled over into anti-British and anti-administration feeling. In the Tirhut division — the area that was the centre of the anti-indigo planter agitation — the non-cooperation movement of 1920-22 achieved its greatest success.

A newly emergent regional intelligentsia, which had developed after Bihar and Orissa was separated from the Bengal Presidency in 1911 to form a separate province with its capital at Patna, helped organize and lead peasant agitation. Braj Kishore Prasad and Rajendra Prasad, both lawyers, and J.B. Kriplani, a schoolteacher, numbered among a group of professional men who interested themselves in peasant grievances, publicized them before the government and the general public, and attempted to coordinate and direct peasant protest. A section of the Bihari intelligentsia, organized into the Congress party, initiated the non-cooperation movement of 1920-22. In doing so they drew on the dissatisfaction of Muslims over Great Britain's attitude to international Islam, on the social tension and racial feeling that had crystallized as a result of the anti-indigo movement, and on popular dislike and opposition to the administration, particularly as represented by its

most visible instruments in north Bihar, the police and the chaukidars. More generally, the non-cooperation movement commanded wide support because at a time when economic difficulty exacerbated demographic pressure it offered an opportunity for the voicing of popular discontents.

The development of intense, extensive popular turbulence in the 1917-22 period had a considerable impact on the operation of police/administrative control in north Bihar. Before analysing this impact the following chapter discusses, in a broadly chronological framework, the anti-indigo movement, the tenants' rights movement and the non-cooperation movement.

The first phase of the anti-indigo movement, 1917-19.

In Champaran in 1917 and throughout north Bihar in subsequent years the peasantry protested on an extensive scale against their oppression by European indigo planters. The roots of this oppression lay back in the first half of the 19th century, when European entrepreneurs, attracted by north Bihar's fertile earth, cheap labour and plentiful supply of water began the commercial production of indigo.³ In the second half of the 19th century the industry expanded greatly, partly because, after the trauma of the rebellion of 1857-59 the administration encouraged its growth as a means of establishing pockets of European influence to bolster British rule⁴ and partly because of developments in the indigo industry of Bengal. In Bengal planter oppression sparked off the "Blue Mutiny" of 1859-61.⁵ In these years, assisted by reformist members of the Calcutta intelligentsia and by liberal Englishmen the Bengali peasantry mounted a large-scale protest movement against the European indigo planters. Peasant intransigence and administrative reforms made it commercially impossible for the indigo industry to continue in Bengal. Many planters transferred their activities to north Bihar, in the outer reaches of the Bengal Presidency, an area far away from Indian reformers, their British non-official allies, and from the base in Calcutta of the provincial government and the Government of India.⁶

The planters became best established in Champaran, the most remote of the districts of north Bihar. Here, by the late 19th century. Europeans held long term leases over nearly half of the land.⁷ In Muzaffarpur they held short term leases on 17.5 per cent of the land, while in the other districts they held only a few per cent of the total land area.⁸ By 1901, the planters of Champaran, with their families and European assistants, formed a tightly knit group of about 200. Another 200 to 300 members of the

planter community was scattered across north Bihar.⁹

Planters, even when they controlled only a small portion of a district's land, exercised considerable influence because the administration favoured them. In Muzaffarpur, though relatively few in number, planters held one out of every four of the presidencies of the chaukidari unions, and thus had extra political and economic leverage at the local level.¹⁰ Planters held seats out of all proportion to their numbers on the District Boards, the organs of limited self-government, had charge of cattle pounds, and held the contract for the upkeep of roads within an area. The administration often located post offices near a planter's bungalow, both to suit his convenience and to help protect the post office against dacoits. The administration built railways, partly under pressure from the planting community, and sited lines and stations to suit the planters' interests.¹¹ Officials and planters, moreover, often participated in social activities together. They gathered for drinks at the club, and accompanied one another on hunting expeditions.¹² Occasionally individual officials criticized the planters but generally planters and officials cooperated harmoniously. From the perspective of the north Bihar peasant, differences between planters and officials assumed far less importance than the cooperation between them.¹³ For most north Biharis, planters had the power and prestige of British officials.

In north Bihar European planters began their operations by acquiring control over land. Sometimes they took over land as ryots, and sometimes they purchased zamindari rights, but generally they assumed zamindari rights as thikadars or lessees.¹⁴ Having gained control over land, the planters established living quarters and a factory in a suitable position at the side of a lake, which would supply the large quantities of water necessary to

the successful extraction of the dye from the indigo plant. Planters generally used the land in the immediate vicinity of the indigo factory as a homestead farm producing foods and products for home consumption — rice for the servants, for example, and oats for the horses. Almost all the indigo processed by the factory grew on the land held by the tenants. Sometimes the ryots would plant indigo on their own initiative, hoping to sell the harvested crop to a nearby indigo factory. Much more frequently, however, the planter, helped greatly by his influence as the possessor of proprietary rights over the ryot's lands, arranged with each ryot for him to cultivate indigo on a certain portion of his land — usually on three kathas out of every twenty. This practice, known as Tinkathia, allowed a planter to ensure the use of the best land throughout the area under his control for the cultivation of indigo. And when, after two or three crops, the land lost productivity, a new portion of the ryot's holding would be chosen for indigo cultivation. In return for reserving their best land ryots were assured of a market for their indigo crop, and might also receive some concessions on the amount of rent they paid.

A planter, to make a good profit by legitimate means, had to be active both as a landlord and as a supervisor of the manufacture of indigo. As a landlord he had to ensure that all cultivable land was fully and properly under cultivation, that the tenants paid their rents promptly and in full, and that his rights in trees, hides, fishing and other miscellaneous commodities were protected. The successful cultivation and manufacture of indigo also demanded close attention. The planter had to ensure that the ryots used their best lands for indigo, and that every few years, to guard against soil exhaustion, they employed a new area for the plant. Throughout the lengthy period of its preparation, the indigo crop required close

attention. The soil had to be carefully prepared before the crop was sown and once sown had to be frequently and carefully weeded. Members of the colony of labourers attached to each indigo factory did much of this work, but because only the most fertile plots, which were usually widely dispersed, were used for indigo, because the proprietary rights that the planters leased often applied to zaminari holdings scattered in bits and pieces over a wide area, and because the need for labour varied greatly throughout the year, the planters could not afford to keep employed a full-time staff sufficiently large to handle all the work associated with the cultivation of the plant. Planters relied instead on the help of their tenants, with whom they arranged for the supply of labour, and also for the provision of carts and bullocks for transportation.¹⁵

For assistance in the management of their concerns planters relied on Indian amlas. The chief amla, the jemadar, functioned as "... a sort of farm-bailiff or confidential land-steward."¹⁶ The jemadar, assisted by a staff of amlas, supervised the work of labourers and the cultivation of the crop. The behaviour of the amlas often caused tension between a planter and his tenants. One planter commented that if a jemadar was

an honest, intelligent and loyal man, he takes half the care and work off your shoulders. Such men are however rare, and if not very closely looked after, they are apt to abuse their position, and often harass the ryots needlessly, looking more to the feathering of their own nests than the advancement of your interests.¹⁷

The rest of the factory staff similarly tended to abuse their positions of authority, unless kept under careful scrutiny by their employer.¹⁸

The close attention needed for the successful production of indigo also created tension between planters and tenants. The necessity of careful preparation of the soil, repeated weeding, and quick efficient harvesting

provided opportunities for disputes between the ryots growing the crop and the planter for whom it was being cultivated.¹⁹ The indigo harvest, in addition, coincided with the harvest of the ryot's food grains. The planters insisted on priority in the use of the villagers' carts and in the supply of casual labour, both of which were in short supply at the height of the harvest.²⁰ The planters also insisted that the best land be reserved for indigo, and since the process of growing indigo continued throughout the entire year the peasants could not use the land set aside for indigo to grow other crops.²¹

The fundamental conflict, C.M. Fisher points out, was between European entrepreneurs seeking to maximize returns from a single speculative crop grown on a large scale, and subsistence farmers operating on a small scale who sought to minimize risk rather than to maximize profit. Indigo, in contrast to other cash crops, and especially high quality rice grown for the market rather than for home consumption, could not be eaten if the market slumped. And indigo

... was very labour intensive, removed land from normal use and so involved a very high opportunity cost, and was very risky.²²

Because indigo was grown in a manner unsuitable to small-scale peasant production, peasants were disinclined to cultivate the crop. Because of this reluctance, and because of the high costs involved in the production of the crop, free market relations could not ensure the commercial manufacture of indigo. Hence the north Bihar planters employed extra-economic pressures, and particularly those they could exercise as local land controllers, to oblige the peasants to grow indigo.²³ Rather than acting as a modern, galvanizing force within the north Bihar agrarian economy, the planters accepted traditional forms and operated within established

institutions. "The indigo industry", Fisher concludes, "created tensions for the peasant, subsistence economy but instituted no radical change."²⁴ These tensions created a strong undercurrent of peasant antipathy to indigo cultivation.²⁵

The character of the indigo planters intensified this antipathy. The planters were adventurers who had come to north Bihar to make their fortunes in what was, because of the frequency of fluctuations in yields and prices, a highly speculative industry.²⁶ One Collector/Magistrate described them as "... rough uneducated men, hard drinkers, loose livers and destitute of sympathy for the natives ..."²⁷ The planters, he continued, attempted "... to get rid of as much as possible of the authority of the Magistrate, because it interfered with the despotic control which they considered it essential to exercise over the ryots."²⁸ Sometimes the control of the planters amounted to a benevolent despotism, with the planter acting to protect, as far as his own interests allowed, the welfare of the people within his realm of influence. A planter who acted fairly and justly could gain the respect of the local people, who would then call upon him to arbitrate disputes which they did not wish to entrust to the lengthy, complicated processes of the official legal system.²⁹ Not all planters, however, were cast in this image. Many were drunken never-dowells,³⁰ who survived financially by extortion rather than by *skilful* management.³¹ "The factory influence", one planter testified in 1876, "... is generally represented by a peon with a stick ... I do not think the factory influence extends beyond that. It is all due to coercion."³²

Despite their faults, the planters did bring some benefits to the people of north Bihar. They increased the demand for labour, and sometimes paid their labourers better than Indian zamindars. They provided managerial

employment for Indians, gave loans to impoverished zamindars, and, by providing a guaranteed market for the indigo grown by the ryots, assured them of a steady income.³³ Because of these benefits the administration viewed the planters favourably, though it sometimes expressed disquiet over the misbehaviour of individual planters.³⁴ For the administration the planters provided a valuable buttress of imperial rule, not least because they were organized into the Bihar Light Horse, an auxiliary unit which had, in 1904, a membership of 141.³⁵ But administrative support for the planters was guarded. The planters helped secure British rule, but this contribution would be nullified if, by mismanagement and oppression, they sparked off peasant protest and thus jeopardized the stability of British administrative control.³⁶ Several times during the latter half of the 19th century the administration, in response to tenant agitation, obliged the planters to make concessions, usually in the form of an increase in the amount paid to the tenant for his indigo crop.³⁷ The administration also encouraged the formation, in 1877-78, of the Behar Planters' Association, an organization intended, according to its founders, both to protect the interests of the indigo industry and to ensure that the planters observed reasonable standards of behaviour.³⁸ Overall, throughout the 19th century, the administration did little other than indulge in occasional pious exhortations to the planters, urging them not to oppress the people. By the 1890s the north Bihar indigo industry had become well entrenched. Now and again, and especially frequently at harvest time, small scale disputes arose between planters and tenants, but in these the planters kept the upper hand.³⁹ The planters enjoyed the sympathy of the administration and had strong links with important, Calcutta-based commercial enterprises.⁴⁰ Indigo provided good profits and the planters lived in a grand style in palatial mansions.⁴¹ Indeed, the industry provided such good returns that the Maharajas of

Darbhangha and Hathwa both devoted part of their lands to indigo production, employing European managers to run their concerns.⁴² But all at once the industry came under serious challenge. In the mid-1890s a German scientist invented a commercially competitive synthetic substitute for the indigo dye.⁴³ In the ensuing years, as table 9 illustrates, the prices for indigo plummeted.

TABLE 9

Average indigo prices, 1894-96; 1897-99; and 1904

PERIOD	PRICE PER MAUND IN RUPEES
1894-96	234
1897-99	152
1904	100

Source: Reid, "Indigo in Bihar", p. 257.

The slump in indigo prices created a crisis for the indigo planters. Taking the continuing prosperity of the industry for granted they had borrowed heavily to invest in their enterprises and to support their lavish life-style. They had found it necessary to borrow particularly heavily because each season the cultivation of indigo required a substantial initial investment which could not be recouped until many months later when the processed product finally reached the Calcutta market.⁴⁴ When the competition of the synthetic substitute for indigo began, their Calcutta financiers cut off the planters' supply of credit.⁴⁵ When the slump in the indigo industry began some planters left the region but others remained, partly because they were too financially committed to extricate themselves and

partly because they hoped for an improvement in the industry's fortunes. The planters who remained attempted to deal with the crisis in the industry in several ways. They experimented with new techniques and with a different variety of indigo seed in an effort to improve production and increase the quality of their product. They diversified their enterprises, lowering the acreage under indigo and growing sugar cane, mustard seed and other cash crops.⁴⁶

TABLE 10

Acreage under indigo in Champaran 1898, 1907 and 1914

YEAR	ACREAGE
1900	96,000
1907	52,600
1914	8,100

Sources: O'Malley, *Champaran*, p. 72; Brown, *Gandhi's Rise*, p. 63.

They kept a stricter control over their amlas, attempting to ensure that none of the concern's profits were embezzled. (Sometimes, however, this policy backfired, and dissident amlas led agitations against their former masters).⁴⁷ And they attempted, wherever possible, to ensure that the peasantry bore much of the burden caused by the slump in prices. They found several ways of doing this. Frequently, they took advantage of the agreements that the ryots had entered into to grow indigo on a certain portion of land. The planters would persuade the ryots, often by dubious methods, that in return for being allowed to stop growing indigo in future,

they should either agree to their rent being increased or else pay a lump sum as compensation to the factory.⁴⁸ They also protected their position by increasing the incidence of abwabs upon the villagers and by dealing more stringently with their labour force.⁴⁹ By these initiatives the planters created discontent throughout a broad spectrum of the community. In particular, planter oppression affected both big and small occupancy tenants, and the tenants in the indigo growing areas reacted by engaging in extensive protest. But planter pressure also had an impact on people lower down in the social scale, and because of this, and because they were mobilized by locally dominant tenants, the labouring poor also participated in anti-indigo protest.

The first striking manifestation of increased planter-peasant tension came in 1907 when tenants surrounded Bloomfield, the manager of an indigo concern in northern Champaran and beat him to death with lathis.⁵⁰ The administration later explained that Bloomfield was attacked after an argument arising out of his refusal to sanction the transfer of some holdings, but according to the local inhabitants, he had been killed because he had been sexually exploiting the local women.⁵¹ In Champaran during the following years recurrent anti-indigo protests occurred. In 1907-08 members of the Muslim Sheik community spearheaded protest against the Sathi indigo factory in the Shikapur thana in the southwest of the district. Their campaign concerned the exaction from the tenants of compensation money in return for them being released from the obligation to grow indigo on part of their holdings.⁵² The tenants contended, completely accurately, that they had not entered any formal agreement to cultivate indigo on behalf of the factory, and therefore had no obligation to compensate the planter when he decided that he no longer required them to produce the crop.⁵³ The disturbances continued for a year, only subsiding when the administration arranged a

compromise under which tenants who stopped supplying indigo to the factory would pay a higher fee for the use of the irrigation works the factory had constructed.⁵⁴ In 1908-09 a wave of protest spread throughout the Bettiah Subdivision, which comprised the western half of the district. To restore order the authorities brought in Military Police, instituted 57 criminal cases, and convicted 226 people of acts of violence. They also arranged a compromise whereby the area under indigo cultivation was reduced from 3/20th to 1/10th of the tenants holding and the price paid for indigo rose from 12 to 13 rupees per acre.⁵⁵

The next wave of protest in the district began in December 1911 with a large but abortive demonstration before the King-Emperor, George the Fifth, when he stopped at Narkatiaganj railway station while on his way back from a hunting trip in Nepal.⁵⁶ Shortly after this demonstration a press and petition campaign began which continued until October 1912.⁵⁷ The level of tension heightened with the commencement, in October 1913, of survey and settlement revision operations, which involved the re-assessment and recording of all existing obligations and rights.⁵⁸ During 1914, activists sent a series of petitions protesting against the imposition of abwabs, and obliged the administration to make an investigation.⁵⁹ Then, in 1915-16, there was again a period of large scale unrest, similar to that of 1908-09, except that this time protest centred in the Motihari Subdivision, which made up the eastern half of the district. The ryots contested the legality of the rent enhancements made in lieu of continued indigo cultivation, claiming that force had been used to procure their agreement.⁶⁰ The ryots, "throughout this period, manifested remarkable cohesion and persistence ..."⁶¹. They, and especially the Bhumihars of the Pipra and Turkalia areas, "were inclined to be turbulent ... and the settlement officers had a continuously unpleasant experience ..."⁶² Agitation also continued outside the district,

and members of the regional intelligentsia publicized the tenants' grievances in the Bihar and Orissa Legislative Council, at the annual meeting of the provincial Congress organization at Chapra in 1915, and at the Indian National Congress session in Lucknow in 1916.⁶³

Raj Kumar Shukul, a Brahman and a "well-to-do middle class peasant and money-lender who also managed the farm of a landholder belonging to Allahabad",⁶⁴ took the leading part in the continuing agitation. In April 1917, after repeated requests, Shukul managed to bring M.K. Gandhi to Champaran to enquire into the ryots' grievances.⁶⁵ This newcomer to the district was an unknown quantity in Indian politics. A Gujerati bania by birth, a lawyer by training, and a political activist cum religious philosopher by vocation, Gandhi was, at the time he came to Champaran, 48 years of age. He had returned to India two years before, after spending most of his adult life in southern Africa, where he had achieved considerable fame and some success as a stalwart champion of the rights of immigrant Indians.⁶⁶ He was adept both in conventional constitutional agitation and in his own distinctive brand of non-violent civil resistance, which he termed satyagraha.⁶⁷ In the India of 1917 Gandhi was a respected but little-known figure whose only notable public act since his return to the subcontinent had been the making of a controversial speech at a meeting of the Hindu University at Benares in July 1916.

Gandhi's intervention in the anti-planter agitation helped bring it to a head. He assumed the role of leadership and soon stood forth as the ryots' advocate.⁶⁸ In rising to this position of local eminence Gandhi benefited from the maladroitness of the British administration. When Gandhi arrived in the district, the Collector/Magistrate passed an order, on the grounds that his presence might cause a breach of the peace,

forbidding him to engage in public affairs and requiring him to leave the district within a few days time.⁶⁹ The provincial government, when informed of this action, immediately responded by instructing the local officials to drop the proceedings.⁷⁰ As the Chief Secretary pointed out, the evidence concerning Gandhi's activities in Africa indicated that he would make the most of any opportunity offered to make a martyr of himself and attract attention to his cause.⁷¹ This, indeed, is exactly what happened: by the time the countermanding instructions of the provincial government arrived Gandhi had already issued a statement declaring that, despite his general respect for the law and for legally constituted authority, he felt obliged, in this particular instance, to obey his conscience and to show his dedication to truth and justice by defying the order, even at the risk of being jailed.⁷² The matter did not come to the test: the administration took no action against him and without further hindrance he began making a detailed enquiry into the allegations and complaints of the ryots. His willingness to stand up to the administration had, nevertheless, redounded greatly to his credit, and encouraged many to support him, including several professional men who were adherents of the Bihar Congress and who had been taking an interest in the dispute between the planters and the ryots.⁷³ These professional men, who included two noted lawyers, namely Braj Kishore Prasad, from Darbhanga town, and Rajendra Prasad, from Chapra, the headquarters town of Saran district, assisted Gandhi during his investigation by acting as scribes and interpreters.⁷⁴

Gandhi's activities in the district soon created a state of "unparalleled excitement."⁷⁵ His stand against the local officials, the aura of saintliness associated with his austerity and simplicity, his novelty as an outsider who had come from afar, his transparent sincerity and the enthusiastic help he received from his lawyer-scribes and from the

leading local peasants encouraged thousands of tenants to come forward and lay their stories before him.⁷⁶ Indeed, so ^{much} in demand did he become that one of his assistants, J.B. Kriplani, had to spend his days putting off unwanted visitors who would unnecessarily interrupt the work of interviewing tenants and recording their statements.⁷⁷ The interest and excitement generated by Gandhi's unofficial enquiry inspired official fears that major turbulence was about to erupt.⁷⁸ With tension at a high level and with Gandhi producing strong evidence in support of the ryots' complaints the administration felt obliged to appoint a commission to enquire into the agrarian conditions in Champaran⁷⁹ and, to the dismay and anger of the planters, appointed Gandhi to it as the spokesman for the ryots.⁸⁰ The committee conducted hearings from July to October 1917, and made recommendations which formed the basis of the Champaran Agrarian Act of 1918, a piece of legislation designed to establish a lasting settlement of the conflicts between the planters and tenants of the district of Champaran.⁸¹

The Champaran Agrarian Act did not, however, provide a lasting solution to the problems it set out to rectify.⁸² The tenants complained about the concessions that had been made in the bill to placate the planters, and particularly because the legislature had

... rejected the clause in the bill which was most of all to protect the raiyats' interest, that is, the clause conferring on the Collector summary power to fine landlords for the exaction of abwabs.⁸³

The compromise that Gandhi engineered in Champaran and which was enshrined in the Champaran Agrarian Act has been widely acclaimed as a verification, in India, of the value of the techniques of political agitation which he had developed during his years in southern Africa.⁸⁴ Many of those for whom he

had acted did not share this view. According to J.A. Sweeney, the Settlement Officer, "the more turbulent elements ... frankly repudiated him and his agreement on their behalf, and raised all possible frivolous objections."⁸⁵ The Bhumihaar ryots were particularly truculent: their actions confirmed, for Sweeney, "the unpleasant impression" that had been "gathered from a somewhat long experience of them".⁸⁶

The Champaran Agrarian Act outlawed certain of the planters' customary activities relating to the cultivation of indigo, but this merely meant that the planters had to find new means by which to extract extra income from their tenants. In doing so they took advantage of their status as long-term lessees of proprietary rights, which endowed them with a wide range of rights and privileges,⁸⁷ many of which they had not previously bothered to implement fully.⁸⁸ One of these hitherto relatively neglected rights derived from their proprietary control over much of the waste land which the tenants used for grazing purposes. Formerly most planters had taken some advantage from this use of their land,⁸⁹ and had also always been ready to impound any cattle that strayed from the waste lands into fields where indigo was growing.⁹⁰ From 1918 onwards the planters began to take full advantage of their ownership of waste lands by charging the ryots high grazing fees. In doing so, the planters were perfectly within their rights,⁹¹ and since there were no effective legal or administrative provisions to control the situation, a heavy burden was placed upon the ryots. The planters also enquired into and began taking greater advantage than hitherto of the rights they possessed as landlords to timber, hides, extra rent payments for land on which houses had been built and so on.⁹² Planters had of course always taken some profits from these things, but henceforth they exploited them with an unprecedented rigour and vigour.⁹³

Indeed, they at times pushed their claims beyond that to which they were legally entitled, but to prove this the ryots had to engage in lengthy and costly legal processes. And, if other means failed, the planter could always attempt to make extra income by imposing abwabs, against which the Act failed to make effective provision.⁹⁴ The Act, moreover, only applied to Champaran, and did not affect abuses by planters in other parts of north Bihar.⁹⁵ Perhaps not surprisingly, therefore, tenants continued to protest against planter oppression, both in Champaran and elsewhere in the region. Planter/tenant conflict, moreover, intensified when during and immediately after World War One the industry temporarily revived because of the demand for dye for uniforms and because of the interruption of the supply from Germany of the synthetic dye.⁹⁶ This revival, though it did not bring any benefits to the tenants, encouraged inefficient and oppressive planters to remain involved in the industry.

Throughout 1918 and 1919 many Champaran tenants displayed dissatisfaction with the agreement that Gandhi had reached on their behalf with the planters and the administration. They delayed the payment of rents and refused to cooperate with the officials who were finalizing the survey and settlement operations in the district.⁹⁷ Gandhi's name continued to be used in efforts to rally support: in March, 1919, three activists from the Gobindganj thana in the northwest of the district, newly returned from the Congress session in Delhi, told the tenants that Gandhi had given instructions that rents were not to be paid and had promised to come to the area in the near future to take personal command of the campaign in defence of their rights and interests.⁹⁸ In the ensuing months anti-indigo feeling continued to simmer in Champaran, and also expressed itself in a number of areas throughout north Bihar. During the 1919-22 period, as will be shown in more

detail below, antagonism to the planters intensified and a number of violent incidents occurred. At about the same time as the first, Champaran centred, phase of the anti-indigo movement was coming to an end, extensive protest, arising out of disputes over rights in land and timber, got under way in the areas owned by the Darbhanga Raj.

The tenants' rights movement, 1919-1920

During the second and third decades of this century recurrent landlord/tenant conflict developed. Such conflict had occurred before, but never before on such a scale and in so many different areas. Nor, ever before, had the ryots been as well organized and as successful in gaining concessions for themselves. Previously, it had only been in somewhat exceptional circumstances that they had been able to gain the upper hand. Throughout the 19th century the zamindars had been in a very strong position. The Permanent Settlement of 1793 had clarified and guaranteed their rights, but it had done little to protect the rights and interests of their tenants.⁹⁹ The first legislative initiative to protect the tenantry did not come until the passing of Act X of 1859, the provisions of which were subsequently improved upon and enlarged upon by the Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885. These Acts abolished the landlords' power to compel ryots to attend when summoned to their offices, protected the ryot from summary eviction, guaranteed the continued rights of occupancy ryots who could establish that they had rented land from a zamindar for a period of twelve successive years, and required zamindars who wished to raise their ryots' rent to prove, through legal processes, that their claim was reasonable.¹⁰⁰ But neither this legislation nor the whole complex structure of British/Indian civil, commercial and criminal law could of themselves effectively secure the position of the tenantry. The key problem concerned the successful implementation of the laws: the tenants often knew little about their rights and even when they knew of them they often found that in legal contests the zamindars benefited from being at the centre of a wide circle of influence. Zamindars, moreover, usually commanded more financial resources, a crucial advantage when, because of the slowness, corruption and complexity of the legal process, legal struggles frequently became long drawn

out tests of financial endurance.¹⁰¹

The tenant who did not wish to take legal recourse could engage in direct action against his landlord. He might, perhaps, be able to put up a good fight,¹⁰² but in the long run the struggle was likely to go against him, not least because the police, if they intervened, tended to take the side of the zamindar. Until the early 20th century flight provided another option for the ryot. North of the border Nepal, with its lower population, had vacant land for cultivation.¹⁰³ And, because north Bihari marriage networks extended into Nepal there were often relatives to greet the newcomer and help him to settle down.¹⁰⁴ In the 1880s, large areas of the district of Darbhanga became all but depopulated when ryots and their families responded to oppression by the rent collectors of the Darbhanga Raj by fleeing northward into Nepal.¹⁰⁵ Brutal, extortionate rent farmers, backed up by a corrupt, arbitrary administration collected the rent in Nepal, so taking refuge there could be likened to leaping from the frying pan into the fire.¹⁰⁶ But if conditions became too unbearable ryots could always, once they heard that conditions in north Bihar had improved, return either to the area from which they had come or to some other nearby place. Most ryots, even when relatively well off, had a minimum of material possessions, most of them readily portable, so changes of residence could be made fairly easily.¹⁰⁷

By the turn of the century the relationship between ryots and zamindars had begun to change. From the last decades of the 19th century the administration had begun to show less inclination to always automatically react in support of the zamindars. The survey and settlement operations conducted throughout north Bihar during the 1890s and the 1900s revealed numerous instances in which abwabs had been imposed and in which the rights

and privileges of the tenantry had been flagrantly ignored.¹⁰⁸ The administration strongly criticized the zamindars for this misconduct, and also scolded them for their abuse of the legal system. The survey and settlement operations, moreover, involved the detailed recording of patterns of land-holding, of rental rates, and of occupancy rights, and thus established an authoritative documentary basis to which tenants could refer in legal disputes with their landlords. Nor was the alternative of fleeing from an extortionate zamindar as attractive as it had been.¹⁰⁹ There was still land to be tilled, though less than previously, across the border in Nepal, but because of demographic pressures in north Bihar, and a resultant shortage of land, anyone who migrated out of the region would have to do so permanently, since if he returned there would almost certainly be no land available for him to occupy, except under very disadvantageous terms as a sharecropper or as a temporary tenant.

With greater protection from the law, and with emigration a much less attractive proposition than hitherto, tenants were increasingly encouraged to engage in protest to secure and advance their interests. Indeed, this response was increasingly forced upon the ryots since, because of demographic pressure, the zamindari system impinged upon them with ever greater force. The small zamindars, threatened with impoverishment, competed keenly with their tenants for control over land, collected their rents rigorously, and intensified their exaction of abwabs.¹¹⁰ The large zamindars, though not always under the same financial pressure as small zamindars,¹¹¹ nevertheless held responsibility for much oppression. The large zamindars employed as their amlas men from small zamindar or big tenant families.¹¹² Some of these amlas lost no opportunity to profit at the expense of the villagers over whom they had been given authority.¹¹³ It was to be in the

largest zamindari estate in the region — the Darbhanga Raj — that substantial tenant protest developed.

The tenants' rights movement which developed in 1919 and 1920 involved large numbers of people and covered a wide geographical area. The development of the movement depended much on the leadership and organizational skills of Bishu Bharan Prasad, a member of the Pachhima Kayasth jati who came from the village of Sughar in Saran. Bishu Bharan Prasad had been born into a well-established family: his father held 30 bighas of land as an occupancy tenant and sat on the local chaukidari panchayat.¹¹⁴ There is only limited information available about Prasad's early years, other than that he had been educated to a reasonable standard and had adopted the life style of a religious mendicant under the name of Swami Vidyanand (also spelt Bidyanand).¹¹⁵ Swami Vidyanand wished to emulate M.K. Gandhi's saintly dedication to social work and political activism. His critics alleged that, when speaking to villagers, he claimed to be Gandhi's chela or disciple; but when explaining his activities to officials he denied this charge.¹¹⁶ Vidyanand may not have presented himself as Gandhi's chela, but he had been impressed by Gandhi's impact on the people and politics of Champaran in 1917-18.¹¹⁷ And like Gandhi, Vidyanand combined traditional religious appeal with an ability to publicize his cause and a capacity to organize political protest.

Vidyanand's career of political activism among the villagers of north Bihar began in June 1919, when he participated in a meeting held at the village of Narar in Madhubani, the northernmost of the three subdivisions of the district of Darbhanga, and delivered lectures on the rights of cultivators and on the need for the establishment of schools to spread education among the people.¹¹⁸ The meeting, which extended over four days from

26 June, provided an opportunity for the airing of a number of grievances.¹¹⁹ A few weeks later, on 31 July, a petition was addressed to the Lieutenant-Governor of Bihar and Orissa from the "inhabitants of Narar" complaining that their landlord was denying them their customary right to the fruits and timber of the trees grown on their holdings; that they were being required to pay a mutation fee when their holdings changed hands; that the landlord had unjustly resumed some of their lands and was holding them as bakast; that they were being forced to supply labourers, ploughs and carts for the cultivation of this land; that the "... well-to-do people of the village" who had refused to supply free assistance and utensils for the cultivation of this land were being harassed by the institution of false criminal and civil cases; that customary grazing rights were being denied them because former grazing lands were being settled for cultivation; and that "even in these days of fearful scarcity" the amlas obliged the vendors of oil and ghee to give them a free supply of these commodities.¹²⁰

This petition began a long series.¹²¹ The petitions varied from one another in matters of detail, but usually featured complaints relating to the tenants' rights in trees, the disappearance of grazing lands, the levying of mutation fees, the interference by the landlord with occupancy rights, and the exactions and oppressions of amlas. As the year progressed Vidyanand extended his field of agitation. By 16 August he was able to take part in the framing of a petition on behalf of the inhabitants of Narar and 17 other villages in the Madhubani subdivision.¹²² Some six weeks later, on 2 October 1919, his associate, Anirudh Singh, presided over a meeting attended by about 5,000 "lower and suppressed class tenants", on whose behalf he sent a telegram, urging that a commission of enquiry into their grievances be established, to the Lieutenant Governor.¹²³ The grievances of the tenants,

one official of the Darbhanga Raj later commented, "... took shape when Bidyanand came on the scenes ... (sic)"¹²⁴ and it was merely chance that led him to start his movement in the areas of Rohika and Rajnager in the Darbhanga district. If Vidyanand had "... gone elsewhere to commence with", the official contended, "... the results would have been the same." Vidyanand, he suggested, wished to use the support of the tenantry to advance his own political career and therefore could be expected to "... find or manufacture grievances" in any place that he visited in the course of his agitation.¹²⁵

Throughout the final months of 1919 the Swami continued his activities in the north of Darbhanga but also found time to make brief forays out of the district. In November he went to Supaul subdivision in north Bhagalpur intending to address a meeting.¹²⁶ The officials of the Darbhanga Raj, however, in collusion with the local representatives of the British administration, deterred him from doing so.¹²⁷ Next, in early December, he travelled to Patna in an attempt to gain the support of the nationalist intelligentsia.¹²⁸ Later in December he visited the Sonbarsa area, on the banks of the Ganges in north Bhagalpur, to enquire into the grievances of the local peasants.¹²⁹ Encouraged by the support and the donations he received during his tours and at the meetings he held the Swami outlined a scheme designed to institutionalize peasant activism by the creation of an extensive organization with branches in every village.¹³⁰ This scheme did not come to fruition, but he at least managed to establish a rudimentary agitational machine which employed, at the rate of eight annas a day, workers to tour from village to village to activate the ryots.¹³¹

In an effort to gain the support of the Indian National Congress Vidyanand journeyed, with a batch of 200 kisan delegates, to the annual conference of the Congress at Amritsar in December 1919.¹³² His effort failed: those present at the conference showed little interest in his tenants' rights campaign.¹³³ In January 1920 Vidyanand returned to north Bihar to continue his work. The focal point of his activities continued to be the Madhubani subdivision of Darbhanga district, but he continued to attempt to broaden the geographical range of his movement. Late in January 1920 he went to the Bihar Provincial Peasants' Conference, held in Muzaffarpur town.¹³⁴ The following month he toured in the Supaul subdivision of the Bhagalpur district. On 5 February a meeting of between 15,000 and 20,000 people from the Supaul area demanded that in Permanent Settlement areas rents should be immune from increase; that common grazing lands be provided in all villages; that ryots should have an unrestricted right to all the trees standing in their holdings; and that ryots, without having to gain the permission of the zamindar, should be allowed to build houses and dig wells in their occupancy holdings.¹³⁵ During the following month Vidyanand initiated agitation in Purnea and in the Madhepura subdivision, the more southerly of the two subdivisions of north Bhagalpur.¹³⁶ In early April he visited Patna to attend a meeting of the Provincial Congress, at which, to no avail, he called for the establishment of a committee of enquiry to look into the grievances of the tenants of the Darbhanga Raj.¹³⁷ Throughout the following months he continued his campaign in the districts of Darbhanga and Bhagalpur,¹³⁸ and also visited the Gogri thana of the district of Monghyr where he spoke to tenants about their grievances over the embankments that the government had built to protect the Bengal and North Western railway and which obstructed the drainage of flood waters during the flood season.¹³⁹

In his speeches Vidyanand struck a militant note. When addressing a meeting in *Samastipur town,* in the south of Darbhanga, he argued that villagers had a right to use violence in self defence against the oppression of zamindars and their retainers.¹⁴⁰ Speaking to the people of the Gogri thana in Monghyr district, he urged his audience to cut the embankments themselves if the railway company took no steps to deal with the problem of drainage.¹⁴¹ Some peasants needed little encouragement to engage in direct action in defence of their interests. On many occasions during the course of the campaign peasants cut down trees and used their wood in defiance of the claim of the landlord to exclusive or substantial rights in trees standing on land which he owned.¹⁴² The authorities became concerned over the excitement that Vidyanand generated.¹⁴³ Some members of the administration, as will be shown below, cooperated covertly with the Darbhanga Raj in suppressing the agitations he inspired. Publicly, however, the authorities avoided taking sides in landlord/tenant disputes. They stayed aloof from Vidyanand's movement, and merely attempted to ensure that both parties stayed within the bounds of the law.

During the second half of 1920 Vidyanand became increasingly involved in running for election to the Bihar and Orissa Legislative Assembly, the electorate of which had been expanded, as a result of the Montagu/Chelmsford reforms of 1918, to include a substantial representation of the more established occupany tenants.¹⁴⁴ His campaign succeeded; in electorates in northern Darbhanga and northern Bhagalpur he and four other tenants' representatives won victories.¹⁴⁵

In the course of his movement Vidyanand attracted extensive support. The petitions framed under his auspices and the meetings over which he presided concentrated on two categories of grievances both of which were of

central importance to most members of the rural population. One category of grievances concerned the behaviour of the amlas whose characteristic dishonesty and oppressiveness is amply documented, not merely by the complaints of their opponents,¹⁴⁶ but also in the administrative records recording the policy discussions and decisions of the senior management of the Darbhanga Raj.¹⁴⁷ The other category of grievances concerned the interference, on the part of the management of the Darbhanga Raj, with what the tenants regarded as their rights both in the light of long established custom and under the provisions of the Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885. Disputes over the use of timber, over the rightful possession of land, over the exaction of fees for the transfer of tenancy rights, and over the use of grazing lands were not new to north Bihar, but by the second decade of this century they assumed an unprecedented importance in relations between landlord and tenant. Only recently, in the period 1896 to 1907, survey and settlement operations had helped create a new awareness among the tenants of their rights. Much more central however, were demographic and associated ecological factors. Population pressure and the demand for land multiplied and magnified disputes over the possession of holdings and tempted zamindars to rent out "waste lands" that had formerly been used for grazing.¹⁴⁸ The demand for land created a market in land tenancies. Rich villagers acquired occupancy rights as an investment and then profited by sub-letting the holdings to sharecroppers and short-term tenants.¹⁴⁹ Landlords benefited from the transfer of tenancies by levying mutation fees.¹⁵⁰ These fees, which were imposed both on transfers by sale and transfers by inheritance obstructed the taking over of land by the poor and interfered with the investment strategies of the better-off, and were thus widely resented.¹⁵¹ With the disappearance of large tracts of standing timber, destroyed for building and fuel, wood assumed an unprecedented scarcity value, and disputes

over rights in trees multiplied.¹⁵² Cow dung "cakes" provided an alternative fuel for domestic use, but wood was essential for building and for the correct fulfilment of Hindu funeral rites, which involved the incineration of the dead on a wood fire.¹⁵³

The issues Vidyanand raised involved the interests of a large proportion of the population of north Bihar. Peasants demonstrated their support for his campaign by coming in large numbers to his meetings. According to a Police Special Branch report Vidyanand attracted 10,000 villagers to a meeting held in Darbhanga on 11 October 1919. Five months later, according to the same source, some 15,000 to 20,000 people attended a meeting he presided over in the Supaul subdivision of Bhagalpur.¹⁵⁴ In a region in which communications of all kinds were very poor, the ability to attract such numbers was impressive. Of course, an individual's ability to attract large numbers is in itself not decisive evidence that he has extensive support. Such is the tedium of life in rural India that large numbers of people will flock to any kind of public event. More convincing proof that Vidyanand commanded considerable support is supplied by the Darbhanga Police Superintendent's report that at the 11 October meeting peasants donated 8,000 rupees to help finance the campaign in defence of their rights. "There is no doubt", commented the Superintendent,

that this man is following the footsteps of Gandhi and inflaming the minds of the Ryots against the Darbhanga Raj as Gandhi did in Champaran against the planters.¹⁵⁵

A few days later he reported that the movement was developing rapidly and that Vidyanand's influence over both Hindus and Muslims was "increasing steadily".¹⁵⁶

Further evidence of the extent of the support which Vidyanand commanded may be found in the reports from the managers of the circles which formed the basic administrative units of the Darbhanga Raj.¹⁵⁷ One such account came, in March 1920, from the manager of Rohika, a circle situated in the Madhubani Subdivision near the border with Nepal. In this area well-established Brahman tenants predominated. "At the end of the year", the manager reported,

... a peasant agitation was started in the circle by a charlatan calling himself Swami Bidyanand, he had meetings instigating ryots to rebel against landlords and defy their authority, he very soon got a large following as he promised them all their desires, though of course he could not fulfill any of his promises. (sic)¹⁵⁸

In the Madhubani Subdivision Vidyanand attracted support from locally prominent Brahmin occupany tenants, but elsewhere, in the Padri circle in south-east Darbhanga for example, he drew support from people lower down in the social scale who held less secure rights over land. According to the circle manager, the population of the Padri area consisted of "low caste men such as Gowalas, Koeris, Mussalmans etc and they are most obstinates. (sic)"¹⁵⁹ Some of these people had been cultivating holdings belonging to the Darbhanga Raj on a sharecropping basis. But "... this year," the Padri manager reported in August 1920, under "the instigation of a Swami ... who came out in this elaka twice, they have changed their minds not to share the produce but to pay rents."¹⁶⁰ The sharecroppers' demand that they be allowed to pay a cash rental rather than give the landlord a half share of the crop was partly, no doubt, designed to take advantage of the unusually high prices prevailing for food grains. Yet it also indicated an awareness on their part that, if they continued tilling the land as cash rent payers, they, by collecting receipts, could establish occupancy rights to the land. Indeed they already claimed such rights, and contended that they had some documentary

evidence to support their claims. In concluding his remarks the manager stressed the "need for orders as to how to handle this urgent business."¹⁶¹

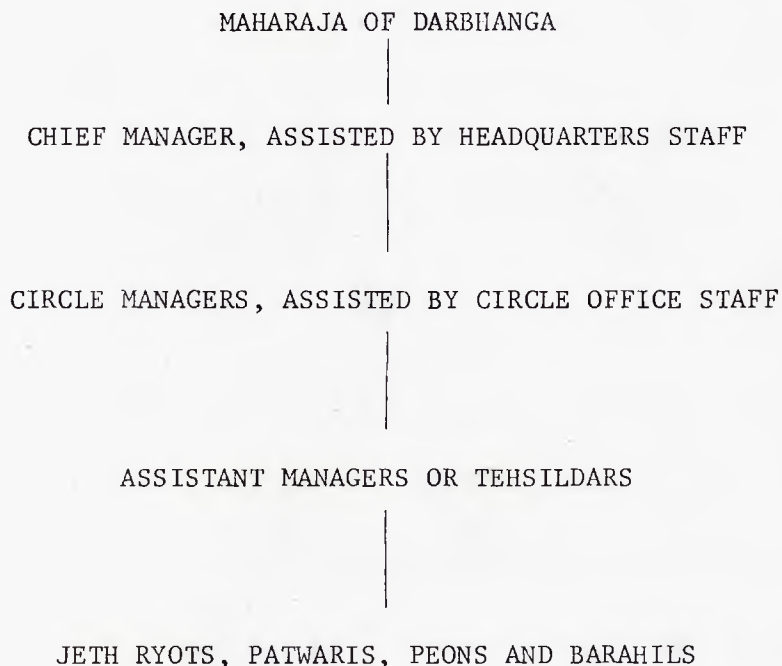
Vidyanand's campaign drew support from a broad spectrum of the social hierarchy. In the petition from Narar village in Madhubani which initiated the movement the petitioners complained that they had "... to supply labourers" to their landlord, a complaint which suggests that the petitioners were locally dominant tenants with tied labour at their command.¹⁶² The petitioners also complained that the "... well-to-do people of the village" who had refused to comply with the wishes of the Darbhanga Raj were being harassed by the institution of legal proceedings.¹⁶³ The Narar petitioners also, however, complained that the Darbhanga Raj amlas insisted on a free supply of oil and ghee "... from those dealing in these commodities."¹⁶⁴ In the village context the producers and suppliers of these commodities were from lower caste groups, namely Yadavs in the case of ghee and Telis in the case of oil. And as has just been shown, Vidyanand also drew support from the lower caste sharecroppers of the Padri area.

By late 1920 Swami Vidyanand had excited widespread interest and had established sufficient support among locally dominant peasants to win a seat in the legislature. By this time, however, his movement was on the wane. Vidyanand's shift of emphasis away from direct action and towards electioneering partly explains the decline of the movement. In 1920, in addition, prices were lower and scarcity was less than in 1919, with the result that economic pressure decreased.¹⁶⁵ After a time moreover, the novelty value of Vidyanand's tours and meetings wore off, and people, finding that change did not come as completely and as quickly as at first they had hoped, lost their enthusiasm for the movement.¹⁶⁶ The attitude of the Congress party also contributed to the decline of the campaign. At first, aware that the

grievances the Swami publicized were genuine and impressed by his ability to mobilize mass support, Congressmen sympathized with his movement.¹⁶⁷ But as support for Vidyanand increased Congressmen became less willing to be associated with him. The Bihar Congress sought to create a united front drawn from a broad spectrum of society against the British administration and Vidyanand's movement, by setting tenant against landlord, conflicted with this aim. Eventually, Rajendra Prasad, a leading figure in the Bihar Congress, publicly denounced Vidyanand, accusing him of being a charlatan out to make a career for himself by exploiting the discontents of the peasants. After Prasad's speech, most Congressmen disassociated themselves from Vidyanand.¹⁶⁸ But perhaps the most important reason for the ebbing away of Vidyanand's movement can be found in the policies adopted by the management of the Darbhanga Raj. These policies effectively combined concession with coercion.

The response of the administration of the Darbhanga Raj to the challenge posed by Vidyanand's movement combined a diversity of elements. This diversity resulted in part from the structure of the Raj administration.¹⁶⁹ The basic administrative unit was the circle, the manager of which reported to the chief manager,¹⁷⁰ who, with his staff, ran the head office located in Darbhanga town and reported directly to the Maharaja. The circle managers, assisted by an office staff, directed a group of four or five tehsildars, or assistant managers, each of whom held responsibility for the control of Raj activities within a subdivision of the circle. Beneath the tehsildars were the "village servants" — a category which consisted of jeth ryots, patwaris, peons and barahils.

 DIAGRAM 6

Administrative structure of the Darbhanga Raj


The jeth ryots had charge of the collection of rents from the tenants within one or two mauzas, and received a commission of a few per cent, varying upwards in proportion to the percentage of the total rental demand which they managed to collect.¹⁷¹ The patwaris kept the rent and land records of the mauzas owned by the Darbhanga Raj. They and the jeth ryots got assistance from the peons and barahils, who acted as messengers, retainers, guards and stand-over men.¹⁷³ In theory a jeth ryot and patwari counter-balanced one another, checking each other's actions and ensuring that each did his job properly.¹⁷⁴ In fact, they frequently acted in collusion to oppress and defraud the tenantry and to hoodwink and defraud the Darbhanga Raj.¹⁷⁵ The Darbhanga Raj administration had only a limited capacity to deal with this situation because in order to ensure the effective collection of rent, the Raj had to employ locally dominant peasants in the positions of jeth ryot and patwari.¹⁷⁶

Vidyanand's campaign threatened the lower level staff of the Darbhanga Raj. The allegations made against them often rang true, and as an object of attack they initially had no sympathy for the campaign. Despite this many of them eventually became covert supporters of Vidyanand. "The people we should be able to rely on to keep up Raj prestige and influence in the villages" one manager reported, "have many inducements to sell Raj interests."¹⁷ The village level staff were paid at rates that had been fixed around 1880, when the price of food was somewhere about a third of the price prevailing in 1920.¹⁷⁸ Previously they had been able to increase their income by extracting abwabs from the villagers but this could much less easily be done now that the tenant movement had encouraged the villagers to defy them.¹⁷⁹ Because of the shaky morale of the lower level staff, this manager reported, the Darbhanga Raj was faced, by the beginning of 1920,

... with a crisis and danger never known before. The Ryots and their ring leaders are being offered the things they value most ... in return for simply combining to disobey the Raj. On the other hand, at present they have no prospect of getting any advantage or concession by loyally refusing such temptation, so that from their point of view they have nothing to lose and everything to gain by joining the agitators.¹⁸⁰

The upper level staff of the Darbhanga Raj knew of this problem of staff morale and acknowledged that many of the complaints made against their subordinates had much justification. The Saraya circle manager expressed a characteristic opinion when he contended, on the basis of his 30 years' experience in the service of the Raj, that "Ryots never rebel unless treated unfairly by amlas."¹⁸¹ Dissidence among the tenantry and discontent among the lower level staff interfered with the collection of rent and thus handicapped the running of an extensive estate. The higher management of the Darbhanga Raj needed to keep both its staff and its tenants reasonably

contented. In some instances, moreover, concessions had to be made to the tenants because they had a legal right to that which they claimed.¹⁸² For this reason P.T. Onraet, the manager of the Rohika circle, urged the Raj to meet the tenants "half way", because legally "... the Raj will not be able to back its demands on the grounds of ancient custom."¹⁸³ The imminence of an election to the Legislative Assembly, due in November 1920, also helped shape the attitude of the Raj administration. This election would be held on the basis of an enlarged franchise.¹⁸⁴ All those who paid 2 rupees or more in chaukidari tax, or 1 rupee or more in road or public work cesses would be entitled to vote.¹⁸⁵ In order for "acceptable" candidates to win office, the senior Raj managers decided at a conference held in January 1920, it would be necessary "... to have the tenants in our hands."¹⁸⁶

To protect the interests of the Darbhanga Raj and rally the support of the tenantry the circle managers and the head office officials decided, at the January conference, to remedy five of the tenants' grievances.¹⁸⁷ They agreed that the village level staff should be paid more, so that they would have less need to exact abwabs. Currently, patwaris and peons earned a lower wage than coolies. In view of this, one official posed the question, "How can we not expect them to receive bribes?"¹⁸⁸ They also decided that the mutation fee, currently being realized at the rate of 25 per cent of the purchase price, should be reduced to around about 10 per cent; that the Raj should waive some of its claims concerning the use of timber; that tenants should be allowed to build houses on their holdings without having their rent increased; and that the low rates being given for the hiring of labour and of ploughs should be increased.¹⁸⁹ The managers also considered some of the special problems that had arisen in those of the Raj properties that lay within the Purnea district.¹⁹⁰ The most notable of the grievances of the Purnea tenants concerned the exaction of fees for the use of ferries. The

Darbhanga Raj owned the right of establishing a ferry service to carry passengers across a stream or a river that traversed an area which it owned and usually sub-contracted this right on a long-term basis to a locally dominant peasant.¹⁹¹ These sub-contractors could not ferry customers during the dry season, because the streams and rivers almost completely dried up. Despite this, they had begun the practice of levying, during the dry season, a ferry fare from every traveller who crossed the dry water course at or near the point where their ferry plied during the wet season.¹⁹² Since the ferry stations were situated along the course of the district's roads and tracks, travellers had to pass near them both during the dry and wet seasons. The members of the conference ordered that henceforth no tolls would be levied during the dry season and decided, so as to make it easier to enforce this order, that in future the right to run a ferry would only be let out for short periods.¹⁹³

The administrators of the Darbhanga Raj combined conciliation with coercion and counter propaganda. Badrinath Upadhyaya, the manager of the Rajnager circle, compiled a 52-page pamphlet in which he replied to the charges laid and the grievances raised both in Rajnager circle and elsewhere.¹⁹⁴ The circle managers sent retainers to keep a close watch on Vidyanand and his associates and to dissuade people from supporting them.¹⁹⁵ At the January conference one circle manager argued that

We should keep the few influential men in our hands. The tenants are completely in their hands and simply by keeping these few men in our hands we shall practically have the whole tenantry in our hands.¹⁹⁶

A tehsildar of the Alapur circle in northeast Madhubani carried out this suggestion. Early in 1920 Vidyanand contacted some of the locally influential men in the circle and arranged to give a lecture on 26 February. Before the

meeting the tehsildar engaged in counter-propaganda in his area among the locally dominant Yadav tenants. Thanks to these efforts

a partition was created. The better class of the leading Goalas carefully avoided visiting him; and Vidyanand had for his audience only the insignificant low class people.¹⁹⁷

The Swami, the tehsildar reported, left Alapur disappointed, having "failed to achieve any success" and in the wake of his departure support for agitation had evaporated.¹⁹⁸

The administrators of the Darbhanga Raj also used a variety of coercive means to dissuade people from supporting Vidyanand's movement. At one stage, it is clear from a document preserved in the Raj archives, a full-scale programme of repression was planned for the Rohika and Rajnager circles.¹⁹⁹ This programme did not come into operation apparently because it conflicted with the conciliatory policy adopted at the January conference.²⁰⁰ But individual Raj officials were not inhibited by the conference from employing coercive methods. In the Supaul division of north Bhagalpur the Raj amlas, "... being enraged at the stopping of perquisites", harassed the tenants by refusing to accept their rent payments when they were proffered.²⁰¹ By this means the amlas exposed the tenants to the danger of being sued for not having paid their rent, and subjected them to the inconvenience of having to keep their rent money on hand. In the district of Purnea a local Raj official decided that two Raj amlas who had given evidence unfavourable to the Raj in a criminal case should be dismissed.²⁰² In the Naredigar circle of the Raj, in the northwest of Bhagalpur district, the manager kept a close eye on Vidyanand's supporters. Late in 1920 he described one of them, a Bengali tenant by the name of Suresh Chunder Laha, as "... a very dangerous person and ... the instigator of much evil:", and followed this comment with the cryptic phrase

"I am looking after him".²⁰³ The same official had urged in January 1920 that good tenants be rewarded with concessions, but insisted that

absolutely no concessions should be made unless and until all other means of gaining over disaffected tenants, if there be such tenants, are exhausted. A good Manager will use his tact and judgement in winning over unruly, turbulent and disloyal men, and he should be allowed the fullest possible latitude in dealing with them in any manner which seems most expedient to himself. He will always be acting in the Raj interests, and he must be permitted to exercise his fullest discretion...²⁰⁴

Raj managers also directed coercion against the Swami himself. On 13 July 1919, according to his own account, Vidyanand was menaced by a group of ruffians while he was journeying from one village to another.²⁰⁵ In another incident that occurred a short time later he discovered that men were awaiting him along the roads and had to take to the fields to avoid them.²⁰⁶ While travelling to a meeting scheduled to be held at Madhubani on October 1919, he was menaced by a large armed mob, and was only saved by the intervention of the local chaukidars.²⁰⁷ Next, on the 12 November, Vidyanand attempted to hold a meeting at the village of Parsa Madho, near Nirmali town in northwest Bhagalpur.²⁰⁸ By noon on the day of the meeting some 15,000 tenants had gathered.²⁰⁹ About 40 minutes later a Raj amla arrived accompanied by 50 lathials.²¹⁰ Vidyanand asked the local Sub-Inspector of Police to request them to leave.²¹¹ The Sub-Inspector made this request but the lathials replied

that if the meeting would be held at that spot they would be dismissed from their services and that it was the order of the Sub-Manager Bhaptiahi circle. Hence they would try their best to prevent the holding of the meeting.²¹²

In view of the determination of the Raj servants to disrupt proceedings Vidyanand decided, on the advice of the Police Sub-Inspector and for the sake

of the safety of the people who had gathered, to suspend the meeting, which he did after talking briefly to the crowd.²¹³

After the January conference had decided to adopt a more conciliatory approach to the tenant problem and because direct interference with him had created bad publicity for the Darbhanga Raj, the supporters of the Raj subjected the Swami to less harassment. There continued to be times, nonetheless, when he courted physical danger. On 20 June 1920, Vidyanand arrived to hold a meeting at the village of Kothia Dumri, in the north of Darbhanga district near the Tajpur police thana.²¹⁴ During the previous weeks the Swami had vigorously criticized the management of the Bhawara indigo factory, a concern owned by the Darbhanga Raj.²¹⁵ The local tenants, according to a police report, became excited about the meeting because they had heard that supporters of the Bhawara factory were planning to attend.²¹⁶ At about half past one in the afternoon Vidyanand arrived and announced that the local police had decided the meeting would have to be postponed in order to avert a breach of the peace. At this point a group of supporters of the factory began pressing the Swami with a number of questions. Protagonists of both sides surrounded him. "At this juncture 50 or 60 Bhawara men"²¹⁷ rushed out of an adjacent hiding place, brandishing lathis. By arriving armed these men broke a promise that had earlier been made to the police by one of the factory amlas that the supporters of the factory would be unarmed.²¹⁸ The Sub-Inspector of the Tajpur thana ordered the lathials to leave, but they refused to go.²¹⁹ The Swami, according to the Sub-Inspector's account, "... was very frightened", and asked for a police escort out of the village, "... as the Head Clerk of the Bhawara factory had asked him to leave the village at once".²²⁰ Once he had managed to get away Vidyanand despatched a telegram to the *Searchlight* complaining about the way he had been treated.²²¹

During the tenants' rights movement the administration and police were committed in theory to take a neutral stance and to administer the law impartially. In reality police and local officials tended to side with the Darbhanga Raj against the dissident tenantry. The police did not effectively protect Vidyanand against harassment by Darbhanga Raj lathials and police and local officials, rather than protect Vidyanand's right to speak, were quite prepared to close down his meetings on the grounds that a breach of the peace appeared likely as a result of the actions of his opponents. The administration had sympathy for the grievances of the tenantry, but because of its support for the zamindari system, and particularly for the Maharaja of Darbhanga, the premier zamindar of north Bihar, it was unwilling to do anything substantial to express this sympathy.

With the covert assistance of policemen and officials the Darbhanga Raj was able to combine coercion with conciliation and keep Vidyanand's movement under control. In the second half of 1920, with the Bihar Congress refusing to extend support, with the economic situation somewhat improved, with the Raj concessions coming into operation, and with Vidyanand directing his energies towards success in the forthcoming elections the movement declined. The movement had not succeeded in bringing about the complete redress of all the tenants' grievances, but it had at least brought them concessions. Less tangibly, but perhaps of greater long-term significance, the movement had raised the level of consciousness among the peasantry of the Darbhanga Raj. This longer term repercussion of the movement was illustrated by the campaign initiated in Pandoul circle in December 1921.

On 20 March 1922, a petition arrived at the head office of the Darbhanga Raj from the Telis or oil pressers of the hamlet of Mohamedpur in the Maksuda mauza.²²² The petitioners complained about the dishonesty of the

local amlas, who, "... quite contrary to custom", had been exacting free supplies of oil from them, and said that though unwilling to supply free oil, they would be willing to pay a cash rate, like the Teli ryots in neighbouring localities, for the right to extract oil from the seeds of the linseed and teli plants.²²³ They said that they had approached the circle manager with their complaint but had received an unsympathetic response.²²⁴ The circle manager reprimanded them for having, on an earlier occasion, approached the head office of the Raj, demanded "in insulting terms" that they supply the free oil, and refused, upon the instigation of the Patwaris and the Tehsildar, to accept their rents, even though they came every day to the circle office ready to pay them, saying that he intended to realize the rent by litigation.²²⁵ According to the account of the circle manager the Telis, every day "since the time immemorial", had given small quantities of oil to the Patwari and to the other village amlas, but had decided to stop doing so in November 1921.²²⁶ The circle manager justified the exaction of the oil by pointing out that the village amlas received "very low pay".²²⁷ He also commented that this issue had originally been raised in the area "... by the so called Swami Vidyanand and since then from time to time the agitation breaks out as in this instant".²²⁸ He argued that the Telis be made to supply the oil lest a

precedent ... be established and if so what is to prevent such attacks from being made on other such established customs. As it is we have before us the pernicious teachings of the Gandhi cult not to pay land revenue and also that the day of swaraj approaches when rents are no longer to be paid.²²⁹

Though the issue of the oil was in itself only of minor importance, he concluded, the effect of the custom being successfully defied "... will be vast and far reaching for further mischief", and therefore contended that the oil should be collected "at any cost".²³⁰ The senior management of the Raj responded to this suggested by commenting that since the exaction of the oil

was an abwab the Raj had no legal redress against the Telis.²³¹ "Our remedy", one official decided,

lies in finding out and stopping the privileges we might have been hitherto allowing them to enjoy as a matter of favour and in putting other tactful pressure forcing them to come to their senses and realize that they should not be recalcitrant and ungrateful to the landlord. (sic) ²³²

The head office of the Darbhanga Raj therefore wrote to the Pandoul manager requesting him to find ways of putting "tactful pressure" on the Teli ryots.²³³

By means of "tactful pressure", the exact nature of which remains obscure, the administration of the Darbhanga Raj defused the protest movement of the Pandoul oil pressers. The history of the oil pressers' agitation illustrates both that Swami Vidyanand's movement had continuing repercussions, and that the Darbhanga Raj had managed to weather Vidyanand's movement successfully, and still had substantial resources and effective means at hand with which to bring dissident villagers into line. Vidyanand had succeeded in drawing peasants into an extensive agitation, and had managed, to a limited extent, to alter the attitude of many peasants to their landlord. These successes helped pave the way for the tenant agitations of the 1930s. But Vidyanand's movement had been dominated by locally powerful tenants, and had had limited, reformist aims. The movement had achieved some successes, but had done nothing to alter the basic structure of the Darbhanga Raj and the distribution of power and wealth within it.

The second phase of the anti-indigo movement, 1919-22

During the period in which Vidyanand conducted his tenants' rights movement the second phase of the anti-indigo campaign got under way. This second phase of campaigning against indigo occurred throughout north Bihar and involved several violent incidents. It thus contrasted with the first Champaran-centred and generally peaceful phase of anti-indigo protest. One area of great turbulence in the post-1919 period lay in the vicinity of Sonbarsa village, on the north bank of the Ganges in Bhagalpur.

The Sonbarsa movement challenged the position of Mr Harry Grant, the principal owner of the Latipur and Narayanpur zamindari estates. Grant and his fellow owners had engaged in the cultivation and processing of indigo, but once this activity ceased to be profitable they phased indigo cultivation out and concentrated on making a profit through efficient running of the property and through the collection of rents.²³⁴ The diara lands, which were situated on the bank of the river or as islands in the course of the river, provided a continuing source of profit. The word diara refers to land which is subject to flooding and which is not infrequently swept away during the floods of the monsoon season to be re-formed again somewhere else. Every year the diara lands received a rich coating of silt, which made them highly fertile. When left uncultivated they soon became covered with long grass, providing excellent grazing for cattle and when cultivated they produced excellent crops. These lands, consequently, were much in demand. The diara lands did, however, have the disadvantage that they tended to disappear and re-emerge as a result of flooding. Grant and his assistants had followed the practice of reassessing diara lands, once they had re-emerged after the floods, at a higher rent than previously.²³⁵ In addition, Grant usually levied a fee from each ryot before allowing them to commence cultivation on the newly

emerged land.²³⁶ Grant justified these actions by pointing out that no rent was taken from the ryots for the period in which their diara lands were under water.²³⁷ For many years the ryots had accepted these practices, despite the fact that they were in contravention of a clause in the Bengal Tenancy Act which declared that no extra rent or fee was to be charged for newly emerged diara lands, because the rights of the tenant to his diara holdings continued even if the lands became submerged and/or relocated in a new position.²³⁸

From 1918, however, Grant's tenantry began to protest vigorously against the raising of rents on newly emerged diara lands.²³⁹ It is not clear what sparked off protest at this time. Perhaps the tenants decided that Grant was attempting to raise the diara rents one time too many, or perhaps they had been inspired by news of developments in Champaran. The large village of Sonbarsa, situated on the north bank of the Ganges about four miles from the Latipur station on the Bengal and North Western railway became the focal point of protest.²⁴⁰ Bhumihars, a group with the reputation of being, to quote a local official, "... a class of fighting tenants",²⁴¹ made up most of the population of the village. In 1918 600 bighas of diara land became fit for cultivation. Grant told the Sonbarsa tenants that if they wanted to take up the land they would have to pay a salami or settlement fee of one rupee per bigha and a rent of six rupees per bigha. The tenants refused to pay, insisting that they should only be obliged to pay rent at the prevailing village rate of three rupees per bigha.²⁴² Grant responded to their opposition by settling the holdings, at the rental of six rupees, with a few local tenants whom he employed in his service and with a larger number of outsiders who previously had held no connection with the village diara lands.²⁴³ The Sonbarsa tenants deeply resented losing their lands and initiated judicial proceedings in an effort to have Grant's decision reversed.

The Bhumihaar tenant's resentment became greatly intensified during subsequent months as Grant, apparently in an effort both to increase his profits and to bring the dissident villagers to heel, began a major offensive against them.²⁴⁴ In 1919 he called upon all his tenants to sign agreements whereby they would undertake to pay an increased rent, even though he had already, in 1902 and 1911, contravened the Bengal Tenancy Act by extorting similar agreements.²⁴⁵ The rent increase of 1911, moreover, had been forced upon the ryots on the legally dubious grounds that they should pay a higher rent in return for being released from the obligation to grow indigo for the landlord.²⁴⁶ Grant also put pressure on the ryots by attempting to restrict their access to grazing land. His men impounded some 500 cattle which they found grazing in some grass covered diara land which belonged to Grant.²⁴⁷ The grass land concerned lay across the route the cattle took to the river to drink water. The ryots retaliated by rescuing their cattle and attacking Grant's amlas. When the case came to court the Magistrate found that the ryots had an established right to graze their cattle in the grass lands and found them not guilty of trespass, but fined them on the charge of committing assault.²⁴⁸ In a related case Grant attempted to prohibit all the cattle of Sonbarsa from entering into any part of the vast diara area even though the ryots had paid a grazing fee of half a rupee each head of cattle. In the course of the hearing, however, Grant's lawyer "curtailed his demand of restraining the raiyats from grazing their cattle on 2,000 bighas of diara to that of 400 bighas of cultivable land only" and on this basis the plaint was accepted.²⁴⁹

Grant also employed other means with which to harass the tenantry. On 7 December 1918 three dacoities took place in the nearby village of Bisunpur. The first report of these crimes named no suspects, but subsequently Grant's amlas managed to throw suspicion on the leading ryots of Sonbarsa, who were then subjected to the inconvenience of being questioned and having their

houses searched by the police.²⁵⁰ The confession of the accused in another dacoity case later exonerated the Sonbarsa ryots from involvement in the Bisunpur *dacoities*.²⁵¹ Before this happened, however, Grant's men traded on the suspicion aroused by their allegations to lay criminal charges against several Sonbarsa tenants, including the prominent ryot Nathuni Kumar, who recently had attracted great attention by winning a rent suit against Grant. The case went to court but resulted in an acquittal for the accused. The trying magistrate later remarked that he had been "surprised" by the blatant dishonesty "... of the prosecution witnesses most of whom were Mr. Grant's men".²⁵² Grant also tried to implicate the Sonbarsa tenants in a murder case. Eventually, however, the District Police Superintendent concluded after personal investigation that the most likely culprit was the complainant who had initiated the case "... on behalf of Mr. Grant".²⁵³

The Bhumihars of Sonbarsa reacted vigorously to their landlord's harassment and oppression. They refused to pay their rent, initiated rent and tenancy cases, and occasionally assaulted Grant's amlas and continually interfered with their work.²⁵⁴ Over the disputed diara lands they displayed such spirited opposition that on three separate occasions in 1919 and 1920 the authorities passed orders under the Criminal Procedure Code requiring them to abstain from breaching the peace.²⁵⁵ The tenants also sought the help of the political activist Swami Vidyanand, who arrived in the village in late 1919, and, according to a police report, "... began to preach his usual anti-landlord doctrines and queer ideas of the rights of tenants..."²⁵⁶ Under his guidance the tenants prepared a petition listing 17 grievances and presented it to the Collector-Magistrate.²⁵⁷ In this petition, in addition to the issues already mentioned, the tenants complained about the abwabs levied by Grant's amlas, about restriction on their right to cut bamboos and trees, and about the use by Grant of an undersized measuring pole in his assessment

of the area of land held by tenants.²⁵⁸

Grant responded to these protests by asking the authorities to send extra police into the Sonbarsa area in order to overawe the tenants. The authorities refused explaining subsequently that they had not wished to take "sides on behalf of the landlord in a contest between the landlord and the tenants."²⁵⁹ The decision reflected official dissatisfaction with the aggressive policy being pursued by Grant, which made the negotiation of a compromise settlement impossible.²⁶⁰ The authorities also pointed out that Grant had supplied insufficient evidence to the local police about the bellicosity of the tenants. Some of his amlas, it seems, had failed him, and because of sympathy for the tenants had not presented evidence.²⁶¹ Official inaction at the local level may also have resulted from a reluctance on the part of the Sonbarsa police to do battle with the sturdy and militant Bhumihars.²⁶²

Grant, denied police help, hired a force of Gurkhas with which to intimidate the ryots. The Gurkhas, who had previously been employed in a military labour corps, arrived at Narayanpur by rail from Lucknow on 30 January 1921.²⁶³ Grant's amlas told the Gurkhas that they would merely be required to stand guard over the mustard crop growing on the diara lands.²⁶⁴ They did not, however, tell them that the crops were growing on disputed lands over which the Sonbarsa ryots currently held possession, and that, before they could guard the crops, they would have to take over possession of the lands. On 1 February 37 Gurkhas set off, late at night and by a circuitous route, for the Sonbarsa diara.²⁶⁵ They arrived the following day at the bank of the Ganges where, accompanied by some of Grant's amlas and some of his supporters among the tenants, they boarded two boats in order to cross to the diara island.²⁶⁶ Up to this point the group, which numbered about 80 men, had been

under the direction of Chamal Lal Jha, Grant's chief assistant, but Chamal Lal Jha now decided that he would stay on the northern bank of the river. He explained that he had to go and make arrangements for the supply of food and the building of huts on the island for the Gurkhas. He also, to quell the fears of the Gurkhas concerning a group of about 100 men that they had noticed on the island, some three-quarters of a mile upstream, said that he would arrange for the sending of a police party to ensure that there was no breach of the peace.²⁶⁷ After they had crossed to the island the Gurkhas breakfasted on supplies they had carried with them. While eating they noticed boat loads of men crossing from the northern bank to the island about a mile further downstream.²⁶⁸ The amlas urged the Gurkhas to proceed across the island to the disputed area which they would have to guard. This area was situated about three-quarters of a mile away but could not be seen from the position Grant's men occupied on the bank of the river because an area of high ground blocked their line of vision.²⁶⁹ The Gurkhas, fearing opposition, did not want to go any further, but the amlas bolstered their confidence by assuring them that the men whom they had seen crossing to the island were Grant's allies. Thus reassured the Gurkhas moved off across the island, accompanied by Singeshwar Kuar and Jugrup Mahto, two of Grant's amlas, and Tekan, a chaukidar from Sonbarsa village, leaving the rest of the party behind with the boats on the edge of the river. After the Gurkhas had gone a couple of hundred yards however the two amlas fell back and covertly returned to the river bank.²⁷⁰

When they had travelled about 600 yards the Gurkhas came to a high ridge of sand, from the top of which they saw, a few hundred yards away, about 600 villagers armed with lathis, spears, swords, adzes and other weapons occupying the land they had come to guard. Ten of the Gurkhas carried kukris, but the rest had no weapons.²⁷¹ The villagers advanced towards the ridge and

the Gurkhas fled back to the bank of the river. Tekan, the chaukidar, tried to dissuade the villagers from any violent action, but he was ignored. When the Gurkhas reached the edge of the river they discovered that the amlas had taken refuge, in the two boats, in the middle of the river.²⁷² The Gurkhas, with their line of retreat cut off, found themselves at the mercy of the villagers, and were severely beaten up. Few of the Gurkhas could swim and many of them, after being driven into the water by their attackers, were beaten unconscious and drowned. Some of the other Gurkhas were killed or beaten unconscious on the river bank.²⁷³ The villagers won their victory at very little cost: there is no report of any of them being killed or injured during the assault. After completing their rout of the Gurkhas, the villagers began to collect some spoils of war by looting the Gurkhas of boots, shirts, greatcoats, blankets, lanterns, wrist watches and other miscellaneous possessions. One of the wounded Gurkhas was stripped of all his clothes except for a shirt.²⁷⁴ Meanwhile, the amlas watched the rout from the safety of the boats. They next attempted to land on the northern bank of the river, but encountering a hostile crowd which hurled rocks at them, journeyed several miles downstream before landing. Once the Sonbarsa villagers had dispersed, the surviving Gurkhas began to make their way to Narayanpur, after being taken across the river by some fishermen.²⁷⁵ Sixteen arrived back, 12 of them wounded, mostly with head injuries. Over the next few days the bodies of seven Gurkhas were recovered from the river. Three of the dead men, post mortem investigation established, had died from head injuries, and one had died by drowning, while the cause of death of the other three, because of the decomposition of their bodies, could not be clearly ascertained.²⁷⁶ The total of seven dead and 16 survivors accounted for 23 of the 37 Gurkhas who had crossed to the diara island. The fate of the other 14 remained unknown. It can only be presumed that their bodies floated downstream

and provided food for fish and crocodiles.

The police did not learn of the massacre of the Gurkhas, which occurred around noon on 2 February, until the following morning. Grant himself did not learn of the massacre until seven in the evening, when a messenger arrived at the European club in Bhagalpur town on the southern bank of the Ganges.²⁷⁷ The messenger, under Grant's instructions, journeyed back across the Ganges and reported the events at 7.30 a.m. on February 3 at the Bihpur police station. The delay, it seems reasonably certain, was intentional. The events on the disputed diara land reflected badly on Grant and his assistants and they needed, in the words of a police report, time "... to concoct a plausible story."²⁷⁸

Partly because of the delay in the commencement of their investigation but mostly because of the uncooperativeness of the Sonbarsa Bhumihars the police could not establish a satisfactory case against those responsible for the death of the Gurkhas. All but one of the *accused* won acquittal because they could not be satisfactorily identified as having been involved.²⁷⁹ The authorities prosecuted Grant and his staff for taking initiatives likely to lead to a breach of the peace, but Grant was acquitted because his intention of using the Gurkhas as an offensive force was not proven, and in the light of his acquittal the authorities dropped the charges against his subordinates.²⁸⁰ The Bihar branch of the European Association strongly criticized the way in which the administration had handled the disputes between Grant and his tenants, and made dire predictions about what could happen unless the administration took a stronger stand in future.²⁸¹ The administration argued that it had acted quite properly because the rights of possession of the disputed lands could only be decided legitimately by judicial processes.²⁸² The administration, moreover, publicly criticized the tactics adopted by Grant and

emphasized his "... moral culpability with respect to the unfortunate Gurkhas."²⁸³ The attitude of the authorities and the self-confidence of the tenants after their dramatic and overwhelming victory in the clash on the diara island obliged Grant to accept a compromise settlement. Grant agreed that in future he would not transgress the continuing rights of tenants to their diara lands and worked out an agreement with the tenants over what constituted reasonable levels of rent.²⁸⁴

While the Sonbarsa campaign was underway, considerable anti-planter activity also developed elsewhere in north Bihar. This agitation both received impetus from and gave impetus to the Congress party's non-cooperation movement, which began in September 1920. In Champaran, Muzaffarpur and Purnea, where the anti-indigo struggle was against European planter-landlords, the non-cooperation campaign gave it considerable stimulus and support. Where, in contrast, the struggle was against an Indian-owned enterprise, as was the case in the indigo concerns owned by the Darbhanga Raj, anti-indigo agitation drew strength from Swami Vidyanand's tenants' rights movement.

In April 1920, the management of the Darbhanga Raj concerns in Purnea reported to the Raj head office that the tenants refused to grow indigo and had returned the cash advances that had been given to them some months before as a consideration for their agreement to grow the crop.²⁸⁵ One of the ryots' complaints concerned the selection of land for the cultivation of indigo. The amlas, according to the report of one Raj official, characteristically took unfair advantage of the practice of reserving the best plots for indigo cultivation. Year by year the ryots agreed, in return for an advance on their payment for the indigo crop, to reserve a certain section of their fields for indigo. Then they would proceed elsewhere in their holdings to prepare the ground and sow the seed for other crops. At this point the

jamadar would arrive and tell them that some of the land they had just prepared for another crop — tobacco, perhaps, or some other cash crop — would have to be reploughed for the sowing of indigo, because he had decided that the land earlier reserved for indigo was exhausted and could not be used. But after the ryots had bribed him he would change his mind and leave them in peace.²⁸⁶ Discontent also arose because the price paid for indigo was "... hardly sufficient to meet the costs of cultivation not to speak of the rent which the ryots have to pay for the land to the Raj."²⁸⁷ The local Raj management, moreover, impounded the ryots' cattle if they wandered into a field sown with indigo, even if the field was part of the tenancy holding of the owner of the cattle.²⁸⁸

The local officials of the Darbhanga Raj initially responded to protest with repression. In reprisal against the agitation in the Kabur indigo concern the house of one of the leading dissident ryots was burnt down, crops belonging to the ryots were trampled and their cattle were wrongfully impounded.²⁸⁹ The district authorities intervened, cautioning the amlas against continuing with coercion.²⁹⁰ Subsequently more conciliatory measures were employed. The local Raj officials dismissed Singheshwar Prasad, an amla against whom there were many complaints, and as a result a number of tenants told an investigating police office that they had no further complaint.²⁹¹ Another amla, M. Abdul Rahman Khan, who had recently been dismissed and who had apparently been playing a leading part among the dissident ryots, was told he would be reinstated if he could get the tenants to grow indigo.²⁹² In the Debipur indigo concern, the other main centre of agitation in Purnea, the tenants complained much of Ajodhiya Singh, a senior amla who had "... tried to bring them under his thumb."²⁹³ The local manager commented that Singh had served the Raj well during his long career and said that it would be inadvisable to dismiss him. Perhaps if he was "... persuaded to

retire it would help matters.²⁹⁴ But the removal of Ajodhiya Singh could only be a partial solution to the problem: great interest and excitement had been created in the area by the presence of Jika Ram Sharma, a tenants' rights campaigner who had arrived in Purnea from Darbhanga.²⁹⁵ The complaints of the tenants, one official of the Darbhanga Raj commented, were mostly justified, and this was particularly true of the charges against the factory amlas.²⁹⁶ In order to keep the tenants under control, the local Raj administrators sought the help of the British administration. In August 1920 A.K. Khan, the newly appointed manager of the Gondwara circle, which included the Debipur concern, wrote confidentially to the Maharaja, claiming that the District Judge of Purnea district was an "old friend" of his, and that he was known and liked by the other officials of the district.

I have every reason to hope ...[he wrote] ...
that I will receive great support from them in
suppressing the agitation raised by Jika Ram ...
the ryots ... are toned down because of my
connection with the officials.²⁹⁷

In the final months of 1920 anti-planter agitation in the Darbhanga Raj, like the tenants' rights movement with which it was associated, faded away. In the following year, stimulated by the impact of the non-cooperation movement, it again manifested itself in a number of different localities.

In April and May of 1921 tenant agitation in the indigo concern owned by the two Shillingford brothers in the district of Purnea came to a head. The tenants were dissatisfied because of the terms under which they grew indigo and because the Shillingfords were, in the words of the Commissioner of the Bhagalpur division, "... unsympathetic landlords who have been treating their tenants harshly and exacting numerous illegal abwabs."²⁹⁸ Investigation by the District Magistrate revealed that the Shillingfords had exacted no less than 19 different kinds of abwab. They had required ryots to pay a fee for

permission to dig wells on their ryoti land, had levied rent on the dwelling houses that the ryots built on their ryoti lands, and had charged the ryots pasturage fees. Most of the abwabs directly affected the tenantry, but some, such as a tax on the sale of grain and a fee exacted at the time of marriage had a wider application and thus affected every member of the local population.²⁹⁹ Because of their oppressiveness, the Shillingfords inspired peasant protest, whereas the other planters of the district, who acted less oppressively, experienced less popular antagonism.³⁰⁰ Protest against the two brothers came to a head when

in the case of Mr. Charles Shillingford a woman about whom there was some dispute in the village was found concealed at night in his factory and in the case of Mr. Alec Shillingford when a respectable headman of a village whom he considered obnoxious was severely assaulted by his peons.

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The tenants arranged a complete boycott of the brothers' indigo concern. Indigo was not being grown, rents were not being paid, the factory market had stopped functioning,³⁰² and, for a short time, even their personal servants had been compelled to stop working for them.³⁰³ The Purnea Police Superintendent thought it unfortunate that "these gentlemen" seemed likely to

to be ruined and hounded out of their homes, where they have been for over forty years or so, by a pack of mischief makers who probably are activated purely by seditious and anti-European motives.

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The brothers, however, had only themselves to blame for their troubles. For in addition to oppressing the ryots both men, the Superintendent commented,

have shown that they are afraid and in consequence their tenants etc. and even their servants have realized that they have the upper hand and can force them to do what they want.

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The dispute finally resulted in victory for the tenants. At a meeting between the Shillingfords and the ryots, with the District Magistrate present as a mediator, the Shillingfords had to accept all the ryots' demands concerning

the cessation of indigo cultivation, the stopping of abwabs and the protection and *fulfilment* of the tenants' rights to trees and to the unrestricted use of their homestead lands.³⁰⁶ The tenants, according to the District Magistrate, "... expressed their universal satisfaction at the final settlement" and agreed to end the boycott.³⁰⁷

While the disputes between the Shillingfords and their tenants were being successfully resolved in Purnea, planter/peasant tension continued to simmer at the opposite end of the region in Champaran. In Champaran the issue of grazing rights provided a fruitful source of disagreement. In June 1921 tension between the tenants and the amlas of the Piprasi indigo concern in the Madhubani thana erupted into violence. The trouble began when a factory peon found 100 of the tenants' cattle grazing on an uncultivated tract that belonged to the factory. With the help of two other factory amlas he attempted to move the cattle off to the pound. They had succeeded in getting about half the cattle into the pound when about 100 villagers under the direction of Baiju Gir, the leader of the village, attacked them. The villagers belaboured the peon who had discovered the trespassing cattle with lathis and left him lying unconscious on the ground; the other amlas fled and the cattle were released.³⁰⁸ What happened next is unclear but it seems that the villagers decided to burn down the grass huts used by the amlas as living quarters. The tenants, however, maintained that during the night after they were attacked the amlas set fire to the huts themselves in order to be able to charge the tenants with arson.³⁰⁹ The Police Superintendent doubted this account; in his view the tenants had probably been responsible for the destruction of the huts. He pointed out that the leader of the village, Baiju Gur, was "not likely to have countenanced anything more than the rescue of the cattle but would have been quite unable to have controlled the crowd" once they had become excited.³¹⁰

Planter/ryot tension also manifested itself in Muzaffarpur. In August 1921 the Governor of the Province received a petition from the tenants of the Belsand factory in Muzaffarpur, complaining that they were being forced to grow indigo, that they were being paid very low rates for carts and labour, that criminal cases had been instituted against tenants who had complained against the factory, and that deeds in which the tenants agreed to set aside a portion of their land for indigo cultivation had been taken under duress. In the Champaran Agrarian Act, the petitioners pointed out, the tinkathia system and any other obligatory system of organizing the growing of the indigo plant had been declared illegal, but the provisions of the Act had been restricted to Champaran district. The rationale for this decision had been the argument that it was only in Champaran that tinkathia and similar systems operated. The petitioners pointed out, however, that in Muzaffarpur the Belsand indigo concern alone had more than one thousand bighas of land under the tinkathia system.³¹¹

Conflict and tension soon erupted into violence. In one incident an altercation developed at Meyrick's Karnoul indigo concern. According to the account of the District Magistrate a group of tenants assembled and threatened to assault the factory amlas. Mr Meyrick intervened and "...laid out the local leader of NCO and another man", suffering as he did so "no more injury than a broken topi."³¹² Eleven days later, on August 25, a more serious incident occurred at the nearby Motipur indigo concern. Two peons went to a village the inhabitants of which were at odds with the factory. According to the District Magistrate a local mahant or "temple-priest"³¹³

... had been telling the villages that Swaraj will soon be established and that then the zerait of the factory would be divided among the raiyats and they will only have to pay -/2/- a bigha rent. The raiyats are mostly low caste and uneducated and they appear to have believed the Mahant.³¹⁴

For some time the tenants of the factory had been refusing to pay rent and the peons had gone to the village in an endeavour to get them to pay up. They were waylaid, however, and murdered. The mahant, the District Magistrate suggested, had been responsible for the death of the two men.³¹⁵

The ryots of north Bihar also employed less bloodthirsty means of expressing their discontent. Many of the planters profited because regular 'hats' or markets were held on land which they owned, which meant that they could levy fees from the merchants and vendors who attended the bazaars to sell their goods. In Champaran, anti-planter activists attacked this source of income by setting up a rival bazaar in an area of uncultivated land near to the planter's market place. The activists, according to the report of the Police Superintendent, would "... induce the Banias who bring things for sale to leave the old site and take up their stands in the new".³¹⁶ This tactic was first employed in the final months of 1921, and it seems likely that the notion of combining boycott with the establishment of an alternative institution was borrowed from the Non-Cooperation movement, which was reaching its peak at about this time.³¹⁷ Sometimes the merchants were attracted by the fact that they had to pay a lower or even no fee at the new bazaar; if this incentive was insufficient, they could generally be discouraged from attending the planter's bazaar "... by a slight show of force and shouting to intimidate them."³¹⁸ As of 24 October some 10 to 15 bazaars belonging to planters had been thus interfered with; no bazaar however, which belonged to an Indian zamindar had experienced any trouble. According to the Police Superintendent the leaders of the boycott against the planter's bazaars generally had "... their own quarrel" with the particular factory concerned. In the Kesariya thana, for example, Fazel Khan, a deportee from Fiji who had been at odds with the factory for over a year led the movement against the Kurnoul factory. Khan, with the help of some other "locally influential

residents" had managed to force the closure of three bazaars owned by the Kurnoul concern. So far, the Police Superintendent commented in mid October, the planters had not used force to protect their interests in the bazaars. But, he predicted, they "will eventually do so when matters take a serious turn."³¹⁹ When force was used, however, it sometimes worked to the advantage of the ryots. In late October at Ghorashan in the Bettiah subdivision of Champaran district, for example, some factory peons were sent out to persuade people to return to the factory's market. The peons lay in wait on the main road by which the merchants brought their wares to the market on market days. The first carts that appeared had their contents covered with cloth. The peons assumed that the carts contained cloth and urged the carters to go to factory bazaar. At this juncture a crowd of villagers arrived among whom were the leading non-cooperators of the locality. The cloths on the carts were pulled back to reveal that they contained loads of bricks; and with the aid of these bricks the factory peons "... were quickly defeated and chased getting well hammered."³²⁰

The most dramatic of the events involving violent encounters between a factory and its tenants occurred in the northwest of Champaran in November 1921. On 1 November, at seven in the morning, a crowd gathered a few hundred yards away from the Chauterwa factory.³²¹ Shouting "Gandhi ki jai" (i.e. "Victory to Gandhi") the crowd marched past the main buildings of the factory and surrounded the houses of the factory amlas. The amlas shut their doors against the crowd, members of which "battered at the windows and doors calling to the inmates to come out." When the amlas refused to emerge some members of the crowd set fire to the thatched roofs of the houses. The amlas were forced to come out into the open, and came under attack. One old amla, Jamuna Lal, "was very badly beaten" and was carried to a nearby river and thrown in. He recovered sufficiently to keep his head above water and later, when the

attention of the crowd had become directed elsewhere, a sympathiser pulled him out and took him to the shelter of the house of a low caste factory servant whose house had escaped the attention of the crowd.³²² The other 12 amlas who had been attacked remained lying semi-conscious on the ground. The police later reported that Jamuna Lal and six of the amlas had been seriously wounded, while the six other amlas had been less seriously hurt.³²³

The crowd received little opposition. Broucke, the manager of the concern, was absent at his other factory on the other side of the Gandak river, and there was nobody staying at the bungalow. When the attack first began the president of the local chaukidari union arrived with three chaukidars and about 50 of his villagers and tried, unsuccessfully, to dissuade the rioters. After being threatened, he and his men departed. The original purpose of the crowd seems to have been to assault Kali Singh, the head amla of the factory, but Kali Singh had been out at work when the amlas' quarters were surrounded. While returning, some time later, he saw the crowd from a distance and, guessing their intent, hid himself in the sugarcane field near the bungalow. Unable to locate Singh the crowd looked for other targets. After completing the destruction of the amlas' quarters the crowd set afire a grain store room, a building used for processing sugar cane, and the factory office buildings.³²⁴ At first the crowd had consisted of only 150 to 200 men but during the course of the morning it grew to a size of about 5,000 and "consisted of men of all the neighbouring villages within a radius of 4 miles to 5 miles of the factory."³²⁵ Prominent within it, according to a police report, were "... low caste men of the Musahar and Nonia class."³²⁶ The climax of the crowd's activities came with an attack on the factory bungalow. One of the house scavengers, a Musahar, showed members of the crowd the store of kerosene oil. The oil "... was immediately seized and poured all over the beds and doors ~~and~~ furniture and set alight."³²⁷ The bungalow, a

large two storey building, was completely gutted.³²⁸ The firing of the bungalow and the other factory buildings was also accompanied by some small scale looting of factory property.³²⁹

The events of 1 November resulted from a situation which had, according to an official report

been volcanic for the past two years being kept in a continual state of unrest by the truculent element among the ryots. This situation is really the aftermath of the Gandhi agitation. The N.C.O. agitation has given the final fillip to the unrest.³³⁰

The main point at issue between the factory and the ryots concerned grazing rights.³³¹ Tensions had been exacerbated a few days before the factory was attacked when Broucke appointed Magahiya Doms, members of an untouchable caste noted for its criminal propensities, as chaukidars to keep the ryots' cattle off lands belonging to the factory.³³² In another incident which had occurred a few days earlier, factory amlas had beaten up some of the tenants.³³³

In the period immediately after the burning of the Chauterwa factory great tension prevailed in the surrounding area. Armed police arrived to make patrols, rumours of impending attacks on other indigo concerns spread and at a couple of other factories there were minor cases of arson.³³⁴ Quiet only returned after additional police were posted in the area and the administration obliged the villagers to pay a collective fine to cover the Rs 98,000 bill for the upkeep of the extra police and to pay Broucke Rs 82,500 as compensation.³³⁵ The police attempted, without much success because of lack of cooperation from the members of the local population, to subject the rioters to criminal proceedings. "It has to be recognized", the provincial government reported to the Government of India,

that of this large mob, the numbers of which as now estimated exceeded 5,000, after working their will on the defenceless factory for three or four hours of broad daylight, very few will eventually be brought to trial, and that the evidence against them is not likely to be strong.³³⁶

The excitement created by the Chauterwa arson case made it difficult for the administration to adhere to its policy of not taking sides in disputes between planters and tenants. In December 1921 Mackinnon, a planter who operated in the Dhanaha area asked for a police patrol to be sent out to intimidate his tenants, who were refusing to supply him with carts and labour. The police complied, and a force of mounted troopers, accompanied by Mackinnon and two of his amlas, marched through three villages. While the column was spread out in line of march some of the policemen, encouraged by the amlas, looted goods and money from the huts of the villagers.³³⁷ Soon after these incidents a large crowd of villagers assembled and waylaid the policemen. The villagers showered the police with clods of earth, and there were scuffles between the villagers and the factory amlas.³³⁸ The crowd only *quietened* after the police had returned the stolen goods.³³⁹ The Champaran Police Superintendent later explained that

The deputation of the Mounted Military Police on the trip in which they misbehaved was as usual quite a mistake simply due to the approach of the Christmas holidays and the general rush of the Prince's visit.³⁴⁰

This "mistake" proved an embarrassment for the authorities. The Indian press made much of the occurrence and the publicity surrounding it, combined with the excitement created by the non-cooperation movement, heightened anti-British feeling.³⁴¹

In January 1922, the non-cooperation movement reached its climax in north Bihar. In Muzaffarpur, a district in which the movement had had great impact, non-cooperation activity included demonstrations against and the boycotting of indigo concerns. In one incident 1,000 men demonstrated

against the Mia Chapra indigo concern in the Patepur thana. Gray, the owner of the factory, took refuge inside the bungalow with his family while the crowd moved around outside, shouting "Gandhi ki jai". The crowd demonstrated for some time and then destroyed a considerable amount of the factory's sugar crop before eventually dispersing.³⁴² Subsequently the police laid charges against the leaders of the demonstration and the tenants responded by boycotting the factory. But after the Police Superintendent had visited the area, and instituted further charges, they abandoned the boycott.³⁴³ Another boycotting incident occurred in the concern at Shahpur Maricha owned by Shamnandan Sahay and managed by Captain Harvey. This boycott related closely to the non-cooperation movement: the villagers had not been paying their chaukidari taxes, and Sahay, as the president of the Chaukidari union, issued warrants against them. In retaliation, the villagers decided to boycott the factory. They intimidated the factory amlas into not working, and attempted to stop the postman making his delivery to the factory. The villagers stopped labourers working for the factory; according to a police report, made at the time, "The factory labourers appear to be poor and willing to work, but dare not."³⁴⁴ This boycott, like the one at Gray's concern, broke down after police investigation and intervention.³⁴⁵

With the waning of non-cooperation during the course of 1922 the anti-indigo agitations that had been associated with it ceased to occur. In the indigo concerns owned by the Darbhanga Raj, in contrast, renewed anti-indigo agitation developed. Anti-indigo protest in the Darbhanga Raj centred in the Bahora indigo concern in Purnea. In October 1922 the ryots of the concern petitioned the Maharaja. They said that hitherto they had willingly grown indigo on their lands because "it was paying to us" and because "the Raj used to show us great favours."³⁴⁶ These favours included the waiving of

rent on land used for building purposes and the letting out of bakast land to the tenants at favourable rates. But of late these concessions were no longer being given and the price paid for the indigo crop was too low to cover the rental cost of the land used to grow it, let alone to cover the costs of cultivation. Furthermore, the tenants said, "... the high handedness and the excessive extortions of the Raj amlas" were causing them great suffering.³⁴⁷ The petitioners concluded by requesting the Maharaja to end the growing of indigo and to instruct the "amlas not to compel us to grow indigo any more, as what is a trifling gain to the Raj means death to us."³⁴⁸ In another petition, sent to the Collector/Magistrate of Purnea, the ryots again complained of the behaviour of the indigo amlas, and particularly singled out that of the Bahora factory jamadar, Hialal Jha.³⁴⁹ The ryots complemented the sending of petitions with a boycott of the factory. During the early months of 1923 they refused to supply the factory with labour, carts, or boats. McDonald, the manager of the factory, set out to break the boycott, and by his success in doing so increased the ryots' antagonism.³⁵⁰ McDonald had the crop sown by labour from outside the locality and by some of the local ryots who had refused to join the boycott. When harvest time came he brought in coolies and carts from outside and arranged for the hiring of boats in order to take the harvested crop over the river to Bahora factory. On June 16, while the harvesting was under way under the direction of the jamadar, Hialal Jha, a group of 300 ryots attacked. They beat Hialal Jha, dispersed the rest of the harvesters, stole one of the factory carts and destroyed half of the crop that had been cut. On hearing of the incident McDonald sent off a messenger to two other Raj managers, asking them to despatch their retainers to him but these reinforcements arrived too late to be of any use. Hialal Jha was seriously injured, and the Chief Medical Officer at Katihar was summoned to tend him. The riot of 16 June, McDonald wrote to his head office,

"... was not reported to the police as the Sub-Inspector of Pirpainti is exorbitant in his demands."³⁵¹ In the same letter McDonald urged that strong measures be taken against the ryots, lest they be encouraged to pursue their protest even more vigorously.

No further information, unfortunately, exists on the outcome of the agitation in the Bahora indigo concern. It can be surmised, nonetheless, that eventually the ryots triumphed, and no longer had to grow indigo. The wartime and immediate post-war revival in the industry came to an end, and the long-term trend towards low prices reasserted itself. In 1922, in the three concerns on which there is information, the Darbhanga Raj lost on indigo cultivation, and the following year prices fell even lower.³⁵² By the mid-1920s the indigo industry, both in the Darbhanga Raj and elsewhere, had all but disappeared. With the decline of the indigo industry in north Bihar, some of the Europeans who had engaged in indigo planting left the region. Others turned their attention to the production of sugar, tobacco, and other cash crops, and remained on in north Bihar until the 1940s when, benefiting from high war-time prices and realizing that for political reasons their future in the region was bleak, they sold up and departed from India.³⁵³

In north Bihar planter/peasant relations within the indigo industry had gone through two stages. In the first stage, which continued until the 1890s, the industry had flourished. Intermittent peasant protest against the indigo planters had developed, but the planters had been able to withstand these challenges. In the second stage, which extended from the 1890s until the early 1920s, the indigo industry had gone through a process of crisis and decline. The planters pressed down more heavily upon the peasantry, and the peasants responded by engaging in extensive protest. This protest created difficulties for the planters, but they were able to withstand the challenge

of peasant discontent. Eventually, the planters gave up the production of indigo, partly because peasant discontent made their position uncomfortable but mainly because by the early 1920s the production of indigo had become completely commercially unfeasible. Many planters remained in north Bihar and engaged in the production of other cash crops. Because these crops were viable commercially in a free market situation, planters could produce them without having to employ non-economic pressures to ensure the cooperation of the peasantry.³⁵⁴

Nationalist Protest 1920-23: The non-cooperation movement as a vehicle for popular discontents.

In September 1920 the Indian National Congress, meeting in conference in Calcutta, launched a civil disobedience campaign against the British administration of India. Under the dominating influence of M.K. Gandhi, the Congress denounced recent British constitutional concessions as inadequate, demanded that India be given Swaraj or "self rule", and undertook to force Britain to grant India freedom by mobilizing Indians to refuse to cooperate with alien rule. British rule depended "... on the active collaboration of some Indians and the acquiescence of the rest", ³⁵⁵ and if collaboration and acquiescence ceased then the Indian Empire would collapse like a house of cards. The programme of non-cooperation set out to ensure this collapse through the boycott of the forthcoming elections to the provincial legislature, the gradual boycott of government schools, colleges and courts, the resignation of honorary offices and abandonment of titles, and the boycott of foreign goods and particularly of foreign cloth. Subsequently, the programme also called for the boycott of liquor vendors, in order to reform society and to pressure provincial governments by reducing their income from the collection of excise. The programme was to be unfolded in progressive stages, culminating in active civil disobedience: the refusal to pay cesses, taxes and revenue and complete non-cooperation with the authorities in order to bring about complete administrative paralysis.

As it developed throughout India during the 1920-22 period, non-cooperation

became a chameleon campaign, taking colour from its surroundings as it was shaped in each locality by the particular forces at work and the strains and stresses of the local power structure. ³⁵⁶

Of nowhere was this assessment more true than of north Bihar. Once it gained momentum the campaign won the adherence of a diversity of people, and assumed a variety of forms. Some of these forms dismayed the members of the Bihar Congress, the group responsible for the initiation of non-cooperation in north Bihar.

In 1920, the Bihar Congress was a new and untried actor on the Bihar political stage. Only 20 years earlier the editor of the *Behar Times* had likened Bihar, in terms of the energy displayed in public life, to "... a pool of stagnant water."³⁵⁷ This situation was transformed in 1912 when, as part of a general re-organization of the Bengal Presidency, Bihar and Orissa were formed into a new province, with the sprawling riverside town of Patna as its capital.³⁵⁸

The formation of the province of Bihar and Orissa made little or no impact on the lives of the vast majority of its inhabitants, most of whom, it seems certain, had no very clear notion of the designation or extent of the administrative unit within which they now resided.³⁵⁹ But for the members of a tiny, high caste, middle class and educated elite the creation of the new province brought opportunities both for private professional advancement and for public social and political activity. Administrative separation meant that henceforth Biharis would suffer less from the competition of skilled and educated Bengalis, who for generations had been radiating out from Calcutta in search of careers.³⁶⁰ And the sleepy town of Patna, by becoming the locale for a new hospital, a new university, a new high court, and a large and impressive secretariat to house the provincial administration, began to reverse the strong attraction that had previously drawn young, middle-class Biharis off to distant cities, and particularly Calcutta, in search of education, jobs and advancement.³⁶¹

The Patna based Bihar Provincial Congress had been inactive since its founding in 1907³⁶² but began a new lease of life in 1912. At this time the leadership of the Bihar Congress, as table 10 illustrates, was dominated by lawyers, and most of its members and supporters were small zamindars and/or lawyers.³⁶³ Increasingly however, from around 1919, well-established ryots began to find their way into the organization. Locally dominant small landlords and big tenants wishing to protect and expand their influence in the villages found themselves in natural alliance with politically aspiring urban professionals against the great landlords who, supported by the administration, dominated provincial-level social and political life and controlled the organs of local government, namely the municipalities and district boards.³⁶⁴

TABLE 11

Occupations of Bihar delegates to the Allahabad Congress Session, 1910

OCCUPATION(S)	NUMBER OF DELEGATES
Zamindar	12
Landholder*	3
Zamindar and Lawyer	6
Lawyer	14
Banker and Zamindar	2
Member, Servants of India Society**	1
Not Known	1
Total number of delegates	39

Source: Datta, *Freedom Movement in Bihar*, 1, Appendix VII.

* The term "landholder" is generally used as a synonym for zamindar or to refer to a lessee of proprietary rights, but is sometimes used to refer to ryots with significant control over land. In this instance it probably refers either to a zamindar or a lessee.

** The Servants of India Society was a charitable organization whose members devoted their lives to good works.

Because only members of the landed interest could afford to educate their sons to a professional level, caste and kinship ties underlay the alliance. Typical of the members of the new regional intelligentsia was Rajendra Prasad, the son of a small landlord from Saran and the great-great nephew of Chaudhur Lal, who for many years had been the chief manager of the Hathwa Raj.³⁶ Mutual interest strengthened the alliance, since urban professions supplied the legal, educational and other services required by locally dominant peasants. The extent of mutual interest between urban professions and dominant peasants was increased, moreover, by the Montagu/Chelmsford constitutional reforms. These reforms, which were announced in April 1918, extended the electorate to give the rural and urban middle classes substantial say in future elections and all but guaranteed them control over local government.³⁶⁶

Nationalist Biharis, responding to initiatives that originated in other provinces, supported the Indian Home Rule Movement between 1915 and 1918 and participated in the Rowlatt Satyagraha of 1919.³⁶⁷ In Bihar before 1920 the nationalist movement received support from only a limited section of society, and this was reflected in the urban centred, small-scale, and peaceful character of Congress protest. But from 1920 on agitation associated with the nationalist movement developed throughout the countryside, occurred on an unprecedented scale, and included many violent incidents. The transition point in the character of nationalist agitation in Bihar came in September 1920 when at the special session in Calcutta, the Indian National Congress decided, with the crucial vote being strongly supported by the Bihar delegates, to make non-cooperation its official policy. Already, the previous month, a meeting of the Bihar Congress at Bhagalpur town had passed a resolution in favour of Gandhi's suggested non-cooperation programme.³⁶⁸

The decision of the Indian National Congress and of its Bihar branch to embark on non-cooperation resulted partially from the impetus supplied by the Muslim-based Khilafat movement. After the victories of Britain and her allies in Western Asia during the final years of the First World War many Indian Muslims joined the Khilafat campaign to protest against the unsympathetic British treatment of the Khalifah, the ruler of Turkey and the spiritual head of all Islam. The leaders of the Khilafat campaign aligned themselves with the nationalist movement in order to challenge the British more effectively. In Bihar the Muslims formed only a small section of the population, but because many of them were settled in urban areas, because of their sense of special identity, which existed despite the internal stratification of their community, and because of their custom of weekly congregational worship, they could be readily mobilized over issues of religious importance and thus were a potent political force.³⁶⁹

The decision to support non-cooperation, and in particular the decision to boycott the elections to the reformed legislatures, also resulted from a realization on the part of many Congressmen, many of whom were of the smaller fry in Bihar political life, that they did not stand a particularly good chance in the elections against the great landowners and the established, influential, non-nationalist members of the intelligentsia.³⁷⁰ Partly too, the decision reflected the transformation that had begun to occur in the character of the Bihar Congress due to the influx into its membership of locally dominant peasants. Many peasant-Congressmen had been drawn into Congress activity via the kisan sabhas or peasant associations. These associations were Congress front organizations which had been established in 1919 in order to mediate in landlord/tenant disputes and to widen the basis of support for the Rowlatt Satyagraha.³⁷¹ The Congress meeting at Bhagalpur town in August 1920,

Judith M. Brown points out, was the first Bihar Congress conference "... where delegates came mainly from outside the professional classes".³⁷² The peasant delegates at the Bhagalpur Congress seem to have regarded civil disobedience as, among other things, a means whereby they could protest against harsh economic and demographic pressures,³⁷³ and they secured the passing of the non-cooperation resolution by voting as a block in its favour.

In north Bihar the decision to engage in non-cooperation, and particularly in a boycott of the elections to the provincial legislature, was also an attempt to head off Swami Vidyanand's tenants' rights movement, which conflicted with the efforts of the Bihar Congress to promote social harmony and a united front against British rule. When Vidyanand attended a meeting of the provincial Congress at Patna on 5 April 1920, and tried to have a resolution passed calling for the formation of a committee to look into the grievances of the tenant's of the Darbhanga Raj, Rajendra Prasad successfully opposed the motion on the grounds that the Swami was untrustworthy and unreliable.³⁷⁴ By August 1920, it was clear that Vidyanad and three of his colleagues would make a good showing in Bhagalpur and Darbhanga in the impending elections. By calling for a boycott of the election in the name of the wider social and national interest the Bihar Congress could attempt to represent Vidyanand as an adventurer out for his own ends.

In Bihar non-cooperation made a slow start. Initially Congress concentrated on dissuading voters from participation in the elections held in November under the terms of the Montagu/Chelmsford reforms. As table 12 illustrates, the election boycott had considerable success though the low turn out may also have resulted from the novelty of the extended franchise.³⁷⁵

TABLE 12

Electoral turnout in 1920 Bihar Legislative Assembly elections

CLASSIFICATION OF VOTERS	PERCENTAGE WHICH VOTED
All electors	41
Electors of Tirhut Division	13
Urban Hindus	27.3
Rural Hindus	41.8
Urban Muslims	12.1
Rural Muslims	28.2

Source: Brown, *Gandhi's Rise*, p. 288

Other than persuading some members of what was only a tiny electorate not to vote,³⁷⁶ non-cooperation workers made little impact during the final months of 1920. In mid-December the provincial government told the Government of India that up till then the main impact of the movement had been in urban areas, and particularly among students, and that the countryside had generally remained quiet. During December, however, the movement received new impetus. In the first half of the month Gandhi made a brief tour of Bihar, attracting considerable interest wherever he went. Then in late December the Indian National Congress assembled in session at Nagpur in western India.³⁷⁷ In addition to re-affirming, in more positive terms, the non-cooperation programme, the ~~Nagpur~~ Congress meeting also reorganized the Congress party to make it a more effective vehicle for mass agitational politics.³⁷⁸

In north Bihar during 1921 the non-cooperation movement won mass adherence and put considerable pressure on the British apparatus of police/

administrative control.³⁷⁹ It did so despite the failure of some items of the programme outlined at the Calcutta and Nagpur Congress sessions. The call for resignation of titles and honorary positions received scarcely any response, and only a limited number of lawyers, teachers and government servants gave up their posts. Because of pervasive dissatisfaction with the legal system, however, the boycott campaign against government courts achieved greater success, and in less serious disputes many people accepted the jurisdiction of Congress organized 'national' panchayats.³⁸⁰ Non-cooperation achieved considerable success in 1921 partly because it developed in new and unexpected directions. One important new direction, both in Bihar and throughout the rest of India, "... was the curious appearance of a temperance movement, not planned or anticipated by Gandhi or Congress, though both encouraged it once it had caught on."³⁸¹ The prohibition campaign attained social respectability because of the disdain with which Muslims and higher caste Hindus regarded the consumption of alcohol and drugs. In Bihar prohibition workers picketed liquor stores and propagandized against the consumption of alcohol and other drugs. In some instances, they also engaged in the intimidation and social ostracism of liquor vendors and customers.³⁸² Because the provincial government placed substantial reliance on its income from excise duties the prohibition campaign put it under serious pressure. In the financial year 1921-22 in Bihar and Orissa the campaign succeeded in decreasing the government's excise income, which usually amounted to around 13,000,000 rupees, by 1,000,000 rupees.³⁸³

People participated in and supported the non-cooperation movement for a variety of reasons. As has been noted, Muslims became mobilized over the Khilafat issue and they and higher caste Hindus felt sympathy for the prohibition campaign. The boycott of law courts also struck a sympathetic chord,

because many people felt dissatisfaction with the corruption and delays of the legal system. Non-cooperation also drew on the social tension and radical feeling that had crystallized during the anti-indigo movement, and it is notable that non-cooperation was strong in the centres of anti-indigo protest. Because of the ethnic identity between European planters and British officials, and because they supported each other politically, popular antagonism to the planters spilled over into hostility to British district officials. In July 1921 the Tirhut Commissioner commented that "... the *izzat* [i.e. the prestige] of Europeans is nothing like it was and is diminishing ..."³⁸⁴ The movement also commanded wide support because it provided a vehicle for the expression, often in messianic terms, of popular antagonism to the police and the *chaukidars*, the most visible instruments of imperial rule in north Bihar. The movement, moreover, provided an opportunity for the poor to express their discontent with the price/supply situation.

In January and February 1921 commodities were highly priced; prices reached high levels and goods were in short supply. In the weeks in which this adverse price/supply situation continued many small-scale incidents of market looting occurred throughout north Bihar. Four incidents occurred in both Purnea and north Bhagalpur, two in north Monghyr, six in Darbhanga and 19 in Muzaffarpur.³⁸⁵ In one incident at Saraya in Muzaffarpur a man arrived at the bazaar on horseback and, proclaiming himself as Gandhi's disciple, demanded that prices be lowered. The merchants disagreed; they and members of the crowd quarrelled and a riot ensued.³⁸⁶ In an incident reported from Purnea a young man appeared at a market and announced to the people assembled there that cloth should be sold at eight cubits for one rupee, rice at nine seers for one rupee and fish at one seer for two annas. A clash developed between the merchants and the public and eight merchants

had goods stolen from their stalls.³⁸⁷ In one incident in Muzaffarpur a woman was killed during the riot and looting. And at Desri market in Muzaffarpur, according to a rather offhand report by the District Magistrate,

... there was some dispute over the price of fish or vegetables. Some Mohammadan — drunk they say — raised the cry of "loot". Some baskets were upset and the contents were taken. The Muhammadan proceeded with the crowd he had attached to himself to the main bazaar to loot the cloth shops. A stalwart shopkeeper ran a spear into him, and the whole disturbance ended.³⁸⁸

The details of each market looting incident varied, but they followed a broadly similar pattern. Those involved in them mostly came from the middle and lower reaches of north Bihar society. The incidents began when, in a crowded bazaar, someone created a disturbance by demanding in the name of Gandhi and/or Swaraj that prices be lowered.

It is difficult to establish the extent to which non-cooperation activists were involved in the initiation of market looting incidents. In the opinion of Macrae, the Deputy Inspector-General of Police, Congress workers held direct responsibility for the incidents. But he could present little evidence to support this conclusion, and suggested that people were either unwilling or unable to come forward and identify the rioters who had participated in different incidents. He did think it significant, nonetheless, that after some of the looting incidents active supporters of the non-cooperation movement had arrived at the markets and had attempted to act as mediators between the merchants and their attackers, seeking to reach some compromise which would make it unnecessary to call in the police and institute legal proceedings. Macrae regarded this initiative on their part with suspicion: he thought that non-cooperators were involving themselves ... "with a view to concealing evidence".³⁸⁹ Forrest, the Tirhut Commissioner, offered

a complementary explanation. He contended that the non-cooperators had initiated the call for lower prices but now had second thoughts, after the lootings and disturbances, about the value of this tactic.³⁹⁰

These interpretations were perhaps unduly Machiavellian. Conservative social groups dominated the Bihar Congress and for both strategic and tactical reasons these groups did not want to create divisions within the Indian community. And in particular, these groups did not wish to encourage disrespect for private property. It seems unlikely that local Congress leaders initiated market looting incidents, though some of their rank and file supporters may have done so. Market looting in early 1921 resulted partly from an extremely adverse price/supply situation, which had a disastrous impact upon the poor. After the price/supply situation improved from late February on, market looting ceased to occur.³⁹¹ Partly, also, market looting resulted from the messianic expectations that the initiation of the non-cooperation movement had aroused among the people of north Bihar. These expectations focused on the personality and name of Gandhi, who by early 1921 had acquired a semi-divine status. In Saran, for example, the story spread during February 1921 that the God Jaganath had begun working with Gandhi. According to the rumour, Jaganath had made it known that anyone worshipping Gandhi was thus worshipping Jaganath himself.³⁹² It is perhaps no accident that the market looting incidents occurred only a few weeks after Gandhi had toured through Bihar.

The messianic expectations that had been aroused among the people of north Bihar also expressed themselves in other ways, as Police Superintendent McNamara discovered in March 1921 when he travelled to the Dhanaha thana in the west of Champaran to investigate rumours that large crowds had been gathering. The local villagers, who willingly came forward to talk to him, told McNamara that crowds of villagers had arrived from the south-west, from over the border

with the United Provinces, beating drums and shouting "Gandhiji ki jai". The villagers from the United Provinces told the local people that Gandhi, a Brahman, a cow and an Englishman had been put into a fire together, and that the Englishman had been burnt while the others escaped harm. The villagers from the west told the Dhanaha people that they had to visit five other villages, shouting "Gandhiji ki jai", and pass this story on; if they failed to do so their crime would be as serious as if they had killed five cows. McNamara travelled throughout the surrounding area and was given, with some minor variations, similar accounts of what had occurred.³⁹³ From Dhanaha the movement spread on to the north-west and east and eventually died out.³⁹⁴ In the districts of *Gorakhpur* and Basti in the western United Provinces a similar succession of events occurred, though here the wandering crowds are also reported to have proclaimed that "Gandhi Maharaj was king and had obtained Swaraj".³⁹⁵ From the evidence available, it seems that the movement originated on an indigo concern near the border between *Gorakhpur* and Champaran, and spread outwards from its point of origin.³⁹⁶ These incidents reflected an attitude of defiance towards authority, an attitude which also expressed itself more directly and more dramatically in the eruption of violence against the police.

The non-cooperation campaign influenced north Biharis to express their discontent with the police and the administration. The local police station, with its staff of constables and its retinue of chaukidars, comprised the nearest centre of state authority. By their oppressive behaviour, moreover, the police had in many areas made themselves prime targets for defiance and aggression. On 19 February 1921, a force of six policemen and 20 chaukidars were attacked while engaged in investigating a case in the Kateya police circle of Saran district,³⁹⁷ an area in which the non-cooperation movement had "made great strides".³⁹⁸ In Kateya and the neighbouring police stations, as of 11 February, 35 panchayats had been formed with 219 members and 368 volunteers

had been appointed. By these means 33 villages had been brought under the "jurisdiction" of the non-cooperation activists. The police force came under attack while enquiring into allegations made by a Koeri woman that a panchayat established by the local non-cooperators had treated her unjustly and cruelly.³⁹⁹ While the police were recording the statements of some of the witnesses in this case a large group of men, armed with sticks, lathis and spears arrived, shouting the slogan "Gandhi ki jai". The men, who greatly outnumbered the police party, ordered the policemen and chaukidars to kneel down and by shouting "Gandhi ki jai" proclaim their acceptance of Swaraj. After the members of the police party refused to comply the men showered them with clods of earth and attacked them with lathis, forcing them to retreat. The sub-inspector in charge of the police party reported that the attacking force was "about 2,000 in number" and was drawn from 19 different villages. He listed 32 people as having definitely been among the rioters, and this list, which included names which are characteristically Brahman, Koeri, Yadav and "low caste" Muslim, indicated that the assailants came from a wide social spectrum.⁴⁰⁰ The assailants came from villages, according to the sub-inspector, in which non-cooperation panchayats had been set up by Babu Bindeshwari Prasad, a lawyer from Saran, and had been put under the control of Mouli Dass Sadh, who the police described as "a much respected though rather dissolute Sadhu of the locality".⁴⁰¹ On the day of the attack Mouli Dass had rallied his supporters at the village of Natwa and had then led them against the police.⁴⁰²

Occasionally, as at Kateya in Saran, popular antagonism to the police was encouraged by the non-cooperation movement to express itself violently, but in other instances it manifested itself less dramatically in an unwillingness to cooperate with the police in their execution of their duties. In the Bagaha thana in Champaran, an area where there had been recurrent planter/

peasant tension, the police reported in June that the occurrence of serious crimes was not being reported to them. In one dacoity and murder case which the police did learn of it became apparent that the incident would not have been reported if the murder victim had not actually died as a result of the assault on him. During the investigation into this dacoity police discovered that another dacoity had occurred at about the same time and rumours also circulated that there had been two other cases which had not been reported.⁴⁰³

In a report submitted on 1 June on the impact of the movement in Purnea the Commissioner of the Bhagalpur division commented that police officers were finding it hard to find accommodation while touring in the countryside. In Purnea there had been little violence against the police, and the people were displaying an attitude of "cold avoidance" rather than "defiance". They were also delaying their rent payments, in the hope that when and if swaraj came they would have less or even no rent to pay. The Commissioner remarked that the people were too shrewd "to fully believe" either in the imminence of swaraj or that their rent burden might be lowered, but the belief was "firm that under Gandhi Raj the necessities of life would be much cheaper".⁴⁰⁴

The arousal of messianic expectations among the people of north Bihar and the eruption of violence between non-cooperation supporters and the police worried the leaders of the Congress. In the early months of 1921 non-cooperation had managed to rally considerable mass support, but this support had often expressed itself in a manner inconsistent with the original aims of the campaign. The Congress leadership was uncertain about what to do next. There was no political mileage left in further calls for renunciation of honours and resignation from professional and government posts, and similarly boycotts of courts and other government institutions had reached the upper limit of their possible success. According to the non-cooperation programme, the next step to be taken involved the initiation of wholesale

civil resistance and the setting up of alternative government institutions. But the level of excitement among the people and the occurrence of violent incidents indicated that the non-cooperation movement was not as yet sufficiently disciplined and organized to do this without risking the initiation of extensive violence and disorder. The Congress leadership responded to this challenge by temporizing. On 31 March 1921 the All-India Congress Committee, the new "cabinet" of the congress which had been set up as part of the general party reorganization at the Nagpur meeting in December 1920, decided that henceforth the emphasis of non-cooperation would be on the production and use of swadeshi (i.e. 'Indian made') products and particularly on the production of cloth by means of the indigenous spinning wheel known as the charkha.⁴⁰⁵

The concentration of the Congress leadership on spinning and on the production and consumption of swadeshi goods failed to capture the imagination of the people of north Bihar.⁴⁰⁶ Because of this, and because of police repression and the emergence of differences of opinion between the Congress and the Khilafat leaders the non-cooperation movement experienced a temporary lull during July and August of 1921. The movement revived, however, from September, and moved towards its high point in December 1921 and January 1922.⁴⁰⁷ At the all-India level the decisive development came in September when the British arrested the Ali brothers, the leading spirits of the Khilafat movement, for having called upon Indian troops to mutiny. In reaction to their arrest a wave of protest began throughout India. In response the administration made further arrests and clamped down much more tightly on the movement. These initiatives inspired yet more protest. Gandhi added to the excitement by publicly repeating the words that had been the justification for the arrest of the Ali brothers.⁴⁰⁸ In north Bihar the movement achieved its greatest strength in the Tirhut division where it interacted with the anti-indigo campaign. According to a government report the Tirhut division "... was greatly disturbed"

for the "... three or four months" from October 1921 onwards.

Defiance of authority was common ... Europeans were frequently assaulted and insulted and Government servants were subjected to pressure of every kind to induce them to resign their posts in pursuance of the policy, for propagating which in its extremest form the Ali brothers were arrested ... Speeches delivered by irresponsible agitators calling for more volunteers ready to bear down by weight of numbers, and in complete disregard of casualties, the resistance which Government officers would be sure to put up against an attempt to stop public business. The imminence of civil disobedience was proclaimed and the announcement made that Mahatma Gandhi was about to wage war against the Government.⁴⁰⁹

The most dramatic incident in which non-cooperation activists brought pressure to bear on the structure of state control occurred in late December 1921 when 200 demonstrators invaded the Sonbarsa thana on the northern frontier of Muzaffarpur.⁴¹⁰ The demonstrators apparently had been inspired by the announcement of the All-India Congress Committee on 4 November that the non-cooperation movement had reached a stage at which its climactic phase of full civil disobedience could be undertaken in selected and carefully prepared areas.⁴¹¹ After invading the police station premises the non-cooperators called on the police to relinquish control and told them that "... they should leave Government service, as by remaining Hindus are eating cow flesh and Muhammadans are eating pig flesh".⁴¹² The police responded by arresting seven of the leaders of the demonstration. The remaining demonstrators "hung about from 4 o'clock till 11 at night ..." before finally dispersing. When reporting the incident the District Police Superintendent commented that the demonstration had been made by "... a mob of high caste men", and said that this boded ill for the future.⁴¹³ During December large crowds also demonstrated at two other thanas in Muzaffarpur. During one of the demonstrations, at the Hajipur thana in the south of the district, non-cooperation activists molested members of a group of beggars who had been assembled to be given alms

in celebration of the visit of the Prince of Wales to north Bihar.⁴¹⁴

The non-cooperation campaign reached its climax in December 1921 and January 1922. On 16 January 1922 the Purnea Police Superintendent reported that

Almost throughout the district there are rumours that Swaraj has been or very shortly will be obtained and this has resulted in certain specific outbreaks of lawlessness. In Rupauli P[olice] S[tation] the Sub-Inspector and police were openly defied by one of the parties in a land dispute. The party assembled in great numbers, forced the Sub-Inspector and the few police with him to leave the spot and in disregard of his warnings proceeded riotously to loot away the disputed crops with shouts of "Mahatma Gandhi ki jai". In Forbesganj P[olice] S[tation] some two or three hundred people attacked and demolished a pound at Dhanaha on 8.1.22 ... [and] ... raised the Swaraj flag over the ruins.⁴¹⁵

In the Araria thana in Purnea on 5 February 1922 three policemen and several chaukidars arrested three picketers who allegedly had assaulted and robbed a liquor shop customer. While taking its prisoners to the Araria police station the police party was "attacked by a large mob of a thousand people shouting the usual Non-Co-operation cries". The chaukidars fled at the beginning of the clash and the crowd surrounded the three regular policemen and inflicted slight injuries on them with "sticks and stones". The policemen relinquished their prisoners and managed to make their way back to the Araria police station.⁴¹⁶ On the same day at Chauri Chaura in Gorakhpur in the United Provinces, members of a non-cooperation procession massacred a group of policemen. Gandhi and the All-India Congress Committee reacted to the massacre by calling non-cooperation off, on the grounds that if it continued then extensive violence would result. The Chauri Chaura massacre provided an occasion for rather than the cause of the decision to suspend non-cooperation. Outbreaks of violence were merely a part of extensive popular turmoil over

which by late 1921 Gandhi, the All-India Congress Committee and the provincial branches of the Congress party had very little control. In some areas, notably in the United Provinces and on the Malabar coast in south India, this turmoil threatened the social order as much as or more than it challenged the formal structure of imperial rule.⁴¹⁷ The Congress wanted to force the British out of India, but in doing so it did not wish to demolish the existing social order.

As a result of the suspension of non-cooperation and because of continuing and effective police repression the campaign came to an end. But because the All-India Congress Committee sanctioned the continuation of swadeshi and prohibition propaganda and because the Bihar Congress held only tenuous control over many of its supporters the campaign took some time to grind to a halt. In the weeks after the suspension of non-cooperation several clashes developed between policemen and non-cooperation activists. In Darbhanga during March police clashed with non-cooperators who were campaigning against liquor consumption. The non-cooperators had decided to hold drunken persons up to ridicule by tying them up. When some policemen tried to intervene, the non-cooperators tied them up and marched them into Darbhanga town.⁴¹⁸ On 8 April at a fair being held at Sitamarhi town in northern Muzaffarpur a constable quarrelled with a group of picketers. Three of the picketeers attacked him and beat him with lathis. Some other policemen arrived, arrested the constable's assailants and took them off to a temporary thana that had been set up near the area in which the fair was being held. A mob of 3,000 people collected and followed the police to the thana. Further police reinforcements arrived but could not restrain the crowd, members of which began throwing bricks and bal fruits. The police retreated and their three prisoners escaped.⁴¹⁹

Later in April a police constable was attacked in a market place in Purnea. The incident began when Constable Gudar Chaubey and a companion made a visit to Sonepur bazaar. Though not on duty at the time they were armed with shot guns which had been issued to them because they had been engaged in anti-dacoit operations.⁴²⁰ Off-duty policemen customarily left their arms in safe custody at a police station, but since there was no police station nearby the two men had kept their weapons with them.⁴²¹ When the two men arrived at the bazaar they bought some ganja from a ganja seller and then got into conversation with Bajrangi Lal, a Marwari salt merchant, who offered to pay them if they would stop picketers from bothering him so that he could sell some foreign manufactured salt. Chaubey agreed to do so in return for two rupees. Two Khilafat volunteers, Alimuddin and Karam Ali, arrived outside the shop and tried to discourage people from buying salt by claiming that the purchase of foreign salt was the equivalent, for Hindus and Muslims respectively, of eating beef and pork. Chaubey began insulting and threatening the demonstrators and a crowd, in which Muslims were present in large numbers, gathered to watch the quarrel. Sometime around this point Chaubey's companion made a discreet exit from the scene. The quarrel developed into a free for all and the crowd jostled Chaubey, beat him with lathis and left him lying semi-conscious in a stretch of open ground near the bazaar. He had kept hold of his gun during the struggle and now, apparently to deter any renewal of the attack on him, fired off two rounds in the general direction of the market place, wounding four bystanders slightly. It seems that the firing was unnecessary because the people he had taken for potential attackers were actually spectators coming forward from other sections of the market to see the interesting and perhaps edifying sight of a bedraggled, dust covered police constable lying stretched out after having been beaten up.⁴²² The Commissioner of Bhagalpur, commenting on this incident, pointed out that because the movement in the

district was getting more and more quiet, because Chaubey himself had been unnecessarily provocative, and because a group of local Khilafat activists were helping police to trace dacoits it was not advisable to begin legal proceedings against Chaubey's attackers.⁴²³

Constable Chaubey's misconduct and subsequent embarrassment at the Sonepur market in Purnea typified the ineffectiveness of the police in meeting both the particular challenge of the non-cooperation movement and the more general challenge of popular turbulence during the 1917-23 period. The following and concluding section of the chapter examines in detail the impact of popular protest on police/administrative control in north Bihar.

Conclusion: police/administrative control 1917-22

In north Bihar between 1917 and 1923 unprecedented popular turbulence developed. Locally dominant groups took the leading part in this agitation. Along the banks of the Ganges in north Bhagalpur Bhumihars protested against the misconduct of the planter Grant. In Vidyanand's movement against the Darbhanga Raj the involvement of the leading men in a particular locality was a pre-condition for the mounting of a successful protest campaign. In the non-cooperation movement locally dominant small landlords and big tenants came forward and engaged in protest. The demonstrators who invaded the Sonbarsa thana in the north of Muzaffarpur district were subsequently described as "a mob of high caste men". In getting protest underway the locally dominant, following the same procedure employed in village level factional struggles, rallied support from among their clients and retainers within village society. More generally, once protest began, a bandwagon effect drew in people from the middle and lower levels of society who were keen to protect and advance their interests and to express their discontents. These people did not play an independent role, but they contributed greatly to the extent and intensity of protest. In the Kateya jurisdiction in Saran in February 1921 Koeris, Yadavs and "low caste" Muslims joined Brahmans in an attack on police. During Swami Vidyanand's campaign poor tenants, sharecroppers and low status Telis became involved in protest. People of low caste and Harijan status took a leading part in the burning of the Chauterwa factory. Those involved in the market looting associated with the non-cooperation movement came from the middle and lower reaches of north Bihar society.

In the turbulence of the 1917-22 period activists from outside the immediate locality played an important part in stimulating and coordinating protest. Among these activists both M.K. Gandhi and Swami Vidyanand combined

religious appeal with organizational skill. Gandhi became the figurehead of anti-indigo protest in Champaran, while Vidyanand sparked off protest in Darbhanga and Bhagalpur. In late 1920 members of the Bihar Congress initiated the non-cooperation campaign and thus provided a vehicle for the expression of a variety of discontents. The importance of the part played by these "outsiders" should not be exaggerated. As David Washbrook points out, they played a mediatory role within the constraints of a wider social and political system.⁴²⁴ The peasants of north Bihar, moreover, displayed an ability to engage in protest independently of outside intervention. The Bhumihars in the Sonbarsa area in Bhagalpur received only a single visit from Vidyanand. Their anti-indigo agitation had begun before his arrival, and continued strongly after he had departed. In Champaran, Gandhi attracted great attention. But in 1908-09 and 1915-16 the tenants of the district had engaged in extensive protest in the absence of outside intervention. And long after Gandhi had left Champaran, vigorous protest continued. During the non-cooperation campaign, the members of the regional intelligentsia responsible for the initiation of protest retained only limited control over many of their supporters.

Activists who intervened in particular localities did however contribute greatly to the coordination of protest over wide areas. The geographical spread of protest, the depth of the social support it commanded and the tendency of protest to become violent combined to create anxiety among the British officials responsible for the administration of north Bihar. Officials had worried least about the tenants' rights movement, which had essentially been a dispute within the landed interest between the Maharaja of Darbhanga and his locally dominant tenants. This movement had attracted extensive support, but had remained under the control of locally dominant peasants, had involved little violence and had been contained effectively by the Darbhanga

Raj. More anxiety had been created in official circles by the anti-indigo movement. The antagonists in this struggle were indigo planters holding landlord rights and locally dominant peasants, and thus to some extent it can be regarded as merely being a conflict within the landed interest. But the movement had wider implications. After the crisis in the indigo industry had begun the planters pressed down heavily not merely on their tenants, but on all sections of the population in the areas of their influence. The campaign against them commanded widespread support and involved a number of violent incidents. The planters found themselves in a vulnerable position before this wave of protest. They comprised an alien elite, and unlike Indian landlords they could not depend on caste and kinship ties and on the prestige associated with high ritual status to consolidate their influence among locally dominant groups. Because of the ethnic identity between planters and British officials, the administration found that by supporting the planters it attracted popular antagonism to itself. The feelings roused by the anti-indigo campaign contributed to the strength of the non-cooperation movement in north Bihar. Locally dominant peasants and their allies and caste fellows in the regional intelligentsia played a leading part in non-cooperation. In part the movement resulted from conflicts within the landed interest, in that small landlords and big tenants who supported the nationalist movement saw it as a means whereby to improve their position vis-à-vis the allies of the British administration, namely the great landlords and the indigo planters. The movement also represented a successful attempt by a section of the landed interest to draw on popular discontents which might threaten its own position and direct them against the imperial state. Because the non-cooperation campaign attracted wide support for its challenge to the state structure, it created much anxiety among British officials.

During 1921, the year when the anti-indigo and non-cooperation campaigns climaxed, many British officials thought an extensive uprising imminent. In May 1921 Atkins, a planter and a Legislative Councillor, informed the administration that a "... great spirit of lawlessness" prevailed in north Bihar. When Atkins gave the Home Member of the Government of India his opinions on the turmoil in the region, he received a careful hearing.⁴²⁵ The British worried particularly over the possibility of insurrection in north Bihar because the region had a population which included "... many turbulent elements". They also worried over the safety of the European population. North Bihar was "... cut off from the rest of the Province by the broad stream of the Ganges".⁴²⁶ It contained

... a considerable European community numbering several hundreds. Twenty years ago the great majority of the Europeans were attached to the indigo factories that were established all over the Division but owing to the decline in the indigo industry many are now employed in sugar factories or rice mills or in zamindari management. The community is a scattered one and many of its members live in lonely and isolated positions.⁴²⁷

If racial hostility became acute the position of the Europeans would be very precarious. In theory the non-official European population contributed to its own protection because its menfolk were organized into the Bihar Light Horse, an auxiliary body of some 100 or so mounted riflemen which held annual drills. This unit was, however, likely to be of limited use in the case of a widespread rising because of the "... necessity of its members to stay close to their properties and families in order to protect them ..."⁴²⁸

In 1921-22 the provincial administration deployed an extra company of military policemen in the Tirhut division to reinforce the squadron of mounted military police stationed there; requisitioned the temporary services

of a squadron of cavalry from the Eastern Command of the Indian Army; and arranged for the building of barracks at Muzaffarpur town to accommodate a company of British infantry detailed from the battalion stationed at Dinapur town, near Patna.⁴²⁹ In addition, in December 1921, on the grounds of the recurrent turbulence which had occurred in the preceding months, the administration arranged for the publication of a notification under the Criminal Law Amendment Act. The implementation of this legislation allowed the Bihar and Orissa government to greatly restrict the holding of public meetings in connection with the anti-indigo and non-cooperation campaigns. In explaining to the Government of India why his government thought extraordinary legislation should be enacted the Bihar and Orissa Chief Secretary contended that

... the Bihari ryot is ordinarily a docile and credulous person whose actions are governed more by instinct than by reason. He is peculiarly susceptible to three influences, namely, (1) a clear order from someone who he believes has the power to enforce it, (2) an appeal to his religious feelings, and (3) a mutual desire to make common cause with his fellow-countrymen, fellow religionists, fellow castemen, and fellow villagers as the case may be. Since the inauguration of the Non Co-operation movement, the Non Co-operation authorities consistently exploited precisely these three influences to their utmost, using social boycott as their ultimate sanction.⁴³⁰

The Chief Secretary then continued his explanation by listing various incidents which had occurred in the course of 1921. He mentioned, among other things, the attack on police investigating an allegation of intimidation in Kateya thana, Saran, the clash between the planter Meyrick and a leading local civil disobedience activist, the murder of two indigo factory peons in Muzaffarpur, the boycott of European owned markets, the vigorous picketting of cloth and liquor shops, and the burning of the Chauterwa factory.⁴³¹

The wave of popular turbulence between 1917 and 1923 severely tried the authorities. Official policy aimed at making the Montagu/Chelmsford reforms work, and hence the administration had to tread carefully. Progressive opinion in Britain had to be placated, and the moderates of Indian politics had to be kept in sympathy with the regime. Undue repression, as the aftermath of the Amritsar massacre had shown, could exacerbate tensions and create a politically costly backlash. Equally, however, the administration had to preserve law and order, and had to appear as an impartial arbiter, dealing out even-handed justice.⁴³² In north Bihar the attempt to project an image of impartiality was handicapped by the favouritism the administration displayed towards the planters and the zamindars, whom it regarded as essential political allies. Unfortunately for the British, neither zamindars nor planters justified this reliance. The zamindars were mostly passive rather than active supporters of the regime, and some of the smaller fry among them, as was shown during the non-cooperation movement, tended to participate in anti-administration protest. The planters were committed and organized supporters of British rule, but their oppressiveness created grave problems of law and order. And unlike Indian landlords the planters could neither make use of personal caste and kinship ties nor benefit from high ritual status to consolidate their position within local society. Hence they often looked to the administration for support.

Official partiality to the zamindars revealed itself during Swami Vidyanand's tenants' rights movement. The administration and the police were committed in theory to take a neutral stance and to administer the law impartially. Because the campaign did not involve the eruption of violence, the police and administration were more easily able to present an appearance of being strictly neutral. This appearance disguised the reality that police and local officials tended to side with the Darbhanga Raj against the

dissident tenantry. The police did not effectively protect Vidyanand against harassment by Darbhanga Raj lathials, and police and local officials, rather than protect Vidyanand's right to speak, were quite prepared to close down his meetings on the grounds that a breach of the peace appeared likely as a result of the activities of Vidyanand's opponents. The administration had sympathy for the grievances of the tenantry, but because of its support for the zamindari system, and particularly for the Maharaja of Darbhanga, the premier zamindar of north Bihar, it was unwilling to do anything substantial to express this sympathy. To the extent that they remained impartial, the police and administration managed to avoid turning the anti-landlord antagonism of the Darbhanga Raj peasantry against themselves. But because they partly compromised this impartiality by covert assistance to the Darbhanga Raj, they lost prestige and support.

Partiality to the indigo planters also sapped the strength of police/administrative control. The administration had an ambivalent attitude towards the indigo industry. Officials regarded the planters as a useful bulwark of British rule, and because they had similar ethnic backgrounds and mutual sporting and social interests strong ties often developed between planters and district level officials. But the administration also knew that planters and officials were closely identified together in Indian eyes, and it reacted unfavourably when planters, by stirring up trouble among the peasantry, acted to create difficulties for the administration and to endanger the stability of the British Raj. But though the administration tended to be critical of the misbehaviour of planters, it would not propose radical reform of the indigo industry. The administration realized that the influence of the planters depended on their possession, under long term leases, of zamindari rights, and that any attempt to restrict the exercise of these rights would be tantamount to an attack on the cornerstone of British rule over north

Bihar, namely the zamindari system established by the Permanent Settlement of 1793. So when planter/peasant trouble surfaced, the administration characteristically attempted to arrange a compromise whereby conflicts of interest could be papered over and at least the appearance of social harmony restored. Sometimes, the administration was able to mediate successfully. In the case of the dispute in the Shillingford concern in Purnea, for example, the District Magistrate managed to arrange the redress of the tenants' grievances over abwabs and to get them to agree to suspend their agitation. In other cases, however, official attempts at compromise did not achieve lasting success. The Champaran Agrarian Act of 1918, for example, did not effectively deal with all the tenants' grievances, and tenant protest continued to simmer in Champaran during the ensuing years. By failing to take a strong, unequivocal stand against an industry which for economic reasons would eventually collapse of its own accord, the British administration of north Bihar, in the event to no real purpose, made itself the target of extensive dissatisfaction.

The police, like the administration, lost out as a result of the anti-indigo movement. The police, as the instrument of the administration, were theoretically neutral in planter/tenant disputes. But they became strongly identified as acting in the interests of the planters. From time to time, as for example in the involvement of mounted troopers in a looting expedition through some villages in the Dhanaha area in Champaran, they quite obviously sided with planters and their amlas against villagers. And after such violent incidents as the Sonbarsa massacre and the Chauterwa arson case, the police who came into the area to investigate immediately found themselves cast in the role of supporters of the planters. Not only did the police lose public sympathy; they also lost credibility. In the two incidents mentioned above, the most serious breaches of order in the region between 1917 and 1922,

scarcely any of the villagers involved were brought to book.

Nor did the apparatus of police/administrative control maintain its prestige through its handling of the non-cooperation movement. The non-cooperation campaign was particularly difficult to contain because of the repercussions of the anti-indigo movement. Antagonism to the European planters easily translated itself into general anti-British and anti-administration feeling. Non-cooperation gathered greatest strength in the Tirhut division, the area where the anti-indigo movement was strongest. In north Bihar in the early 1920s, the colonial attitudes of British planters and officials were mirrored back at them in anti-colonial feeling. This attitude reached a peak in the early 1920s partially because over the preceding years, as a result of British initiatives, there had been a transformation in attitudes towards the state. Throughout the 19th century, for most north Biharis, the imperial state had been a distant, autocratic entity which played a limited role in their lives.⁴³³ From the last decades of the century, however, this sense of distance began to diminish.⁴³⁴ In order to improve the political and financial stability of their far flung empire the British, in 1892, 1909 and 1919, made several constitutional concessions. These concessions progressively increased the opportunities for a section of Indian society to participate in institutions of representative government, particularly in the sphere of local government. Constitutional advance and devolution of government power directly affected only a small minority of the population, but had wider repercussions because this minority commanded considerable wealth and influence. Through the extension of representative institutions the state linked the politics of the locality and the region into wider imperial structure and itself became a more obtrusive factor in local politics. The constitutional concessions were less rapid and less substantial than many had hoped, and thus their implementation created as much animosity

as it won support. And because of the structure of imperial control in north Bihar, and particularly because of the zamindari system, government had few resources at its disposal after it had covered the costs of revenue collection and of seeing "... that the districts remained quiet".⁴³⁵ Hence it could spend little on social and administrative services which might have reaped a valuable harvest of political support. Through intervention in local political arenas the imperial state created expectations which, because of its pattern of rule, it did not have the capacity to fulfil. More than they had in the 19th century, people came to look at the state as a resource and to blame it for many of their problems.

Hostility to the imperial state increased because of the deficiencies of its main instrument in north Bihar, the police force. The British wished to keep a tight rein on non-cooperation, but did not wish to alienate liberal and moderate opinion in India and Britain by unnecessary rigour in their measures against the campaign.⁴³⁶ The inadequacies of the police force made it impossible for them to preserve this fine balance. The police were few in number and poorly equipped and were trained merely to handle routine police work rather than to cope with the challenge of an extensive civil disobedience movement involving large numbers of people who, other than their involvement in the movement, were law abiding citizens. Because they were few in number and poorly equipped the police found it difficult to handle large and hostile crowds. In the Kateya area in Saran in February 1920 and at Sitamarhi fair in Muzaffarpur in April 1922 small groups of unarmed police retreated before the onslaught of large, angry groups of people. The police, moreover, were often inept, corrupt and harsh. Constable Chaubey's misconduct and subsequent embarrassment at the Sonapur market in Purnea typified the failings of the police. Another incident illustrative of their inadequacies occurred during the wave

of market looting which developed during January 1921. During a riot in the Makhana bazaar in the Bakhtiarpur thana of north Monghyr members of the crowd looted four stalls. The police subsequently arrested 13 people of whom three, it later emerged, had been falsely charged to gratify private grudges. Apart from the laying of false charges, the general conduct of the local police left much to be desired. Official investigation showed that in the period before the looting there had been great discontent among the local police constables and among the chaukidars. The chaukidars were resentful because their pay had not been raised for many years, despite rising prices. And according to the District Magistrate the constables were discontented because, as a result of agitation among the peasantry, they now had "... to pay for their own food, a new and unpleasant experience which gives them an unusually large interest in prices".⁴³⁷ There was good reason to believe, the Magistrate concluded, that the riot and robbery

was organized by the local dafadar and chaukidars with at least the acquiescence of the staff of the police station and there are some grounds for thinking that the writer head constable of the police station and some of the constables were actually concerned in organizing it.⁴³⁸

The inadequacies of the police resulted directly from the financial weakness of the province of Bihar and Orissa, which in turn derived from the structure of imperial rule in the province. In Bihar and Orissa all the instrumentalities of government were starved of funds. In 1922 the police force of the province was severely undermanned, both in proportion to population and to area. This deficiency continued even though, since the foundation of the province in 1912, the share of the budget devoted to the police force had increased by 50 per cent.⁴³⁹ For both financial and political reasons, the provincial administration considered that no further increases could be made. The provincial finances were in an extremely

straitened condition, and had been tightened further as a result of the effect of the non-cooperators' prohibition campaign on the income from excise. And further increases in support of the unpopular and much criticized police force would be politically unacceptable to the more representative legislature which had come into being under the Montagu/Chelmsford reforms.⁴⁴⁰ The Bihar and Orissa government had insufficient funds even to pay its police constables a wage above that earned by ordinary labourers. Policemen therefore had little incentive to refrain from corruption. In January and February 1921 police work was disrupted over a wide area when an extensive agitation developed among the constabulary over their low pay.⁴⁴¹ Nor could the provincial government afford to meet the extra expenses associated with the policing of the non-cooperation movement. In May 1921 the Bihar and Orissa government reported to the Government of India Army Department that the maintenance by the provincial authorities

... of a force sufficient to cope unaided with the disturbances which may result from the Non Co-operation movement is entirely beyond their power. It would be unreasonable to plan the permanent arrangements for maintaining law and order on the assumption that the Non Co-operation movement is to go on indefinitely.⁴⁴²

The Bihar and Orissa Government found this problem of finance impossible to resolve. Under the Montagu/Chelmsford reforms the provinces had been given financial autonomy, and hence the provincial government could solicit only limited help from the Government of India. Nor did the Bihar and Orissa administration see any way of increasing its income from within the province itself. Land was the main source of wealth and because of the pattern of agrarian relations within the structure of imperial rule most of the agrarian surplus was absorbed by the landed interest, and particularly by the zamindars. Only a small share went to the state. Because of its financial difficulties, the provincial administration ran its police force

on a shoe-string. The police force, like the administration it represented, displayed weaknesses in its handling of the non-cooperation movement. More generally, the popular turbulence of the 1917 to 1923 period revealed the deficiencies of the apparatus of formal, police/administrative control in north Bihar. In the early 1930s, these deficiencies would be revealed even more clearly.

- 1 Judith M. Brown, *Gandhi's Rise to Power: Indian Politics 1915-1922* (London 1972), pp. 61-22; GGB, *Statutory Commission XII*, p. 9; Hauser "Bihar Kisan Sabha", p. 31; B.R. Tomlinson, "India and the British Empire, 1880-1935", *Indian Economic and Social History Review* XI, 2-3, 1974, pp. 337-80, pp. 349-52.
- 2 Hauser, "Bihar Kisan Sabha", p. 7.
- 3 O'Malley, *Champaran*, pp. 108-11; Maori, *Nepaul Frontier*, p. 7.
- 4 B.B. Misra (ed.), *Select Documents on Mahatma Gandhi's Movement in Champaran 1917-18* (Patna 1963) "Introduction", p. 8.
- 5 Binay Chaudhuri, "Agrarian economy and agrarian relations in Bengal 1859-1855" (Oxford D.Phil. thesis 1968);
B.B. Kling, *The Blue Mutiny. The Indigo Disturbances in Bengal 1859-1862* (London, 1966); Ranajit Guha, "Neel-Darpan: The Image of a Peasant Revolt in a Liberal Mirror", *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 2, 1, October 1974, pp. 1-46.
- 6 Fisher, "Indigo Plantations", p. 35.
- 7 G. Mishra, "Indigo Plantation and the Agrarian Relations in Champaran during the Nineteenth Century", *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, III, 4, Dec. 1966, pp. 332-57.
- 8 Byrne, *Bhagalpur* p. 129; O'Malley, *Champaran* p. 111, *Saran* p. 102-03, *Muzaffarpur* p. 101, *Darbhanga* p. 99, *Monghyr* p. 140-1, *Purnea* p. 130-1.
- 9 Datta, *Freedom Movement in Bihar*, I, pp. 179-80.
- 10 O'Malley, *Muzaffarpur*, p. 126.
- 11 Gorakh Prasad to Editor, *Searchlight*, 31 Dec. 1920; "The Voice of the

- Tenant", *Searchlight*, 22 Sept. 1922; Brown, *Gandhi's Rise*, p. 64; Datta, *Freedom Movement*, II, p. 224; Sunil Munshi, "Railway Network Growth in Eastern India 1854-1910", Centre for Studies in Social Sciences Calcutta, Occasional Paper No. 3.
- 12 Maori, *Nepaul Frontier*, pp. 5-6.
- 13 Fisher, "Indigo Plantations", pp. 55, 232.
- 14 The following account of a planter's mode of operation is drawn from Maori, *Nepaul Frontier*, chap. 2.
- 15 Fisher, "Indigo Plantations", chap. 5.
- 16 Maori, *Nepaul Frontier*, p. 18.
- 17 *Ibid.*
- 18 In 1917 a British official, J.A. Sweeney, commented that "The danger of the system is the extent of power exercised. Everything depends on the personality of the Manager. The same concern may change, in the eyes of the tenants, from a benevolent despotism to a capricious tyranny". Sweeney went on to remark that most of a planter's troubles were due to his amlas. GBO, *Champaran Committee Report*, p. 9.
- 19 Misra, *Select Documents*, p. 7. For detailed discussion of the tenants' grievances, see also G. Mishra, "Socio-Economic Background of Gandhi's Champaran Movement", *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, V, 3, September 1968, pp. 245-75.
- 20 Jacques Pouchepadass, "Local leaders and the intelligentsia in the Champaran satyagraha (1917): a study in peasant mobilization", *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, New Series 8, 1974, pp. 67-87, p. 74;

Mishra, "Socio-Economic Background".

- 21 Fisher, "Indigo Plantations", pp. 87, 89.
- 22 *Ibid.*, p. 85, 87, 89, 103.
- 23 *Ibid.*, pp. 64, 104, 105, 109, 310; Datta, *Freedom Movement*, II, p. 223.
- 24 Fisher, "Indigo Plantations", p. 312.
- 25 *Ibid.*, pp. 111, 112. For a perceptive analysis of the particular circumstances in which this antipathy found political expression during the 19th century, see *ibid.*, chap. 3 and the same author's "Planters and Peasants: The Ecological Context of Agrarian Unrest on the Indigo Plantations of North Bihar", in Clive Dewey and A.G. Hopkins (eds.), *The Imperial Impact. Studies in the Economic History of Africa and India* (London 1978).
- 26 *Ibid.*, pp. 46-7.
- 27 Beames, *Memoirs*, pp. 172-3.
- 28 *Ibid.*
- 29 Maori, *Nepaul Frontier*, pp. 153, 223; Fisher, "Indigo Plantations", p. 47.
- 30 Wilson, *Behar Indigo Factories*, pp. 100-01, 122-3, 138-9, 242-3, 329-31.
- 31 Datta, *Freedom Movement*, II, p. 175; Fisher, "Indigo Plantations", pp. 59, 60, 103, 176-8.
- 32 Yang, "Saran Riots", p. 15; Datta, *Freedom Movement*, II, pp. 178-9; Fisher, "Indigo Plantations", p. 104.

- 33 O'Malley, *Champaran*, p. 117; Sweeney, *Champaran Settlement Report*, p. 25; Maori, *Nepaul Frontier*, p. 22; Fisher, "Indigo Plantations", p. 217.
- 34 In the opinion of one official much depended "... on the management ... with a considerate and just manager, who looks into all affairs, and checks the work ... the ryots are philosophically resigned ..."
Collector/Magistrate Norman, quoted in *British Parliamentary Papers*, 1890-91, 59, 157, p. 12.
- 35 Fisher, "Indigo Plantations", p. 310, 311.
- 36 Stephen Henningham, "The Social Setting of the Champaran Satyagraha: The Challenge to an Alien Elite", *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, XIII, 1, 1976, pp. 59-73, 63-4, 66-7, 72.
- 37 Fisher, "Indigo Plantations", p. 64; O'Malley, *Champaran*, pp. 109-10.
- 38 *British Parliamentary Papers*, 1890-91, 59, 157, p. 8; T.R. Filgate, "The Behar Planters' Association, Ltd", in Arnold Wright (ed.), *Bengal and Assam, Behar and Orissa* (London 1917) pp. 268-351, 268-71.
- 39 Fisher, "Indigo Plantations", p. 311.
- 40 *Ibid.*, pp. 35, 37, 51.
- 41 D.J. Reid, "Indigo in Behar", in Wright, *Bengal and Behar*; T.F. Filgate, "The Behar Planters' Association"; Henningham, "Social Setting of Champaran Satyagraha", pp. 62-4. For descriptions and photographs of the planters' properties see Wilson, *Behar Indigo Factories* and Filgate, "Behar Planters' Association". According to Filgate the management of the Seeraha concern in Muzaffarpur had devoted

a section of its 21,000 acres to the construction of a golf course.

- 42 Wilson, *Behar Indigo Factories*, p. 101; O'Malley, *Purnea*, pp. 130-31.
- 43 O'Malley, *Champaran*, p. 111.
- 44 Reid, "Indigo in Bihar", p. 238.
- 45 Fisher, "Indigo Plantations", p. 280.
- 46 *Ibid.*; Filgate, "Behar Planters' Association".
- 47 "Rutherfordism at Bettiah", *Searchlight*, 18 Aug. 1920: "Rutherfordism", *Searchlight*, 1 Sep. 1920; Pouchepadass, "Local leaders and intelligentsia", pp. 73-4; Henningham, "Social Setting of Champaran Satyagraha", p. 68.
- 48 Misra, *Select Documents*, p. 13; Filgate, "Behar Planters' Association", p. 349.
- 49 Misra, *Select Documents*, pp. 13-14; Mishra, "Socio-Economic Background".
- 50 Sweeney, *Champaran Settlement Report*, p. 19.
- 51 *Ibid.*; M. Razi Ahmad, "Indigo Unrest in Champaran and Mahatma Gandhi, 1867-1918", (Patna University Doctoral thesis 1966), p. 97, note 27.
- 52 Sweeney, *Champaran Settlement Report*, p. 20.
- 53 *Ibid.*
- 54 *Ibid.*
- 55 *Ibid.*; Misra, *Select Documents*, p. 15.
- 56 About 15,000 peasants assembled at the station and shouted, in the

local Bhojpuri variant of Hindi, slogans that outlined their grievances. Their efforts miscarried: when George asked about the meaning of the slogans a quick-witted aide told him that they were expressions of joy and welcome. Rajendra Prasad, *Satyagraha in Champaran* (Ahmedabad 1949), p. 42.

57 Sweeney, *Champaran Settlement Report*, p. 21.

58 The previous Survey and Settlement operations were conducted from 1892 to 1899. *BDG Champaran*, p. 126; Sweeney, *Champaran Settlement Report*, p. 1.

59 Sweeney, *Champaran Settlement Report*, p. 23.

60 *Ibid.*, p. 25.

61 *Ibid.*

62 *Ibid.*

63 Misra, *Select Documents*, pp. 18-20.

64 *Ibid.*, p. 20.

65 Datta, *Freedom Movement II*, pp. 193-5; Brown, *Gandhi's Rise*, p. 65.

66 R.A. Huttenback, *Gandhi in South Africa, British Imperialism and the Indian Question, 1860-1914*, (London 1971); Brown, *Gandhi's Rise*, chap. 1.

67 Joan Bondurant, *Conquest of Violence, The Gandhian Philosophy of Conflict*. (New Jersey 1958).

68 Henningham, "Social Setting of Champaran Satyagraha".

- 69 The Champaran District Officer, W.B. Heycock, was directed to pass the order by L.F. Morsehead, the Commissioner of the Tirhut Division. Morsehead to District Magistrate, Champaran, 13 April 1917, and Heycock to Gandhi, 16 April 1917, Misra, *Select Documents*, pp. 61-2.
- 70 Telegram, GBO to Tirhut Commissioner, 19 April 1917, Misra, *Select Documents*, p. 73.
- 71 H. McPherson to L.F. Morsehead, 20 April 1917, Misra, *Select Documents*, p. 75-6.
- 72 M.K. Gandhi, Statement filed before Subdivisional Magistrate, Motihari, 18 April 1917, Misra, *Select Documents*, p. 69.
- 73 Pouchepadass, "Local leaders and intelligentsia in Champaran", pp. 69-71.
- 74 Brown, *Gandhi's Rise*, p. 77.
- 75 Sweeney, *Champaran Settlement Report*, p. 23. Judith M. Brown points out that at the time Gandhi became involved in Champaran affairs primary produce prices had dropped sharply, a development which affected cultivators "... who were accustomed to buying products imported into Champaran with the profit from the small surplus they grew over and above their own immediate needs". She suggests that this economic pressure on pivotal groups in the middle range of society increased unrest and contributed to the interest inspired by Gandhi. See her, *Gandhi's Rise*, pp. 60-1.
- 76 Pouchepadass, "Local leaders and intelligentsia", pp. 82-4.
- 77 M.K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography. The Story of My Experiments With Truth*, (London 1966), p. 350.

- 78 Pouchepadass, "Local leaders and intelligentsia", pp. 83-5; W.H. Lewis, Subdivisional Officer to W.B. Heycock, District Magistrate, 29 April 1917, Misra, *Select Documents*, p. 99.
- 79 For the interaction of the Government of India and the provincial government on this issue, see Brown, *Gandhi's Rise*, pp. 70-2.
- 80 H. Cox, Secretary Bihar Planters' Association, Champaran, to H. McPherson, Chief Secretary GBO, n.d., Misra, *Select Documents*, p. 219.
- 81 Brown, *Gandhi's Rise*, p. 72.
- 82 Pouchepadass's claim that the activities of Gandhi and his associates "... eventually met with full success " is exaggerated. "Local leaders and intelligentsia", p. 85.
- 83 Sweeney, *Champaran Settlement Report*, p. 23.
- 84 Prasad, *Satyagraha in Champaran*; D.G. Tendulkar, *Gandhi in Champaran* (Calcutta, 1957).
- 85 Sweeney, *Champaran Settlement Report*, p. 25.
- 86 *Ibid.*
- 87 For details of the all-inclusive range of zamindari rights, see Sen, *India*, p. 135.
- 88 Mishra, "Socio-Economic Background", pp. 269-74.
- 89 R.A. Sweeney, quoted by Hammond, Legislative Council Proceedings, p. 9, PSf 159, 1922, BSA.
- 90 Mishra, "Socio-Economic Background", pp. 269.

- 91 Speech by Hammond, Legislative Council Proceedings, PSf 159, 1922, BSA.
- 92 Mishra, "Socio-Economic Background to Gandhi's Movement", p. 271;
"The Voice of the Tenant", *Searchlight*, 22 Sept. 1922.
- 93 "The Voice of the Tenant", *Searchlight*, 22 Sept. 1922.
- 94 Sweeney, *Champaran Settlement Report*, p. 24; Purnea District Magistrate,
"Terms of Settlement", 29 May 1921, PSf 184, 1921, BSA.
- 95 *Searchlight*, 19 Aug. 1921.
- 96 Prasad, *Satyagraha in Champaran*, pp. 16-17; Brown, *Gandhi's Rise*,
p. 63.
- 97 Sweeney, *Champaran Settlement Report*, p. 25; GBO FR (1) Jan. 1918,
PSf 8, 1918, BSA.
- 98 GBO Police Abstract 419, Champaran, 7 Mar. 1919, BSA.
- 99 Baden-Powell, *Land-Systems*, II, pp. 630-1.
- 100 *Ibid.*, pp. 641-56.
- 101 See Chapter 1 above, p. 32.
- 102 Wilson, *Behar Indigo Factories*, pp. 332-4.
- 103 Maori, *Nepaul Frontier*, pp. 216, 220-21; Wilson, *Behar Indigo
Factories*, p. 191.
- 104 Buddhikar Jha, interview, Darbhanga town, 20 Sept. 1976.
- 105 O'Donnell, *Ruin of an Indian Province*.
- 106 Maori, *Nepaul Frontier*, pp. 216-17; Wilson, *Behar Indigo Factories*,
pp. 190-1.

- 107 O'Malley, Purnea, p. 113; C. Vowell, "Report on the Census of the District of Purnea, 1891", para. 145, Misc. Papers, BSA.
- 108 See for example, J.A. Sweeney, "Statement on Ramnagar", *Champaran Committee Report*, II.
- 109 It is difficult to establish when migration to Nepal ceased to be an attractive proposition. As late as 1921, when the tenants of the Parihar circle of the Darbhanga Raj petitioned the Maharaja in order to make complaints against the acting circle manager, calling for his dismissal, they contended that "... if he will live here any more, we shall go to settle in Nepal". Petition from Mahanand Raut, f 8G, C Darkasht, G 1921-22, RDA.
- 110 It was generally agreed that small zamindars were particularly hard landlords. Kerr, *Darbhangra Settlement Report*, p. 101; Lila Rai to Editor, *Searchlight*, 24 Sept. 1922.
- 111 The large zamindars of Bihar had large incomes, but often lived beyond them, and became embroiled in financial difficulty. See "Review of 1896", *Behar Times*, 1 Jan. 1897, and "Triennial Review", *Behar Times*, 5 Jan. 1900.
- 112 Umarpathi Tewari, who became a clerk in the Darbhanga Raj in 1936, was the son of Ram Sakhi Tewari, who held about 50 acres of land, some as a tenant and some as a zamindar. Palat Mishra, who was a Darbhanga Raj jeth ryot in the Madhubani subdivision of Darbhanga in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, held about 12 to 15 acres of high quality land. Interview, Jageshwar Mishra, Darbhanga town 23 Sept. 1976; Interview, Umarpathi Tewari, Dumari village, Darbhanga, 17 Oct. 1976.

- 113 Confidential Police Report on Purnea, f 14H, C XXVI, G 1919-20, RDA; *Champaran Committee Report*, II, p. 9; "Benaili Raj - Amlas' Oppressions", *Searchlight*, 29 Sept. 1920.
- 114 Badrinath Upadhyaya, *Reply to 'The Open Letter' Printed in the Searchlight Steam Press with a foreword from an alleged Sanyasi calling himself Swami Vidyanand* (Bankipore, n.d.), p. 1. This 52-page pamphlet, which was written by the manager of the Rajnager circle of the Darbhanga Raj, is highly critical of Vidyanand but supplies much information about his activities. The author of the pamphlet quotes Vidyanand's letters and petitions in detail before presenting arguments against them.
- 115 *Ibid.*
- 116 *Ibid.* See also the denial by Shiva Shankar Jha, one of Vidyanand's associates, that he and Vidyanand had misused Gandhi's name. *Searchlight* 15 Dec. 1920.
- 117 In November 1919 Vidyanand commented "... The zamindari of the Maharaja Bahadur of Darbhanga is not only in the District of Darbhanga but mostly in all the neighbouring districts and the tyrannical oppressions have been prevailing everywhere which are not a bit less than those of Champaran." Vidyanand to the Lieutenant-Governor Bihar and Orissa, 17 Nov. 1919, para 14, quoted in Upadhyaya, *Reply to Vidyanand*, pp. 33-6.
- 118 GBO Police Abstract 1356, Darbhanga 5 July 1919, BSA; GBO FR (1) Oct. 1919, GBO Ps f 8, 1920, BSA.
- 119 GBO Police Abstract 1356, 5 July 1919, BSA.
- 120 Memorial to the Lieutenant Governor of Bihar and Orissa, quoted in Upadhyaya *Reply to Vidyanand*, pp. 2-3. The land that the landlord had

resumed had originally been taken over for indigo cultivation on the tinkathia system.

- 121 Five of these petitions are quoted in *ibid.* on pp. 2, 7, 12, 16, 19.
- 122 *Ibid.*, pp. 12-14.
- 123 *Ibid.*, p. 47.
- 124 Note by Onraet, Manager Rohika circle, 11 Aug. 1920, on letter from Lakshmi Kant Jha, f 14H, C XXVI, G 1919-20, RDA.
- 125 *Ibid.*
- 126 GBO Police Abstract 1842, Bhagalpur 14 Nov. 1919, BSA; Upadhyaya, *Reply to Vidyānand*, pp. 34-6.
- 127 Upadyha, *Reply to Vidyānand*, pp. 35-6; GBO Police Abstract 1944, Bhagalpur, 22 Nov. 1919, BSA.
- 128 GBO Police Abstract 1981, Bihar Special Branch, 13 Dec. 1919, BSA.
- 129 GBO FR (2) Dec. 1919, GBO Ps f 8, 1920, BSA.
- 130 Swami Bidyanand, "Timely notice to cultivators", leaflet quoted in GBO Police Abstract 1680, Bihar Special Branch 11 Oct. 1919, BSA; GBO Police Abstract 1786, Bihar Special Branch 1 Nov. 1919, BSA.
- 131 Manager, Naredigar Circle, Raj Darbhanga to Supaul Subdivisional Officer, 20 Nov. 1920, f 10E, C V, L 1920-21, RDA.
- 132 GBO FR (1) Jan. 1920, PS f 8, 1920, BSA.
- 133 Onraet, Manager Rohika Circle to General Manager, 7 Jan. 1920, f 14 H, C XXV, G 1919-20, RDA.

- 134 GBO FR (1) Feb. 1920, PSf 8, 1920, BSA.
- 135 *Ibid.*
- 136 GBO FR (1) Mar. 1920, PSf 8, 1920, BSA.
- 137 GBO FR (2) April 1920, PSf 8, 1920, BSA.
- 138 GBO FRS for May-Sept, PSf 8, 1920, BSA.
- 139 GBO FR (1) July 1920, PS f 8, 1920, BSA.
- 140 GBO FR (1) May 1920, PSf 8, 1920, BSA.
- 141 GBO FR (1) July 1920, PSf 8, 1920, BSA.
- 142 Naredigar Manager to Head Office 20 March 1920 f 14H, C XXVI G 1919-20;
Pandoul Manager to Babu Nath Bannurjee 12 March 1920 f 14H, C XXVI
G 1919-20.
- 143 GBO Police Abstract 1756, Bihar Special Branch 25 Oct. 1919, BSA.
- 144 GBO, *Instructions for the preparation of the electoral role*, (Patna
1920) BSA.
- 145 Brown, *Gandhi's Rise*, p. 289; GBO FR (1) Dec. 1920, PSf 8, 1920, BSA.
- 146 For tenants' allegations against amlas, see the Darkasht (i.e. petition)
files in the General Department holdings of the Darbhanga Raj.
- 147 See for example the conference papers, f 14S C XXVI, G 1919-20, RDA.
- 148 Naredigar AAR 1318 F (1910-11), f 16D3, C Naredigar, G 1941-42, RDA;
Dharampur Manager to Chief Manager, 13 March 1920, f 2, C XXXIV,
G 1919-20, RDA: Upadhyaya, *Reply to Vidyamand*, p. 13, para 5.
- 149 Jacques Pouchepadass, "Local leaders and intelligentsia", pp. 74-5;
Interview, Jageshwar Mishra, Darbhanga town, 15 Sept. 1976.

- 150 Pouchepadass, "Local leaders and intelligentsia", p. 75; Alapur AAR 1326 F (1918-19) f 2, C XXXIV, G 1919-20, RDA; Interview, Jageshwar Mishra, Darbhanga town, 15 Sept. 1976.
- 151 Naredigar AAR 1318 F (1910-11), f 16D3, C Naredigar, G 1941-42, RDA; Upadhyaya, *Reply to Vidyānand*, p. 12, para 2; Interview, Jageshwar Mishra, Darbhanga town, 15 Sept 1976.
- 152 Demands concerning rights in trees recur again and again in the petitions quoted in Upadhyaya, *Reply to Vidyānand*.
- 153 *Ibid.*, p. 12.
- 154 GBO Police Abstract 1756, Special Branch, 25 Oct. 1919, BSA; GBO FR (1) Feb. 1920, PSf 8, 1920, BSA.
- 155 GBO Police Abstract 1756, Bihar Special Branch, 25 Oct. 1919, BSA.
- 156 GBO Police Abstract 1786, Bihar Special Branch, 1 Nov. 1919, BSA.
- 157 The number of circles varied from time to time as a result of administrative adjustments but usually numbered about fourteen. For information on the circles, see the *Raj Darbhanga Directory, 1941*, RDA and the annual administrative reports on each circle.
- 158 The passage quoted continues with the allegations that "... he made presidents of meetings and collecting members for realizing subscriptions; it is believed he enriched himself by this means to some extent and the collecting members also made money out of it." Rohika AAR, 1326 F (1918-19), f2, C XXXIV, G 1919-20, RDA.
- 159 Manager, Padri to Chief Manager, 10 Aug. 1920, f 2A, C XXXIV, G 1919-20, RDA.

- 160 *Ibid.*
- 161 Padri manager to Chief Manager 10 Aug. 1920 f 2A C XXXIV G 1919-20, RDA. See also, Alapur AAR 1326 F (1918-19) f 2 C XXXIV G 1919-20 RDA. Unfortunately I was not able to ascertain the outcome of the Padri sharecroppers' protest movement. It seems probable that the Darbhanga Raj was able to contain it effectively and to silence discontent by the granting of some concessions.
- 162 Upadhyaya, *Reply to Vidyanand*, pp. 2-3.
- 163 *Ibid.*
- 164 *Ibid.*
- 165 The lessening of economic pressure seems also to have resulted in a fall in the crime rate. See GBO FR (2) Aug. 1920 PSf 8, 1920, BSA.
- 166 GBO FR (2) March 1920, PSf 8, 1920, BSA.
- 167 The initial sympathy of Congress politicians for Vidyanand's movement may have been a result of the fact that they and Vidyanand had a common opponent in the Maharajah of Darbhanga. GBO FR (1) Dec. 1919, PSf 8, 1919, BSA.
- 168 This incident occurred at a provincial Congress meeting held at Patna on 5 April. Vidyanand moved a resolution calling for the formation of a committee to enquire into the grievances of the Darbhanga Raj tenants. Prasad opposed the motion, and succeeded in having it shelved, on the grounds that Vidyanand was untrustworthy and unreliable and had falsely claimed to be Gandhi's disciple. GBO FR (2) April, PSf 8, 1920, BSA.

- 169 This structure is outlined in the *Raj Darbhanga Directory, 1941*, RDA.
- 170 Up until circa 1915 the chief manager of the Darbhanga Raj was referred to as the general manager, and the circle managers were referred to as sub-managers. At times, the alternative terms were used interchangeably. Since the terms chief manager and circle manager were in vogue during most of the period which this study is concerned, I have chosen to use them throughout my text.
- 171 G.P. Danby, Chief Manager, Memorandum 9 March 1933, f 16D27, C Management, G 1941-42.
- 172 "Rules Regarding Patwaries and Jethrayats", f 16D39, C Management G 1941-42, RDA.
- 173 Interview Jageshwar Mishra, Darbhanga town, 20 Sept. 1976; Maori, *Nepaul Frontier*, p. 147.
- 174 "Rules regarding Patwaries and Jethrayats", f 16D39, C Management, G 1941-42, RDA.
- 175 In March 1920 the Parihar circle manager commented "The Patwaris and Jeth Ryots generally go hand in hand in injuring Raj interests." Parihar Manager to Chief Manager 9 March 1920, letter 9, f2, C XXXIV, G 1919-20; see also Alapur AAR, 1326 F (1918-19), f 2, C XXIV, G 1919-20, RDA.
- 176 Chief Manager, Memorandums dated 6 Aug. 1937, 25 Aug. 1939, f 16D27, C Management, G 1941-42, RDA.
- 177 R.S. King, "Strictly Confidential Note", 14-17 Jan. 1920, letter 1, f 14S, C XXVI, G 1919-20, RDA.

178 *Ibid.*

179 *Ibid.*

180 *Ibid.*

181 Saraya Manager to Chief Manager, 16 June 1928, f 1a-1c, C XVIII, G 1927-28, RDA.

182 In 1915, when there had been no agitation under way among the tenants of the Darbhanga Raj the higher management of the Raj had shown some interest in improving Raj/tenant relations. On 30 June 1915 the manager of the Darbhanga circle canvassed the other circle managers suggesting the establishment in each circle of a committee of locally influential men, presided over by the circle manager, to "... look after village improvement, settle disputes, foster good Zamindar/Tenant relations and preach loyalty to Government". Darbhanga circle manager, note dated 30 June 1915, f 26, C XXV, G 1915-16 RDA. The plan did not come to fruition, but initially it elicited a reasonably favourable response. Six of the ten managers who replied agreed with the proposal, two thought it was a good idea but impractical, and two were opposed to it. The Naredigar manager agreed with the proposal and commented that it was "... but an echo of what is before the Legislative Council of the Government of India regarding advisory boards." The Gondwara manager, however, was against the proposal because "Those appointed will become leaders of the tenantry and in cases where tenants & Raj are opposed at once a combination will be formed." The manager's replies are held with the Darbhanga manager's note.

- 183 Note by Onraet, Manager Rohika circle, 11 Aug. 1920, on letter from Lakshmi Kant Jha, f 14H, C XXVI, G 1919-20, RDA.
- 184 GBO, *Instructions for the preparation of the electoral role*.
- 185 *Ibid.*; Note by Sunder, 22 Jan. 1920, f 14Z 24, C XXV, G 1919-20, RDA.
- 186 "Conference Papers", letter 1, f 14S, C XXVI, G 1919-20, RDA.
- 187 *Ibid.*
- 188 *Ibid.*
- 189 *Ibid.*
- 190 "Special Grievances of Purnea tenants", *ibid.*
- 191 *Ibid.*
- 192 *Ibid.*
- 193 *Ibid.*
- 194 Upadhya, *Reply to Vidyandand*.
- 195 Letters 21 and 22, f 14H, C XXVI, G 1919-20, RDA.
- 196 Comment by Gadadhar Pandit Jha, "Notes of 15th January Conference", f 14S, C XXVI, G 1919-20, RDA.
- 197 Letter 22, f 14H, C XXVI, G 1919-20, RDA.
- 198 *Ibid.*
- 199 See the Head Office circular to managers Rohika and Rajnager, n.d., held with letter 1, f 14H, C XXVI, G 1919-20, RDA. The programme outlined in the circular called on the Rohika and Rajnager circle managers to bring rent enhancement suits against those local leaders who had assisted Vidyandand, to initiate damages suits against ryots who had cut

trees without permission, to offer jeth ryots a commission of 10 per cent of the money realized if they brought people forward to have transfers of holdings recorded on payment of the "usual" fee of one quarter of the purchase price, to establish and keep up to date a register of "loyal" and "disloyal" ryots, and to investigate and take action upon any Raj legal claims against "disloyal" tenants.

200 In the margin of *ibid.* are written the words "Not Issued". I was unable to confirm that the circular had not been sent out because the volume of despatched Head Office circulars for the year had been misplaced and could not be located during the period in which I was working in the Raj Darbhanga Archives. I would be grateful for information on this point from any scholar who may in future work on the Darbhanga Raj records.

201 Letter 18, f 14H, C XXVI, G 1919-20, RDA; Moti Lal, Telsildar, Nawahakhar Group to Manager, Naredigar, 28 March 1920, held with letter 29A, f 14H, C XXVI, G 1919-20, RDA.

202 "Report on Samiah case", f 14H, C XXV, G 1919-20, RDA.

203 D. Sunder, Manager Naredigar to His Highness the Maharaja, 1 Sept. 1920, f 14H, C XXVI, G 1919-20, RDA.

204 D. Sunder, "Confidential Note", 22 Jan. 1920, f 14 Z 24, C XXV, G 1919-20, RDA.

205 Swami Vidyanand to the Lieutenant-Governor, Bihar and Orissa, 17 Nov. 1919, quoted in Upadhyaya, *Reply to Vidyanand*, pp. 31-6, p. 31.

206 *Ibid.*, p. 32.

207 *Ibid.*

- 208 *Ibid.*, p. 35.
- 209 *Ibid.*
- 210 *Ibid.*
- 211 *Ibid.*
- 212 *Ibid.* p. 35.
- 213 *Ibid.* p. 36.
- 214 W.B. Brett to McPherson, Home Secretary, 7 Aug. 1920, GOI HPf 50, Sept. 1920, NAI.
- 215 *Ibid.*
- 216 Confidential Diary, Darbhanga Police Superintendent, 23 June 1920, GOI HPf 50, Sept. 1920, NAI.
- 217 *Ibid.*
- 218 *Ibid.*
- 219 *Ibid.*
- 220 *Ibid.*
- 221 *Ibid.*
- 222 Petition from Raghunandan Sahu and others, f 5C, C X, G 1921-22, RDA.
- 223 *Ibid.* The Telis' offer to pay a cash fee for the right to produce oil perhaps indicates that they were vexed more by the arbitrary behaviour of the amlas than by the exaction of the perquisite itself. However the offer to pay cash may also have been a ploy. Once money changed hands, then receipts could be demanded; and the Telis could use these receipts as evidence in court to show that the practice continued, in the hope of being awarded a court decision declaring it illegal.

- 224 *Ibid.*
- 225 *Ibid.*
- 226 Pandoul Manager to Chief Manager, 15 Dec. 1921, f 5C, C X, G 1921-22, RDA.
- 227 *Ibid.*
- 228 Pandoul Manager to Chief Manager, 7 April 1922, held with *ibid.*
- 229 *Ibid.*
- 230 *Ibid.*
- 231 Head Office notes, 3 May 1922, f 5C, C X, G 1921-22, RDA.
- 232 *Ibid.*
- 233 Chief Manager to Manager Pandoul, 5 May 1922, f 5C, C X, G 1921-22, RDA.
- 234 *Searchlight*, 31 July 1921; "Note on the situation in village Sonbarsa in Thana Bihpur", HPf 315, 199 NAI [hereafter "Note on Sonbarsa"] paras 2, 5; O'Malley, *Morghyr*, pp. 74, 129.
- 235 "Note on Sonbarsa", para 2.
- 236 *Ibid.*
- 237 Judgement by Justice Das, HPf 315, 1922, p. 40, NAI.
- 238 *Ibid.*, pp. 54-5.
- 239 "Note on Sonbarsa", para 3.
- 240 *Ibid.*, para 1.
- 241 *Ibid.*
- 242 *Ibid.*, para 3.

- 243 *Ibid.*
- 244 *Ibid.*, paras 5, 10; "Note on the agitation in Grant's estate", HPf 315, 1922, NAI [hereafter "Grant agitation"].
- 245 "Note on Sonbarsa", paras 5, 6; "Grant agitation", para 1.
- 246 *Ibid.*
- 247 "Note on Sonbarsa", para 9, section (3).
- 248 *Ibid.*
- 249 *Ibid.*, para 9, section (5).
- 250 *Ibid.*, para 10.
- 251 *Ibid.*
- 252 *Ibid.*
- 253 *Ibid.*
- 254 *Ibid.*, para 5.
- 255 *Ibid.*, para 4.
- 256 *Ibid.*, para 7.
- 257 *Ibid.*
- 258 *Ibid.*, paras 5, 7.
- 259 Judgement by Justice Das, HPf 315, 1922, NAI, p. 43.
- 260 "Note on Sonbarsa", paras 7, 8; Chief Secretary GBO to Secretary European Association, 2 Nov. 1921, GOI HPf 315, 1922, NAI.
- 261 "Note on Sonbarsa", para 8.
- 262 If this were the case, then official explanations as to why no strong police action was taken might merely be justifications after the fact.

- 263 "Special Branch Officer's report," 4 Feb. 1921, HPf 315, 1922 NAI,
[hereafter Special Branch report] p. 12.
- 264 *Ibid.*
- 265 *Ibid.*; Report by Drake-Brockman, Deputy Inspector-General Police,
7 Feb. 1921, GOI HPf 315, 1922, NAI [hereafter Drake-Brockman report]
p. 17.
- 266 Special Branch report, p. 13.
- 267 Drake-Brockman report, pp. 16-17.
- 268 *Ibid.*, p. 17.
- 269 *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.
- 270 *Ibid.*; Special Branch report, p. 13.
- 271 Drake-Brockman report p. 18; Special Branch report, p. 13.
- 272 *Ibid.*
- 273 *Ibid.*
- 274 *Ibid.*
- 275 *Ibid.*
- 276 Drake-Brockman report, p. 19.
- 277 *Ibid.*, p. 19-20.
- 278 Drake-Brockman, the Deputy Inspector-General of Police, commented "It
will be seen therefore that no information of any sort or kind was
given to the authorities till 7-30 A.M. of 3-2-21. This is attempted
to be accounted for in various ways, but it is impossible to put any
reliance on any of the excuses and was done doubtless to get time to
concoct a plausible story." See *ibid* pp. 19-20.

- 279 Memorial presented to the Government of Bihar and Orissa by the north Bihar branch of the European Association, HPf 315, 1922, NAI.
- 280 GBO Chief Secretary to Secretary, European Association, 2 Nov. 1921, HPf 315, 1922, NAI; Judgement by Justice Das, HPf 315, 1922, NAI.
- 281 Secretary, European Association to GBO Chief Secretary, 8 Nov. 1921, HPf 315, 1922.
- 282 GBO Chief Secretary to Secretary European Association, 2 Nov. 1922, HPf 315, 1922, NAI.
- 283 *Ibid.*, para 9.
- 284 K.S. Coombe, Manager, Luttipur Concern, Narayanpur, to Rajendra Prasad, 26 Sept. 1936, f XII, 1936, MF 4, PP, NML.
- 285 *Searchlight*, 25 April 1920, cuttings held with f 14H, C XXVI, G 1919-20, RDA; Vaidyanath Jha, "Confidential Purnea" Report", 7 April 1920, f 14H, C XXVI, G 1919-20, RDA [hereafter Purnea Report].
- 286 Purnea rerport.
- 287 *Ibid.*
- 288 *Ibid.*
- 289 *Searchlight*, 25 April 1920, cuttings held with f 14H, C XXVI, G 1919-20, RDA.
- 290 W. Johnson, District Magistrate Purnea to Assistant Manager, Kabur factory, quoted in *Searchlight*, 25 April 1920, held with *ibid.*
- 291 Purnea Police Superintendent's Report, circa 30 April 1920, held with *ibid.*

- 292 Purnea Report.
- 293 *Ibid.*
- 294 *Ibid.*
- 295 *Ibid.*; Confidential CID Reports, *ibid.*
- 296 Vaidyanath Jha, "Confidential Purnea Report", 7 April 1920, *ibid.*
- 297 A.K. Khan, Gondwara Circle Manager, to His Highness the Maharaja,
18 Aug. 1920, *ibid.*
- 298 Commissioner Bhagalpur Division to Chief Secretary, 1 June 1921, PS f
184, 1921, BSA.
- 299 Purnea District Magistrate, "Terms of Settlement", 29 May 1921, held
with *ibid.*
- 300 Commissioner Bhagalpur Division to Chief Secretary, 1 June 1921, *ibid.*
- 301 *Ibid.*, para 4.
- 302 *Ibid.*; Purnea Police Superintendent to Deputy Inspector General
Police, GBO, 10 April 1921, held with *ibid.*; Purnea District Magistrate,
report dated 29 May 1921, held with *ibid.*
- 303 Police Superintendent's and Commissioner's letters, cited in notes 298
and 302 above. According to the Superintendent, the disgruntled tenants
had forced the Shillingfords' servants to stop serving them, but accord-
ing to the Commissioner the servants had struck work in protest against
their masters' actions.
- 304 Purnea Police Superintendent to Deputy Inspector General Police,
GBO, 10 April 1921, held with *ibid.*
- 305 *Ibid.*

- 306 Purnea District Magistrate's report 29 May 1921; Purnea District Magistrate, "Terms of Settlement", 29 May 1921; both held with *ibid.*
- 307 Purnea District Magistrate's report 29 May 1921, held with *ibid.*
- 308 Champaran Police Superintendent to 1st assistant to Deputy Inspector General Police, 21 June 1921, PSf 287, 1921, BSA.
- 309 *Ibid.*
- 310 *Ibid.*
- 311 *Searchlight*, 19 Aug. 1921.
- 312 Toplis, Muzaffarpur District Magistrate, quoted in Tirhut FR (1), August 1921, PS f 93, 1921, BSA.
- 313 A mahant(h) held the right to officiate in a village temple and also controlled the landholdings which wealthy peasants had donated to provide for the upkeep of the temple and its staff. Because he combined religious leadership with control over land a mahant held considerable power in village society.
- 314 Toplis, Muzaffarpur District Magistrate, quoted in Tirhut FR (1), Sept. 1921, PSf 93, 1921, BSA.
- 315 *Ibid.*
- 316 Champaran Police Superintendent, Confidential Diary for week ending 24 Oct., extract quoted in PSf 93, 1921, BSA.
- 317 Hammond, GBO Chief Secretary to GOI Home Secretary HPf 357, 1921, para 5, NAI.
- 318 Champaran Police Superintendent, Confidential Diary for week ending 24 Oct., extract quoted in PSf 93, 1921, BSA.

- 319 *Ibid.*
- 320 Champaran Police Superintendent, report on situation in Champaran,
3 Nov. 1921, PSf 539, 1921, BSA [hereafter Champaran Police report].
- 321 Special Report Case 29, Report II, 2 Nov. 1921, PSf 539, 1921, BSA,
[hereafter Special Report II].
- 322 *Ibid.*
- 323 Champaran Police Report.
- 324 *Ibid.*
- 325 Special Report II.
- 326 Champaran Police Report.
- 327 *Ibid.*
- 328 Hammond, GBO Chief Secretary to GOI Home Secretary para 2, HPf 357,
1921, NAI.
- 329 Champaran Police Report.
- 330 *Ibid.*
- 331 Hammond, GBO Chief Secretary to GOI Home Secretary, paras 3 & 5,
HPf 357, 1921, NAI.
- 332 Council speech by Mr Hammond, PSf 159, 1922, BSA; Champaran Police
Superintendent's Report, 13 Nov. 1921, GBO PSf 539, 1921 BSA.
- 333 Champaran Police Superintendent's Report 13 Nov. 1921, PSf 539, 1921,
BSA. Reporting to the Home Department, the GBO Chief Secretary noted
that "The immediate cause of the outbreak is attributed to the insti-
tution earlier in the month of a case against some of the tenants who
had beaten one of the factory guards when he tried to impound cattle

grazing on land which the factory claims to be reserved..."

Hammond, GBO Chief Secretary to GOI Home Secretary, para 3, HPf 357, 1921, NAI.

- 334 Hammond, GBO Chief Secretary to GOI Home Secretary, paras 4 & 6, HPf 357, 1921, NAI; PSf 216, 1922, BSA.
- 335 *Ibid.*; *Searchlight*, 23 Aug. 1922.
- 336 Hammond, GBO Chief Secretary to GOI Home Secretary para 2, HPf 357, 1921, NAI.
- 337 J. Pearson, Risaldar Mounted Military Police to Champaran Police Superintendent, 27 Dec. 1921; Champaran Special Report Case 35, Report II, 3 Jan. 1922; Extract from Fortnightly Confidential Report, 17 Jan. 1922; Champaran District Officer to Tirhut Commissioner 28 Feb. 1922; all in PSf 69, 1922, BSA.
- 338 J. Pearson, Risaldar Mounted Military Police to Champaran Police Superintendent, 27 December 1921, PSf 69, 1922, BSA.
- 339 Champaran District Officer to Tirhut Commissioner, 10 Jan. 1922, held with *ibid*.
- 340 Champaran Police Superintendent, Demi Official letter, 4 Jan. 1922, held with *ibid*.
- 341 Press clipping from *Prajabandhu*, 11 Jan. 1922, held with *ibid* and *Searchlight*, during Jan. 1922.
- 342 H.K. Gray, Mia Chapra Indigo Concern, to Police Sub-Inspector, Patepur, n.d., PSf 3, 1922, BSA.

- 343 Tirhut Commissioner to GBO Chief Secretary, 24 Jan. 1922, held with *ibid.*
- 344 Muzaffarpur Police Superintendent, Supplementary Confidential Diary, 23 Jan. 1922, held with *ibid.*
- 345 *Ibid.*
- 346 Petition by ryots of Khawaspore and other places, 16 Oct. 1922, C XXV, f 18C, G 1922-23, RDA.
- 347 *Ibid.*
- 348 *Ibid.*
- 349 A.V. Khan, Gondwara manager to MacDonald, indigo manager, C XXV, f 18C, G 1922-23, RDA.
- 350 C.S. McDonald, Bahora manager to chief manager, 19 June 1923, C XXV, f 20, G 1922-23, RDA.
- 351 *Ibid.*
- 352 Conference papers 7 June, 1 Sept. 1923, f 7A, C XXV, G 1922-23, RDA; Instructions from Head Office, 13 June 1923, f 18ZF, C XXV, G 1922-23, RDA.
- 353 Filgate, "Behar Planters"; Sir John Wardle Houlton, *Bihar, The Heart of India*, (Calcutta 1949), p. 118; Behar Planters' Association Report for 1937-38, Political 2, f 52, 1939, Commissioner's Record Room, Muzaffarpur town.
- 354 Fisher, "Indigo Plantations", pp. 285-7.
- 355 Brown, *Gandhi's Rise*, pp. 307-8.

- 356 *Ibid.*, p. 322.
- 357 *Behar Times*, 5 Jan. 1900.
- 358 The analysis of the rise of nationalist activity in Bihar that follows is based upon G. McDonald, "Unity on Trial : Congress in Bihar, 1919-39", in D.A. Low (ed.), *Congress and the Raj. Facets of the Indian Struggle, 1917-1947* (London 1977) pp. 289-314, 292-5.
- 359 On the subject of the level of supra-local political awareness among the mass of the population, see F. Tomasson Jannuzi, *Agrarian Crisis in India. The Case of Bihar* (New Delhi 1974), pp. 107-116.
- 360 McDonald, "Unity on Trial", pp. 292-3; Broomfield, "The Regional Elites: A Theory of Modern Indian History", in Metcalf, *Modern India*, pp. 60-70, 69.
- 361 McDonald, "Unity on Trial", pp. 292-3.
- 362 *Ibid.*; H.F. Owen, "Towards Nationwide Agitation and Organisation : the Home Rule Leagues, 1915-18", in D.A. Low (ed.), *Soundings in Modern South Asian History* (London 1968), pp. 159-95, 160-1.
- 363 According to the hostile account of the Chief Secretary of the Government of Bihar and Orissa, writing in 1917, "The Congress here is a most hollow business. The whole thing is run by half a dozen wire-pullers and the audience consists chiefly of the junior bar." Gait to Vincent, 6 Aug. 1917, HPf 47, Oct. 1917, NAI.
- 364 G. McDonald, "Unity on Trial", pp. 293-4.
- 365 K.K. Datta, *Rajendra Prasad* (New Delhi 1970) p. 1.

- 366 Owen, *Bihar 1921*, p. 12; GGB, *Statutory Commission*, XII, p. 20.
- 367 Owen, "Nationwide Agitation" and "Organizing for the Rowlatt Satyagraha of 1919", in Ravinder Kumar (ed.), *Essays on Gandhian Politics. The Rowlatt Satyagraha of 1919* (London 1971), pp. 64-92.
- 368 Brown, *Gandhi's Rise*, pp. 259-60, 270.
- 369 *Ibid.*, chap. 6; Francis Robinson, *Separatism among Indian Muslims. The Politics of the United Province's Muslims, 1860-1923* (Cambridge 1974); A.C. Neimeijer, *The Khilafat Movement in India, 1919-24* (The Hague 1972).
- 370 Brown, *Gandhi's Rise*, pp. 253, 260, 261; Richard Gordon, "Non-cooperation and Council Entry 1919 to 1920" in Gallagher et. al. *Locality, Province and Nation*, pp. 123-53, 146.
- 371 Brown, *Gandhi's Rise*, p. 287.
- 372 *Ibid.*, p. 260.
- 373 Brown notes that the Bhagalpur Congress meeting passed "a resolution urging the government to relieve distress caused by high food prices — which was of course completely incompatible with the principle of non-cooperation with the government". *Ibid.*
- 374 GBO FR (2) April 1920 PSf 8, 1920 BSA.
- 375 GBO FR (1) Dec. 1920, PSf 8, 1920, BSA; Brown, *Gandhi's Rise*, p. 288.
- 376 The legislature which came to office as a result of the November 1920 elections consisted predominantly of great zamindars and of non-congress lawyers, but also included Vidyanand and three of his colleagues, representing electorates in the north of Bhagalpur and Darbhanga. Under

the Montagu/Chelmsford reforms the total electorate amounted to 1.9 per cent of the total adult male population. Owen, *Bihar 1921*, p. 13.

- 377 GBO FR (1) Dec. 1920, PSf 8, 1920, BSA; GBO, *Synopsis of History of NCO movement*, PSf 286, 1924, BSA.
- 378 Brown, *Gandhi's Rise*, pp. 297-200; Gopal Krishna, "The Development of the Indian National Congress as a Mass Organization, 1918-23", in Metcalf, *Modern India*, pp. 257-72.
- 379 For a detailed report of the development of the campaign in the Madhubani subdivision of Darbhanga, see Lakshmi Mishra, "An account of the non-co-operation movement", PSf 434, 1923, BSA. Mishra emphasizes the galvanizing effect of Gandhi's Dec. 1920 tour of north Bihar.
- 380 Brown, *Gandhi's Rise*, pp. 309-10. In Bihar the call to boycott government educational institutions and to attend 'national' schools and colleges also achieved considerable success.
- 381 *Ibid.*, p. 315.
- 382 *Ibid.*, p. 316; GGB, *Statutory Commission*, XII, p. 274.
- 383 *Ibid.*, p. 315; GGB, *Statutory Commission*, XII, pp. 273, 274, 374.
- 384 Forrest, Tirhut Commissioner to GBO Chief Secretary 2 July 1921 PSf 37, 1921, BSA. On 9 March 1921 the Champaran Police Superintendent reported an incident illustrative both of planter arrogance and of the change in popular attitudes. The Superintendent reported that

A few days ago Mr Owen, Manager of Pursa factory, went to Murchargaon village and happened to meet Mangal Prasad Singh. The latter refused to salaam or failed to do so. This annoyed Mr Owen who lost his temper at the insolence of Mangal and abused him ... Subsequently

Mangal Prasad Singh came to Dhanaha elaka and delivered some exciting speeches to the raiyats urging them not to work for the Factorys.

Champaran Police Superintendent's Weekly Report held with *ibid*.

- 385 "Reports of Hat looting", PSf 21, 1921, BSA; Forrest, Tirhut Commissioner, to Rainey, GBO Chief Secretary, 20 Jan. 1921, PSf 12, 1921, BSA.
- 386 R.S.F. Macrae, Deputy Inspector General Police to GBO Chief Secretary, 20 Jan. 1921, PSf 21, 1921, BSA.
- 387 Purnea Special Report Case 11, Report II, 19 Feb. 1921, PSf 21, 1921, BSA.
- 388 Report by Toplis, 12 Feb. 1921, pp. 33-4, PSf 93, 1921, BSA.
- 389 Macrae, Deputy Inspector General Police to GBO Chief Secretary, 20 Jan. 1921, PSf 21, 1921, BSA.
- 390 Forrest to Rainey, GBO Chief Secretary, 20 Jan. 1921, PSf 12, 1921, BSA.
- 391 The phenomenon of market looting requires further research. Disturbances at markets were always likely to occur, quite independently of the impact of political movements. Villagers tended to be suspicious of and hostile towards merchants, since they knew from harsh experience that merchants might short change them or give them short measure. Thieves and hoodlums and the poor and mendicant gathered in the market places, and could easily, for their own advantage, be drawn into and help magnify any disturbance that might get under way. An adverse price/supply situation was the essential pre-condition of market looting. In 1918 and in the first months of 1942 scarcity and high prices coincided with the occurrence of market looting during periods when no mass political agitation was under way. And in 1921, the cessation of looting incidents

happened contemporaneously with the improvement, from late February on, of the price/supply situation. From this, and because none of the available evidence connects any of the incidents with any individual non-cooperator, it would seem that mass agitation was perhaps a contributory but not a necessary or sufficient cause of market looting. GBO FR (2) May 1918 PSf 8, 1918, BSA; GBO FR (2) Jan. 1942 Freedom Movement Papers [hereafter FMP] f 76, 1942, BSA.

- 392 Extract from diary of Gopalganj Police Inspector 13 Feb. 1921, PSf 58, 1921, BSA. See also Misra "Account of non-co-operation", PSf 434, 1922 BSA and Pouchepadass, "Local leaders and intelligentsia", pp. 83-4. Indeed, such was the aura surrounding Gandhi's name that his authority could be invoked for all kinds of purposes. In July 1921 Elliot, an indigo planter, dealt with a rent strike by his tenants by telling them that "... Mr Gandhi had said that he had no complaint against his factory, and if they did not pay their rents he would be obliged to report them to Mr Gandhi". This ploy proved to be successful, because, according to the official report, "The local Gandhi-ite leader, being much pleased with this recognition by the local magnate, ordered the raiyats to pay the rents and they did". Forrest, Tirhut Commissioner, to Rainy, Chief Secretary, 2 July 1921, PSf 37, 1921, BSA.
- 393 In some instances the "Lat Saheb", i.e. the Governor of the Province had featured in the story in the place of the Englishman. F.S. McNamara "Report of the gathering of mobs in the Dhanaha thana", 1/2 April 1921 PSf 148, 1921 BSA [hereafter Dhanaha report]. The importance of the messianic element and of racial antagonism in popular participation in the non-cooperation movement led one British official to conclude that "... there is no *economic* grievance behind all this agitation.

It has been based on sentiment throughout ..." (*italics in original*).
 Forrest, Tirhut Commissioner to Rainy, Chief Secretary GBO 2 July 1921
 PSf 37, 1921, BSA.

- 394 Basti (United Provinces) Police Superintendent's diary, extract dated
 2 April 1921, held with Dhanaha report.
- 395 *Ibid.*
- 396 Dhanaha report.
- 397 Saran Special Report Case 10, Report 1, 20 February 1921, GBO PSf
 58, 1921, BSA [hereafter Case 10, Report I].
- 398 Saran Special Report Case 10, Report II, 28 Feb. 1921, held with *ibid.*
 [hereafter Case 10, Report II]. See also Yang, "Saran Riots" pp. 20-1.
- 399 Case 10, Report II.
- 400 Case 10, Report I.
- 401 Case 10, Report II.
- 402 Case 10, Report I.
- 403 Champaran Police Superintendent to Deputy Inspector General Police,
 21 June 1921, PSf 287, 1921, BSA.
- 404 Bhagalpur Commissioner to Chief Secretary, 1 June 1921, PSf 184, 1921,
 BSA.
- 405 Brown, *Gandhi's Rise*, p. 313; GGB, *Statutory Commission*, XII, p. 15.
- 406 GGB, *Statutory Commission*, XII, p. 15.
- 407 *Ibid.*, pp. 14-16.

- 408 D.A. Low, "The Government of India and the first non-cooperation movement, 1920-2", in Ravinder Kumar (ed.), *Essays on Gandhian Politics, The Rowlatt Satyagraha of 1919* (London 1969) pp. 298, 323, 306, 308.
- 409 GGB, *Statutory Commission*, p. 15.
- 410 Telegram from Muzaffarpur Police Superintendent, 30 Dec., 1921, PSf 3, 1922, BSA.
- 411 Synopsis of history of NCO movement, PSf 286, 1924, BSA.
- 412 Diary of Muzaffarpur Police Superintendent, 29 Dec. 1921, PSf 3, 1922, BSA.
- 413 Telegram from Muzaffarpur Police Superintendent, 30 Dec. 1921, PSf 3, 1922, BSA.
- 414 FR(2) Dec. 1920 PSf 7, 1920, BSA.
- 415 See his confidential diary 16 Jan. 1922, PS f 146, 1922, BSA.
- 416 Purnea Police Superintendent, confidential diary 8 Feb. 1922, report of 18 Feb. 1922, PSf 146, 1922, BSA.
- 417 For details of the Chauri Chaura incident see GOI HP files 563, 1922 and 677, 1922, NAI. For details of developments in the United Provinces and on the Malabar coast, see W.F. Crawley "Kisan Sabhas and Agrarian Revolt in the United Provinces 1920 to 1921", *Modern Asian Studies*, 5, 2, 1971, pp. 95-109, 108-9; Majid Hayat Siddiqi, "The Peasant Movement in Pratapgarh", *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 9, 1972, pp. 305-26, 306; Brown, *Gandhi's Rise*, p. 327.
- 418 Owen, *Bihar 1922*, chap. 1.

- 419 Diary of Muzaffarpur Police Superintendent 11 April 1922, PSf 225, 1922, BSA. The bal or bel fruit is about the size of a large orange and has a hard outer casing.
- 420 S.P. Mukharji, Sub-Divisional Officer, Kishanganj, Report regarding Sonepur Hat enquiry, 13 May 1922, GBO PSf 232, 1922, BSA [hereafter Sonepur report]; Dundas, Inspector General Police to GBO Chief Secretary, 22 April 1922, held with *ibid.*
- 421 Sonepur report.
- 422 *Ibid.*
- 423 Bhagalpur Commissioner to GBO Chief Secretary, 22 May 1922, held with *ibid.*
- 424 See his "Gandhian Politics" (review of Brown's, *Gandhi's Rise*) *Modern Asian Studies*, 7, 1, 1973, pp. 107-15, p. 110. Washbrook's comments draw on his own research into the role and activities of middle-men in the Madras Presidency. Some of the people he refers to had little or no connection with the land, and hence could only play an intermediary role. The situation in Bihar differed because the members of the regional intelligentsia, some of whom became involved in protest, had strong ties with the land.
- 425 W.H. Vincent's note of an interview with Mr Atkins 12 May 1921, HPf 49, 1921, NAI. Vincent responded to Atkin's comments with the remark that "... some planters had been harsh and others unjust to their tenants in the past and perhaps that was the reason why the people were now so bitter against the planters".
- 426 GBO Chief Secretary to GOI Army Department Secretary 10/11 March 1922 HPf 49, 1921, NAI.

- 427 Memorandum held with *ibid.*
- 428 Statements by Mr Craik, held with *ibid.* pp. 33ff, p.41.
- 429 GBO Chief Secretary to GOI Army Department Secretary 10/11 March 1922, held with *ibid.*
- 430 GGB, *Statutory Commission*, XII, p. 16. GBO Chief Secretary to GOI Home Secretary, 10 Dec. 1921, HPf 441, 1921, NAI.
- 431 *Ibid.*
- 432 See Low, "**F**irst non-cooperation movement", pp. 298-305. See also David Arnold's, "The Police and Colonial Control : An Introduction" in his forthcoming, *Law and Order: Madras 1858-1947*.
- 433 Yang, "Saran Riots", p. 13.
- 434 Anil Seal, "Imperialism and Nationalism in India", in Gallagher et. al. *Locality, Province and Nation*, pp. 1-27.
- 435 *Ibid.*, p. 8.
- 436 Low, "first non-co-operation movement", pp. 298-305.
- 437 E.H. Johnston Monghyr District Magistrate to Drake-Brockman, 17 March 1921; E.H. Johnston to Bhagalpur Commissioner, 21 Feb. 1921; Monghyr Special Report Case 22, Report II, 4 March 1921; all in PSf 66, 1921, BSA.
- 438 Johnston to Drake-Brockman as cited in note 437 above.
- 439 GBO Chief Secretary to GOI Army Department Secretary 10/11 March 1922 HPf 49, 1921 NAI.

- 440 *Ibid.* For discussion of the comparable situation in the Madras Presidency, see David Arnold, "The Armed Police and Colonial Rule in South India, 1914-1947", *Modern Asian Studies*, II, 1, 1977, pp. 101-25, 120.
- 441 PSf 1, 1921, BSA. In response to the agitation, the administration granted the constables a small wage increase.
- 442 GBO Chief Secretary to GOI Army Secretary Department Secretary, 29 May 1921, HPf 49, 1921, NAI.

Chapter 3

1930-32: "LIMITED VIOLENCE" DURING THE CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE MOVEMENT AND THE OPERATION OF POLICE/ADMINISTRATIVE CONTROL

*Introduction; The salt and prohibition campaigns;
The anti-chaukidari movement and the clash at Bhorey;
The Bihpur disturbances; Independence Day 1931; The
waning of protest; Conclusion: "Limited violence" and
police/administrative control.*

Introduction

In north Bihar between 1930 and 1932, for the first time since the 1917 to 1922 period, widespread popular turbulence developed. The turbulence of the early 1930s contrasted in its focus with that of the 1917-1922 period. In the earlier period turbulence was associated with three relatively distinct movements — the anti-indigo planter movement, the tenants' rights movement and the non-cooperation movement. In the early 1930s, in contrast, turbulence had a single focus in the civil disobedience movement launched by the Indian National Congress in protest against Britain's slowness in granting the people of India substantial advances towards self-government and independence.¹

The Congress movement which joined battle with the British administration in the early 1930s was better organized and more widely supported than that which had taken part in non-cooperation a decade before. The years between the two periods of mass protest formed, in the words of K.K. Datta, a "constructive phase" in the history of the Bihar Congress. After the collapse of non-cooperation, Congress activists turned their attention to constitutional agitation. They achieved considerable success in the sphere of local government by capturing control of District and Municipal Boards. Victory in local elections helped give Congressmen and the national movement publicity and prestige, while more concretely it meant that henceforth local Congress committees had powers of patronage at their command with which to rally supporters and reward the faithful.² By December 1929, the month when the annual Indian National Congress session decided to wage mass protest in the pursuit of the goal of complete independence, Congress activists in north Bihar had created extensive networks of supporters among locally dominant small landlords and big tenants. From the time of the non-cooperation movement onwards the Bihar Congress had sought to incorporate such people into

its activities, and conversely, perceiving advantages in the coming of more self-government, they had sought involvement in the affairs of the Congress.³ Previously such people had been involved in anti-administration protests sporadically and in geographically limited areas. Congress provided them with a unifying ideology and a widespread organization which allowed the initiation, from 1930 on, of extensive, determined civil disobedience. In its aims and methods, civil disobedience in the early 1930s was broadly similar to the non-cooperation movement of 1920-22. But the two campaigns differed in that non-cooperation attracted support from a broader spectrum of society than did the 1930s movement. In 1920-22 non-cooperation drew strength from the Khilafat movement, which it incorporated, and from the anti-indigo movement, with which it was closely associated. Khilafat protest drew support from a broad cross-section of the internally differentiated Muslim community, while anti-indigo protest attracted support from a broad cross-section of north Bihar society. The broad support for Khilafat and anti-indigo protest was channelled into the non-cooperation campaign. In the ensuing decade, in contrast, Muslim participation in the civil disobedience campaign was minimal and the campaign had less social depth and stimulated fewer messianic expectations than its predecessor. Partly, also, this contrast arose because at the time of the non-cooperation movement the Bihar Congress had only partially completed the process of establishing an organization which linked rich peasants with the urban middle class. By 1930 this process was complete, and the party organization was able to exercise more effective control over mass protest than it had a decade previously. And because of the conservatism of the Congress in Bihar, which derived from the importance of a section of the landed interest in the party, this control was exercised to ensure that locally dominant peasants played the leading part in agitation and protest. Through their pivotal position in local society, and because of

the attractiveness of the nationalist ideology which they espoused, which embodied the hopes of many for a better future,⁴ such people were able to mobilize extensive support for anti-administration protest. In the early 1930s they played an even more dominant role in the direction and expression of this protest than they had in the early 1920s.

During the civil disobedience movement the Bihar Congress evolved an implicit, covert policy of "limited violence" which contradicted its official, explicit policy of non-violence. Congress workers soon found that peaceful picketing and propaganda could produce only insubstantial results, and before long began to employ sabotage, intimidation and assault. Congress workers used open violence to only a limited degree, thus protecting the credibility of official Congress support for the ideal of non-violence and avoiding the unleashing, by the authorities, of massive repression. Congress espousal of the ideal of non-violence boosted the organization's prestige and helped ensure its support among conservatives and moderates. Meanwhile, the use in practice of "limited violence" gave militant Congress supporters scope for activity, hamstrung the administration through an offensive against the chaukidars, the weakest link in the chain of British control, and helped elicit a harsh response from the authorities. This response provided the Bihar Congress with valuable propaganda which stood it in good stead both during the civil disobedience movement and in the ensuing period.

The employment of "limited violence" put great pressure on the provincial administration. The administration was obliged to increase its spending on the police, and lost money because of the success of a campaign, made effective through the limited use of violence, against the consumption of drugs and liquor, from the sales tax on which the administration earned a substantial revenue. In north Bihar, the police did not cope effectively

with the challenge of limited violence. Undermanned and poorly equipped, and widely resented among the people, the police lost prestige by their handling of protest because they acted with unnecessary severity and because they temporarily lost out in violent confrontations with demonstrators. The chaukidars, because they were amenable to local level pressure, displayed even more weaknesses than the police. Chaukidars proved ineffective supporters to the police in confrontations with angry villagers, and in some areas in north Bihar stopped functioning entirely. As in the 1917 to 1922 period, extensive popular turbulence during the civil disobedience movement revealed the essential fragility of the system of police/administrative control in north Bihar. The following chapter examines the main features of the civil disobedience movement in north Bihar within a broadly chronological framework to lay the foundation for a discussion of "limited violence" and the operation of police/administrative control.

The salt and prohibition campaigns

The civil disobedience movement initially focused on a campaign protesting against the tax that the administration levied on the production and sale of salt.⁵ The salt issue was of great symbolic value to the national movement. The salt taxes affected all sections of the community but weighed most heavily on the poor, and profits from them supported an alien administration. Congress workers found that the campaign was well suited to coastal areas, where sea water could be processed by means of the heat of the sun. In interior, landlocked north Bihar, the manufacture of salt was more difficult, and depended upon the availability of saline earth from which, by means of boiling and clarification, salt could be extracted.⁶ Traditionally, throughout north Bihar, members of the Nonia jati had engaged in the extraction of salt. Improved communications and the ready availability of foreign and coastal salt had destroyed the local industry, but in some parts of the region salt-making on a small scale, upon the produce of which the government levied an excise fee, still continued.⁷ Using these long-established local methods of production the Congressmen of north Bihar began, early in 1930, the illegal manufacture of salt. At first the breaking of the salt laws attracted considerable interest. When, for example, Congress volunteers paraded through Samastipur town, on their way to break the salt law at the village of Pipra in Bahera thana in the south of Darbhanga, the local merchants presented them with money, fruit, and garlands of flowers. "All people", according to the *Searchlight's* report, "gave hearty send off and showed great enthusiasm".⁸ But the excitement generated by the salt movement soon waned as a result of the firm action taken by the police, who responded to the illegal manufacture of salt with a policy of sabotage and of selective arrest. The police confiscated and destroyed the pots and other utensils used by the Congress volunteers

for the production of salt and, at each centre for salt manufacture, arrested one or two of the leading organizers. Arrests were kept to a minimum, because the authorities wished to limit as far as possible the interest and excitement that resulted from the taking of volunteers into custody.⁹ These tactics succeeded: by May, as the Champaran Police Superintendent reported, salt manufacturing had "practically ceased", and the centres set up for the making of salt had either suspended operations or had closed down entirely.¹⁰ A month earlier, the Saran Police Superintendent had reported that

... the one prominent feature of the salt campaign so far has been the fact that the ordinary masses are not taking the slightest interest in the movement, and it is confined almost entirely to school boys and youth.¹¹

The absence of widespread enthusiasm for salt-making and the predominantly non-violent response that was made by salt volunteers to police arrests and sabotage made it possible for the authorities to withdraw the armed police who had initially been stationed at salt-making centres in case of trouble. As the Saran District Magistrate pointed out,

... the presence of Magistrates, Police Officers and Armed Police at small villages generally creates a good deal of excitement and as a consequence people assemble just to watch this tamasha.¹²

With the failure of the salt movement in north Bihar Congress volunteers began using other means by which to protest against and harass the administration. During the salt campaign they had adhered strictly to the ideal of non-violence, but henceforth they would make a limited use of violent methods. Congressmen launched a concerted attack on the sale of intoxicating drugs and liquor, the excise duty on which supplied just under a third of the provincial revenue.¹³ They picketed drug and liquor stores and brought social pressures to bear on both customers and sellers. The official Congress policy required

prohibition campaigners to adhere strictly to Gandhi's principles of non-violence but before long these principles were transgressed. In one incident a sadhu who purchased a half tola of opium had it confiscated by Congress volunteers, while in another a man who had ignored a picket line and had bought a bottle of liquor had it taken from him and broken and was also beaten up.¹⁴ Measures of social boycott proceeded beyond the limits prescribed by Rajendra Prasad. The Purnea Police Superintendent reported in May 1930 that Congress workers had told licensees of liquor stores at Kesba village that if they continued selling liquor the services of barbers, washermen and food sellers would be denied them. At Barhara bazaar, also in the Purnea district, workers told liquor vendors to abandon their business lest they be denied the use of the local supply of water.¹⁵ Later in the year, on 4 December, picketers beat up a liquor vendor of the Kesariya thana of Champaran. The vendor suffered a fractured skull and subsequently died.¹⁶ When the police intervened in an effort to limit the activities of picketers, they often received a vigorous response. On 26 October 1930, for example, nine Congress volunteers were arrested at the Sarsi mela for picketing a liquor and ganja shop. While they were being escorted to the railway station by a force of four policemen and three chaukidars a large crowd assembled, jostled and abused the police, and rescued the volunteers from custody.¹⁷

The prohibition campaign carried out under the auspices of the civil disobedience movement was broadly similar, though more extensive and intensive, to that which occurred during the non-cooperation movement.¹⁸ The campaign, in addition to the well-tried technique of picketing, also employed, on a quite unprecedented scale, the weapon of sabotage. Conveyances carrying loads of liquor were waylaid, and on one occasion Congress workers confiscated a large drum containing spirits sent out from a warehouse for sale, and destroyed its contents.¹⁹ More importantly for the longer term viability of the liquor

production industry, Congress volunteers destroyed the spathes of the toddy palms, thus making it impossible for toddy to be produced.²⁰ The police found it extremely difficult to cope with the prohibition campaign. They encountered a legal difficulty in dealing with the sabotage to toddy palms, because the toddy tappers seldom owned the palms, but instead leased the right to extract toddy from them from the owner of the land on which they stood. Often toddy trees were sabotaged with the support or at least the acquiescence of the land holder, which meant that the police could take no action. Nor were there sufficient police to protect all the toddy trees and the liquor and drug shops, which were scattered throughout the countryside.²¹ The campaign, moreover, commanded widespread support both among orthodox high caste people and among middle and low caste people hopeful of improving their social status by denying themselves intoxicants.²² The producers, vendors and consumers of intoxicants, generally poor and of low social status, found it difficult to oppose the prohibition activists.²³ In some instances they did fight back. In one incident, which occurred in late May in Saran, a group of toddy tappers assisted by some chaukidars intervened while a party of 20 Congress volunteers was sabotaging some toddy trees. A fight broke out and members of both parties were injured. The leader of the volunteers received a blow on the temple, and died a few hours later.²⁴ No complaint was made to the police, but subsequently local Congress supporters took direct action against Sawal Chamar, a Harijan and the leader of the toddy tappers. A couple of nights after the day on which the fight had occurred

... his house, straw rick, bamboo clump, mango trees, and everything he possessed were burnt to ashes, and he himself was forced to run away to Calcutta for fear of his life.²⁵

Over the longer term, as this incident illustrates, the advantage lay with the adherents of the prohibition campaign. Nor were the toddy tappers the

only losers: the finances of the provincial government suffered severely from the reduction in its income from excise duties.²⁶ In Champaran by late May the consumption of drugs and liquor had dropped by about half.²⁷ Where picketing was particularly intense, the effect was even greater. The liquor store in Motipur town, Champaran, in the 20 day period immediately before picketing began, sold an average of 20 gallons of liquor per day. But in the 10 day period after picketing had commenced, the store only sold a daily average of 4.8 gallons.²⁸

The anti-chaukidari movement and the clash at Bhorey

Apart from the salt and prohibition campaigns the third main strand of Congress civil disobedience activities in north Bihar was the campaign against the chaukidari system. Activists in this campaign urged people to stop paying the taxes levied for the support of their local chaukidars, urged chaukidars to resign from their posts, and urged members of the chaukidari unions or panchayats, which held the responsibility for the collection of chaukidari tax and the recruitment and direction of chaukidars, to relinquish their positions.²⁹ The notion of campaigning against the chaukidari system found a receptive audience among the people of north Bihar. The chaukidari tax, according to one Congress spokesman, was "the most hated of all taxes".³⁰ He commented that no villager "likes this tax for the simple reason that the chaukidar is more an oppressor than a friend to the village folk".³¹ In many instances, moreover, the collectors of the chaukidari tax acted oppressively. It was their custom to "greatly harass the poor people and assess whatever tax they liked".³² A further important consideration, which weighed heavily with the conservative leaders of the Bihar Congress, was that unlike a rent or revenue strike, which might result in the confiscation of land-holdings, a campaign against the chaukidari system seemed to be attended with few risks for its participants. The highest amount of tax levied on any individual was 12 rupees, so the extent of individual liability for non-payment was limited.³³

The anti-chaukidari campaign began in May 1930, and rapidly gained momentum. Villagers readily agreed to suspend payment of the chaukidari tax and some of them went so far as to sign pledges refusing ever again to pay it while alien rule prevailed.³⁴ Congress supporters used a variety of means, ranging from persuasion to intimidation, to get chaukidars to resign their

positions. Uncooperative chaukidars were refused access to village wells, had their womenfolk harassed whenever they went out into the fields to relieve themselves, and in some instances encountered physical violence and complete social boycott.³⁵ The campaign seems to have been most successful in areas where a substantial section of a locally dominant jati adhered to the Congress movement. At Ramdiri village in north Monghyr, for example, where Bhumihars predominated, the "entire panchayat as well as twelve out of the fourteen chaukidars ... resigned ..."³⁶ In Saran, where Bhumihars and Rajputs played leading roles in the Congress movement the chaukidars were, in the words of the Deputy Inspector General of Police, "prevented from carrying out their duties". In consequence, it seemed to the local authorities, the crime rate had increased but the extent of reporting of offences had greatly decreased.³⁷ From Saran, moreover, it was officially reported that

... many of the defaulters of Chaukidari tax are rich and influential persons. They are Brahmans and Rajputs and consequently their lead is followed by the lower castes.³⁸

The authorities viewed the campaign with anxiety. The chaukidars carried out the routine police work of the villages and, through their weekly reports at the police stations, operated as the "eyes and ears" of the administration. When they ceased to perform these functions the whole edifice of police/administrative control was threatened. In some areas, moreover, after being persuaded to resign from the service of the British, the chaukidars had next been re-employed in their old positions, but this time as "national" chaukidars under the control of the local Congress committee.³⁹ The British reacted strongly to these threats to the foundations of their rule. Concerning Ramdiri village in north Monghyr, where the chaukidari system had ceased to function, the Subdivisional Officer told his superiors that "we shall not hesitate to use force, if this is found necessary in collecting the taxes".⁴⁰ The

authorities usually responded to the cessation of the payment of chaukidari taxes by sending a police party to the offending area. If the villagers continued to refuse to pay, the police attached their movable property in lieu of the money owed. The police collected cattle, and had bedsteads, furniture and cooking utensils loaded into carts and carried away.⁴¹ The villagers complained that in order to harass them, the police confiscated items whose value totalled far more than the money owed. The villagers supported this complaint with lists detailing the value of confiscated items. In response the authorities explained, not entirely convincingly, that since the villagers kept their money and valuables well hidden, the police were obliged to take larger items. If the attachment of their property failed to force the villagers to abandon their stand, the administration quartered additional police at the villagers' expense and jailed the activists in the locality for long periods.⁴³ The police sent to the villages either to attach property or to serve as additional police frequently took advantage of the opportunities that arose to oppress the villagers in a variety of minor ways, thus helping to break the spirit of resistance.⁴⁴

In the long run official attempts to uphold the chaukidari system succeeded. But in some areas official initiatives met vigorous opposition. In the Bhorey and Kateya thanas in the extreme north-west of Saran, for example, large sections of the population assumed a militant stand against the administration. During the period of the non-cooperation movement, the area had been the centre of much activity, culminating in an attack on the Kateya police station, and the authorities had found it necessary to post an additional police force of 34 men there.⁴⁵ From the time of the initiation of the civil disobedience movement the people of the two thanas became active participants in the salt campaign, the prohibition campaign and the anti-

chaukidari campaign. In August 1930, in a request that additional police be posted in the area, the district police superintendent listed incidents in which Congress supporters had acted violently; contended that, since the beginning of the civil disobedience movement, the crime rate had greatly increased; and pointed out that police work was proceeding under great difficulties. The chaukidars were being subjected to social boycott, and the members of the career police force were being greatly hindered in the performance of their work. On 26 April, when a

Sub-Inspector went to village Bhagwanpur to investigate a dacoity he was not allowed to stay in any house, and could not even get a charpoy to sleep on. He could not obtain a scrap to eat.⁴⁶

And in the Bhorey thana the problems of the police were compounded because the thana, he alleged, was

... cursed with nearly 100 registered bad characters and suspected dacoits, almost all of whom have joined the civil disobedience movement and supply gangs of volunteers to distant places such as Chapra, Siwan, Gopalganj and Mirganj.⁴⁷

The police of Saran reacted harshly to these threats to their authority. On 4 October, Deputy-Police Superintendent MacKensie, accompanied by the Subdivisional Officer and some police, made a visit to Bhorey thana. He later informed his superiors that having come upon two Congress volunteers picketing the police station he and his party "caught them and after giving them a good thrashing sent them home."⁴⁸ Next he and his men visited the local "Swaraj Ashram", which consisted of a bamboo and thatch hut. When the hut was "raided", he reported,

... the garrison vanished like smoke. The property left behind by the volunteers in their flight was collected and during this operation something seems to have happened to the ashram and it fell down.

Later a suspicious column of smoke was seen to be emanating therefrom. ... On our return from Bhorey in the evening we descended suddenly and heavily on the picketers at the Hatuwa ganja shop. The proceedings may be described tersely as that the S[ub] I[nspector] got his own back (with interest) for the attempt to assault him on the second.⁴⁹

Actions like these antagonized Congress supporters and helped prepare the ground for a more serious clash. At 1 p.m. on 16 December about 2,000 people assembled for a Congress meeting in a mango orchard near the Bhorey police station. The Bhorey sub-inspector, supported by his staff and by the 20 additional police who had been posted at the police station made 21 arrests and ordered the crowd to disperse.⁵⁰ There are differing versions of what happened next. According to a pro-Congress account, the members of the crowd remained peaceful and did nothing apart from complaining strongly to the sub-inspector. The sub-inspector ignored their complaints and ordered his men to make a lathi charge on the crowd. When the crowd did not disperse he became "beside himself with anger and ordered firing as a result of which some were wounded and all ran away".⁵¹ According to the police version, the crowd "immediately became violent" after the arrests had been made and "attacked with lathis and brickbats", injuring "all members of the force".⁵² The sub-inspector sent some of his men back to the thana to collect the muskets of the additional police, and meanwhile the crowd increased to about 4,000. The police alleged that some of the members of the crowd had guns, and claimed that a total of four shots were fired at the police party, none of which, however, found their target. After the first of these shots had been aimed at, and narrowly missed, the sub-inspector, the additional police opened fire and fired 11 buckshot and 17 ball cartridges. They operated "as if engaged in a frontier skirmish, firing in the prone position and from behind cover at a range of fifty yards or more".⁵³ This firing did not intimidate the crowd. Because of

the poor quality of the guns and ammunition, and because the additional police were unfamiliar with the old pattern police musket, the firing caused few casualties.⁵⁴ The only serious injury was a shattered forearm, and out of 10 injured who were later sent to hospital, five were only slightly injured and were able to make their escape.⁵⁵ The members of the crowd continued their attack and obliged the police to retreat and take refuge in the thana.⁵⁶ At this point the deputy-superintendent of police arrived and reorganized the thana's defences, and the crowd, apparently fearing that police reinforcements would soon arrive, melted away.⁵⁷

Bhorey was not the only area in which the success of anti-chaukidari protest, in association with other facets of the civil disobedience campaign, helped bring about clashes between the police and the local people. At Bihpur in north Bhagalpur the confrontation between the police and their opponents became the highlight of Congress protest in north Bihar.

The Bihpur disturbances

From the beginning of the civil disobedience movement the authorities were aware of the need to act carefully when dealing with Congress demonstrations. Violent or undeniably subversive activity had to be stopped, but overly vigorous repression of Congress volunteers could result in adverse publicity and in the creation of widespread sympathy for the national movement. At times, despite the risk of creating adverse publicity, officials took rigorous measures against Congress protest. Such a situation of confrontation developed at Bihpur town in north Bhagalpur.

In late 1929 local Congress leaders chose Bihpur, an important rail junction situated five miles north of the Ganges, as the locale for a Congress ashram. The Bihpur ashram became the centre for Congress activities in the vicinity. The local Congress organizers enrolled 300 volunteers at the ashram. According to a police report the Congress organizers gave the volunteers "intensive training" along "semi-military lines with formal parades held twice daily and ostentatious practice of fighting with lathis and daggers".⁵⁸ The ashram, which was regularly visited both by local Congress leaders and by several people whom the administration suspected of being revolutionary terrorists, created great excitement among the local inhabitants many of whom were members of the Bhumihaar jati. According to one official, members of this group could "be easily stirred up to violence".⁵⁹ After a period of preparation Congressmen initiated the salt campaign at Bihpur on 17 April and, a month later, began the picketing of foreign cloth shops and of liquor and drug stores. Congress workers also made intensive efforts to win over the local chaukidars to the nationalist cause. By mid-May, according to the Deputy Inspector General of Police for north Bihar, "Congress had practically got the upper hand in this elaka and the police were hardly functioning."⁶⁰

Many chaukidars resigned, while others stopped performing their duties. The regular police, fearing for their safety, were unwilling to go into the countryside to carry out their duties.⁶¹ Ninnis, the District Police Superintendent, decided that it was necessary to take action. Later, when justifying Ninnis's initiatives, the Deputy Inspector General pointed out that, in addition to the undermining of the loyalty of the local chaukidari force, there had also been two incidents near to Bihpur in which Congress volunteers had engaged in violent protest. At the village of Sabour, Congress supporters had attacked a senior policeman while he was attempting to enforce a prohibition order against volunteers who had started a market in competition with the market owned by a local zamindar. And at the village of Gopalpur, he alleged, volunteers had broken up a district board election in an attempt to ensure that the loyalist candidate was defeated.⁶² The Deputy Inspector General also justified Ninnis's actions by referring to the murder, "a few years ago", of the Gurkha watchmen on Grant's estate at nearby Sonbarsa. In the Sonbarsa murder case, he contended,

... the district authorities were largely to blame in that they failed to appreciate the situation and take strong preventive action in time. Sonbarsa has in these parts become a war cry of rioters and it, with others, was used at Gopalpur.⁶³

It was against this background that Ninnis, after receiving orders from the provincial government and after consulting the District Magistrate, ordered his men to occupy the Bihpur ashram in an effort to cripple Congress activities in the locality.

The police took over the ashram on 31 May.⁶⁴ The Congress volunteers departed from the ashram as soon as the police arrived, and, according to Ninnis's account, displayed no opposition except for the throwing of some stones at some members of the police party. On each of the next few days

crowds of Congress supporters gathered outside the gateway, and attempted to force their way into the grounds of the ashram. On each occasion policemen stationed at the gateway drove them back. By 4 and 5 June the situation, in the opinion of Ninnis, had become more serious. The crowds that gathered were larger than they had hitherto been, and the speakers who addressed them assumed a more militant stance. On 4 June a speaker told the crowd that Congress workers would find out the names and addresses of the constables and the Sub-Inspector who had occupied the ashram and would send these details to the Congress committees of the localities from which the policemen came so that pressure could be brought to bear on their families. On the following day speakers, the police alleged, urged the crowd "to use all means in their power to compel the resignation" of those few chaukidars who still remained in their posts. One Congress activist, according to Ninnis,

... got up on a table, turned to the constables who were on duty at the gate-way, lifted up his hands and denounced them as 'bloody butchers' for opposing their own countrymen; informed them that by doing so they were committing a deadly sin and said dramatically that their place was not where they stood but on the side of the Congress volunteers ... Other leaders followed suit and addressed both the crowd and the constables in a similar manner. From time to time these lecturers used to appeal to the crowd and asked whether they supported what was said with regard to the police and the crowd used to shout back unani- mously that they did. On this day one of the prominent speakers was Chulhai Mahto who took a prominent part in the Gopalpur riot.⁶⁵

These attempts to undermine the morale of the police worried Ninnis. He was also anxious because it was rumoured that a major attempt to "rush" the ashram grounds would soon be made. He could not enquire effectively into the truth of this rumour because there were no chaukidars available to act as his informants, and he therefore "had to rely for all information upon one or two

plain clothes constables".⁶⁶ To protect the morale of his subordinates and the security of the ashram, Ninnis decided that henceforth he would not allow crowds to assemble outside the gateway. On 6 June he sent detachments of policemen to disperse crowds as they approached the open space outside the entrance to the ashram. On three separate occasions police broke up crowds of volunteers with lathi charges. On one of these occasions the police became the target for "some fairly heavy stone-throwing", but soon managed to force the crowd to retire.⁶⁷ The next day, after the forces at his disposal had been increased by the arrival of a party of military police, Ninnis stationed pickets along the approaches to the ashram. This arrangement, which had the concurrence of the District Magistrate, allowed the police to turn back demonstrators before they had an opportunity to get themselves organized. On the following day the Moharram festival was held, and no political demonstrations took place. And then, on 9 June, according to Ninnis,

... a large number of prominent leaders including Rajendra Prasad visited the place. The crowd on this occasion was, as might be expected, enormous. Two of these gentlemen whose names I now forget took the extraordinary course of suggesting a visit to the volunteer's camp a step which could only have resulted in drawing larger crowds than ever to the spot. As it was the police pickets that had been posted on the road had difficulty even during the early part of the day in keeping back the crowd. I replied that I was afraid that under the existing circumstances a visit to the Ashram could produce no good results. I further sent the circle inspector to the leaders to inform them that while I regretted that I could not see anyone at the moment I should be glad to receive a letter from any one of them if there was any matter which required discussion. I was informed that they had no thought of coming to see me.⁶⁸

By late afternoon "immense crowds" had assembled at three different locations near to the ashram. One of these crowds gathered in an orchard near the gateway. Ninnis later alleged that he was slow to take action against the crowds because, so he had been told, there were "a large number of responsible leaders

present", and he did not think that "they would commit the folly of marching these immense uncontrollable crowds towards the camp".⁶⁹ Eventually, however, he reported, he felt that it was necessary for the police to intervene, and ordered the people who had assembled to disperse. When they did not do so, he mounted lathi charges against each of the crowds in turn until they had been broken up and forced to retire. Some of the demonstrators, while retiring before the onslaught of the police, gathered stones from the adjacent railway track and hurled them at their attackers. Ninnis denied that the leaders of the crowds had been singled out as special objects of attack, and claimed that he was not personally acquainted with any of the leaders that were said to be present. Nor were any of his officers, he claimed, able to verify the presence of most of the prominent leaders who were said to have been in the crowds that were attacked. And, he contended, it was "difficult in the confusion caused in dispersing such a huge crowd ... to avoid hurting even known persons".⁷⁰

The events of 9 June created a sensation.⁷¹ Many people did not believe the official assertion that the police in occupation of the Bihpur ashram had been obliged, by the force of circumstances, to act as they did. One strong protest came from Anant Prasad, a local 'notable' and a member of the Bihar and Orissa Legislative Council. For some time Prasad had been sympathetic to the civil disobedience movement and had previously complained to the higher administration of the province about the treatment of picketers at Bihpur by the local police. On 11 June Prasad wrote to the private secretary of the Governor of the province, complaining that the police had taken over the ashram on legally dubious grounds and presenting his own account of the events that had occurred two days previously.⁷² On 9 June, Anant Prasad reported, the prominent leaders Rajendra Prasad, Professor Abdul Bari, Baldeo Sahai and Murli Manohar Prasad set out to investigate, in cooperation with local leaders, the circumstances surrounding the occupation of the Bihpur

ashram. When they found their way to the ashram blocked by a body of police, Anant Prasad sent a message to Ninnis asking him for permission to make an inspection. Ninnis replied that in his opinion "no useful purpose would be served by a visit to the place in question." Thwarted in their attempt to visit the ashram, the leading politicians present had begun to move back to the bazaar. Before doing so, Rajendra Prasad, Abdul Bari and A. Ariff addressed a large assembly of about 10,000. After this meeting had been dissolved the police began, according to Anant Prasad,

... the assaults on the sightseers which beggar description. I solemnly affirm that there was no justification for this ... The crowd was perfectly peaceful and if it be said that the crowd displayed any hostile attitude or threw brick bats I am prepared to deny this on solemn affirmation before any tribunal in the country ... the indiscriminate assaults began, the Superintendent of Police running in front of a batch of constables ... beating right and left and chasing the crowd ... shouting *Maro Sala Ko*.⁷³

The police passed by the point where Anant Prasad was standing and entered the bazaar area, where a number of Congressmen and a few shopkeepers were gathered. The police, Anant Prasad, reported,

... proceeded to apply 'moderate' force to this crowd and it appears to me that Professor Abdul Bari and Babu Rajendra Prasad were mainly selected for the purpose.⁷⁴

Abdul Bari received lathi blows on the head and shoulders, and "bleeding profusely" and feeling faint, he collapsed onto the ground. While he was lying there "he was given another lathi blow which he warded off by his left hand thus sustaining a severe wound on the wrist". Rajendra Prasad got three lathi blows on his shoulders but was saved from further injury by the self-sacrifice of some Congress volunteers who surrounded him and "almost covered him", one or two of them "sustaining severe injuries" as they did so.⁷⁵

Next the police moved on and attacked the crowd assembled nearby at the railway station. Afterwards, Anant Prasad comments, having engaged

... in this favourite pastime of beating innocent sightseers and others this valiant Superintendent retired fully satisfied, I believe, that he had thus rendered a great service to his country.⁷⁶

So shocked was Anant Prasad by the violence of the police that he resigned his membership of the Legislative Council because he found "co-operation with Government impossible under the present circumstances." He warned the authorities that whatever the outcome of the civil disobedience movement,

... the seed of hatred that is being planted in the minds of people of all classes in this country not by the propagandists but by the officers of Government themselves, will fructify one day in a manner frightful to contemplate.⁷⁷

The events at Bihpur supplied valuable publicity for the Congress movement in Bihar, and there was much discussion of the brutality of the police.⁷⁸ Similar charges to those made by Anant Prasad featured in the nationalist press, with emphasis placed on the injuries to Rajendra Prasad and other well-known leaders and on the contention that many of the members of the crowd were bystanders and sightseers, innocent of close connection with the Congress movement.⁷⁹ In the Bihpur thana itself, the harsh action taken by Ninnis failed to restore the position of the local administration. After the taking over of the ashram on 31 May those few chaukidars who were still performing their duties stopped doing so, either willingly or under pressure.⁸⁰ And after the violence of 9 June feeling against the authorities rose to a new level of intensity. On 11 June — the same day that Anant Prasad sent his letter of protest and resignation — Ninnis reported that,

All work outside Bihpur itself is at a standstill. The Sub-Inspector is unable to go out into the mofassal as threats have been made against his life

and even when no active violence is shown to him he cannot obtain any assistance in making his enquiries. For the same reason it is not possible for the constables to go out ... to watch bad characters. Summonses and warrants cannot be served. Cases are not being reported ... In fact it is no exaggeration to say that this area is temporarily lost to the Government.⁸¹

This situation continued throughout the next few months. At Bihpur ashram Congress workers kept public interest alive by sending, everyday, a batch of volunteers to the gateway. The volunteers attempted to enter the ashram but on each occasion the police drove them back. The police, according to Congress accounts, were unnecessarily harsh in dealing with the volunteers,⁸² but according to Ninnis a minimum of force was used.⁸³ Elsewhere in the vicinity Congress agitation continued and in areas that had previously been inactive propagandists effectively rallied support by reference to the events at Bihpur. Immediately to the north, in the Kishanganj thana, the movement had little effect on the chaukidars until early June, but from then on "almost daily up to the end of the month and well into July" complaints were made to the thana that chaukidars were being intimidated "in spite of the action that was being taken where possible under the ordinances".⁸⁴ In July and August Bihpur and the surrounding areas suffered from severe flooding but protest continued indicating that "the movement had taken root and did not need encouragement from outside leaders".⁸⁵ With the breakdown of the apparatus of law and order the crime rate increased. In June, July and August 1930 there was a total of 77 burglaries in the Bihpur and Kishanganj thanas, compared with an average of 51 for the same months in 1927, 1938 and 1929.⁸⁶ Nor do figures such as these illustrate fully the increase in the crime rate, because in the absence of chaukidars many crimes went unreported.⁸⁷

Gradually, with the sending out of strong police patrols to troublesome villages and the continual taking into custody of leading Congress workers the administration began to regain control. In the second half of June chaukidars began to return to their posts, and by mid-July almost all had done so. By this time, too, "the Sub Inspectors had begun freely to move about their jurisdictions, but never without an armed escort". Nor was it yet "considered safe to send out night patrols for surveillance work".⁸⁸ Agitation continued throughout August and September, but there was a tendency for volunteers to avoid confrontation with the police. On 17 September a liquor vendor of Naugachhia village complained that his shop was being aggressively picketed and that "not infrequently" volunteers snatched bottles away from liquor customers and destroyed them. The volunteers kept a round-the-clock watch on the trains and usually fled whenever the police arrived.⁸⁹ By September collections of chaukidari tax had been brought more or less up-to-date but "not without considerable trouble". It was definitely known that in one village the president of the chaukidari union had "collected nothing and has met the demand from his own pocket". It was thought that the same had happened in other cases. The members of the chaukidari force were functioning but they were still affected by "the fear of social ostracism should they give out more information than the villagers wish".⁹⁰ In view of the continuing unrest, and because in his view the local people were "by nature refractory, turbulent, and disposed to resort to force on the slightest provocation", the Deputy Inspector General of Police for north Bihar decided in September to post 110 additional police in the area, and to pay for their upkeep by a levy on the local inhabitants.⁹¹

The reaction of many Indians to the disturbances at Bihpur illustrated the problems faced by the administration when coping with the civil disobedience

movement. Police Superintendent Ninnis was antagonistic to the national movement, and was worried because the excitement of the local population, the intimidation of the chaukidars and the pressures on his constables threatened the prestige and effectiveness of the administration. Ninnis feared for the worst and decided to take harsh action. Congress supporters condemned him for doing so, and pointed out that he and his subordinates were unnecessarily severe in their treatment of demonstrators. There is considerable agreement between Ninnis and his critics about the events that occurred at Bihpur ashram. The two accounts differ mainly in their interpretation of the events. In relating the events of 9 June Ninnis readily admitted that his police had made, not one, but several lathi charges, and that the attacks on the people assembled did not cease until they had been forced to disperse. He did not accept that the people had any right to assemble in front of the ashram and, for the sake of administrative prestige, police morale, and public order, felt it was his duty to disperse them. His opponents, in contrast, thought that the crowds had every right to assemble and that their dispersal was brutal and unnecessary. Anant Prasad, who had been in the midst of the crowd, denied that anyone had acted aggressively. He believed, it seems, that adherence to Gandhian principles of non-violence was widespread among the local population. Ninnis, in contrast, doubted whether the members of the crowd would avoid acting violently. Anant Prasad's claim that no one had acted aggressively may have been correct, but it could also have been a mistaken impression arising because he was but one member of a large gathering spread over a wide area, and was not in a position to observe all sections of the crowd at all times. Such mistakes were unavoidable, and given that Ninnis took a consistently harsh, extreme line of policy, given that the police were mistrusted and disliked, given that police lathi charges caused many injuries, and given that, without doubt, individual policemen exceeded the orders they received,

it was also unavoidable that the actions of the police at Bilpur created considerable bad feeling. So strong, indeed, was the sentiment aroused by Ninnis's initiatives that, though intended to restore the position of the local police, they had, in the short term at least, precisely the opposite effect. Members of the Bhumihaar community, the locally dominant caste group, controlled the local Congress organization, and in the weeks immediately after the clash of 9 June they were able to ensure that all the chaukidars of the area ceased working and that the activities of regular policemen were impeded. Eventually, by means of harsh repression, the administration was able to re-establish its position. The administration also employed harsh measures elsewhere in north Bihar throughout 1930. Official repression maintained British rule, but only at the cost of creating a long-term legacy of antagonism and disaffection. The intensity of this ill feeling towards the administration expressed itself dramatically early in 1931 on the occasion of the observation by Congress supporters of "Independence Day".

Independence Day 1931

On 26 January 1930, when Congress volunteers observed Independence Day with processions and demonstrations, few clashes developed between police and demonstrators. One year later, in contrast, violence erupted between policemen and Congress supporters in three of the seven north Bihar districts. The backgrounds to these two days may be usefully compared. In January 1930 the civil disobedience campaign had not yet developed into a mass movement, and the administration wished to avoid direct confrontation with the supporters of Congress. The administration instructed the district authorities to deal strongly with subversive and revolutionary agitation, but to handle demonstrations by the mainstream of the Congress movement leniently and without unnecessary fuss.⁹² During the next 12 months, and especially during the second half of 1930, the situation was much transformed. The civil disobedience movement gathered momentum, there was extensive mass protest, and, especially concerning the prohibition and anti-chaukidari movements, repeated violent clashes erupted between the police and Congress activists.⁹³ In addition, the belligerence of Congress supporters and the extent of support for the civil disobedience movement may well have been increased by the impact, from October 1930 onwards, of the world-wide economic depression, which sent the prices of agricultural products plummeting.⁹⁴ Peasants relied on the sale of their cash crops and their food crop surplus to earn money to pay their rents and purchase consumer items, so the drop in prices put them under immediate pressure. In early January 1931, the Purnea District Officer reported, money in the villages was so scarce that money lenders were able to impose their own terms.⁹⁵ Throughout the 12 months from 26 January 1930, moreover, police morale had been repeatedly challenged and the authorities had come to the view, already foreshadowed⁹⁶ when civil disobedience first got under way,

that at all costs the loyalty of the police and the prestige of the administration must be preserved. Thus was the stage set for violent confrontation.

On Independence Day 1931 there were two violent clashes between police and demonstrators and their supporters in Darbhanga, one in the Basantpur thana of Saran, and one in Beguserai town, an important railway junction and the principal town of north Monghyr. Both of the incidents in Darbhanga occurred in the Madhubani subdivision, in thanas which adjoined the frontier with Nepal. In the lesser of the two incidents, which occurred in the Harlakhi thana, in the north-west of the subdivision, the local sub-inspector of police and his men arrested 12 members of a procession. The people who had been watching the procession reacted to this interference by assaulting the police with sticks and clods of earth. The police fought back and, with the aid of some Muslims and two of the headmen of the local chaukidari unions dispersed their assailants.⁹⁷ The police later arrested some of the rioters. It would appear from the Maithil Brahman names given in the police report that the rioters were mostly kinsmen and/or caste fellows of the men who had initially been taken into custody.⁹⁸ The other Darbhanga incident occurred in the Khautana thana in the northeast of the Madhubani subdivision and began when the sub-inspector, supported by a force of six constables and 60 chaukidars, stopped a small procession, confiscated the flags being carried and arrested three of the processionists. "At the instigation of the local Marwari merchants " the crowd of spectators protested to the police over the arrests. The crowd refused to disperse and kept on confronting the police for two hours.⁹⁹ Then, at about 5 p.m., some members of the crowd, among whom Yadavs were prominent, began an attack on the police with stones and lathis.¹⁰⁰ Most of the chaukidars fled when the attack began and the remaining members of the police party locked themselves into a building

that was within the compound of the local dispensary. The crowd continued to demonstrate outside the building and to pelt its doors and windows with rocks, despite the efforts of the Marwaris who, worried by the turn events had taken, tried to dissuade them from further protest.¹⁰¹ The position of the police party seemed to be precarious. The only firearm the police had with them was the sub-inspector's pistol. At the beginning of the encounter the sub-inspector had had two rounds of ammunition for this pistol, but subsequently he had fired one of them off into the air, during the period when the crowd was first protesting against the arrests the police had made, in a fruitless effort to intimidate the demonstrators.¹⁰² The attack on the dispensary building only ceased at 7 p.m., with the arrival on the scene of a Muslim zamindar who, as a prominent figure in the locality, was able to persuade the demonstrators to disperse.¹⁰³

A more serious Independence Day clash occurred in the Basantpur thana of the district of Saran. The setting for the confrontation was the village of Goreakothi, in the vicinity of which members of the Bhumihaar jati predominated.¹⁰⁴ Sub-Inspector Chandrika Sinha, accompanied by three constables and about 50 chaukidars, encountered a procession of some 3,000 people drawn from Goreakothi and 11 nearby villages. Sub-Inspector Sinha ordered the processionists to disperse and, when they did not obey, arrested two of their leaders, whom he sent off towards the police station under the guard of his subordinates. Sinha, who was mounted on a pony, remained confronting the crowd and tried to get them to disperse.¹⁰⁵ At this point the students of the nearby high school came out from their classes for their afternoon break and joined the processionists.¹⁰⁶ The school was a centre of nationalist activity. It had been founded by Babu Narain Prasad Singh, a leading member of the local Bhumihaar community, who had been active during the non-cooperation

movement and who had been sentenced, in April 1930, to one year's imprisonment for a breach of the salt laws.¹⁰⁷ The arrival of the students seems to have given the crowd a new impetus, because soon Sub-Inspector Sinha found himself hemmed in and under threat.¹⁰⁸ He drew his pistol and threatened the demonstrators but one of them snatched the pistol from his grasp.¹⁰⁹ At about the same time other members of the crowd began to throw stones.¹¹⁰ The sub-inspector galloped off on his pony and a section of the crowd attacked and pursued his subordinates. The crowd pressed the pursuit with great determination; some of the members of the police party were chased for one or two miles before being caught and beaten up.¹¹¹ The experience of Constable Parmeshwar Singh was, according to the District Police Superintendent, not untypical. Constable Singh escaped from the main crowd with only a few minor injuries and reached the village of Sawna, where he was suddenly set upon by several villagers. He fled into a hut but was pursued and beaten up. He finally managed to escape into some nearby fields where he collapsed, so badly beaten that he could scarcely move. A chaukidar, another fugitive from the riot, found him and brought him water and later, under cover of darkness, arranged for a bullock cart to come and bear him, by a circuitous route, to the police station.¹¹² Almost every member of the police party was injured, 34 of them seriously enough to require medical examination. Sub-Inspector Sinha was wounded on the head by a stone, and one of his subordinates suffered "a very nasty cut ... which laid bare 2½ inches of skull bone". One chaukidar had a finger smashed and another had his arm broken. Other members of the party, including Constable Parmeshwar Singh, were so badly bruised that, even some 10 days later, they still had not fully recovered.¹¹³ To bring the area under control a body of military police was brought in.¹¹⁴ Twenty-seven of the rioters were brought to trial, of whom 18 were sentenced to six months' rigorous imprisonment, while the remaining nine were acquitted

because they could not be positively identified as having taken part in the riot. This acquittal, the District Police Superintendent alleged, "was entirely due to the witnesses being gained over".¹¹⁵

The rout of the police party at Goreakothi illustrated the weakness of the police when, outnumbered and armed only with lathis, they encountered a hostile, determined crowd. When, however, the police bore firearms they fared better. Though outnumbered and heavily pressed, an armed police party managed to defend itself effectively against its attackers in an Independence Day clash in Beguserai town in north Monghyr.

At Beguserai on 26 January, 1,000 Congress volunteers and several thousand Congress sympathisers gathered to march in procession to commemorate Independence Day.¹¹⁶ The procession, which according to a Congress estimate was 10,000 strong,¹¹⁷ moved along Tirhut road from west to east but stopped when it found its way blocked by a cordon of police.¹¹⁸ The police were stationed where Tirhut road was met at right angles by Local Board (or L.B.) road which ran to the north and gave access to the police station. The police party was under the direction of the Sub-Divisional Officer and of the Deputy Superintendent of Police and consisted of 45 men armed with lathis, who were drawn up in two ranks across the road facing the head of the procession, and of 33 policemen armed with muskets, who were also drawn up in two ranks, one facing towards the procession and one facing to the rear in case of an attack from that direction. On the flanks and to the rear of the police party, a large body of casual observers assembled. The officers in charge of the police moved forward across the 75 or so yards that separated the procession from the police cordon, and ordered the procession to disperse. When the members of the march refused to do so, the police arrested two of their leaders. Up to now, according to the official account, the processionists had been hurling abuse

at the police party, and from the time the arrests were made they also, along with people from among the gathering of spectators, began hurling stones.¹¹⁹ While he was being arrested one of the leaders called upon his fellows to refrain from violence but this appeal fell upon deaf ears, and the crowd began to advance along the road.¹²⁰ The Deputy Police Superintendent, according to the official account, immediately ordered the lathi bearing police to make a counter-attack "but as they did so brickbats were showered on them from every side" and they fell back in confusion.¹²¹ The shower of bricks drove the lathi police back onto the riflemen, and drove them all back along the L.B. road towards the thana. "Several were knocked down and many injured".¹²² Their officers retreated with them and while the subdivisional officer was crossing "the ditch in front of the thana building ... he was knocked down by a brick on the head". He was also hit on the back by several bricks. As he rose to his feet he

... gave the order to fire, and the armed police opened fire in the first instance up the L.B. road down which they had been driven and then also on the rioters who were stoning them from other directions.¹²³

The subdivisional officer later said that he had ordered the firing of only a few rounds, but if so, his order was either misheard, misunderstood or ignored, and uncontrolled firing continued for 10 or 15 minutes until the members of the crowd had stopped throwing stones. The police fired a total of 146 rounds, of which 32 were buckshot and 114 were ball. By opening fire, the police saved themselves from being overwhelmed, and managed to withdraw into the thana compound. A number of demonstrators remained in the vicinity of the thana for the next few hours, but no further clash occurred, and they eventually dispersed.¹²⁴ During the encounter the subdivisional officer, two sub-inspectors and six constables suffered bad head injuries, while the

Deputy Police Superintendent and 23 other members of the police party sustained other injuries.¹²⁵ The police firing killed seven demonstrators. (Four died on the spot, while the other three succumbed later to their wounds.) At least another seven demonstrators suffered gunshot wounds. Four of the killed and three of the wounded were Bhumihars. These casualties included both Congress activists and bystanders who, it seems, had taken no part in the assault on the police.¹²⁶ The low casualty rate in spite of the number of rounds expended reflected the panic among the police, many of whom fired wildly, and the poor quality of their arms.¹²⁷ It should be borne in mind, nonetheless, that the official casualty figures may well have been inaccurate. It was rumoured that to escape police and official harassment many people who had been wounded in the firing had decided not to attend hospitals and dispensaries and had gone into hiding in their villages.¹²⁸

British officials subsequently justified the action taken by the police at Beguserai by claiming that they had had prior warning that the procession intended to make an attack on the police station. They pointed out that since the early stages of the civil disobedience movement there had been growing tension between the police and the inhabitants of the locality, and particularly with the members of the numerous and predominant Bhumihar community, who made up one-fifth of the population of the subdivision.¹²⁹ On 29 May 1930, a group of Bhumihars from the villages of Ratanpur and Sadanandpur broke into the police station compound, assaulted police, and rescued some prosecution witnesses who had been called in a "semi-political case".¹³⁰ Similar minor disturbances continued throughout June, with the result that the Bhagalpur Divisional Commissioner suggested, early in July, that the best way to quieten the situation was "to have a 'battle'",¹³¹ by which he meant that the police should take the opportunity, if it eventuated, to disperse an

excited crowd by means of a lathi charge. Later in the same month a local official related the aggressiveness of local activists to the absence among them of any dominating figure. "Every man", he commented "is more or less a law unto himself and does as he pleases".¹³² On 5 August, according to a police report, a group of Bhumihars prepared to make an armed night attack on the Teghra police station, in retaliation against some arrests that had been made in the local bazaar, but some "responsible Congressmen dissuaded them."¹³³ On 14 September at the village of Bihat, four miles from Barauni, a town five miles to the south of Beguserai, villagers stoned a group of policemen while they were attempting to confiscate property in lieu of the money that the villagers had refused to pay as chaukidari tax. Four days later the local authorities sent to the village a force of 200 policemen, of whom about a third bore lathis while the rest carried fire-arms. On arrival at Bihat the police found that Namdhari Singh, the secretary of the District Congress Committee, had preceded them by one day, and had persuaded the villagers not to offer resistance.¹³⁴ The police arrested 33 people and discovered that two days before, on the 16th, in anticipation of the imminent arrival of the police after the disturbance of 14 September,

... there had been a gathering of some 8,000 Babhans [i.e. Bhumihars] from 36 different villages, most of them armed with lathis or garassas, with the object of resisting the police and that 4 maunds of rice had been brought in to feed them.¹³⁵

Two months later, at the nearby village of Khagaria, five constables and some chaukidars arrested two Congress picketers, but were attacked by a large crowd and were forced to release them.¹³⁶ Some five weeks later, on 24 December, a detective constable who had been active in reporting on the activities of Congress supporters was attacked, at the village of Aigh, near Beguserai, by some Bhumihars who came from the nearby village of Ratanpur, and "was severely

beaten, his arm being broken and his head cut open".¹³⁷ A police party came and made several arrests, but this did not bring the trouble to a conclusion. A few days later a villager who had assisted the police in their investigation of the attack on the detective was assaulted and was also "severely beaten".¹³⁸ Because of these incidents the local authorities later claimed they had anticipated trouble on Independence Day 1931. There was "every indication", the Police Superintendent reported a few days after the riot,

... that it was not so much the inhabitants of Beguserai itself who were responsible for the riot, as the Babbans from villages all over the subdivision, including Bihat and Majhaul.¹³⁹

And, according to another senior policemen,

The mob consisted largely of Babbans, animated by an intense hostility towards the police, not merely as one tenet of a political creed, but also for more intimate and personal reasons arising from contact with the police during the last few months. There seems good ground for believing that a large part of the mob were deliberately seeking a trial of strength with the police ... In the existing temper of the mob, an attack on the thana would have been almost inevitable, whether deliberately planned or not. The smallest incitement would have started it and there were plenty of persons ready to furnish that incitement.¹⁴⁰

The reports of the Beguserai clash by the local officials were accepted, with reservations, by their administrative superiors. Mr Lee, the District Magistrate, criticised the way in which the Subdivisional Officer had deployed the armed police. In his view they should have been posted further in the rear of the lathi bearing police, nearer to the thana, so that their fire power could have been used more effectively.¹⁴¹ The Subdivisional Officer and the Deputy Superintendent of Police were also criticised for failing to limit and direct the firing of their subordinates more closely.¹⁴² One senior official who was sent to make confidential enquiries into the events of 26 January commented that

I am not very satisfied that there was a real apprehension on the part of the officials, at the time, of an attack on the thana, and I am pretty sure that the procession itself started without any such intention. Had this been the idea of the mob lathis would have been very prominent, and it was clear that, although the mob, at the time of the police charge and afterwards, in moving towards the thana, was well within striking distance of the police, only one of the latter has marks of a lathi blow, and the mob evidently confined themselves to missiles, which, as one witness said, fell like a hailstorm.¹⁴³

Despite this, he did not think that "the local officers were wrong in breaking up the procession".¹⁴⁴ If the processionists had been allowed to continue along Tirhut road, and had not turned left into L.B. road, they would have entered the bazaar area, where they may have caused much damage.

The procession was essentially an unlawful assembly, constituted with the direct intention of defying government and promoting sedition. Even if it had no intention of a conflict with the police, the danger of allowing such a procession to march through the bazaar is practically clear from what happened. From the moment the police attempted forcibly to disperse it, sympathisers began to hurl a storm of brickbats from all sides. With such inflammable material it was unsafe to allow even a peaceful procession of these dimensions to proceed through the bazaar, and no criticism is called for of the local officers' decision to disperse it.¹⁴⁵

Many members of the Indian community could not accept that the action taken by the police at Beguserai had been justified. One public man from Patna, Bishundeva Narayan Singh, made an enquiry into the events and concluded that the procession had merely wanted to pass along the Tirhut road through the bazaar, and that it had wished to avoid clashing with the police. He pointed out that the procession had been stopped in a narrow stretch of road, and that therefore its members were

... packed into a very small compass. Those who were in front had no room to budge an inch either this side or that side in spite of the brutal lathi charge, because the entire procession was facing east and unless the men in the rear made room for them they could not disperse. In order to save themselves from being severely assaulted or killed on account of the indiscriminate lathi charge, they took recourse to throwing brickbats picked up from the vicinity of Ramtahal's shop, then under construction. The shower of brickbats resulted in scaring away the entire Police force to the thana.¹⁴⁶

A contrasting version of what occurred was given by a Congress activist, Anugrah Narayan Sinha. According to his account the people at the front of the procession remained perfectly non-violent in the face of the lathi charge. The rock throwing was begun by bystanders and by people at the back of the crowd, who became outraged by the brutality of the police. Then the procession began to move forward under the impetus of the people at the back.¹⁴⁷ Both these accounts probably contain an element of truth. Once someone had begun throwing stones it is likely that many people throughout the procession and among the bystanders followed suit. Bishundeva Narayan Singh and Anugrah Narayan Sinha agreed that next, having provoked the people into violence, the police responded by resorting to undisciplined, indiscriminate, and unnecessarily prolonged firing. Both men emphasized that innocent bystanders had suffered because of the irresponsible actions of the police.¹⁴⁸ One such person was Banarsi Prasad Singh, a senior student at the high school that was adjacent to the scene of the riot. This youth, who was described by Bishundeva Narayan Singh as "the only hope of support to his family", was hit in the jaw by a stray bullet and subsequently died of the wound.¹⁴⁹ And both commentators agreed that the clash had been unnecessary and avoidable and that the police had acted throughout with extreme and unnecessary brutality.¹⁵⁰ Editorially, the *Searchlight* compared police violence at Beguserai with that at Bihpur, and accused the Beguserai officials of acting

as callously as General Dyer had at Amritsar in April, 1919. "In plain words", it commented,

Beguserai has had an exhibition of Dyerism with this difference that while Dyer had the courage to own up that he meant to teach the people a lesson the pinch-beck Dyers of Beguserai have the cowardice of covering their incompetence or worse under a cloak of obvious subterfuge ... surely, in the face of this brutal episode it ill-becomes the officials of the province to talk about popular violence and lawlessness. That such an obvious case of incompetence, such a flagrant instance of outrageousness, should be sought to be white washed ... is but a reminder of the unspeakable humiliation of foreign rule administered by an arrogant bureaucracy.¹⁵¹

The waning of protest

The celebration of Independence Day on 26 January 1931 and its tragic results marked the highpoint of civil disobedience agitation in north Bihar. Extensive arrests and the quartering of additional police in areas that were Congress strongholds had, by the first months of the year, begun to seriously erode the strength of the movement. A new phase began after 5 March when Gandhi and Irwin, the Governor-General, agreed to a pact in which, in return for the easing up of government restrictions on political activity and the release of Congress prisoners, Gandhi suspended mass protest pending the results of the second Round Table Conference on India's constitutional future, due to be held in London later in the year. Henceforth, according to the terms of the pact, Congress workers would restrict their activities to propaganda work and to a peaceful, non-coercive picketing.¹⁵² In the short run the Gandhi/Irwin pact was seen, in north Bihar, as a victory for Congress. Irwin's treating with Gandhi as an equal and his apparent acceptance, in doing so, of at least the quasi-legitimacy of the Congress movement shook the morale of the police and boosted that of Congress supporters. Congress activists, the authorities alleged, distorted the details of the pact and used its existence to drum up support.¹⁵³ In doing so they were helped greatly by the release of Congress prisoners. In Muzaffarpur town, for example, the arrest in early January of 180 Congress volunteers, most of whom had come in from the countryside, took the wind out of the sails of the local Congress organization, and little enthusiasm was displayed on Independence Day. Yet with the release of the prisoners there was a new surge of activity and picketing was carried out with renewed intensity.¹⁵⁴ By early April in the Muzaffarpur countryside, according to a police report, the people had come "to understand that Swaraj has been obtained", and Congress workers were successfully

collecting subscriptions. The Police Superintendent commented:

The fact that such people as the Mahanth of Maniari, the Mahanth of Jaintpur, Rai Bahadur Shyamnandan Sahai and others are now helping to support the Congress indicates that the general public are of the opinion that Congress has obtained authority and can seriously injure the interests of those who fail to lend their support.¹⁵⁵

And from north Bhagalpur officials reported that villagers in the vicinity of Bihpur had been asking when the chaukidars and police "are to be replaced by a Swaraj force".¹⁵⁶ The authorities claimed that the revival of agitation involved numerous breaches of the Gandhi/Irwin pact.¹⁵⁷ In Saran, there was a renewed wave of sabotage of toddy palms, and in the Tegra thana of north Monghyr an old man who had purchased some ganja was attacked by Congress volunteers, kicked in the stomach, and subsequently died of his injuries.¹⁵⁸

Before long, however, the flurry of agitation died down. The national and provincial leaders of Congress urged their followers to observe restraint, and the police, once they learnt that there was no truth in the widespread rumours that their past excesses were to be the subject of enquiry, dealt harshly with Congress activists.¹⁵⁹ By July, the situation had quietened sufficiently for the authorities to withdraw the contingents of additional police from everywhere in north Bihar except for the Bhorey thana, where extra police remained because, officials explained to Rajendra Prasad, even in normal times the area was "turbulent and criminal".¹⁶⁰ This state of inactivity persisted throughout the remaining months of 1931.¹⁶¹

Early in 1932 protest briefly revived. In late 1931 the Government of India became worried over outbreaks of turbulence and violence in Bengal, the United Provinces and the North-West Frontier Provinces and grew impatient of Gandhi's unwillingness to make the concessions it sought. The government

passed an emergency powers ordinance, proclaimed the civil disobedience campaign and threw the Congress leadership into jail. The Congress re-activated mass civil disobedience and a wave of protest erupted, to which the authorities responded draconically with police violence and mass arrests.¹⁶² As in 1931, Independence Day supplied the occasion for serious clashes.

At Motihari town in Champaran on 26 January 1932 Congress supporters attempted to hold a demonstration at the Banjaria Pandal, an open air meeting place which, a few days earlier, had been notified under the Unlawful Association Ordinance and had been taken over by the police. During the days before the 26th the police were informed that

an attempt was being made throughout a wide area in the Sadr Subdivision to bring in large crowds into Motihari to form processions and hold demonstrations at the Banjaria Pandal ...¹⁶³

On two occasions during the course of the afternoon of 26 January the police broke up Congress processions and made a total of about 20 arrests. Undeterred, the demonstrators made their way to the pandal. A party of 20 police arrived at the pandal and dispersed, by means of a lathi charge, the demonstrators who had already arrived there. While they were doing this more demonstrators arrived and soon the police found themselves threatened with encirclement by a crowd of about 3,000, some members of which began throwing rocks at them. The District Magistrate arrived and, according to the police account,

... attempted to parley with the crowd, but the only result was a continued hail of missiles. One Congress leader, Ram Lochan Singh, asked the District Magistrate to hold his fire and to allow him to address the crowd. He was, however, not given a hearing, and was actually struck with lathis by the crowd which then began to advance on the Pandal and was clearly determined not to listen to reason but to attack the police force and the magistrate.¹⁶⁴

The police responded to this threat by firing 35 shots, some of them buck-shot and some of them ball, and the crowd retreated. Within five minutes a section of the crowd renewed the attack only to retire after five more shots were fired. The District Magistrate then learnt that a plain clothes constable had been caught on his own and was being beaten up a few hundred yards away. A lorry^{load} of policemen departed to rescue him and came under attack while turning on to the main road. The police in the lorry retaliated by opening fire, killing one man and fatally injuring another. Their attackers withdrew and they completed their rescue mission. During the remainder of the afternoon no further attack occurred and the demonstrators slowly dispersed. Of the members of the crowd two had been killed, one had been seriously wounded, seven had been sufficiently injured to require hospital treatment as in-patients and a number of others had been less seriously injured.¹⁶⁵ Among their opponents, the District Magistrate had minor injuries from being stoned and a number of police had minor injuries from stones and from lathi blows.¹⁶⁶

In February, at the Sheohar police station in Muzaffarpur, the local authorities anticipated a demonstration on the 26th, and posted a detachment of Gurkha military police there. Nothing happened on the 26th or the 27th, but the police received the news that "there would be a demonstration and an attempt to put up the Congress flag on the thana building on the 28th."¹⁶⁷ From about 1 p.m. on 28 February a large crowd, headed by about 100 volunteers, began to assemble on the main road 30 yards from the front verandah of the police station, the compound of which had no definite boundary. The crowd grew until it numbered about 7,000. Some of its members "were carrying Congress flags and a large bamboo ladder and considerable numbers were armed with lathis". Two attempts to disperse the crowd by means of lathi charges did not succeed, and the crowd began hurling stones at the thana and its

defenders, injuring two of the constables and three members of the military police. The police were later to be informed that the "local people had been told that the police would not fire",¹⁶⁸ and if this were true, then it might help account for the determination of the crowd's demonstration. The commanding officer, a deputy-magistrate, decided that "it would be impossible to disperse the mob except by opening fire". The District Magistrate reported that on the command of the Deputy Magistrate the officer-in-charge of the police force,

... detailed four men to fire one round each at the more violent members of the mob. Four rounds were fired by the Gurkha Military Police stationed at the north-east corner of the thana building. This firing with .303 rifles at close range had a very pronounced effect on the mob who dispersed at once. Four dead were picked up on the spot, two of whom, as well as one of the injured, were identified as ring leaders of the attack. Nine injured have been treated in the local dispensary, one of whom died during the night. One other case of spinal injury is not expected to recover. The others will probably recover.¹⁶⁹

The initiatives taken by the police at Sheohar police station and at Motihari town were characteristic of the harsh line now being adopted by the authorities. Harsh action against demonstrators and the making of mass arrests soon broke the back of the movement. By the middle of March the Viceroy was able to advise the Secretary of State that, in Bihar and Orissa, agitation was now on the "downgrade", and this assessment was to be repeated throughout the year.¹⁷⁰ In January 1933, on Independence Day, there were numerous arrests but there were "no serious incidents" and less interest was shown than had been the case in previous years.¹⁷¹ The civil disobedience movement died a lingering death, not finally being called off until April 1934. Right until the end dedicated nationalists were willing to risk a lathi blow or a spell in jail by joining in a flag waving procession or a vociferous demonstration.¹⁷² But from mid-1931 on, with the exception of the brief flurry of excitement in

early 1932, the movement was no longer a mass agitation. The administration of north Bihar, which had been vexed by the prohibition movement and gravely worried by the anti-chaukidari movement, had encountered and overcome a crisis.

Conclusion: "Limited violence" and police/administrative control.

In north Bihar in the early 1930s high caste, locally dominant peasants led an extensive civil disobedience campaign against British rule. The movement they led lacked the social depth of the non-cooperation movement, yet commanded considerable support and elicited widespread sympathy throughout north Bihar society. Like its predecessor, however, the 1930s campaign involved numerous violent incidents. At first civil disobedience operated in strict accordance with the Gandhian principle of non-violence, but before long it became characterized by sabotage, intimidation, and assault. These elements, indeed, proved essential to the successes civil disobedience achieved. Initially, activists concentrated on the salt campaign but the police dealt effectively with this challenge by selectively arresting Congress leaders and by sabotaging salt-making utensils. The salt campaign was thus quickly quelled and raised only passing interest. Congress workers had more success in their campaigns against the sale of liquor and drugs and their campaign against the *chaukidari* system. Success in the prohibition campaign resulted from the intimidation of vendors and customers and the sabotage of the *spathes* on the *toddy* palms. Peaceful picketing and propaganda work on their own, it seems likely, would have produced a far less dramatic impact. The anti-*chaukidari* campaign had most success in those areas where, in addition to peaceful persuasion, Congress workers brought stern social pressures upon the local *chaukidars* and their families.

The violence of Congress supporters conflicted with the adherence of the leaders of Congress to the principle of non-violence. The Congress leaders dealt with this problem by ignoring it. On this issue the drawing of a parallel with the workings of the British administration in India may be instructive. As Anil Seal has pointed out, British officials in the

subcontinent, despite their noble words and high-flown sentiments about bringing justice to the masses, were in practice, because of their reliance on local intermediaries, "winking at the existence of a legal underworld where the private justice of faction settled conflicts with the blows of lathis..."¹⁷³ The leaders of the Bihar Congress movement were in a broadly comparable situation. They might not approve of the methods of their local supporters, but these methods had the merit of getting things done, of crippling the liquor trade for example, or of ensuring the resignation of chaukidars. The importance of physical force to Congress success meant that, side by side with the official policy of non-violence, there emerged an unofficial, covert policy of limited violence. 'An all out, explicitly violent, attack on the administration was not made, since such an enterprise would be both socially divisive and would stimulate massive and bloody repression, but the use of violence to a limited extent became tacitly accepted. Limited violence forced waverers and dissidents into the Congress camp and encouraged the police into harsh action which gave a publicity victory to Congress, even if the victory in the physical clash went to the police. Limited violence, moreover, put pressure on the administration and damaged its prestige, but yet encouraged it, for reasons of publicity, to delay making a repressive response.

Individual Congress leaders attempted to counteract the tendency towards the use of violence, but such men could not be everywhere at once. In Patna in the weeks immediately after the signing of the Gandhi/Irwin pact, for example, Rajendra Prasad was able to use his personal influence to ensure that Congress workers adhered to the provisions of the pact concerning picketing. But British officials complained that elsewhere the aggressive, intimidatory picketing characteristic of the pre-pact period continued unabated.¹⁷⁴ And at times even such a devoted Gandhian as Prasad found it necessary to turn a

blind eye to the activities of some of the movement's supporters. In the early months of 1931 Prasad responded to official complaints about violence by Congress workers by enquiring from the local Congress committees which had jurisdiction over the areas in which the alleged offences were said to have happened. When the local Congress officials replied that there was no substance whatsoever in the allegations, Prasad took them at their word and relayed a summary of their findings to the administration.¹⁷⁵ This action was disingenuous, since Prasad must have been aware that there was some truth in the official charges.

Violence on the part of Congress supporters was often a response to, and often stimulated, violence by the police. The police, by their aggressiveness, worked to the long-term disadvantage of the administration they served. Sometimes, like Ninnis and his men at Bihpur, the police acted with unnecessary severity; sometimes, like MacKensie in Saran, they acted with gleeful brutality. The police unleashed violence against demonstrators and treated Congress prisoners harshly after they had been taken into custody. Police and prison officers were accustomed to mistreating those given into their charge. They beat and tortured Congress prisoners, molested women Congress prisoners and made homosexual assaults on younger Congress prisoners.¹⁷⁶ Congress activists and the Congress press reported such incidents widely. These reports, it seems probable, contained exaggerations,¹⁷⁷ but they also contained much truth and given popular hostility towards the police they helped rally support for the Congress movement. Congress spokesmen were in an excellent position to take advantage of violence by the police. Because the official Congress policy was one of non-violence, and because some members of the organization adhered strictly to the policy while the rest gave lip service to it, spokesmen could explain away incidents of violence on

the part of Congress supporters as accidental aberrations, while pointing out that police violence was completely in accordance with the traditions of police work in the province.¹⁷⁸ Frequently as at Beguserai and Bihpur the police won victories in clashes yet lost the propaganda and prestige war. Police repression created an emotional groundswell of sympathy and support for Congress, and because of this, as D.A. Low has pointed out, the crushing of the civil disobedience movement was a pyrrhic victory for the administration.¹⁷⁹

The success of the technique of "limited violence" had a serious impact on the finances of the administration. This was partly because more money had to be spent maintaining law and order. The administration spent a large sum on the recruitment, training, and deployment of 400 extra policemen.¹⁸⁰ Much more important, however, was the impact of Congress sabotage and intimidation on the revenue the government earned from excise duties. Up to 30 December 1930 the total loss of excise revenue to the provincial administration amounted to 4,300,000 rupees, out of an annual excise income which, by 1930, totalled some 20,000,000 rupees. Nor did rapid recovery occur in the ensuing years, because the destruction of toddy spathes had a long-term effect on productivity.¹⁸¹ The drop in excise revenue came, moreover, at a time when, from the end of 1930 onwards, the finances of the province were suffering from the impact of the great depression. Even in 'normal' times the finances of the province were precarious. In future, with the budget even more strained than previously, the government found it difficult to keep even basic administrative structures operating and had even less money available than usual to spend on various public amenities, the provision of which may have reaped a valuable harvest of support for British rule.¹⁸²

The success of "limited violence" also illuminated the fragility of police control over north Bihar. In his speech to the annual police parade in February 1930 the Bihar and Orissa Governor commented that

Taking the criterion of area or population, we have still the smallest police force in India; we spend less on our police per head of population than any other province. We cannot respond to the demand for new police stations; we cannot even man properly the stations we have whose jurisdictions extend in several cases from 300 to 800 square miles.¹⁸³

Nor did the police have effective weapons.¹⁸⁴ Moreover, as officials admitted privately to one another, there were great deficiencies in the human material from which the police force was drawn.¹⁸⁵ During the course of the civil disobedience movement the members of the force, because of these weaknesses, were not always able to cope effectively with violent confrontations. The most successful police action of the period, from the police point of view, was the firing at Sheohar police station in early 1932, at which ex-soldier members of the Gurkha Military Police company, armed with .303 rifles, wrought havoc and rapidly dispersed a crowd with the firing of a few shots.¹⁸⁶ On other occasions, at Beguserai and Bhorey for example, less well-trained, armed, and led police suffered casualties and temporary reverses, and accordingly lost prestige. Such loss of prestige, as the Chief Secretary complained to Rajendra Prasad, made it more difficult than previously for the police, with their limited numbers, to handle ordinary crime, let alone political disturbances.¹⁸⁷

The chaukidars displayed even more weaknesses than the regular police. The chaukidars, because they resided in the locality in which they worked, had always been subject to the pressure of the locally powerful. In the early 1930s, in some parts of north Bihar, such pressure was applied with such success that the whole chaukidari system temporarily collapsed. Nor did the chaukidars prove themselves reliable in clashes between police and

demonstrators. Outside the Goreakothi school in Saran, for example, the chaukidars broke and ran before the onset of the crowd, while at Khautana in the Madhubani subdivision of the Darbhanga district, they decamped and left the regular police to their fate once stones began to fly. Overall, the conduct of both chaukidars and regular policemen during the period of the civil disobedience movement indicated that the whole police system needed drastic and extensive reforms. Such reforms, however, would be financially costly, and because of the financial problems which were bedevilling the province they were postponed again and again. The political and administrative costs of these successive postponements were to be revealed, a decade later, in the complete collapse of British rule over north Bihar during the Quit India revolt.

NOTES : CHAPTER 3

- 1 Judith M. Brown, "The Role of A National Leader: Gandhi, Congress and Civil Disobedience, 1929-34", in Low, *Congress and the Raj*, pp. 133-64, 134-7; R.J. Moore, "The Problem of Freedom with Unity: London's India Policy, 1917-47" in Low, *Congress and the Raj*, pp. 375-403, 377-9.
- 2 Datta, *Freedom Movement*, I, p. 467; GGB, *Statutory Commission*, XII, pp. 19-21.
- 3 McDonald, "Unity on Trial", p. 294; Punyanand Jha, "Split in Purnea District Congress Committee. Its Causes and Effects", Feb. 1929, AICCPf G2(Kwi) 1931 NML.
- 4 For the similarities between non-cooperation and civil disobedience in Bihar, and for details about the limited participation of Muslims in the 1930s movement, see Judith M. Brown, *Gandhi and Civil Disobedience. The Mahatma in Indian Politics, 1928-34* (London 1977) pp. 144-5, 191. For analysis of the character and effect of nationalist propaganda, see G. Pandey, "Mobilization in a Mass Movement: Congress 'Propaganda' in the United Provinces (India), 1930-34", *Modern Asian Studies*, 9, 2, 1975, pp. 205-26, 224-5.
- 5 For a discussion of the various tactical alternatives open to the organizers of the civil disobedience movement see Jaleshwar Prasad, "Non-Payment of Taxes in Bihar", *Searchlight*, 12 February 1930, reprinted as Appendix II, K.K. Datta, *Freedom Movement*, II, pp. 419-21.
- 6 Because of the difficulty of manufacturing salt in Bihar, Rajendra Prasad was at first lukewarm about the prospects of the salt campaign. See the report of his speech of 23 February 1930 in *Searchlight*, 26 February 1930. See also K.K. Datta, *Freedom Movement*, II, p. 53.

- 7 Prasad, "Non-Payment of Taxes"; O'Malley, *Champaran*, p. 46; Roy Choudhary, *Muzaffarpur*, pp. 69-71.
- 8 *Searchlight*, 19 April 1930. See also report entitled, "Nonias join hands with Satyagrahis", *Searchlight*, 28 April 1930.
- 9 Whitty, Tirhut Commissioner to Briscoe, Chief Secretary, 16 April 1930, PSf 139, 1930; MacKensie, Saran Police Superintendent to McDowell, 9 April 1930, PSf 139, 1930; Hamid, Champaran Police Superintendent to District Officer, 17 April 1930, PSf 138A 1930; all in BSA. See also, K.K. Datta, *Freedom Movement*, II, pp. 61, 85, 86.
- 10 Champaran Police Superintendent, "Report on working Satyagraha Movement", 10 May 1930, BSA. According to the official Congress explanation, however, the salt campaign was not a failure, and was only suspended because the coming of the monsoon in late June made the collection of suitable earth impossible. Datta, *Freedom Movement*, II, p. 91.
- 11 MacKensie to McDowell, 9 April 1930, PSf 139, 1930, BSA.
- 12 Khan, Saran District Officer to Middleton, Tirhut Commissioner, 20 April 1930, PSf 139, 1930, BSA.
- 13 Brown, *Gandhi and Civil Disobedience*, p. 117, note 41, p. 144.
- 14 Case 66, 1930, Report I, 11 Sept. 1930, and "Commitment Order in Case of Emperor versus Ram Chandra Sah and 5 Others", 19 July 1930, both in PSf 139B, 1930, BSA.
- 15 Sinha to Horsefield, Commissioner Excise and Salt, 22 May 1930, FMPf 84, 1920-42, BSA.

- 16 Swanzy, Champaran District Officer to Horsefield, Commissioner Excise and Salt, 5 Dec. 1930 and Chief Secretary to Home Political Department, 9 Dec. 1930, both in PSf 138B, 1930, BSA.
- 17 Special Report Case 117, Report dated 1 Nov. 1930, PSf 158, 1930, BSA. For other official allegations about violence by picketters see "Extract Confidential Diary Police Superintendent Champaran", 14 July 1930 and Special Report Case 80, Report dated 10 Aug. 1930, both in PSf 138B, 1930, BSA.
- 18 For discussion of the prohibition campaign during the non-cooperation movement see above, Chapter 2, p. 160.
- 19 Commissioner of Excise to Collectors of Shahabad, Patna and Bhagalpur, 3 June 1930, FMPf 84, 1920-1942, BSA.
- 20 Champaran Police Superintendent, "Report on the working of the Satyagraha movement", 20 May 1930, PSf 138B, 1930, BSA.
- 21 *Ibid*; Khan to Middleton, Tirhut Commissioner, 9 June 1930, PSf 138B, 1930, BSA.
- 22 "Note by Mr McPherson", p. 7, PSf 411, 1921, BSA.
- 23 Hallet to Home Secretary, 14 April 1931, GOI, HPf 33/V/1931, NAI.
- 24 Saran Police Superintendent, extract from confidential diary for period ending 8 June, PSf 139B 1930, BSA; Saran Police Superintendent, memorandum to Inspector General Police, 6 Aug. 1930, PSf 379, 1930, BSA [hereafter Saran memorandum].
- 25 Extract from Confidential Diary, Saran Police Superintendent cited in *ibid*.

- 26 Datta, *Freedom Movement*, II, 121-2.
- 27 Champaran Police Superintendent, "Report on the working of Satyagraha movement", 20 May 1930, PSf 138B, 1930, BSA.
- 28 Excise Superintendent's Report, 2 June 1930, PSf 138B, 1930, BSA.
- 29 Datta, *Freedom Movement*, II, pp. 108, 116-117, 126.
- 30 Prasad, "Non-Payment of Taxes".
- 31 *Ibid.*
- 32 Darzia Bazaar public meeting, 27 Dec. 1930, resolution 3, PSf 49, 1931, BSA [hereafter Darzia resolutions].
- 33 Prasad "Non-Payment of Taxes".
- 34 Extract Confidential Diary, Champaran Police Superintendent, 23 Oct. 1930, PSf 138B, 1930, BSA.
- 35 Special Report Case 28, 1930, Report I, 30 May 1930, and Special Report Case 36, 1930, Report I, 2 June 1930, both in PSf 138B, 1930; Bhagalpur Commissioner to Chief Secretary, 9 June 1930, PSf 172, 1930; all in BSA.
- 36 Ayyar, Beguserai Subdivisional Officer to Zaman, Monghyr District Magistrate, 14 Aug. 1930, PSf 166, 1930, BSA.
- 37 Brett to Tirhut Commissioner, 10 Aug. 1930, PSf 379, 1930, BSA; Weekly Confidential Reports from Saran Police Superintendent, 2 Sept. and 2 Oct. 1930, PSf 139B, 1930, BSA.
- 38 Tirhut Confidential Reports, Saran, 16 Aug. 1930, PSf KW23, BSA.

- 39 Interview Umarpathi Tewari, Dumari village, 17 Oct. 1976.
- 40 Ayyar, Beguserai Subdivisional Officer, Beguserai to Zaman, Monghyr District Magistrate, 14 Aug. 1930, PSf 166, 1930, BSA.
- 41 Champaran Police Superintendent, "Report on the working of Satyagraha movement", 20 Aug. 1930, PSf 138B, 1930, BSA.
- 42 Bihar Provincial Congress Committee Reports, 5 and 12 Sept. 1930, AICCPf 11, 1930, NML.
- 43 Saran memorandum; Rajendra Prasad to General Secretary, 7 Oct. 1931, AICCPf 75, 1931, NML; Rajendra Prasad to Jawaharlal Nehru, 10 March 1937, AICCPf P6(i), 1937, NML.
- 44 Darzia resolutions, number 1; Bihar Provincial Congress Committee, "A Note on Government excesses in Bihar", HPf 5/80/1930 NAI; "Happenings in Champaran", *Searchlight*, 1 Feb. 1931.
- 45 Saran memorandum.
- 46 *Ibid.*, p. 10.
- 47 *Ibid.*, p. 11.
- 48 Report by MacKensie, 4 Oct. 1930, PSf 172, 1930, BSA.
- 49 *Ibid.* MacKensie's colleague in Saran, Superintendent Johnston, was also inclined to act harshly against members of the local population. On 31 January 1930 Johnston wrote as follows to the Deputy-Inspector General of Police:

My dear Brett, A line to admit having played the ass on the night of the 29th. Police and military officers hit it up mildly and we went to the refreshment room at Chapra station about midnight. There was the usual crowd

of people sleeping in front of the door and in clearing them out, I hit a youth on the head with my torch the glass of which broke. I heard afterwards that he was cut by the glass very slightly. There were a couple of pleaders at the station and they have spread lurid accounts, which will probably be reported in the local papers. I have reported verbally to the D[istrict] M[agistrate] but to nobody else. I suppose this is correct. If there is any kick coming I am entirely responsible. I particularly don't want the officers of the detachment to be blamed.

According to a report subsequently printed in the *Searchlight*, however, Johnston and his companions had arrived at the station

in a drunken state, smashed the doors of the Kellner's hotel, assaulted each and every person who happened to be on the platform, particularly those wearing Gandhi caps. One Maheshwar Prasad Singh ... was badly hurt. He was struck on the head by an electric torch causing a deep wound.

Johnston to Brett, 31 January 1930 and extract from *Searchlight* 7 Feb. 1930, both held in PSf 214, 1931, BSA.

- 50 Johnston, "Brief advance report on Riot at Bhorey on 16/12/1930" PSf 139B [hereafter Advance report].
- 51 Darzia resolutions, number 2.
- 52 Advance report.
- 53 Johnston, Additional report on Bhorey riot, dated 17 Dec. PSf 139B, 1930, BSA.
- 54 Advance report and Saran Special Report Case 108, 1930, Report I, 17 Dec. 1930, PSf 139B, 1930, BSA.
- 55 Advance report; Saran Special Report Case 108, 1930, Report II, 30 Dec. 1930, PSf 139B, 1930, BSA; GBO Communique, 18 Dec. 1930, PSf 148, 1931, BSA.

- 56 Advance report.
- 57 Saran Special Report Case 108, 1930, Report I, 17 Dec. 1930, PSf 139B, 1930, BSA.
- 58 Deputy Inspector General Police, Northern Range, "Report on the situation in Bihpur and Kissenganj police stations in the District of Bhagalpur", paras 3 and 5, Sept. 1930, PSf 172, 1930, BSA [hereafter cited as Report on Bihpur]; Hallet, Chief Secretary to Home Secretary, 28 June 1930, PSf 172, 1930, BSA.
- 59 Hallet to Home Secretary cited in *ibid.*
- 60 Report on Bihpur, paras 6, 8, 9.
- 61 *Ibid.*, para 10.
- 62 Report on Bihpur, para 18; C.R. Murray, *Bihar and Orissa in 1929-30* (Patna 1931) pp. xv; Hallet to Home Secretary, 28 June 1930, PSf 172, 1930, BSA.
- 63 Report on Bihpur, para 18.
- 64 R.D.K. Ninnis, Bhagalpur Police Superintendent, "Bihpur Affairs", 11 June 1930, PSf 172, 1930 BSA [hereafter Bihpur Affairs]; K.K. Datta, *Freedom Movement*, II, p. 95.
- 65 Bihpur Affairs, pp. 4-5.
- 66 *Ibid.*, p. 3.
- 67 *Ibid.*, pp. 5-7.
- 68 *Ibid.*, pp. 7-9.

- 69 *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.
- 70 *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.
- 71 For the official Congress version of the events at Bihpur, see Datta, *Freedom Movement*, II, pp. 94-9.
- 72 Anant Prasad to the private secretary to His Excellency the Governor of Bihar and Orissa, 11 June 1930, PSf 172, 1930, pp. 60-5, BSA.
- 73 *Ibid.* "Maro Sala Ko" means, when literally translated, "Kill the brother-in-law". In Hindi, "brother-in-law" is a term of serious abuse.
- 74 *Ibid.*
- 75 *Ibid.*
- 76 *Ibid.*
- 77 *Ibid.*
- 78 Datta, *Freedom Movement*, II, pp. 94-9.
- 79 *Young India*, 19 June 1930, extract reproduced in FMPf 60, 1930-33, BSA; *Searchlight*, June and July, 1930.
- 80 Bihpur Affairs, p. 2; Report on Bihpur, para 9.
- 81 Bihpur Affairs, p. 14.
- 82 Ninnis, report on "Bihpur Affairs" dated 21 July, PSf 172, 1930, BSA; "Bihpur Satyagraha", *Searchlight*, 31 Oct. 1930; Bihar Provincial Congress Committee, "Weekly Reports from Bihar", 20 and 24 Oct. 1930, AICCPf 11, 1930, NML.

- 83 Bihpur Affairs, pp. 2-3; Report on Bihpur, para 14.
- 84 Report on Bihpur, para 12.
- 85 *Ibid.*, paras 12, 14 and 15.
- 86 "Crime Chart of Bihpur Police Station", PSf 172, 1930, BSA.
- 87 Report on Bihpur, para 17.
- 88 *Ibid.*, paras 13 and 14.
- 89 *Ibid.*, para 16.
- 90 *Ibid.*
- 91 *Ibid.*, paras 18 and 19.
- 92 Chief Secretary to all Commissioners and District Magistrates, 21 Jan. 1930, FMPf 84, 1920-42, BSA. This circular is quoted at length in Datta, *Freedom Movement*, p. 50.
- 93 In Bihar and Orissa up until the end of July 1930 the civil disobedience movement had resulted in no casualties among the police, the military or the people. In the second half of the year, in contrast, several casualties resulted from a number of violent clashes. "Reply to enquiry from Secretary of State as to casualties", HPf 23/54/1930 and the lists in HPf 14/15/1930, both in NAI.
- 94 P.T. Mansfield, *Bihar and Orissa in 1930-31* (Patna 1932) chap. 1; Tomlinson, "India and Empire, 1880-1935", pp. 370-1.
- 95 D. Prasad, Purnea District Officer to Bhagalpur Commissioner, 9 Jan. 1931, PSf 44, 1931, BSA.

- 96 The circular cited in footnote 92 above had instructed that "there should be no avoidable clash, but tolerance to avoid this should not extend beyond a reasonable point". See also the report of the Governor's speech to the Police Parade in February 1930 and the editorial comment thereon, *Searchlight*, 26 and 28 Feb. 1930. See also Datta, *Freedom Movement*, II, pp. 142, 174.
- 97 Dixon to Hallet, 30 Jan. 1930, PSf 72, 1931, BSA.
- 98 Darbhanga Special Report Case 4, 1931, Report III held with *ibid.*
- 99 Dixon to Hallet, 30 Jan. 1930, PSf 72, 1931, BSA.
- 100 *Ibid.*; Darbhanga Special Report Case 3, 1931, Reports III and IV, and Chief Secretary to Dixon, 14 Feb. 1931, all in PSf 72, 1931, BSA.
- 101 Dixon to Hallet, 30 Jan. 1930, PSf 72, 1931, BSA.
- 102 Scott, Tirhut Commissioner to Hallet, 9 Feb. 1931, PSf 72, 1931, BSA.
- 103 Dixon to Hallet, 30 Jan. 1930, PSf 72, 1931, BSA.
- 104 Saran Special Report Case 150, 1931, Report II, PSf 23, 1931, BSA, [hereafter cited as Saran Report II].
- 105 Chandrika Singh, "First Information Report", 26 Jan. 1931, PSf 23, 1931, BSA [hereafter cited as First Report].
- 106 Saran Police Superintendent report, 27 Jan. 1931, PSf 23, 1931, BSA, [hereafter cited as Superintendent's Report].
- 107 Saran Report II.
- 108 *Ibid.*; Superintendent's Report; First Report.

- 109 First Report.
- 110 Rameshwar Singh, Subdivisional Officer to S.A. Khan, District Magistrate, 28 Jan. 1931, PSf 23, 1931, BSA.
- 111 Saran Report II.
- 112 *Ibid.*
- 113 *Ibid.*
- 114 Rameshwar Singh, Subdivisional Officer to S.A. Khan, District Magistrate, 28 Jan. 1931, PSf 23, 1931, BSA.
- 115 Saran Special Report Case 15, 1931, Reports XI and XII, PSf 23, 1931, BSA.
- 116 "Story of the Beguserai Riot", *Indian Nation*, 9 Feb. 1931 [hereafter cited as Beguserai report]. This report consists of a slightly abridged version of a communique issued by the Government of Bihar and Orissa, which presented the findings of an inquest by the Monghyr District Magistrate. An abridged version of this communique is also given in the *Searchlight*, 10 Feb. 1931. The complete communique is held in PSf 32, 1931, BSA. There is a brief mention of the incident at Beguserai in K.K. Datta, *Freedom Movement*, II, p. 150.
- 117 Anugrah Narayan Sinha, "Tragic Episode at Beguserai", *Searchlight*, 1 Feb. 1931 [hereafter cited as Episode at Beguserai].
- 118 Beguserai Report.
- 119 *Ibid.*
- 120 The official version of the clash reads "the leader of the procession, Raghunath Brahamachari ... shouted 'Look I have been arrested. Be

peaceful.' As if this were the signal for action, the mob advanced..."

Beguserai Report.

- 121 *Ibid.* According to this account "brickbats were showered ... both from the procession in front, by members of the procession who ran up to the side road ... by the crowd behind, and by people in the verandah and on the roof of the single-storeyed school building".
- 122 *Ibid.*
- 123 *Ibid.*
- 124 *Ibid.*; Whitty, "Visit to Beguserai in connection with the rioting of the 26th January", 17 Feb. 1931, GBO PSf 32, 1931, BSA, [hereafter cited as Visit to Beguserai]; *Searchlight*, 10 Feb. 1931.
- 125 Beguserai Report.
- 126 *Ibid.*; Telegram, District Magistrate to GBO, 26 Jan. PSf 32, 1931, BSA.
- 127 Beguserai Report; E.O. Lee, "Report of Inquest held", HPf 252/1/1930, NAI; "Note by Dain", Deputy Inspector General Police, Criminal Investigation Department, PSf 32, 1931, BSA [hereafter Note by Dain].
- 128 Monghyr Special Report Case 4, 1931, Report II, 30 Jan. 1931, GBO PSf 32, BSA, [hereafter cited as Monghyr Report II]; Episode at Beguserai.
- 129 Monghyr Report II; Dain to Hallett, 29 Jan. 1931, PSf 32, 1931, BSA.
- 130 Beguserai Subdivisional Officer, "Demi-official letter number nil", 6 Feb. 1931, PSf 32, 1931, BSA.
- 131 A.R. Toplis, Bhagalpur Commissioner, Demi-official letter 447-C, 7 July 1930, PSf 166 1930, BSA.

- 132 Zaman to Toplis, 27 July 1930, PSf 166, 1930, BSA.
- 133 Beguserai Subdivisional Officer, "Demi-official letter number nil",
6 Feb. 1931, BSA.
- 134 Monghyr Police Superintendent, "Intermediate confidential diary", 19
Sept. 1930, PSf 166, 1930, BSA.
- 135 *Ibid.* According to this report "... the villagers of Bihat had sent
parwanas to 22 neighbouring villages asking them to come and help them
fight the police and had removed their women folk".
- 136 Monghyr Police Superintendent, confidential diary 16 Nov. 1930, PSf 166,
1930, p. 104, BSA.
- 137 Monghyr Police Superintendent, confidential diary, 2 Jan. 1931, PSf 32,
1931, BSA.
- 138 *Ibid.*
- 139 Monghyr Report II.
- 140 Dain, Deputy Inspector General Police, to Hallet, 29 Jan. 1931, PSf 32,
1932, BSA.
- 141 Lee, "Report of Inquest held", HPf 252/1/1930, NAI; "Note by Dain".
- 142 Visit to Beguserai.
- 143 *Ibid.*
- 144 *Ibid.*
- 145 *Ibid.*

- 146 "Babu Bishundeva Narayan Singh's Report", *Searchlight*, 10 Feb. 1931.
- 147 "Episode at Beguserai".
- 148 *Searchlight*, 1, 10 Feb. 1931.
- 149 *Searchlight*, 10 Feb. 1931.
- 150 *Searchlight*, 1, 10 Feb. 1931.
- 151 *Searchlight*, 10 Feb. 1931.
- 152 D.A. Low, "'Civil Martial Law': The Government of India and the Civil Disobedience Movements, 1930-34" in Low, *Congress and the Raj*, pp. 165-198, 170; Datta, *Freedom Movement*, II, p. 153. For a perceptive analysis of why Gandhi agreed to the pact see Sumit Sarkar, "The Logic of Gandhian Nationalism: Civil Disobedience and the Gandhi-Irwin Pact (1930-1931)", *Indian Historical Review*, III, 1, July 1976, pp. 114-46.
- 153 McDowell, Deputy Inspector General Police, "Report for the week ending 21 March 1931", HPf 33/V/1931, NAI; Tirhut Commissioner, "Confidential Report", 13 Jan. 1931, PSf 20, 1931; and Muzaffarpur Police Superintendent, Confidential Diary, 2 April 1931, PSf 40, 1931, both in BSA.
- Meanwhile the Bihar Provincial Congress Committee criticized the Bihar and Orissa Government, contending that it was being lackadaisical and obstructive in its implementation of the provisions of the pact. Datta, *Freedom Movement*, II, pp. 154, 163-4.
- 154 Muzaffarpur Police Superintendent, Confidential Diary, 2 Jan. 1931, PSf 40, 1931, BSA.

- 155 Muzaffarpur Police Superintendent, Confidential Diary, 7 April 1931, PSf 40, 1931, BSA.
- 156 McDowell, Deputy Inspector General Police, "Report for the week ending 21 March 1931", HPf 33/V/1931, NAI.
- 157 *Ibid.*
- 158 Excise Sub-Inspector, Siwan Circle, "Tour Diary", 15 and 25 April 1931, HPf 33/V/1931, NAI; Monghyr Police Superintendent to Dain, 10 Sept. 1931, PSf 166, 1931, BSA.
- 159 Rajendra Prasad, "Statement number 2", 24 April 1931; and M.K. Gandhi to H.W. Emerson, Home Secretary, 31 May 1931; Hallet, Chief Secretary to Home Secretary, 14 April 1931; all in HPf 33/V/1931, NAI.
- 160 "Notes of discussion with Babu Rajendra Prasad", 16 July 1931, HPf 33/V/1931, NAI.
- 161 GBO, Report to GOI, 2 Dec. 1931, PSf 20, 1931, BSA.
- 162 Low, "'Civil Martial Law'", pp. 173-4; Brown, *Gandhi and Civil Disobedience*, pp. 298-300; R.J. Moore, *The Crisis of Indian Unity 1917-1940* (London 1974), pp. 246-9, 292-3.
- 163 J.E. Scott, Commissioner Tirhut, "Note on collision between mob and police in Motihari town on the afternoon of 26th January 1932", HPf 5/80/1932, NAI.
- 164 *Ibid.*
- 165 *Ibid.*

- 166 *Ibid.* The official Congress account gives an entirely different version of what occurred at Motihari. According to this version, the demonstrators sat quietly and endured lathi charges and firing without engaging in violence against the police. See Rajendra Prasad quoted in K.K. Datta, *Freedom Movement*, II, pp. 184-5.
- 167 GBO Chief Secretary to GOI Home Secretary, incorporating report by Muzaffarpur District Magistrate, 1 March 1932, HPf 5/80/1932, NAI.
- 168 *Ibid.*
- 169 *Ibid.* The Sheohar incident is briefly mentioned in Datta, *Freedom Movement*, II, p. 187.
- 170 Telegrams, Viceroy to Secretary of State, 19 March, 18 April, and 20 May 1932, HPf 36/1/1932, NAI.
- 171 GBO FR(2) Jan. 1933, HPf 18/1/1933, NAI.
- 172 R.L. Gupta, *Bihar and Orissa in 1932-33* (Patna 1934), chapter one.
- 173 See his "Imperialism and Nationalism", p. 8.
- 174 McDowell, Deputy Inspector General Police, "Report for the week ending 21 March 1931", HPf 33/V/1931, NAI.
- 175 Rajendra Prasad, "Report of some incidents regarding picketting", 17 April, 1931, AICCPf G56, 1931, NML.
- 176 Bihar Provincial Congress Committee, "A Short Note on Repression in the Congress Province of Bihar", AICCPf P4, 1932, NML: C.F. Andrews to H.G. Haig, Home Member, 4 April 1932, HPf 40/2/1932, NAI; Datta, *Freedom Movement*, II, pp. 137-41.

- 177 Congress officials were not unaware of the possibility of exaggeration. When a British Labour Party delegation arrived in India in late 1932 to study the political situation the All-India Congress Committee instructed the provincial Congress committees that "Care should be taken to avoid all exaggerations in preparing the materials to be placed before the delegation and to bring thoroughly reliable witnesses before it". Acting General Secretary, All-India Congress Committee to all Provincial Congress Committees, 22 Aug. 1932, AICCPf 1, 1932, NML. See also Datta, *Freedom Movement*, II, p. 49.
- 178 Editorial, *Searchlight*, 28 April 1930.
- 179 See his "'Civil Martial Law'", p. 191. See also Arnold, "Armed Police and Colonial Rule", p. 121.
- 180 Murray, *Bihar 1929-30*, pp. xv-xxvii.
- 181 Brown, *Gandhi and Civil Disobedience*, pp. 145, 300; GGB, *Statutory Commission*, XII, p. 374.
- 182 "Governor's speech at Police Parade", *Searchlight*, 26 Feb. 1930; GGB, *Statutory Commission*, p. 382.
- 183 *Searchlight*, 26 Feb. 1930.
- 184 GOI, "Report of the Conference of Police Officers, held in New Delhi 19th-24th January, 1931", HPf 152, 1931, Item (ii), NAI.
- 185 Hirst report, paras 1, 4, 7, 8, 9, 16, 37, BSA.
- 186 Because of their effectiveness, however, the use of .303s could have adverse political repercussions for the British administration. Often,

as Arnold suggests, the greater efficiency of the .303s was "... in practice a drawback to their use in minor disturbances and for crowd control; by contrast, the smooth-bore muskets of the district reserves ... made an effect without inflicting too many casualties". See his "Armed Police and Colonial Rule", p. 123. But unfortunately for the British administration, as the Beguserai riot illustrates, the impact of firing from smooth-bore muskets was not always sufficient to have an immediate effect on a determined crowd.

- 187 "Note of further discussion with Rajendra Prasad on 16 July", HPf 33/V/1931, NAI.

Chapter 4

1937-39: THE LEFT-WING CHALLENGE TO 'ORTHODOX' CONGRESS CONTROL

Introduction; Economic depression, natural calamities and the rise of the kisan movement; Conflict within the Bihar Congress; The bakast lands issue; The Bakast Restoration Act and the bakast direct action campaign; Conclusion: The left-wing challenge and police/administrative control.

Introduction

In the early 1930s the Bihar Congress shook the foundations of British administration in north Bihar by means of extensive civil disobedience. During the civil disobedience movement Congress workers lessened government income through the prohibition campaign, put pressure on an undermanned, overburdened regular police force, and temporarily subverted the *chaukidari* system, the basic unit in the collaborative structure of imperial rule. By these agitational achievements the Bihar Congress won recognition as a political institution which offered an alternative to the existing government. In a period of deepening economic crisis the reward for winning this recognition, and the British administration's punishment for its harsh, inept handling of protest, came in the form of electoral triumphs, initially in the elections to the Central Legislative Assembly in 1934 and later, and more importantly, in the provincial elections in 1937. The Bihar Congress, once it had come to power after its success in the 1937 elections, encountered a situation in sharp contrast to that which it had met during the years of the civil disobedience movement. Where previously the Congress had shaken the foundations of political control it now held responsibility for orderly administration and for the maintenance of law. Where previously Congress had presented itself as a possible alternative government it now had to turn this possibility into reality. In responding to these challenges the Bihar Congress had to deal with popular expectations that had been raised during the civil disobedience movement and the 1934 and 1937 election campaigns and with widespread discontent arising from the impact of the great depression and of natural disasters on an inequitable, tension-ridden society. The potential for popular turbulence in north Bihar made possible the expansion in influence of the *kisan sabha* (peasant association) movement. From 1930

to 1934 local-level kisan sabhas had operated as front organizations for the Bihar Congress, but from 1934 onwards, organized into the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha, they assumed an increasingly independent stance. Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, a charismatic sanyasi, dominated the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha, but great influence was exerted within its organization by Jay Prakash Narayan and the other members of the small bloc of Congress Socialist Party members within the Congress Party. The great depression resulted in a catastrophic collapse in the prices for primary produce, and in consequence landlord/tenant relations became strained when tenants found it extremely difficult to meet their rent payments. The Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha campaigned vigorously in favour of the interests of the tenantry and sought to expand its influence within the Bihar Congress and to alter Congress policy to ensure that tenant interests were protected and advanced. The conservative mainstream of the Bihar Congress reacted unfavourably to these kisan sabha initiatives. Small zamindars played a pivotal role in the Congress organization, and most Congressmen adhered to the Gandhian ideals of social harmony and peaceful, gradual socio-economic change. Conservative or "orthodox" Congressmen accordingly responded to the challenge of kisan sabha militance and kisan sabha demands for substantial agrarian reforms by attempting to squeeze kisan sabha activists out of the Congress organization. Tension within the Bihar Congress culminated, in late 1937, in violent clashes between the orthodox mainstream of the party and an amorphous left-wing group made up of kisan sabha activists, some of whom were also members of the Congress Socialist Party, and of disgruntled, formerly orthodox Congressmen who had lost out in faction fights for position and privilege. In late December 1937 the election of delegates to the Haripura session of the Indian National Congress provided the occasion for

violent confrontation between conservative Congressmen and their opponents. Confrontation was sparked off when the conservative-dominated Bihar Provincial Congress Committee ruled, early in December 1937, that henceforth Congress workers could not be involved in both mainstream Congress and kisan sabha activity. When the dissidence within the party came to a head in late 1937 and early 1938 the conservative mainstream won a victory against the left-wing challenge. In consequence, from 1937 to 1939, the left-wingers found themselves obliged to relinquish their ambitions to gain organizational power within, and to alter the policy of, the Bihar Congress Party. Instead, they concentrated on initiating direct action, against the administration and the Bihar Congress Ministry, to protect and advance tenant interests. Left-wing direct action became focused on disputes between landlords and their tenants and sharecroppers over the control of land which landlords claimed to be in their bakast, or "direct cultivating" possession. The bakast struggle came to a head in 1939, and created considerable anxiety within the administration and government. But eventually, by a mixture of repression and conciliation, the Bihar Congress Ministry, ably assisted by the police and the administration, brought the bakast campaign under control.

Though ultimately unsuccessful, the challenge by the left-wing to mainstream Congress control had long-term repercussions for police and administrative control in north Bihar. The use by the Congress Ministry of the police as a coercive force in support of landlords in their disputes with tenants over bakast lands did nothing to enhance the already low popularity of the police, while the success of the Bihar Congress in maintaining order in 1937-39, and the prospect that eventually it would return to government, adversely affected the morale of Indian policemen and officials when British government was re-established after the resignation of the Congress Ministry

in October 1939. The following chapter, before examining the effects on police/administrative control of the left-wing challenge, discusses the impact of natural calamities and economic depression on the people of north Bihar and the rise of the kisan sabha movement; traces the development and culmination of conflict within the Bihar Congress; and examines the direct action campaign waged by the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha over the bakast lands issue.

Economic depression, natural calamities and the rise of the kisan movement

North Bihar, in the late 1930s, was the setting for much political turbulence, a development which received great impetus from the impact of the great world economic depression. The depression, which began in 1929 with the collapse of the United States stock market, eventually resulted, in north Bihar and throughout India, in a catastrophic collapse in primary produce prices. These prices began to fall in October 1930. By December 1931, as G. McDonald has noted, "grain was selling at only one half of its 1929 price".¹ This price depression continued until the advent of the Second World War. The serious effect of the fall in the price of primary products was intensified because the prices of the products of secondary industry remained stable.² In 1928, as Table 12 illustrates, one rupee could only buy 5½ seers of rice, but in 1936, it was sufficient to purchase 10 seers. During the same period, in contrast, the price of cotton had only decreased slightly, that of kerosene oil had remained constant, and that of salt had increased slightly.

The collapse of primary produce prices had a lessened impact at first because of the occurrence, in 1930 and 1931, of unusually good agricultural seasons.³ Eventually, however, the price fall affected every section of north Bihar society. In 1934, moreover, the region suffered greatly from the impact of a major earthquake. The 1934 earthquake collapsed houses, damaged roads, twisted railway tracks and reduced the productivity of land as a result of the emergence and spread of deposits of sand from fissures that opened up in the earth.⁴ As a result of the earthquake's impact on agrarian conditions, one official commented, "there can be no hope of improvement in Tirhut and the adjoining districts for a very long time to come".⁵

TABLE 13

Primary produce and commodity prices, 1928 and 1936

(a) PRIMARY PRODUCE PRICES

(Quantities given could be bought for one rupee)

	1928	1936
Common rice	5 seers, 8 chataks	10 seers
Wheat	7 " , 8 "	12 "
Maize	11 " , 9 "	19 "

(b) COMMODITY PRICES

Kerosene oil per case of 2 tins.	8 rupees, 9 annas	8 rupees, 9 annas
Cotton per bundle of 8 to 9 pounds.	8 " , 11 "	7 " , 11 "
Salt per maund.	3 " , 2 "	3 " , 4 "

Source: "Report of the Bihar Kisan Enquiry Committee", PPf VII, 1937,
microfilm 6, chapter 3, pp. 1, 2, NML.

Next, in the second half of the 1930s, the inhabitants of the region suffered from the devastation of several serious floods.⁶ The combination of natural disasters with economic depression created grave difficulties for the people of north Bihar. Given the distribution of power and wealth in north Bihari society, however, some groups of people suffered more than others. At the bottom of the social scale landless labourers, selling their services in a market where supply far exceeded demand, found themselves under stern pressure

to accept lower wages and more of their wages in kind. Sharecroppers now found that they could earn less than previously by selling a portion of their share of the crop they cultivated. In an especially precarious position were those sharecroppers who, during the period of high prices before the depression came, had agreed to become short-term tenants by paying a high cash rental instead of a produce rent.⁷ Occupancy tenants had more legal protection than short-term tenants and sharecroppers against summary eviction, but they also found it increasingly difficult to meet their rental and debt obligations. Those who were less well established found themselves in serious difficulties, whereas those who were better established managed to weather the storm more effectively. Some zamindars found conditions harder, because as a result of general impoverishment it was more difficult to collect rent and to profit from various exactions. But those zamindars who could exert sufficient leverage at the local level found that the vulnerability of the tenants to their pressure had increased. In the Darbhanga Raj, because of stricter management, rent collections for the five-year period from 1932 to 1937 increased by an average of 600,000 rupees each year over the collections for the five-year period from 1926 to 1931. This increase, the Chief Manager of the Darbhanga Raj pointed out, occurred despite the fact that the earlier period had had favourable agrarian and economic conditions, whereas the later period was affected by depression, earthquake, and political turbulence.

Much of the political turbulence of the post 1932 period developed among the occupancy tenants of north Bihar. The world economic depression and the associated collapse in primary produce prices made it impossible for many tenants to earn sufficient money to pay their rents and meet their other expenses. Indebtedness, which had long been a serious problem, became greatly intensified during the 1930s. In February 1934, the registrar of the provinces' cooperative societies commented that "In a very large number of cases the

cultivator has practically given up all attempt to cope with his liabilities".⁹ The situation, he concluded, was desperate, and predicted that a "non-payment complex" would develop. If there was no improvement in economic conditions, he contended, "it is difficult to see how widespread agrarian trouble can fail to result".¹⁰

Tenants who fell behind in their rent payments could be summonsed to court to face a rent suit. In the period from 1929 to 1935, as Table 14 illustrates, there was an increase in the number of rent suits filed and a dramatic rise in the frequency of suits in which a tenant's "immovable property", that is, his occupancy holding, was sold up to pay for the arrears of the rent that were owing.¹¹

TABLE 14

Rent suits and forced sales of immoveable property 1929 to 1935

YEAR	NUMBER OF RENT SUITS	SUITS IN WHICH IMMOVEABLE PROPERTY SOLD UP
1929	123,458	14,891
1930	122,030	17,910
1931	122,116	25,416
1932	121,926	26,861
1933	149,036	39,159
1934	157,321	42,134
1935	180,001	45,847

Source: "Report of the Bihar Kisan Enquiry Committee", PPf VII, 1937, microfilm 6, chapter 3, pp. 1.

These rent suit and immovable property cases directly affected only a small proportion of the tenantry. And even when a tenant did have his holding sold up this did not necessarily mean that he was reduced to abject poverty. In the Darbhanga Raj, where there was a large number of suits filed,¹² the estate usually bought up the holding when it was auctioned by the court to pay off the rent arrears, with the intention of either settling it at favourable terms with another occupancy tenant or else of cultivating it by means of labourers, sharecroppers, or short-term tenants. But the legal and administrative task of actually acquiring possession of the sold-up holding was long and arduous. After success in what was usually a long drawn out rent arrears suit and having bought the holding, thus establishing its nilami, or "newly purchased at auction sale" status, the landlord next had to send his amlas to take actual physical possession of the holding and concurrently to file a "dakhaldehani" suit in order that this take over be legally recognized and recorded. The inefficient, overworked, and corrupt lower-level officials¹³ of the Darbhanga Raj often did not complete this process, with the result that some judgement debtors, (and especially those with enough wealth and influence to confuse and sway the local amlas), remained in possession of their sold-up holding for year after year, enjoying its proceeds without paying any rent whatsoever,¹⁴ and eventually managed to regain their occupancy rights with relatively little expense.¹⁵ Overall, nonetheless, the increase in the number of rent cases, when considered in conjunction with the intensification of indebtedness, accurately reflects the increasingly difficult economic circumstances of the tenantry. Not many tenants actually lost the legal rights to their holdings, but many had this threat hanging over them, which added to the general anxiety of having to live through a period of financial stringency.

Many of those who were under pressure had been active participants in or interested spectators of the civil disobedience movement, and with this experience behind them they hoped for political solutions to their problems. In the early 1930s, according to the Kisan Enquiry Committee established by the Bihar Congress in 1936,

The distress of the tenantry grew and when in 1934 after the civil disobedience movement they were asked to assemble in any public meeting they would come in large numbers believing that a way out of the distress would be found out by the organisers...¹⁶

The kisan sabha movement assumed the leadership of the north Bihar tenantry.¹⁷ Bihar's first kisan sabhas (peasant associations) had been formed in the 1919 to 1923 period, but had had relatively little impact at that time, and had soon become moribund.¹⁸ In the years from 1929 onwards a number of local kisan sabhas had become active under the leadership of Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, a sanyasi who hailed from a Jujhantil Brahman and small zamindari family based in the district of Ghazipur in the United Provinces.¹⁹ These kisan sabhas operated as front organizations for the provincial Congress movement. In 1934, Swami Sahajanand coordinated their activities into the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha.²⁰

On paper the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha had an elaborate formal structure, but to quote Walter Hauser, it could be "more accurately characterized as a movement than an organization as such. Its primary instruments were numerous meetings, the rallies and annual sessions".²¹ The Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha sought to protect the interests of all kisans, but did not define clearly who exactly it meant by the word kisan, which can be variously translated to mean "farmer", "cultivator", or "peasant". In his early years as a kisan activist Swami Sahajanand gave the word a broad application, and hoped to unite landless labourers, occupancy tenants and small

zamindars into a coalition against the great zamindars and the administration.²² In contrast to this ideal, however, the main support and impetus for the movement came from the occupancy tenants of Bihar, people who were "peasants" in what is, as Andre Beteille points out, the strict sense of the term by virtue of their direct involvement in agricultural production and their control over the holdings they tilled.²³

Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, the leading figure and dominating influence in the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha, was a loyal Congressman who thought that the national struggle should take precedence over other political campaigns and who held that the Indian National Congress must play the central role in the achievement of the goal of national independence. But Sahajanand also worried over the harsh economic situation and lacked confidence in the ability and willingness of the conservative mainstream of the Bihar Congress to initiate substantial agrarian reforms.²⁴ From 1934 onwards Sahajanand and his followers began to differ increasingly from the mainstream members of the Bihar Congress. In doing so, they were much influenced by a continuing groundswell of popular discontent and by the ideological and organizational impetus supplied by the Bihari members of the Congress Socialist Party.

The Congress Socialists were a bloc of young intellectuals who sought to capture control of the national movement and ensure that it led both to Indian independence and to the creation of a liberal-democratic socialist society. The Bihar branch of the party was initiated in 1931 during the period of the Gandhi/Irwin pact. Most of its members were jailed after the resumption of civil disobedience in January 1932. After their release from jail in April 1934 the Bihar members of the Congress Socialist Party involved themselves wholeheartedly in the kisan movement. They soon established themselves as the dominant force in the organization of the Bihar Provincial Kisan

Sabha. From 1934 onwards they were always in a strong majority in the Bihar Provincial Kisan Council, the chief executive organ of the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha. The Bihar Congress Socialists, McDonald points out,

saw in the *Kisan Sabhas* the mass base they needed to attain their objectives. They brought with them an enthusiasm and a revolutionary programme that provided the rationale for the Kisan Sabha agitations ... More important they provided ... an organisational ability which had been missing previously in the *Kisan Sabhas*.²⁵

The intervention of the Congress Socialists into the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha created three tiers of leadership in the kisan movement. At the top was the single, dominating figure of Swami Sahajanand. In the middle were the young intellectuals of the Bihar branch of the Congress Socialist Party, among whom Jay Prakash Narayan exerted great influence. At the bottom were activists, often of only limited education and sometimes from middle rather than high caste groups, who exercised leadership within a restricted locality.

The new dynamism and the new perspectives supplied through the intervention of the Congress Socialists in the kisan movement greatly encouraged support for the policy of zamindari abolition. In the early 1920s, when Swami Vidyanand had called for the abolition of the zamindari system, his had been a voice in the wilderness.²⁶ Some 10 years later, in vastly changed economic, social and political circumstances, the policy attracted growing support, and in November 1935, bowing somewhat reluctantly before pressure from both the Congress Socialists activists and the "discontented tenantry", Swami Sahajanand included it as a major plank in the platform of the provincial kisan movement.²⁷ Apart from the abolition of the zamindari system, the other main aims of the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha, as summed up

in a manifesto issued in July 1936, were the cancellation of agrarian debts; the granting of ownership rights over their holdings to peasants; the exemption from taxation of all those whose income was below the minimum necessary to keep them and their families at a reasonable standard of living; and the provision of gainful employment for the landless. In the interim before these major, long-term aims could be fulfilled, the kisan movement sought the implementation of 19 short-term aims, which included the provision by legislation of common pasture in every village, the cancellation of arrears of rent, the limitation of interest rates to six per cent, the provision of cheap government loans, the right to vote for every adult, and the reinstatement of peasants in lands lost due to their participation in the "freedom movement" or due to failure to pay revenue or rent during the economic depression. Before listing these aims the manifesto claimed that the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha "stands ... for all who live for cultivation" and argued that the kisan movement, by organizing the villagers,

enables them to put a stop to the thousand and one harassments and extortionate practices of their landlords and their men and of petty government officials.²⁸

Kisan sabha activists complemented the radicalism of the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha platform with militance in their propaganda and demonstrations. Orthodox Congressmen viewed these developments with alarm.²⁹ Their dominance in the nationalist movement in Bihar had managed to ensure that during the civil disobedience campaign, in contrast to developments in the United Provinces,³⁰ no landlord/tenant conflict emerged. By its practice of assertiveness and its policy of agrarian reform the kisan movement threatened to split the Congress movement asunder, and in particular to destroy that alliance between small landlord and better-off tenant which hitherto had

been crucial to Congress success. But despite considerable tension and occasional eruptions of conflict³¹ an open cleavage within the Bihar Congress did not develop until after the January 1937 elections to the provincial legislative assembly. Prior to the 1937 elections mainstream Congressmen and kisan sabha activists were bound together in a relationship of mutual need. The elections were held in an electorate which had been enlarged, under the terms of the Government of India Act of 1935, from 1.1 to 9.3 per cent of the population.³² Many of the newly enfranchised electors were more impressed by kisan sabha propaganda in favour of agrarian reform than by the orthodox Congress 'constructive work' programme which sought to foster village handicrafts and improve village sanitation, and hence the Bihar Congress profited electorally from kisan activism. Kisan sabha propaganda provided an electoral asset from which mainstream Congressmen were glad to benefit and against which they could not afford to protest too openly.³³

Yet while the kisan movement held the agitational and propaganda initiative during the pre-election period the mainstream of Congress maintained control over the party organization. Kisan sabha activists formed only a small minority within the Bihar Congress and had only minority representation on the provincial Congress committee. They held firm control over the Patna District Congress Committee and for a time controlled the Gaya District Congress Committee, but mainstream Congressmen controlled all the other district committees. (Kisan sabha activists did, however, form substantial minorities in the Champaran, Muzaffarpur, Darbhanga and Monghyr district committees).³⁴ Given their weak position in the Congress organization, kisan sabha activists needed to delay the eruption of extensive confrontation with their opponents. Meanwhile they sought to increase their leverage by rallying mass support.³⁵

In the pre-election period kisan sabha activists won votes for the Congress and increased the expectations and militancy of the peasantry. After the election the provincial administration acknowledged the significance of their impact and informed the Government of India that

In the more advanced parts voters, who would normally have done what their landlords told them to do, are reported to have remarked that they voted for the Congress because they had noticed that the kisan agitation had led to a marked diminution in the amount of begari which their landlords dared to demand.³⁶

While kisan activists busied themselves rousing the peasantry their opponents in the mainstream of the Bihar Congress actively wooed and were wooed by local notables who were much concerned to avert dramatic social change. In many instances locally influential men who previously had been lukewarm or even hostile to the Congress movement became absorbed into the Bihar Congress and won nomination as Congress candidates.³⁷

The Bihar Congress achieved dramatic success in the 1937 elections. It won more than 90 per cent of the seats it contested and finished with 98 of the 152 seats in the Bihar Legislative Assembly.³⁸ Thanks to the mainstream Congress domination of the candidate selection process,³⁹ only seven of the newly elected members of the assembly came from what the provincial government described as the "socialist element", whereas most of the others could "... be described as belonging to the right wing".⁴⁰ With unity no longer a pressing concern there was increasing opportunity, in the ensuing months, for conflict to find expression.

Conflict within the Bihar Congress

Once the Bihar Congress had won victory in the 1937 elections, controversy developed over whether it should form a government. The minority of kisan sabha activists, led by Jay Prakash Narayan and by Swami Sahajanand, called on the Congress to boycott the legislatures and instead to press forward with a programme of mass protest. But the majority of orthodox Congressmen did not want to see the spoils and privileges of power thrown away and realized the potential dangers of mass agitation to social stability and to their entrenched position within the party organization. The orthodox majority succeeded, after a period of some hesitation and uncertainty, in ensuring that the Congress assumed office.⁴¹ The new ministry, which took office in July 1937, soon found that it could not keep the allegiance of all those who had supported its coming into power. In impoverished, financially-stricken Bihar⁴² the government's powers of patronage and appointment were limited, and not all those who felt deserving of favours could be accommodated. Some of those who were thus disappointed rebelled against the party establishment and henceforth sided with the kisan and socialist activists. Caste and factional rivalries, moreover, led to the squeezing out and subsequent disenchantment of several leading figures. Nor, by the policies it initiated, did the ministry succeed in silencing criticism from the left-wing made up of kisan sabha activists and disgruntled "rebels". The Bihar Congress Ministry sought to ensure that the Congress remained what McDonald has described as a "multi interest" party dedicated to the preservation of stability and social harmony. It therefore initiated policies designed to improve the position of the tenantry without, however, substantially affecting the position of the small zamindars. The left-wing responded by claiming that the ministry was betraying the official

Congress policy and the specific promises made during the election campaign.⁴³

Throughout 1937 the left-wingers, bereft of power within the Congress Ministry and the Bihar Provincial Congress Committee, took steps to bring pressure to bear on the government by means of mass protest.⁴⁴ Among the peasantry, the combination of harsh economic conditions and kisan sabha propaganda had created a readiness to engage in direct action. In Bhagalpur in March 1936 the local kisan organizers interpreted the teachings of the kisan movement as a call to stop paying rent.⁴⁵ In north Monghyr in the following year, shortly after a visit by Swami Sahajanand, tenants who had been displaced from their land after it had been sold up in a rent suit attacked and killed the servant of a zamindar while he was engaged in ploughing the forfeited holdings.⁴⁶ In south Bihar, in the Gaya and Patna districts and in the Barahiya Tal area of south Monghyr, peasants and landlords clashed repeatedly.⁴⁷ Sahajanand and his lieutenants took an active interest in and drew inspiration from these local struggles. But they displayed a reluctance to escalate these local conflicts into a wholesale, broad-based campaign of direct action against the zamindars and the administration. Their reluctance derived from their acceptance of the primacy of the national struggle against alien rule and of the primacy of Congress within that struggle.⁴⁸ The kisan leaders also, it seems probable, realized that as yet their organization and support base did not have the strength to make mass direct action feasible and effective. Instead, kisan sabha workers concentrated on defending their position and, where possible, increasing their strength within the Congress organization in order to get Congress to assume a more militant and radical position.

The struggle that developed in 1937 between the left and the mainstream of the Bihar Congress reached its climax at the elections, held in late

December 1937, of delegates to the annual session of the Indian National Congress, due to be held at Haripura in February 1938. These elections were of crucial importance, because under the terms of the constitution adopted at the Bombay plenary Congress session in 1934 the delegates who were elected at the election to attend the annual Indian National Congress session also served on the provincial Congress committee, the district Congress committees and the local Congress committees.⁴⁹ In most districts the delegate elections, apart from some incidents of rowdiness and of malpractice on the part of presiding officials, passed off smoothly, but in Darbhanga all but a very few of the elections had to be suspended because of clashes between the adherents of kisan sabha candidates and the supporters of the orthodox Congressmen who controlled the local party machine.⁵⁰

In the 1930s the Bihar Congress was a 'top heavy' political organization.⁵¹ In theory the dynamism of the party was generated by the rank and file membership of its local thana and municipal units, but in actuality control was concentrated in the hands of the members of the district and provincial committees. Many of the rank and file members took very little part in the running of the organization. Often, indeed, they had been signed up merely for the sake of their subscription, for the sake of their carefully tutored vote in internal party elections, or to justify by their numbers the election of extra committee men and delegates. Frequently, such members were not even active supporters of Congress policy except when prodded into action by party organizers during periods of mass protest or during election campaigns. This situation worked to the advantage of orthodox Congressmen, who kept an iron fast grip over the machinery of the party. Their opponents, in contrast, viewed it with dismay and set out to transform it by "politicizing" and "radicalizing" the existing members and by

enrolling new rank and file members. They were especially active and most successful in Darbhanga, the home district of the skilled activist Ramnandan Misra, the estranged son of a well-established Bhumihaar zamindar.⁵² In Darbhanga, the orthodox Congressmen who controlled the party machine had to adopt extreme means ~~with~~ which to defeat the left-wing challenge.

In the months preceding the Haripura delegate elections the orthodox Congressmen who held the reins of power in Darbhanga worked busily to ensure the defeat of their rivals.⁵³ To begin with, they neglected to supply their opponents with the official Congress forms which were necessary for the proper enrolment of Congress members, while making these forms widely available among their own allies. The leaders of the local opposition responded to this challenge by continually badgering the local Congress officials for the forms and by appealing to the higher organs of the party. The opposition was successful in getting a supply of enrolment forms and was soon forging ahead in the enrolment of supporters. The group in power responded by covertly allowing the enrolment of its potential supporters to continue beyond the final date set down, subsequently backdating the completed membership slips and subscription receipts. The group in power, moreover, made full use of its control over the party apparatus to gerrymander the constituencies in its favour and to appoint carefully selected partisans as presiding and electoral officers. Finally, on 13 December, the tension between the contending parties in the district came to a head when the Bihar Provincial Congress Committee voted in support of initiatives that had already been taken by the Champaran, Saran and Monghyr District Congress Committees and agreed that henceforth, in view of the "violent" propaganda of kisan activists, Congress members would be barred from participation in kisan sabha activities.⁵⁴ From now on individuals would have to opt for involvement in either kisan

sabha or Congress activities. For the kisan sabha activists of Darbhanga district the forthcoming delegate elections would be the last opportunity for them to capture, as a group, power within the Congress organization.

In the days leading up to the election excitement mounted to a high pitch, and in one or two instances violence erupted. In the Jale constituency, on the day before the election, processions in support of the rival candidates met and clashed.⁵⁵ On the same day a canvasser for the orthodox Congress group was assaulted by members of the kisan party. On the following day polling began at the Kamtoul polling station under the direction of a presiding officer who was a partisan of Rampratap Thakur, the orthodox candidate. According to the presiding officer polling proceeded smoothly until about three in the afternoon when a disturbance began outside the polling station. The presiding officer fled, leaving the ballot boxes behind, and subsequently discovered that they had been interfered with. He then decided that supporters of Jamuna Karjee, the kisan candidate, had been responsible for the riot; that they had been guilty of interfering with the ballot boxes; and that since Rampratap Thakur had been winning at the time of the riot he should be declared the winner of the poll. The Congress Violence Enquiry Committee, a neutral body set up in the wake of the delegate election disturbances, visited Kamtoul to investigate the propriety of the presiding officer's decision. The members of the Enquiry Committee later reported that the evidence presented before it

was of the type that is usually seen in criminal courts where each witness tries to go one better than his complainant. One thing is patent. That men of both parties assaulted each other with lathis and we refuse to believe considering the previous history that they did not come armed.⁵⁶

Many of the details about what had occurred remained uncertain. What was clear, however, was that

all the objections and telegrams made with regard to the voters being prevented from voting came from Rampratap Thakur who even filed a petition to stop the polling.⁵⁷

"This conduct", it seemed to the members of the Enquiry Committee, was difficult to understand if, as the presiding officer alleged, Rampratap Thakur was "so patently leading at the polls".⁵⁸

At another polling station, that of Songar in the central Tajpur constituency,⁵⁹ the members of the Enquiry Committee found it equally hard to get at the facts. "Oral evidence on both sides", they found, was "of the usual type in criminal cases in the Mofassil, full of exaggerations, embellishments and patent falsehood".⁶⁰ All that could be definitely established was that a disturbance occurred. According to the orthodox Congress version, kisan sabha voters, angered because their candidate was losing, made an attack on the booth, forcing the presiding officer and his assistant to flee, and then interfered with the ballot boxes. The Enquiry Committee discovered, however, that at the time of the disturbance the candidates had been running neck and neck, and decided that it was most likely that the disturbance arose when kisan sabha voters protested about not being permitted to record their votes because of obstruction by members of the orthodox party.

Obstruction of kisan sabha voters was also an issue in the central Warisnager constituency, at the Phulahara polling station, where Rameshwar Thakur, a kisan sabha candidate, ran against Babu Rajeshwar Narain Singh, a representative of the orthodox Congress group.⁶¹ The Enquiry Committee later collected evidence from Rameshwar Thakur and learnt that Rajeshwar Narain

Singh and his two brothers, Maheshwar Narain Singh and Chandreshwar Narain Singh were "very big and powerful zamindars".⁶² Chandreshwar Narain Singh was the leader of the opposition in the Legislative Assembly. Maheshwar Narain Singh and Rajeshwar Narain Singh, in contrast, had been returned to the assembly at the January 1937 elections as Congress candidates.⁶³ Until he ran for the Legislative Assembly Rajeshwar Narain Singh had never been a member of the Congress, and his selection as the party's candidate had had a "very great effect on the feelings of the kisans". Rajeshwar Narain Singh's home was within a mile of the Phulahara polling station and before the day of the delegate election Rameshwar Thakur, or so he later claimed, had made an application requesting that the voting be secret, so that Rajeshwar Narain Singh would be unable to exert undue influence on the voters. But this application disappeared, under mysterious circumstances, from the Congress office, and open voting was held in the presence of Rajeshwar Narain Singh and his amlas. At the polling station, according to Rameshwar Thakur, kisan sabha voters were not allowed in to vote, while other potential kisan sabha voters were waylaid on their way to the booth and threatened with ejection from their holdings unless they agreed to return home without casting their vote.

Voting was also interfered with at the Baurhur polling station in the Harlakha thana.⁶⁴ Here the contest was between Nawalal Pande, a kisan sabha candidate, and Rajendra Narain Choudhary, a zamindar representing the orthodox Congress group. Harendra Kishore Choudhary, an agnatic relation of Rajendra Narain Choudhary, was the presiding officer. According to the version of the orthodox Congress group, trouble began when the kisan sabha candidate, finding that he was losing, called Dhanraj Sharma, a prominent kisan organizer, to the scene. Orthodox Congress workers claimed that Sharma arrived in a motor taxi loaded with brick bats, clods of earth, and bal

fruits⁶⁵ and led the local kisan activists in an attack on the orthodox Congress supporters of Rajendra Narain Choudhary. Having dispersed them, the kisan activists then took over the polling booth, destroyed the ballot boxes, and stole the voting papers and other articles. According to the version of the kisan sabha activists, Rajendra Choudhary, knowing that he could not win in a fair competition, placed a group of lathials outside the polling station to stop the kisan sabha voters getting into the polling room to cast their vote. Dhanraj Sharma arrived to vote and protested against the situation. In response the supporters of the orthodox group began throwing brickbats at the kisan activists and then brought in four elephants to disperse them. When the criminal case arising from this clash first came to a court decision, in September 1938, the trying magistrate found in favour of the orthodox Congress group, but this finding was later reversed, in the appeals court, by Judge S.A. Fath. Judge Fath pointed out that all the witnesses for the orthodox Congress case were "the connected persons" of Rajendra Narain Choudhary, and they were all from Choudhary's home village of Khirhar, whereas the witnesses in support of the kisan sabha case were "mostly disinterested", and were drawn from 20 different villages. The testimony given by some of the witnesses called in support of the orthodox Congress case, furthermore, revealed upon close examination that the majority of voters in the constituency were likely to have been supporters of the kisan sabha cause.⁶⁶ On the basis of the evidence, Judge Fath decided, it seemed clear that the clash had been started by members of the orthodox Congress group and had then developed into a free for all.⁶⁷

Despite the vigour with which they competed in the Haripura delegate elections, and despite the fact that the findings of the Congress Violence Enquiry Committee generally favoured them, the kisan sabha activists

lost their struggle to retain and expand their influence within the Congress party machine. Summing up its findings on the election disturbances, the Enquiry Committee commented that

all sorts of objectionable tactics were used. Factionalism, groupings, doubtful pacts and alliances, exploitation of caste sentiments, enrolment of bogus members for the purpose of retaining and grabbing power became rampant. Heads were broken, riotous mobs were led to the polling stations and inside the polling room ... lathies [sic] were displayed and in some cases used ... ballot boxes were taken away, windows of polling rooms were smashed ... Abuse and threats were very common. The pity of it is that responsible officials of Congress were not free from such practice.⁶⁸

In view of the turmoil that had characterized the elections the Enquiry Committee called for reforms in the demarcation of constituencies, the provision of polling booths, the appointment of electoral officers and the conduct of elections, but pointed out that such measures could not really succeed unless there was a change of attitude on the part of Congress workers and a return to faithful adherence to the Gandhian values of non-violence and truth.⁶⁹ Such a change of heart was not forthcoming, and it soon became apparent that the struggle over the control of the party apparatus was an unequal once.

The elections which had caused so much disturbance in Darbhanga decided the composition of the All-India Congress Committee and of the "working committee" of the Bihar Congress, the headquarters component of party organization in the province. Only five of the 36 Biharis elected to the All-India Congress Committee came from the left, and there was not even one left-winger elected to the provincial working committee.⁷⁰ (This was one less even than the previous year, when Sahajanand had been the sole left-wing representative).⁷¹ In Darbhanga left-wing activists kept trying to capture control over the local party organization until the final

months of 1938. They even set up a rival, parallel, district Congress committee, a development which also occurred, during the same period, in Saran.⁷² But eventually, with orthodox Congressmen denouncing them for their radicalism and militance and shutting every door in their face the left-wing activists were forced to relinquish their attempt to gain control over the party machine. The heightening of tensions in the countryside, moreover, obliged them to look to the interests of the tenantry. In August 1938 Ramnandan Misra reported from Laheriaseraï town in Darbhanga that

In the interest of the cause ... we must get out of the party struggle at least for a year. Kisan problems require our immediate attention. Situation is very critical and serious, how can we leave the kisans, who are being assaulted, murdered, abused and their crops and property looted. In any case I cannot leave my district at least for a week. Yesterday morning one of my workers was attempted to be murdered. I think we shall be able to save his life, but I must proceed to the spot at once.⁷³

From late 1938 onwards kisan sabha activists concentrated their efforts towards mobilizing the peasantry into direct action against their landlords and against the pro-landlord policies of the Bihar Congress and the provincial administration. The change in tack on the part of the kisan movement achieved formal recognition at the annual conference of the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha, held at Waini in Darbhanga in December 1938. The conference passed a resolution supporting the use of satyagraha as the chief weapon of struggle in defence of the peasants' interest.⁷⁴ From now on, as an official policy, the kisan sabha movement would engage in intensified direct protest against the zamindars and the administration and, if other methods of agitation failed to result in the redress of grievances, would employ the weapon of satyagraha. The central focus of this direct action became the struggle for control over those lands defined as being part of the bakast holdings of the zamindars.

The bakast lands issue

Under the zamindari system bakast (or bakasht), along with ryoti and zirat,⁷⁵ was one of the three main categories of agricultural land. Bakast land consisted of holdings in which the zamindar exercised direct control over cultivation, but in which, under certain circumstances, occupancy rights could be acquired by short-term tenants paying a cash rental or by sharecroppers.⁷⁶ Because of intensifying population pressure⁷⁷ competition over the possession of bakast lands had been a feature of agrarian relations in north Bihar since the late 19th century. Zamindars, their property being broken up through inheritance as generation succeeded generation, had competed fiercely with tenants in order to maintain and expand their control over land.⁷⁸ Nor had they always been scrupulous in the methods they used: in one instance, recorded in the village notes for Darbhanga, a zamindar had intimidated some tenants so that, when questioned by government officials collecting data for their village's "record of rights", they denied that they held ryoti rights in the lands of the village and instead said that the lands in question were part of the zamindar's bakast.⁷⁹

During the 1930s the bakast issue became particularly crucial because an unusually high number of tenants' holdings were sold up as a result of rent arrears suits.⁸⁰ Often the purchaser of the holding was the landlord who was glad by this means to convert what had been ryoti land into bakast land, a category of land in which, for the time being at least, no rights other than those of the landlord existed. By having his bakast lands tilled by labourers, short-term tenants, or sharecroppers, a landlord could generally⁸¹ make a better profit, and be less hampered in doing so by legal and social restrictions, than he could by letting out the land to an occupancy tenant.⁸² Often the former tenants of lands that had newly become bakast

remained tilling the land as sharecroppers or short-term tenants.⁸³ Former tenants who had in this way, during the depression period, been pushed down a rung in the social ladder were deeply resentful. They viewed the coming of the depression not as one of the normal risks of agricultural life but as a highly unusual circumstance, equivalent in its unexpectedness and its catastrophic impact to a major natural calamity, against the effects of which they felt they deserved protection and support from their zamindars and the administration, rather than harassment and the loss of their legal rights to their land. Even more resentful were those tenants who had actually been displaced from their holdings, which had been passed down to them through several generations, to make way for another occupancy tenant or for a sharecropper or short-term tenant.⁸⁴ These resentments were articulated into a recurrent demand for the restoration of ryoti rights in bakast lands to tenants who had lost them during the period of the depression. Once kisan sabha workers had begun protest movements over newly bakast lands, moreover, peasants became inspired to claim possession, under a seldom used provision in the Bengal Tenancy Act, to lands that had been held as bakast by landlords over a long period. In the Padri circle of the Darbhanga Raj, tenants demanded the restoration of newly bakast lands. In the Pandoul circle of the Darbhanga Raj and in the Barahiya Tal area in Monghyr, in contrast, sharecroppers campaigned in defence of their rights in long established bakast lands.

In the Padri (or Parri) circle of the Darbhanga Raj in the south-east of Darbhanga tenants strongly demanded the return of ryoti rights in newly bakast lands. In the late 1930s the Padri area had a population of some 40,000 people spread over some 50 villages. "Practically the whole population", Ramnandan Misra reported in June 1939, "consists of Koeris and Goalas who have been kept down under the iron wheel of the Hindu society".⁸⁵

Until the 1930s the area had grown lucrative cash crops, and because of this the landlord had been able to raise the rents to a high level. But throughout the 1930s Padri suffered repeatedly from serious flooding, the effects of which were worsened because the local Darbhanga Raj officials had neglected to keep the dams that had earlier been built for flood protection in good repair.⁸⁶ Flooding, combined with the collapse in primary produce prices, had a disastrous effect on the kisans of Padri. "Year after year", Ramnandan Misra tells us, the

tenants would cultivate in the tragic hope of getting something. But nothing would come except the notice of the sale of their holdings. In this way about ten thousand bighas ... became bakast lands ... But the lands remained in the possession of the tenants.⁸⁷

Despite their plight, the Padri kisans received little sympathy from the agents of their landlord. The patwaris and other subordinate amlas of the Darbhanga Raj, on the contrary, took advantage of the tenants' difficulties to bring extra pressure to bear on them.⁸⁸ Nor were the Padri circle managers willing to ease the burden of the kisans.⁸⁹ Under these conditions the local peasants turned readily to kisan sabha activists for assistance.

In June 1936 the local officials of the Darbhanga Raj broke up a large kisan meeting by driving an elephant into the midst of the crowd.⁹⁰ In the ensuing months, using this incident as a rallying cry,⁹¹ kisan workers continued in their efforts to have the grievances of the tenants' redressed. Late in 1937, in response to continuing agitation, Sri Krishna Sinha, the Bihar Congress Chief Minister, visited Padri in the company of R.E. Russel, the Commissioner of the Tirhut division, and as a result the administration made representations to the top management of the Darbhanga Raj.⁹² In response

the Darbhanga Raj Chief Manager, G.P. Danby, made a personal investigation.

"I regret", he began the report of his enquiry,

to say that this circle has been neglected ... The tenantry are generally in a deplorable condition ... If we do not give immediate consideration to the tenants so distressed will they become that I cannot imagine their future. There has been considerable agitation. I am ashamed to say that it is due to some extent to the neglect and lack of sympathy shown to tenants ... I believe the tenants are still loyal to the Raj and would become as good tenants as any others if now, and in the future, due consideration were given to them. [sic] 93

At Padri, tenants demanded the return of lands that had recently become part of the landlords' bakast holdings. Elsewhere, in contrast, protest developed over the control of land that had been part of the landlords' bakast over a long period. A provision of the Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885 had made it possible for sharecroppers and short-term tenants who cultivated bakast holdings continuously for a period of 12 years or longer to acquire occupancy rights, but this provision had seldom been taken advantage of because of the ignorance, low morale, and lack of power of those whom it was intended to benefit. But in the 1930s, under the impetus of the kisan movement, villagers began to campaign for the fulfilment of their rights in the bakast lands that they had tilled over long periods for their landlords.⁹⁴ The most striking instance of this development occurred at Barahiya Tal in south Monghyr. In 1931 Rajendra Prasad had pointed to this village with pride because of the active part its Bhumihar landlords assumed in the civil disobedience movement,⁹⁵ but a few years later the area was proving a great source of anxiety to Prasad and to other Congress leaders. From November 1936 onwards the sharecroppers and short-term tenants of Barahiya Tal began agitating strongly against their landlords.⁹⁶ At first they protested against the exaction from them of forced labour, but soon they began demanding that

they be given ryoti rights in their landlords' bakast lands.⁹⁷ They continued their protest for the next three years, and only quietened down after the arrival of a large police force that had been deputed to keep the peace and protect the position of the zamindars.⁹⁸ Sharecroppers and short-term tenants, many of them Yadav by jati, also began to claim rights to long established bakast lands in the Pandoul area in Darbhanga.⁹⁹ In the Pandoul area one piece of land which became the subject of a series of related disputes had been let out every year by the Darbhanga Raj for the growing of a rabi crop and had then been resumed so that the Raj could use it for the cultivation of sugar cane.¹⁰⁰ The local villagers, if they could establish that they had tilled this land successively for a period of 12 years or more, were legally entitled to be awarded occupancy rights over it.¹⁰¹

In some localities struggles over the bakast issue developed between members of distinct social strata. In Barhiya Tal in south Monghyr depressed short-term tenants campaigned against their well established Bhumihar landlords. In the Padri area, impoverished low and middle caste peasants struggled against the Darbhanga Raj, the greatest zamindari in north Bihar.¹⁰² Elsewhere, in contrast, the socio-economic distinction between the conflicting parties was less clearly marked. In a campaign that developed in the vicinity of Dekuli village in the Bahera thana of Darbhanga, for example, the local kisans claimed that they had acquired occupancy rights in about 150 bighas of land.¹⁰³ The ownership of this disputed land was divided between the members of five distinct groups of co-sharing zamindars, who claimed that they cultivated the land directly by means of hired labour, and that therefore no tenants had any rights in the land. Detailed information is, unfortunately, not available about the total number of zamindars involved, and the distribution of the land among them, and nor is detailed information available about

the kisans who became involved in the campaign.¹⁰⁵ But on the basis of the fact that the average amount held by each zamindari group totalled only some 30 bighas,¹⁰⁶ it seems probable that some of the co-sharing zamindars held, at least so far as this disputed area of land is concerned, only a small parcel of land. The leader of the bakast campaign was described as a petty zamindar and ryot,¹⁰⁷ and it is perhaps not unlikely that some of his leading supporters were well established occupancy tenants with some zamindari interests.¹⁰⁸ In this context the struggle over the bakast lands assumed the character of a clash focused within the landed interest and involving competing vertical social alliances rather than distinct, horizontally stratified groups. In some instances, moreover, both vertical and horizontal cleavages contributed to the development of bakast conflict. In Radhanager, the north Bihar village studied by Ramashray Roy, simmering discontent existed among the poorer peasants, who were under the thumb of an interconnected group of Brahman families. In the 1930s kisan sabha activists attempted to draw on this discontent to initiate a mass protest movement but they found it hard to get protest underway because the poorer peasants feared reprisals from their landlords.¹⁰⁹ Eventually, however, they succeeded by taking advantage of the fact that

Some of the impoverished landowning Brahmana families had some old scores to settle with their richer brethren; others, seriously indebted [to them] ... were in search of an opportunity to bring their indebtedness to an end — because debts were not legally registered — by breaking away from their benefactors.¹¹⁰

The kisan organizers managed to win the support of these families, and the "... impoverished landed gentry ... joined their social and economic inferiors in a common fight ..." against the dominant landowning families.¹¹¹

Although the character of the bakast struggle varied from locality to locality, it is clear that the concentration of the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha on the bakast issue reflected the extent to which the kisan movement in Bihar drew its strength from and acted in the interests of the middle strata of north Bihar society. The leaders of the kisan movement (like the leaders of the mainstream of Congress) were drawn from high caste, zamindari and literate backgrounds.¹¹² Their supporters generally came from middle status caste groups such as Yadavs and Koeris.¹¹³ The members of these middle status groups differentiated themselves from the higher caste zamindari families, who they regarded as their oppressors, and from the low caste, Harijan and Adivasi small holders and landless labourers whom they often themselves oppressed.¹¹⁴ This point is made crystal clear by an investigation which probes beyond the rhetoric of the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha to the realities of the bakast campaign.

Judging merely from the repeated bitter attacks of kisan activists on the zamindari system and from the contents of the kisan sabha manifesto one might have expected the Bihar kisan movement to engage in a rent strike, to call for a general moratorium on debt repayments or to take some other radical initiative. There are, perhaps, two reasons why such initiatives were not taken. One reason was that many of the better established tenants operated as money lenders and also, on part of their holdings, collected rents from sharecroppers and short-term tenants. The second reason is that the main body of kisan supporters had something to lose from a rent or debt repayment strike because they had some property which could be confiscated in the course of a rent or debt suit. Agitations about bakast lands, rather than being radical initiatives, were in fact efforts to work within the zamindari system, either to re-establish rights which had previously existed,

or else to take advantage of rights under the law which had been in existence for some years. Potentially, of course, the bakast issue could mobilize a variety of supporters drawn from a wide section of the social spectrum. But significantly the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha does not seem to have made use of the issue to cross the status line which divided Harijans and Adivasis from the rest of society, even though there were stirrings of dissidence among Adivasi sharecroppers over their rights in long established bakast lands.¹¹⁵ Nor, though it claimed to represent "all who live for cultivation",¹¹⁶ did the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha take much interest in the plight of landless labourers, except to assure them now and again that there was no need for them to organize themselves separately since it would protect their interests. Significantly the Bihar Kisan Manifesto, rather than calling for the breaking up of large holdings and the distribution of land to the landless, instead called for the granting of full ownership rights over their holdings to tenants and for the provision of gainful employment for the landless. When, in 1937, under the leadership of the Harijan activist Jagjivan Ram, the Bihar Provincial Khet Mazdoor Sabha (Agricultural Labourers' Association) came into existence, it received no support from the province's kisan sabha movement.¹¹⁷ And when, in the mid-1930s, agrarian labourers began to protest against exploitation by their kisan and zamindar employers their protest was quickly curbed by intimidation, physical assault¹¹⁸ and, in one or two instances, murder.¹¹⁹ Some years later, having become disillusioned with the movement that he had led in the 1930s, Swami Sahajanand pointed out that it was "really the middle and big cultivators" who had been "for the most part with the Kisan Sabha", and contended that such people were in the habit of "using the Kisan Sabha for their benefit and gain". He and his supporters, in contrast, had been trying to use these middle and big peasants "to strengthen the Sabha, till the lower and lowest strata of the peasantry are awakened to their real economic and political interests and needs..."¹²⁰

The Bakast Restoration Act and the bakast direct action campaign

The people who formed the backbone of the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha found the bakast issue a worthy subject for protest during 1936 and 1937. In 1938 they found further reasons to focus on the subject of the bakast lands. In an effort to defuse kisan sabha protest over the ryoti lands which had been swallowed up into the landlords' bakast the Bihar Congress government framed a restoration of bakast lands bill. This bill came before the Bihar Legislative Assembly in early 1938. The bill provided for the return to tenants of lands which had been sold up in the period from 1929 to 1936, if in return the tenant paid, within a period of five years, half the auction price of the holding as well as the legal costs.¹²¹ The amount of land to be returned varied, as table 15 illustrates, in proportion to the amount that had been sold up.

TABLE 15

Formula for the restoration of bakast lands, 1938

AREA SOLD UP	QUANTITY RESTORABLE
Less than 6 acres	All to be restored
More than 6 but less than 15 acres	Half to be restored
More than 15 but less than 30 acres	A third to be restored
More than 30 acres	A quarter to be restored

Source: *Indian Nation*, 31 July 1938.

The bakast restoration bill was emasculated by clauses exempting from restoration those bakast lands which were either (a) under the direct cultivating control of a petty zamindar, who tilled the land by means of labourers, or (b) which had already been settled with another occupancy tenant.¹²² The presence of these provisions meant that the bill worsened rather than improved the position of many tenants.¹²³ In many cases former tenants who had remained associated with their former ryoti holdings as sharecroppers or short-term tenants were summarily displaced from them by zamindars anxious either to re-settle the holdings with other occupancy tenants (who would pay a better price for them than could be gained from the former tenants under the restoration provisions), or else to bring the holdings under their own direct cultivation. After learning of the legislation, according to one report, "... the land-holders of Bhagalpur have settled every inch of restorable bakast lands benami or on acceptance of salami".¹²⁴ In the Darbhanga Raj the senior management effectively pressured the Padri circle amlas into forging ahead, during 1938 and 1939, with the settlement of tenancy holdings.¹²⁵ G.P. Danby, the Chief Manager of the Raj, felt sympathy for the plight of the Padri peasantry. In both 1938 and 1939, Danby tried to help them by lowering rents and by cancelling rent arrears.¹²⁶ But the drive to settle holdings on occupancy tenures more than cancelled out the good done by rent remission and arrear cancellation. The settlement drive played into the hands of a small minority of "money lending kisans"¹²⁷ who could afford to pay the high salami rates being levied (in spite, by the way, of legislation passed in mid-1938 specifically abolishing salami), and could influence the local Raj amlas in their favour. In 1939 the circle manager reported that "35 percent of the tenantry has become landless"¹²⁸ and Ramnandan Misra commented that

... by starting land settlement the Raj is forcing us to organize Bakast struggle. In several plots of land I found standing sugar cane crops but the land has been settled with another person. For instance in the village Sihma, a plot has been settled with Tribeni Raut, where still stands the crop of the tenant who has been cultivating it for long.¹²⁹

The Bakast Restoration Act, moreover, moved at a snail's pace through the legislature, which allowed zamindars additional time in which to find ways to avoid its provisions.¹³⁰ Many tenants, furthermore, could not afford the costs of filing a suit in order to take advantage of the legislation.¹³¹ The efforts of former tenants to establish that bakast lands should be returned to them and the attempts of sharecroppers and short-term tenants to establish their occupancy rights over bakast lands also often failed because of the peasants' inability to bring convincing documentation before the courts. As the author of the provincial year book for 1938-39 pointed out

... the cultivator often finds it difficult to prove his claim even when it is just, because the conditions under which bakast land is let out by the landlord make it impossible for him to produce documents. In the absence of reliable oral evidence on either side, the courts have in the past been compelled to decide cases mainly on documentary evidence.¹³²

Documentary evidence usually favoured the landlords because through their agents, the patwaris, they kept a strict control over the creation and distribution of documents and could usually ensure that their potential legal adversaries had little documentary evidence on hand. This was so whether their adversaries were trying to prove that they had acquired ryoti rights to a holding or whether, alternatively, they were claiming that they had previously held such rights and that the land in question had neither been settled elsewhere nor had been kept under the direct control of a petty zamindar. And even where their opponents had been able to collect some

written evidence, the zamindar and his amlas could usually rise to the challenge by bribing lower level officials¹³³ and by forging documents. Indeed, on the subject of forging evidence a letter from a member of the legal staff of the Darbhanga Raj makes intriguing reading. The letter, which concerns the progress of court cases over a disputed area near village Raghapur in Darbhanga known as the Tinconwa zerat, reads in part:

... on account of the claim of the accused to the tinconwa lands the other two cases fixed for the tenth have become difficult ... In order to explain away the receipts and prove that those do not refer to the disputed tinconwa [lands] and then to prove that the disputed tinconwa [area] is in Khas [i.e. direct] cultivation of the Raj, what labour I have been taking in examining and shifting documents and in getting maps and statements prepared can better be known from your Amlas. Today I had in my own hand given forms of statements to the Zirat clerk, Amin and others and they compiled them in part and to see whether they are doing rightly this evening I again examined them and compared them with registers and gave them further instructions to complete them and get other wanting papers. As desired by you, I am personally doing the whole thing and for reasons better known, [sic] we cannot safely rely on others for such matters.¹³⁴

Gravely disadvantaged in the courts, and receiving no sympathy from the administration and the mainstream of the Bihar Congress, kisan sabha activists had no alternative left other than direct action. By having effects quite opposite to its nominal intentions the Bakast Restoration Act helped crystallize conflict over the bakast issue.¹³⁵ In Radhanagar village the struggle involved "... numerous law suits ... [and] ... use of physical force". The kisans "... resorted to social boycott of their landlords ... [and to] ... tilling their land by force ..."¹³⁶ In the Padri circle, during 1939, the discontented peasantry engaged in what the circle manager later described as "... a violent explosion of ... agitation", in the course of

which rent collections "almost stopped" and the "loot of Raj crops standing in Zirat and Dahnal [i.e. flood affected] lands was ... a daily feature ..." ¹³⁷

In north Bihar, in 1939, intensified bakast protest culminated in the employment of satyagraha as a weapon of last resort. Kisan direct action was intended, in principle, to be non-violent, ¹³⁸ but in actuality violent clashes eventuated. These clashes were on a small scale and happened in widely dispersed areas. Since the crucial issue was the ownership and possession of holdings the clashes occurred when one or the other party to a dispute attempted to exert what it claimed to be its rights in a particular plot of land. Such action might take the form of ploughing up and sowing the disputed land, or the harvesting of crops growing on this land. It might also involve the sabotage of crops previously planted by the opposition party. ¹³⁹ The peak months for bakast clashes, (as for agrarian disputes generally), were those in which harvesting and/or ploughing and planting were under way — December/January, March/April, and July/August. ¹⁴⁰ The zamindars, knowing that they had the sympathy of the administration, generally called in the police when a confrontation seemed imminent. The administration posted extra police in particularly troubled areas and in Darbhanga, at the height of the campaign, established a special police station. ¹⁴¹ The small scale of the encounters, and their occurrence in the open fields, made it easier for the police and the zamindars to control them. Unlike those of the clashes of the civil disobedience period which had occurred in congested urban settings, there were fewer bystanders to be drawn into action against the police and there were no impartial observers to carry away and publicize stories of police harshness. As it developed the bakast movement got an extremely bad press, being unsympathetically treated and under reported in the nationalist media ¹⁴² and being subjected to a tirade of criticism in the columns of the *Indian Nation*. ¹⁴³

In February 1939 the kisan movement received a fillip when, at Reora in the Gaya district in south Bihar, the District Magistrate, after investigating a dispute that had been simmering for several months, made a settlement which awarded 4/5ths of the disputed land to the tenants.¹⁴⁴ Heartened by this success,¹⁴⁵ kisan workers at Amwari in Saran, at Dekuli, Raghopore, Padri and Pandoul in Darbhanga and at a number of other places in north Bihar continued to mobilize support for bakast campaigns. At Dekuli and Raghopore, according to a report by the Bihar government, neither the local kisan workers nor the zamindars were cooperating with officially supported efforts to arrange a compromise settlement. The kisan workers moreover, the report commented disapprovingly, seemed to be "hell bent on satyagraha".¹⁴⁶ On 16 March, at Dekuli in the Bahera thana of Darbhanga, a group of villagers obstructed the progress of a cartload of rice which was being taken away on behalf of a local zamindar. A quarrel developed and one of the zamindars was assaulted. In retaliation the local zamindars and their supporters turned out "in force" and fired on the villagers, wounding nine of them.¹⁴⁷ During April, elsewhere in the district, kisans looted two zamindar's kutcherrries (store-houses).¹⁴⁸ During May¹⁴⁹ there was a lull in kisan protest, but in the first fortnight of June, with the commencement of the ploughing season, there came such a revival of activity that the provincial administration reported that the "kisan movement ... appears to be working to a crisis".¹⁵⁰ A fortnight later the administration reported that

the agrarian situation continues to deteriorate and reports of attempts or threats to seize bakasht land have come in from nearly every district in Bihar.¹⁵¹

In the Raghopore and Dekuli areas of Darbhanga the kisan leaders were all set to initiate satyagraha, and only postponed the commencement of a satyagraha campaign pending the results of official efforts to arrange a settlement.¹⁵²

At Raghapur these efforts were successful and the dispute was settled on terms which, according to an official view, were "very favourable to the tenants". At Dekuli and elsewhere, in contrast, attempts at settlement failed, and heightening tension prevailed.¹⁵⁴ At Chitauli village in Saran kisan activists and supporters of the landlord clashed over disputed lands. Two of the kisan activists were beaten up, and the kisan leader, Jamuna Karjee, was arrested and sentenced to eight months imprisonment.¹⁵⁵ By the first weeks of July, in wholesale defiance of the All-India Congress Committee's ban on the initiation of satyagraha campaigns that had not been authorized by the relevant provincial Congress committee, kisan activists were leading tenants in direct action against their zamindars in a number of localities.¹⁵⁶

The storm centre of kisan sabha activity over the bakast issue during 1939 was Darbhanga, the district where kisan activists had made the strongest efforts to capture control of the Congress party machine. In Darbhanga, according to an official report prepared in early July

Attempts to seize the land or to obstruct cultivation ... have been almost daily occurrences and numerous clashes have occurred. There has been a large number of prosecutions and a number of the principal leaders ... have been arrested. The agitation was intensified by the Provincial Kisan Sabha meeting which was held at Sakri close by on the 7th and 8th ... Volunteers are now being imported from elsewhere to continue the attack which it is intended to enlarge into a general attack upon the bakast lands of the Darbhanga estate. It has been necessary to keep Magistrates and armed police continuously on the spot and a large number of arrests have been made. It is clear that this agitation is going to be made a provincial issue as the attack is upon the principal landlord of the province.¹⁵⁷

In July, in the Pandoul area of Darbhanga, one confrontation began when some Darbhanga Raj amlas arrived with a tractor to plough a disputed holding. The

local tenants attacked the driver of the tractor with a volley of stones and a free for all developed between them and the Raj amlas.¹⁵⁸ In three Muzzaffarpur thanas, similar disturbances occurred, while in the Gogri thana in north Monghyr police arrested several leaders for encouraging a crowd to plough disputed lands. In this area, according to an official report,

Most of the lands have been ploughed and settled by the landlords, but attempts have been made to replough the lands and uproot the seedlings.¹⁵⁹

By the middle of July, according to a kisan sabha publicity officer, the "agrarian situation was getting more serious day by day".¹⁶⁰

For some time it seemed that the bakast issue would lead to disturbances on a wider and more intensive scale, but a mixture of coercion and concession thwarted such a development. In Darbhanga by late July the police had arrested the local kisan leaders and 180 of their followers, thus striking a severe blow to the movement.¹⁶¹ When amlas of the Darbhanga Raj arrived at a village in the Pandoul area to plough some disputed holdings only women, children and old men rallied to demonstrate against them, all the younger adult males already having been arrested. (The protesters, most of whom came from the Yadav jati, put up a brave fight. They stopped the ploughing by sitting down in front of the plough bullocks, and only left after they had been jostled and beaten by the Raj amlas.¹⁶² With the immediate future of the Darbhanga campaign looking bleak, Jay Prakash Narayan intervened and made a fresh attempt, with official support, to arrange a compromise settlement.¹⁶³ Success in containing the kisan campaign in Darbhanga, the provincial government later reported, was achieved through cooperation between the district officials and the members of the local district Congress Committee. The head of the district Congress Committee, Satya Narain Singh, MLA, the administration reported approvingly, had "worked hard to

counteract false propaganda by the Kisan Sabha and to infuse a more reasonable frame of mind among the tenants."¹⁶⁴

The imprisonment of kisan sabha activists and administration initiatives to ensure the negotiation of compromise settlements which gave the tenants some concessions¹⁶⁵ dampened the fires of kisan discontent.¹⁶⁶ By early August the situation had quietened considerably. The only exception to this general trend was a clash between landlords and tenants in the Laukaha thana in the Madhubani subdivision of Darbhanga district, in the course of which the landlord's amlas opened fire, killing two of the tenants and injuring several others.¹⁶⁷ By the end of the month the provincial government was able to report that

There has been a general decrease in agitation partly owing to the fact that the ploughing and the sowing season is drawing to a close and partly due to exhaustion and the success of local officers with the assistance of prominent non officials in settling a large number of important disputes.¹⁶⁸

A fortnight later, in mid-September, the government was able to report that kisan sabha activity had "become much less pronounced",¹⁶⁹ and it was clear that the provincial government had effectively contained the bakast movement. The government had achieved this success with relatively little trouble. In Darbhanga, the district where the movement attained its greatest strength, the police curbed protest by arresting the local leaders and 180 of their supporters. In Bihar as a whole only about 600 people were arrested during 1939 in connection with the bakast movement.¹⁷⁰ This figure pales into insignificance when compared with the figure of 10,889 arrests made in connection with the civil disobedience movement up to November 1930.¹⁷¹ Nor at any stage, and again in contrast to the civil disobedience movement period, did bakast campaigners effectively challenge the local authority of the police by giving

them a sound beating during small-scale clashes. The bakast movement was limited both in the areas and in the number of people it affected. The Bihar Congress Ministry viewed the bakast campaign with anxiety, but found the informal and formal mechanisms of control at its disposal perfectly adequate to deal with the challenge of kisan turbulence.

By September 1939 the bakast campaign was on the wane, but it had not fully disappeared. In the second half of September, with the coming of the Second World War, those kisan workers who were not at the time in custody were distracted from the bakast issue by the problems posed by the war.¹⁷² In the following month a settlement was finally reached on the long-standing Padri dispute, on terms which the provincial government regarded as "very favourable to the tenants".¹⁷³ Later in October there was an upturn in kisan sabha activity, and the administration advanced the opinion that more protests could be expected as the harvesting season approached.¹⁷⁴

But these protests did not eventuate, partly because on 31 October 1939, in obedience to an All-India Congress Committee resolution, the Bihar Congress Ministry resigned from office. The decision to relinquish office in the provinces was, according to the All-India Congress Committee,¹⁷⁵ an act of protest against the way Britain had brought India into the war without consulting the nationalist leadership and without offering Indians further constitutional advance in return for help in the war effort.¹⁷⁶

After the resignation of the Bihar Congress Ministry the left-wing and mainstream members of the Congress movement coalesced in opposition to the British. The occurrence of this development has inspired B.R. Tomlinson, M.V. Harcourt and G. McDonald to argue that the need to preserve party unity was the underlying reason for the decision to relinquish office. This

suggestion may have some validity at the level of all India politics, and in relation to other provinces, but in the context of political developments in Bihar in the late 1930s it cannot be supported with substantial evidence. B.R. Tomlinson contends that the prevalence of factional conflict over spoils and the resulting adverse effect on the prestige of the Congress movement encouraged the party leadership to decide that a spell out of office and a revival of anti-British propaganda would restore party unity and clean up the tarnished image of the nationalist movement.¹⁷⁷ But though Tomlinson has demonstrated at some length that since at least the early 1930s bitter factional conflict had been characteristic of provincial and local Congress activity and organization,¹⁷⁸ he does not present evidence in support of the view that in Bihar by late 1939 the problems of unity and image arising from factional strife had become compelling enough to force the Congress out of office.¹⁷⁹ From another perspective, G. McDonald and M.V. Harcourt have suggested that the strength of the left-wing opposition to the mainstream of the Congress obliged the conservative Congress leadership to pay the price of office resignation in order to restore unity and preserve control.¹⁸⁰ But their claims are exaggerated; as has been shown, the challenge of the left-wing had only affected a limited area and involved only a limited number of people. By August 1939, weeks before the resignation decision, the movement had been contained by the Bihar Congress Ministry and the provincial administration and was on the wane.

In late 1939 mainstream and left-wing Congressmen agreed over the need to oppose British rule but differed over the tactics which should be employed to express this opposition. In the following months left-wingers called for the initiation of mass protest against imperial rule, and partly as a result of the pressure they brought to bear the All-India Congress

Committee eventually adopted the compromise tactic of 'individual satyagraha'.¹⁸¹ The demands of this debate over tactics took attention away from the waning bakast movement. In the course of November 1939 there was only one notable landlord/tenant clash, during which shots were fired and a member of the tenant's party was killed by a gunshot wound, but otherwise the situation remained quiet, and kisan workers were reported to be "marking time, waiting to see how the policitical situation develops".¹⁸² Concerning developments in Darbhanga an official report commented that

where a few months ago kisan agitation was causing grave anxiety the Kisan Sabhaites are now quiet and are not speaking against the Congress.¹⁸³

In the first fortnight of December the possibility of a revival of bakast agitation was further reduced by a 20 per cent rise in food grain prices.¹⁸⁴ This increase marked the end of the long period of depression and took the edge of kisan discontent.¹⁸⁵ In December, despite the commencement of the harvesting season, the agrarian situation remained quiet and "nothing but ordinary disputes between landlords and tenants"¹⁸⁶ were reported. And in January 1940, the condition of the countryside was officially estimated to be "unusually quiet".¹⁸⁷ The bakast campaign, which at one stage had caused "grave anxiety" in official ranks, had come to an end.¹⁸⁸

Conclusion: The left-wing challenge and police/administrative control

In the late 1930s the Bihar Congress encountered a challenge from left-wing dissidents within its ranks. These dissidents were organized into the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha and claimed a right to influence Congress policy because of the breadth of their support among the peasantry. "Who does not know", Jay Prakash Narayan asked in December 1937, "... that our Kisan Sabha workers have won the last general election for the Congress and are asking for nothing more than the fulfilment of the Congress Agrarian Programme?"¹⁸⁹ In 1939, after they failed to capture control of the Congress organization and had come under heavy pressure from mainstream members of the party, the left-wingers turned their full attention to organizing mass protest over the bakast lands issue.

The Bihar Congress was strikingly successful in coping with this challenge. Though lackadaisical in their activity in other areas,¹⁹⁰ the orthodox majority of Congressmen held firmly to the reins of power. In holding on to power orthodox Congressmen were much assisted by the prestige and sympathy gained for Congress during the nationalist struggle, by the administrative experience gained by many of them on district and municipal boards and in the reformed councils, by the strength of their links with vested interests in the localities, by their close cooperation with the civil service and the police, and (perhaps most importantly) by the failure of their left-wing opponents to mount an effective campaign against them.

In Bihar, in the late 1930s, the main (indeed almost the only) alternative political institution to the left of the mainstream of the Congress was the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha.¹⁹¹ The leaders of the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha, (like the provincial and local Congress leaders), were high caste

men from zamindari backgrounds who accepted the primacy of the nationalist struggle over other agitation. The campaigns they led essentially sought to transform the policy and activities of the Congress, either from within by capturing control over the Congress organization or from without by pressuring the Congress by means of mass protest. The leading supporters of the kisan sabha movement were middle and big tenants who sought to defend their own interests against zamindari pressure. In doing so their aims were short term and reformist. Significantly, and despite all the rhetoric about zamindari abolition, the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha, when forced into a position in which it had to attempt to initiate extensive protest against the Congress government, chose to focus on the fundamentally conservative issue of the bakast lands. The bakast campaign had the potential to gather wide support, but as it developed it tended to become focused on disputes within the landed interest. The bakast movement did not gather sufficient support for the mounting of an effective anti-Congress campaign. During the middle months of 1939 the bakast movement created difficulties for the Bihar Congress government. Ultimately, however, the government, by combining coercion and concession, was able to bring the situation under control. The kisan movement won some concessions and encouraged the kisans to stand up for their rights and protest against landlord harassment.¹⁹² By late 1939, however, the movement had been effectively contained. When the Bihar Congress Ministry relinquished office in October 1939 it did so from a position of strength rather than of weakness. Withdrawal from office, combined with an economic upturn, did reduce intra-party and landlord/tenant tensions, but these results were by-products rather than conscious aims of the decision to resign.

After announcing that the Bihar Congress Ministry would relinquish office the Chief Minister, Sri Krishna Sinha, thanked the police and the

administration for their cooperation in preserving law and order during a period of agrarian turmoil.¹⁹³ The effective cooperation of the police and the administration with the Bihar Congress Ministry had long-term repercussions for the future of police/administrative control in north Bihar. By reacting conservatively towards an agrarian dispute the Bihar Congress weakened its support among some sections of the population, and used up some of the political capital it had gained through the sacrifices of the civil disobedience movement. But because the bakast movement had been limited in its extent and support, and because conservative Congressmen had played the role of mediator and had brought the kisans concessions, the Bihar Congress emerged from the period of bakast struggle with its prestige relatively unimpaired. The use by the Congress government of the police as a coercive force in support of landlords in their disputes with tenants over bakast lands decreased the already low popularity of the police. And the success of the Bihar Congress in maintaining control in 1937-39, combined with the expectation that eventually Congress would return to government, had a bad effect on the morale of Indian policemen and officials when British government was re-established in the province after the resignation of the Congress Ministry. Lukewarm support for British rule manifested itself among police officers and throughout the bureaucracy, and was particularly prevalent among those younger officials who had been appointed, in many cases as an act of favouritism by a leading Congressmen, during the period when the Congress Ministry held power. This lack of support prevailed during the following years. In January 1942 the Director of the Government of India Intelligence Branch, reporting on the political situation in Bihar, commented that Indian officers in all the services, feeling that eventually Congress would return to power, were "reluctant to take firm action".

NOTES : CHAPTER 4

- 1 "Unity on Trial", p. 297. See also Hauser, "Bihar Kisan Sabha", p. 31; Tomlinson, "India and Empire 1880-1935", pp. 370-1.
- 2 Purnea FR (1) March 1931 PSf 44, 1931 BSA.
- 3 Mansfield, *Bihar 1930-31*, chap. 1.
- 4 GB Revenue Department, Land Revenue Branch, B proceedings, May 1937, f VIA-8/1937, BSA.
- 5 Registrar, Co-operative Societies to Member, Board of Revenue, 9 Feb. 1934, in *ibid.*
- 6 In a number of areas the 1934 earthquake had an adverse effect on drainage and in subsequent years flooding became more frequent and more serious. Geof Wood, "The Legacy of the Past : The Agrarian Structure", in J.L. Joy and Elizabeth Everitt (eds.), *The Kosi Symposium. The Rural Problem in North-East Bihar : Analysis, Policy and Planning in the Kosi Area* (University of Sussex, 1976) pp. 93-112, 98.
- 7 For a lucid discussion of this point, with particular reference to south Bihar see Hauser, "Bihar Kisan Sabha", pp. 11, 26-30. For a general discussion of the impact of the economic depression on Bihar see Binay Bhushan Chaudhuri, "Agrarian Movements in Bihar and Bengal, 1919-1939" in B.R. Nanda (ed.), *Socialism in India* (Delhi, London, 1972) pp. 190-229, 201-2.
- 8 According to G.P. Danby, the Chief Manager, the collections had increased because, in the period since he had been appointed Chief Manager in 1931, the administration of the Darbhanga Raj had operated more

efficiently than previously. It is not clear whether this increase in efficiency had an adverse effect on the interests of the tenantry, or whether it merely meant that the lower level officials of the Darbhanga Raj were being more closely supervised and were thus less able to profit, at the expense of the Raj, from corrupt practices and were thus passing more of their rental receipts on up the hierarchy to the senior Raj management. "Chief Manager's note on the Retrenchment Committee Report", f 10G, C Head Office, G 1937-38 RDA [hereafter Chief Manager's note].

- 9 Registrar, Co-operative Societies to Member, Board of Revenue, 9 Feb. 1934, Revenue Department, Land Revenue Branch, B proceedings, May 1937, 873-90, f VIA-8/1937, BSA.
- 10 *Ibid.*
- 11 See also Hauser, "Bihar Kisan Sabha", p. 32.
- 12 "Retrenchment Committee Report", marginal note p. 13, and Chief Manager's note, p. 5, f 10G, C Head Office, G 1937-38, RDA.
- 13 "Retrenchment Committee Report", pp. 9, 17; Chief Manager's note pp. 8-10; Manager Alapur to Chief Manager, 22 Dec. 1937, all in file 10G, C Head Office, G 1937-38, RDA.
- 14 Another not uncommon ploy was for the judgement debtor to take up the settlement of the sold up holding as a benamidar, i.e., in the name of another or in a fictitious name, at a reduced rental. See "Inspection Report", f 6H2, C Padri G 1938-39, RDA.
- 15 The manager of the Jhanjharpur circle of the Raj reported that "... we

try our level best not to allow cultivation of the Dakhaldehani lands yet we cannot enforce it strictly as we have very little control over the village on account of shortage of village staffs (sic)."

Jhanjharpur, AAR 1348 F (1940-41) f 16D2, G 1941-42, RDA. The Padri manager reported that up until 1347 F. (1939-40) rent defaulters cultivated the dakhaldehani lands without any hindrance and that therefore they were better off as defaulters than as rent payers. Padri AAR, 1348 F. (1940-41), f 16D1, G 1942-43, RDA. And in April 1941 the Chief Manager noted that in the three Raj circles in Purnea he had been informed by the circle managers that "they were having great difficulties in taking and keeping possession over the Dakhaldehani lands ... settlement takers cannot be found due to various causes, the principal one being that the judgement debtors retake possession and cultivate the land ... it is practically impossible to keep judgement debtors out of possession of such big areas as they are often 10 miles or so distant from the circle, and circle and village staffs are very small ..."

Note on discussion on administration of Purnea circles by the Chief Manager, 24 April 1941, 16D37, C Head Office, G 1941-42, RDA.

- 16 "Report of the Bihar Kisan Enquiry Committee", PPf VII, 1937, [hereafter Kisan report] microfilm 6 chap.1, p. 18.
- 17 See B.R. Tomlinson, *The Indian National Congress and the Raj, 1929-1942. The Penultimate Phase* (London 1976) pp. 69-70. This well documented study collects much useful material and makes many interesting suggestions. In a chapter entitled "Provincial Congress Politics 1934-39" it has much to say about developments in Bihar. In his treatment of events in Bihar, however, Tomlinson attempts unsuccessfully to explain Congress political activity almost exclusively in terms of

factional conflicts within the party organization over material interests. The third paragraph on page 79 is not untypical of Tomlinson's approach. Tomlinson begins by commenting that in 1936, encouraged by mainstream Congressmen, many zamindars agreed to run as Congress candidates in the forthcoming Legislative Assembly elections in an effort to head off the challenge of the kisan movement. He then makes the statement that

Although the events of late 1936 came to be seen in ideological terms, at the time they were conditioned much more by the interaction of factional conflict within the Congress, at the district as well as at the provincial level. Kisan Sabha leaders at the district level were usually in a minority in the D[istrict] C[ongress] C[ommittee]s and were not able to draw in such powerful outside allies as were their opponents. It is for these reasons that they tended to do so badly in the selection of candidates.

The obvious questions which arise at this point are: 'Why were the kisan sabha leaders in a minority in the district Congress organs and why were they not able to draw in powerful outside allies?' Let alone answering these questions, Tomlinson does not even raise them. Instead he begins a new paragraph and launches into a discussion of the character and activity of the Indian National Congress's all-India Parliamentary Committee. Perhaps Tomlinson is unwilling to raise these questions because he could not answer them without considering the role of ideology. Kisan/socialist activists were in a minority and attracted little support from "powerful outside allies" because their beliefs and policies conflicted with the ideas and threatened the interests of mainstream Congressmen and their supporters within the landed interest. Indeed, Tomlinson himself has already pointed out two pages earlier (page 77) that conservative Congressmen had made efforts to reassure the landed interest and to make it clear that the majority of Congressmen did not favour the radical line being taken by the kisan

sabha movement. If, in 1936, ideology was as unimportant as Tomlinson suggests, then surely the kisan/socialist activists would have done as well or badly as any other "faction" in the competition for control over the candidate selection process?

- 18 The kisan sabhas formed by Swami Vidyanand and his followers during this period had the aim of defending the interests of the tenants by militant agitation. But often also at this time kisan sabhas were either infiltrated or created by conservative local notables who proclaimed the need for social harmony and who sought to use the sabhas to contain kisan discontent. GBO Police Abstract 1786, Special Branch 1 Nov. 1919 BSA; PSf 417, 1922 BSA; Hauser, "Bihar Kisan Sabha", p. 36.
- 19 Swami Sahajanand was born in approximately 1889. He became a sanyasi in 1907 and was drawn into Congress politics in the early 1920s. He became interested in kisan problems while engaged in social work activity on behalf of the Bhumihar Brahman Sabha at Bihta in Patna district in the late 1920s. Hauser, "Bihar Kisan Sabha", pp. 82-5.
- 20 A Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha had a brief existence in the early 1920s before disappearing into obscurity. In 1929, under Sahajanand's leadership, a new Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha was created, only to be suspended soon afterwards so as not to distract attention from Congress activity during the civil disobedience movement. Subsequently, in 1933, the organization was re-established. Hauser, "Bihar Kisan Sabha", pp. 35-6; *Searchlight*, 29 December 1922.
- 21 Hauser, quoted in Chaudhuri, "Agrarian Movements", p. 226.
- 22 Hauser, "Bihar Kisan Sabha", p. 16; preamble to "The Manifesto of the

Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha", July 1936, Agriculturalists' Unions f 149, 1936, JPNP, NML [hereafter Kisan Manifesto, 1936].

- 23 Andre Beteille, *Six Essays in Comparative Sociology*, (Delhi, London 1974), p. 79.
- 24 The following discussion of the attitudes of the kisan sabha leadership, and the effect on these attitudes of Congress Socialist Party influence is drawn from Hauser, "Bihar Kisan Sabha", pp. 66-73, 79-80, and McDonald, "Unity on Trial", pp. 299-305.
- 25 McDonald, "Unity on Trial", pp. 304-6; Hauser, "Bihar Kisan Sabha", p. 79.
- 26 In the course of 1922 the Bihar Congress had agreed that a meeting of the All India Kisan Sabha would be held in conjunction with the annual session of the Indian National Congress, scheduled to be held at Gaya town in December. But this decision was reversed when it became known that Swami Vidyanand intended to put a resolution calling for zamindari abolition, and the Bihar Congress leaders refused to allow the running of an All India Kisan Sabha meeting and denied recognition to the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha. *Searchlight*, 29 Dec. 1922.
- 27 Hauser, "Bihar Kisan Sabha", pp. 100-07; McDonald, "Unity on Trial", pp. 303-4.
- 28 Kisan Manifesto, 1936; Hauser, "Bihar Kisan Sabha", pp. 102-7.
- 29 Tomlinson, *National Congress and Raj*, p. 77; R. Prasad to J. Nehru, 18 December 1937 and Secretary, Bihar Provincial Congress Committee to General Secretary, All-India Congress Committee, 30 Dec. 1937, f G98, AICCP, NML.

- 30 In the United Provinces 'left-wing' leaders encouraged, with some reservations, the mounting of 'no rent' campaigns in conjunction with the civil disobedience campaign. D.N. Dhanagre, "Congress and Agrarian Agitation in Oudh, 1920-22 and 1930-32", *South Asia* 5, Dec. 1975, pp. 67-77; Gyanendra Pandey, "A Rural Base for Congress: the United Provinces 1920-40" in Low, *Congress and the Raj*, pp. 199-223.
- 31 Tomlinson, *National Congress and Raj*, pp. 78-9.
- 32 *Ibid.*, p. 173.
- 33 *Ibid.*, pp. 69-70, 77.
- 34 *Ibid.*,
- 35 McDonald, "Unity on Trial", pp. 305-6; Hauser, "Bihar Kisan Sabha", pp. 34, 55-6.
- 36 GB FR (1) Feb. 1937, HPf 18/2/1937 NAI.
- 37 "Report of the Violence Enquiry Committee", f P6, 1939-40, AICCP, NML, [hereafter Violence Report]; Ramanand Singh to J. Nehru, 10 Nov. 1936, P5, 1936, AICCP, NML; GB FR (2) Nov. 1936, FR (2) Dec. 1936, FR (1) Feb. 1937, HP files 18/11/1936, 18/12/1936, 18/2/1937, NAI; Tomlinson. *National Congress and Raj*, pp. 79, 83.
- 38 McDonald, "Unity on Trial", p. 306.
- 39 Tomlinson, *National Congress and Raj*, pp. 78-80.
- 40 GB FR (1) Feb. 1937, HPf 18/2/1937, NAI.
- 41 McDonald, "Unity on Trial", pp. 306-7; GB Fortnightly Reports for

April, May, June and July, HP files 18/4/1937, 18/5/1937, 18/6/1937, 18/7/1937, NAI.

- 42 Bihar's extremely bad financial situation is the subject of S. Solomon's anonymous article, "A Plea for Justice", which concentrates especially on the inequitable treatment of Bihar relative to other provinces under the Niemeyer award. Solomon, a member of the civil service in Bihar, wrote this article in his private capacity in the hope that its contents could be brought to the attention of British parliamentarians. He was obliged to abandon this plan, however, as a result of the intervention of the provincial government. See GOI, HPf 51/5/1936, NAI.
- 43 McDonald, "Unity on Trial", pp. 307-311; "Sahajanand's Statement of September, 1937", f G98, 1937-38, AICCP, NML; GB FR(1) Sept. 1937 to GOI, HPf 18/9/1937, NAI
- 44 As M.V. Harcourt points out, the left-wing also attempted to outflank the Bihar Provincial Congress Committee by going over its head to the All-India Congress Committee, in which the left-wing was relatively stronger than it was in the provincial committee. See his "Kisan Populism and Revolution in Rural India: The 1942 Disturbances in Bihar and East United Provinces", in Low, *Congress and the Raj*, pp. 315-48, p. 331. On the subject of mass agitation, see also Hauser, "Bihar Kisan Sabha", pp. 118-22 and McDonald, "Unity on Trial", pp. 307-9.
- 45 GBO FR (2) March 1936 HPf 18/3/1936, NAI.
- 46 GB FR (1) Dec. 1937, HPf 18/12/1937, NAI.
- 47 GBO FR (1) July 1936, GOI HP f 18/7/36; *Indian Nation*, 10 April 1938;

Indian Nation, 5 August 1938; GB "Fortnightly Reports on Agrarian Troubles (Patna Division), 1938", f62, FMP, BSA; "A short history of the agrarian trouble in the Barahiya Tal area", Land Reform files, f226, 1938, JPNP, NML.

48 McDonald, "Unity on Trial", p. 306.

49 Tomlinson, *National Congress and Raj*, p. 65.

50 McDonald's "Unity on Trial" is an excellent introduction to the disturbances at the time of the Haripura delegate elections. But McDonald generalizes too far on the basis of events that were mainly concentrated within the single district of Darbhanga and over emphasizes the extent of Congress disunity and the strength of the left-wing challenge to the orthodox Congressmen.

51 The following information on the character of mass participation in the Congress organization is from "Answers to Congress and Mass Contact Questionnaire" INC f 116, 1936, JPNP NML, and "Report of the AICC Mass Contacts Committee:", f IX, 1936, microfilm 4, PP, NML.

52 GB FR (2) Nov. 1937, HP f 18/11/1937, NAI. Ramnandan Misra was the son of Rajendra Prasad Misra, a middle-range zamindar of the Bhumihaar jati from the village of Raghunathpur in Darbhanga. Rajendra Prasad Misra had an annual income of some 20,000 to 25,000 rupees, of which about one-tenth went to the government in land revenue payments. Ramnandan Misra was born in 1906 and became involved in politics while studying for his matriculation. In 1922 he joined the Congress and left school to take part in the non-cooperation movement. He studied briefly at the National College at Benares and then became a full-time political

worker. In the course of his political activity he "became aware of the extent of exploitation of the people by the landlords" and also "saw the need for the masses to be involved in the mainstream of the nationalist struggle". He also became involved in social uplift work, and was active in anti-purdah activity. His increasing radicalism and interest in socialism led to conflict with his family, with whom he eventually broke all ties. (This breaking of ties, it should be noted, is one striking point of contrast between his career and that of mainstream nationalist leaders). Interview, Laheriasera town 31 Oct. 1976.

- 53 The following information on misconduct in the period leading up to the elections is from: Dhanraj Sharma and fifteen others to the President, Bihar Provincial Congress Committee, 7/1/1938, f P6, 1936, AICCP, NML; Assistant Secretary, BPCC to General Secretary AICC 13 Sept. 1937 f P6, part II, 1937, AICCP, NML; Violence Report pp. 4-5. For details concerning intra-Congress struggles in Darbhanga in the period preceding the 1937 Legislative Assembly elections, see Tomlinson, *National Congress and Raj*, pp. 78-9.
- 54 McDonald, "Unity on Trial", p. 309; GB FR (1) and (2) Dec. 1937, GOI HP f 18/12/37 NAI; letters cited note 29 above.
- 55 The information given here on events in the Jale constituency is from "Case No. 11" of the "Darbhanga Cases" appended to the Violence Report.
- 56 *Ibid.*
- 57 *Ibid.*
- 58 *Ibid.*

- 59 See "Case No. 1" in *ibid*.
- 60 *Ibid*. The finding of the Enquiry Committee on the reliability of evidence presented before them in the central Tajpur constituency was, they contended, generally applicable to all the evidence they were presented with in the course of their investigations. See Violence Report, p. 1.
- 61 The information given here on events in the central Warisnager constituency is from "Case No. 6" of the "Darbanga Cases" appended to *ibid*.
- 62 *Ibid*.
- 63 For details of the political activities of Maheshwar Singh during 1936 see Tomlinson, *National Congress and Raj*, pp. 78-9.
- 64 The information given here on events at the Baurhar polling station is from Judge S.A. Fath, "Appelate Court Judgement", 6 Feb. 1939, f P6, 1939-40, AICCP, NML.
- 65 A bal fruit is about the same size as a large orange and has a hard outer casing.
- 66 Judge Fath commented:
- It is to be noted that the election was held in December 1937 after the Congress had come into office and the cleavage between the kisan party and the zamindar party in the Congress had become more sharp and prominent. The evidence is that there were 42 polling stations in the Madhubani subdivision and at each polling station a candidate on behalf of the kisan party had been set up ... The trying magistrate seems to think that Rajendra's academical qualifications being better than Newelal's he must have got more votes. This is a misapprehension. Votes were likely to go the interest which each party

candidate represented and there can be no doubt that kisan voters were much more numerous. Prosecution Witness 1 admits that most of the voters were kisans. Prosecution Witness 6 states that in Khirhar itself there were about 600 voters out of whom 40 to 50 were zamindars and the rest were kisans". See Fath, "*Appellate* Court Judgement".

- 67 *Ibid.*
- 68 Violence Report p. 2.
- 69 *Ibid.*, pp. 4-6.
- 70 McDonald, "Unity on Trial", p. 310.
- 71 GB FR(1) May 1937, HPf 18/5.1937, NAI.
- 72 Krishna Chandra Mukerji, General Secretary, Bihar CSP, Darbhanga Branch to J.P. Narayan, 5 Aug. 1938, CSP f 23, 1937-38, JPNP, NML; GB FR (2) June 1938, FR (1) Aug. 1938, FR (1) Sept. 1938, HP files 18/6/1938, 18/8/1938, 18/9/1938, NAI.
- 73 (Punctuation as in original). Ramnandan Misra to Dear Comrade (presumably J.P. Narayan), Laheriasera, 17 Aug. 1938, Agriculturists' Unions, f 149, 1936, JPNP, NML.
- 74 S.M. Wasi, *Bihar in 1938-39*, (Patna 1942), p. 7.
- 75 Ryoti lands, which generally comprised by far the greater part of a zamindar's property, were those in which an occupancy tenant had acquired protected rights. Zirat lands, which usually formed only a tiny part of a zamindar's property, were the 'homestead' lands of the zamindar in which no other rights could accrue. (Strictly speaking, the term zirat was only applicable to these 'homestead' lands, but in popular usage it was often employed to refer to both 'homestead' and bakast lands).

- 76 Under the terms of the tenancy law produce rent had an equivalent status to cash rent. In actuality, however, payers of cash rents were more secure and more able to advance their rights than sharecroppers. Note by R.N. Prasad on "Agrarian trouble in ... the district of Purnea", PSf 120(I), 1940, p. 19, BSA.
- 77 In some districts, by the 1930s, land had become so scarce and so much sought after that landlords were able to rent out for cultivation lands formerly used for tanks, roads, burning ghats and other miscellaneous purposes. Kisan report, chap. 2, p. 56; Murari Prasada to Chief Manager, 29 June 1939, f 34F, C Pandoul, L 1938-39, RDA.
- 78 Kerr, *Darbhangra Settlement Report*, p. 101.
- 79 Village Note for Kubaul, February 1901, village 407, Bahera thana, Collectorate Record Room, Laheriasarai town, Darbhanga.
- 80 In the Darbhanga Raj, the large number of holdings that were sold up put a great strain on the Raj's administrative machinery. See the comments quoted in note 15 above.
- 81 Small landlords who supervised cultivation personally profited most from bakast holdings, whereas large landlords often found that their amlas, who were indispensable for supervisory work in a large estate, soaked up most of the extra profits that could be derived from holding direct cultivating control. In mid-1938 the chief manager of the Darbhanga Raj commented that land held by the Raj under direct cultivating control "is always a source of income to Amlas if they are not properly controlled". "Inspection report", 7 May 1938, f 6H2, C Padri, G 1938-39, RDA. And as Hauser points out, the cost of closely supervising amlas was prohibitively high. Hauser, "Bihar Kisan Sabha", p. 28.

Large landlords generally attempted to resettle newly sold up land with an occupancy tenant. But because the administrative machinery of the great zamindari estates moved slowly and inefficiently great landlords often held large areas as bakast. On the slowness and inefficiency of the Darbhanga Raj administrative machinery, see the material cited in notes 13 and 15 above.

- 82 For information on this point and also for more general information on the bakast campaign and on agrarian relations and political developments in north Bihar I am grateful to Ramnandan Misra who, though in ill health as a result of advancing age and of the long-term effects of torture and harsh treatment while imprisoned by the British during the Second World War, gave me three interviews at Laheriasera in October and November 1976.
- 83 Because of this development the legal position concerning the right to cultivate the lands often became "... exceedingly obscure", GB FR (1) Aug. 1937 HPf 18/8/1937.
- 84 Harcourt, "Kisan Populism", p. 332.
- 85 Ramnandan Misra, "A short note on the conditions of tenants of Raj Darbhanga of parri elaka", Land Reform file 226, 1938, JPNP, NML. In a circular dated 6 July 1939 accompanying this document Misra comments that all other avenues of agitation having been patiently tried over a period of two years "it seems that there is no way open for the tenants but to organize a direct fight".
- 86 *Ibid*; In a report submitted in October 1937 the Padri circle manager reported that "In absence of bunds the Elaka has become Dahnal to a great

extent". (Dahnal lands are lands whose productivity has been adversely affected by inundation). He also commented that "The Elaka remains surrounded on all sides with water for full four months and all communications is stopped during the rainy season." Padri AAR 1344 F (1936-37), f 10 H 3, C Padri, G 1937-38, RDA.

87 "A short note".

88 According to Ramnandan Misra, the tenants, by losing their occupancy rights, were reduced to a condition of "absolute slavery". *Ibid.*

89 One Padri circle manager was dismissed late in 1936 after it was discovered by his superiors that he had colluded with the amlas under his control in defrauding and exploiting the peasantry. This manager had also failed to implement the Darbhanga Raj policy of arranging rent remissions on land that had been adversely affected by inundation. His successor, nonetheless, did not show much sympathy for the people of Padri. In his report for the year beginning September 1936, he noted that "the condition of the tenants is not at all good ... due to flood and high rental," and that "Poverty is prevailing". He then went on to boast that the collection of rents had been the best for four years and that "Never before was such a big amount in Raj salami realized". He also commented, in the course of his report, that the tenants of Padri were "Not good in any respect. They are illiterate but talking law, selfish and mean". In support of his contention that the tenants were mean he noted that "If the distribution of Alms (even a half seer of rice) is done in the circle, even well-to-do tenants also come and accept the Alms without caring for their position". The possibility that it was abject poverty that drove people to come forward to accept

alms does not seem to have occurred to him. "Inspection report", 7 May 1938 cited in note 81 above; Padri AAR cited in note 86 above.

- 90 The Government of Bihar reported that "... a somewhat blatant attempt to break up a big kisan meeting was made by agents of the Darbhanga estate, including the somewhat crude device of driving an elephant into the crowd. This piece of opposition did more good to the Swami than to the estate". GBO FR (1) June 1936, HPf 18/6/1936 NAI.
- 91 *Ibid.*; Ramnandan Misra, "A short note"; AICC Foreign Department Newsletter No. 2, 18 June 1936, f XI, 1936 (microfilm 4), JPNP, NML (The official account refers to "an elephant", whereas the kisan and Congress accounts refer to elephants plural).
- 92 Ramnandan Misra, "A short note".
- 93 Inspection report, cited in note 81 above.
- 94 The distinction between protest over control of newly sold up bakast land and that over long established bakast land was not clearly defined. To strengthen their claim tenants, no matter what the facts were, tended to claim that they had only recently lost their occupancy rights in the land under dispute, and conversely landlords tended to claim that they had held the disputed land as their bakast over a long period. Protest campaigns seeking the granting of ryoti rights in both types of land ran concurrently and drew strength from one another.
- 95 Rajendra Prasad to General Secretary, AICC, 7 October 1931 f 75, 1931, AICCP, NML.
- 96 "A short history of the agrarian trouble in the Barahiya Tal area",

Land Reform f 226, 1938, JPNP, NML.

- 97 Rajendra Prasad to Jawarharlal Nehru, 10 March 1937, f P6(i), 1937, AICCP, NML. In this letter Prasad contends that though some of the disputed land had only recently been taken over by the landlords, most of it had been part of their bakast over a long period. I have accepted Prasad's interpretation, but it should be noted that a contrasting perspective is given in a report by the Bihar Government. According to this report the produce rents of the tenants of the area had been commuted to high cash rents in the period prior to the 1930s, and with the price slump of the 1930s the tenants had no longer been able to pay their rents. It is difficult to decide which version is correct. Prasad's version is sympathetic to the Bhumihar landlords because they were stalwart Congress supporters, whereas the official version is antipathetic to them for the same reason. GB FR (1) March 1937, HP f 18/3/1937. See also note 94 above and Hauser, "Bihar Kisan Sabha", pp. 11, 26, 30, 111.
- 98 "A short history of the agrarian trouble in the Barahiya Tal area". Land Reform f 226, 1938 JPNP, NML.
- 99 Unfortunately there is only limited documentary information available on the caste background of the people who participated in bakast campaigns. The evidence in support of the suggestion that Yadavs were active in the Pandoul bakast campaign consists of a sentence in a report by subdivisional officer H.R. Krishnan on a clash between Raj amlas and tenants. Commenting on the testimony of one of the witnesses to the clash Krishnan records that the witness in question "... is a Goala [i.e. a Yadav] but otherwise had no connection with those that

took part in the Kisan movement". H.R. Krishnan, "Report on enquiry", 29 Aug. 1939 PS f 79(X), 1939, pp. 75-82, BSA.

- 100 Note dated 13 July 1939, p. 9 in *ibid*.
- 101 The burden of proof lay with the tenants, but they were usually ill equipped to provide evidence because landlords avoided giving receipts for rental payments. Failure to give receipts was a technical breach of the tenancy law but as Hauser points out there was no effective machinery to ensure that receipts were given. Hauser, "Bihar Kisan Sabha", pp. 127, 131.
- 102 Walter Hauser and M.V. Harcourt have based their assessments of the bakast struggle mainly on those instances where conflict developed between members of distinct social strata, and have concluded that the struggle was essentially a class conflict. But as will be shown, the bakast struggle assumed different forms in different localities, and many of these forms do not fit neatly into any simple class conflict model. For the views of Hauser and Harcourt see "Bihar Kisan Sabha" pp. 33-4 and "Kisan Populism", pp. 323-25.
- 103 K.P. Sinha, Collector's Office, Darbhanga to R. Russell, Chief Secretary to Government of Bihar. 13 March 1939, PSf 79, 1939, BSA.
- 104 *Ibid*.
- 105 There is, unfortunately, only a limited amount of official documentary data available on the bakast campaigns. In the indices of the Bihar Government Political Special Department for the late 1930s there are numerous files listed under "Agrarian Disputes", "Landlord/Tenant Relations", "Riots", and other relevant headings, but unfortunately most

of these files have either been destroyed or cannot currently be located. Sri T.S. Sinha, the Archives Director, told me that he had it on good authority that the British, before they left in 1947, destroyed many files which they felt reflected badly on their administration. Another possibility is that Congress politicians, anxious about their reputations, have arranged the suppression of material. Even if, however, all these files were available, they would only tell one side of the story. Fortunately, however, answers to many of our questions about this period will in due course be supplied by Walter Hauser of the University of Virginia, who in recent years, building on the foundations laid in his doctoral thesis, has engaged in intensive field work research into agrarian turbulence in Bihar in the 1930s. Hauser has isolated five areas which were centres of peasant discontent, and has visited them to make an extensive series of interviews with people who were involved (on one side or another) in landlord/tenant conflict. He has, in addition, located private documents surviving from the period and has also delved into previously unused district level official documents. For information about his work and for generous help in a variety of ways I am grateful to Walter Hauser, whom I met during my initial field trip to India in March and April 1975.

- 106 This estimate is based, of course, on the information that some 150 bighas was divided among five groups of landlords.
- 107 According to the official version, which must of course be treated with caution, the Dekuli bakast agitation began with a private quarrel between Ajab Narain Rai, the biggest co-sharing zamindar, and Satyadeo Rai, "a petty co-sharer malik and cultivator". As a result of this

quarrel there was a rioting case and a counter case. Next, Satyadeo Rai became the local leader of the kisan sabha, called Ramnandan Misra into the area, and with his help, and apparently in order to harass his rival, mobilized the tenants into involvement in a bakast campaign. K.P. Sinha, Collector's Office, Darbhanga to R. Russell, Chief Secretary to Government of Bihar, 13 March 1939, PSf 79, 1939, BSA.

- 108 As Walter Hauser points out, big tenant cultivators could well be better off than many small zamindars. Hauser, in "Bihar Kisan Sabha", p. 21.
- 109 "North Bihar Village", pp. 304-6.
- 110 *Ibid.*, p. 306.
- 111 *Ibid.*
- 112 There were, in addition, some middle caste leaders, but these people were only to be found in local leadership roles. Hauser, "Bihar Kisan Sabha", pp. 75-8.
- 113 Harcourt, "Kisan Populism", p. 331.
- 114 *Ibid.*, p. 331.
- 115 The main centre of this dissidence was the Dhamdaha thana in Purnea. In Purnea, in contrast to the other districts of north Bihar, there was, in addition to occupancy tenants, a large number of tenure holders who held permanent leases on proprietary rights from the superior landlord, the Maharaja of Darbhanga. Some of these tenure holders had extensive holdings, but most, due to fragmentation of holdings by inheritance, held only a small amount of land. Most of these tenants and tenure holders

did not engage directly in cultivation, but instead had their fields cultivated for them by sharecroppers. Some of these sharecroppers were Santals, a tribal people who had originally been brought north across the Ganges to Purnea from the Chota Nagpur area to clear the land of jungle and bring it under cultivation. (The land in question had become available because of the steady westward movement of the main channel of the Kosi river, and was covered with a thick grass jungle. The Santals were brought in to clear the jungle because they were docile workers and because they were more capable of doing the heavy work involved and more resistant to malaria and other diseases than the indigenous labouring population). The first Santals were brought into Purnea around the turn of the century and there was a particularly heavy influx in the 1920s and 1930s. Under the terms of the tenancy law the Santals were entitled to acquire occupancy rights in the holdings they tilled for tenure holders, but in actuality, to quote one official,

On account of ignorance of their own statutory rights, they were at the mercy of the landlords who were ... free to evict them and settle their lands with whomsoever they choose".^a

In theory, the Santals shared their produce half and half with their landlord, but in fact, because of the imposition of abwabs, the proportion left to them was about one third. The

lands assigned to them were frequently interchanged, rent receipts were never granted to them and they were on the land merely on sufferance and could be ousted at any time at the Malik's [i.e. landholder's] will.^b

From mid-1938 the Santals began to protest against their situation. One reason for this was that under the revisions to the tenancy laws implemented by the Bihar Congress government, the rights of sharecroppers, particularly the rights of those who cultivated as under tenants to

occupancy tenants were more clearly defined. A second reason, according to the District Magistrate, was that local Congress and kisan activists, "from disinterested as well as interested motives ... began to educate them in their rights".^c (These interventions by Congress and Kisan Sabha workers seem to have been purely local initiatives and received little attention and made little impact in the wider arenas of institutional and agitational politics.) A third reason, one can speculate, for the beginning of dissidence among the Santals was the fact that they, in common with the other elements of Bihari society, had been affected by the economic difficulties and the political ferment of the 1930s. In their protest campaign the Santals initially concentrated on the demand that their landlords fulfill the provisions of the law and grant them receipts in return for their share of the crop. The effective meeting of this demand would ensure that the Santals would eventually be able to take advantage of the law and acquire occupancy rights. The tenure holders and occupancy tenants responded to this demand by refusing to give the required receipts and "began to oust the existing Santal Bataidars [i.e. sharecroppers] and to set up fresh Bataidars from among their relations and servants".^d The Santals responded by attempting to take over possession of the lands they claimed as theirs by right of long-term cultivation. According to the District Magistrate, "they rapidly organized themselves", and "moved in large numbers, many times with bows and arrows".^e There were a number of crop-cutting cases, a number of confrontations in which only the arrival of the police averted riots and a number of clashes, some of which resulted in casualties. One clash began when a group of Santals who were ploughing up some disputed land were interrupted by a group of Yadavs. It seems from the evidence available, the Police Superintendent reported, that the Yadavs attempted to drive the Santals away with a

lathi charge, and that the Santals responded with a volley of arrows. Members of both parties were injured in the affray and one of the Yadavs was killed by an arrow through the chest. In conjunction with and partly as a result of confrontations such as these, the Santals and their opponents fought against each other in a series of civil and criminal cases. Santal/landlord tension simmered on throughout 1939 and 1940, despite official attempts at arbitration and settlement. Eventually, in late 1940, the administration was able to quieten agitation by arresting Santal activists and by bringing pressure to bear on occupancy tenants and tenure holders in order to oblige them to provide receipts. Significantly, though 1939 was elsewhere in north Bihar the year of the highpoint of the kisan sabha direct action, the kisan sabha movement did not involve itself in support of the Santals. At first, as we have seen, kisan (and Congress) workers played a part in activating the Santals, but once the Santal movement got under way they *shied* away from it.

The information presented in this note is from PSf 120(I), 1940, BSA. The direct quotations are from documents held in this file as listed below:

- a. Quoted from a Board of Revenue letter of 3 Dec. 1931 in a note by R.N. Prasad dated 5 June 1940.
- b. N.P. Thadani, Purnea Collector/Magistrate, Report on the Agrarian trouble in Dhamdaha and Darbhanga police stations of Purnea.
- c. *Ibid.*
- d. *Ibid.*
- e. *Ibid.*

See also GB Fortnightly Reports for 1939, 1940, and Martin Hoskins, "Land-Holding and Development in the Kosi area", pp. 79-80, and Geof Wood, "The legacy of the past : the agrarian structure", pp. 106-8, in Joy and Everitt, *The Kosi Symposium*, pp. 78-92 and pp. 93-112. For information about discontent and protest among Adivasi sharecroppers in Champaran where conditions broadly similar to those in Purnea prevailed, see GB Fortnightly Reports for June, July and August of 1938, HPf 18/6/1938, 18/7/1938, and 18/8/1938, NAI.

- 116 The preamble to "The Manifesto of the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha", states that "The Kissen [sic] Sabha means the unity of the peasants. The Sabha stands not only for the raiyats, but also for petty zamindars and agricultural labourers in other words for all who live for cultivation". Agriculturalists' Unions f149, 1936, JPNP, NML.
- 117 Hauser, "The Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha", p. 20 and footnote 1, p. 20.
- 118 In April and May 1936 there were, in the Tirhut division, a large number of "social uplift" meetings among members of the Musahar community, a Harijan group whose members were mainly engaged in agricultural labour. In late May the Musahar leader, Santdas Bhagat, mounted a large demonstration against a Muzaffarpur sugar factory. A few weeks later he drew a crowd of several thousand Musahars to a protest meeting at Dalsingsarai in Darbhanga and complaints were levelled against Ramasre Prasad Chaudhuri MLC, a leading local zamindar, and against Mr Parr of the Harsingpur factory. Subsequently a demonstration was held at Parr's factory and a protest letter was sent to Chaudhuri. Several thousand Musahars assembled near Chaudhuri's residence, armed (according to an official report) with lathis. Chaudhuri assembled a large body of men and a confrontation seemed

imminent. At this point a body of police arrived, arrested the Musahar leaders, and then broke up the crowd by means of lathi charges. As a result of this encounter the Musahar leaders and 30 of their followers were charged in court with riotous behaviour. In the ensuing weeks the Musahars held two large meetings to discuss the situation; at one of these meetings the police intervened and arrested the leading Musahar spokesmen. As a result of this repression Musahar activity subsided for some months, and the only other newsworthy event which occurred in the remainder of 1936 occurred in August when one of the Musahar leaders broke bail and fled to the safety of Nepal. In the following year there were some minor disturbances, but no major events until September, when a group of Musahars demonstrated outside the Sitamarhi court in Muzaffarpur while some of their caste fellows who were under-trial prisoners were having their suitability for bail considered. A clash occurred between the demonstrators and the jail staff and the police, and the Musahars were severely beaten up and dispersed. Press reports appeared claiming that the police and jail staff were unnecessarily provocative and brutal in their treatment of the protesters. But according to one official explanation the severest force used against the Musahars was employed by outside members of the public who came to the assistance of the police and jail staff. If this statement is correct (and given prevailing public attitudes towards the police), it throws an interesting light on the attitude of the other elements of the population to the Musahars and their cause. After this Musahar activity subsided, though there was a brief revival in June 1938. There is no evidence that kisan workers, despite the obvious political potential of the Musahars, showed any interest in their cause, though there is an allegation (in GB FR(2) June 1936, HPf 18/6/1936 NAI)

that "certain Congress agents" were responsible for encouraging Santdas Bhagat to protest. GB Fortnightly Reports for April, June, July and August 1936, July and September 1937 and June 1938, HP files NAI; Muzaffarpur Collector to Tirhut Commissioner, 1 Sept. 1938 and R.S.L. Norsering, "Enquiry into Allegations", Police file 51, 9, 1940 (includes 51, 15, 1938 and 51, 21, 1937), Commissioner's Record Room, Muzaffarpur town.

- 119 *Indian Nation*, 9, 22 July, 4 Aug. 1938.
- 120 Quoted from Sahajanand's presidential address to the annual session of the All-India Kisan Sabha, 14, 15 March, 1944 in Hauser, "The Bihar Kisan Sabha", p. 19.
- 121 *Indian Nation*, 2 April, 27 July, 31 July 1938; Hauser, "Bihar Kisan Sabha", pp. 127-30.
- 122 *Indian Nation*, 2 April 1938. For trenchant criticism of the legislation, see Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, "Tenancy Measures in Bihar", chap. III of R.G. Ranga (ed.), *Peasants and Congress* (Madras 1938 ?) pp. 37-46.
- 123 Martin Hoskins points out that "as is commonly the case with land reform, attempts to implement it lead to consequences opposite to those intended". See his "Landholding and Development in the Kosi area", in Joy and Everitt, *The Kosi Symposium*, p. 91.
- 124 H.K. Prasad to Rajendra Prasad, 30 June 1938, f IA, 1938 (microfilm 8) PP, NML. See also Hauser, "Bihar Kisan Sabha", pp. 129-30.
- 125 During the 1930s the senior management of the Darbhanga Raj made continuing efforts to reorganize and rationalize the administration of the

Raj estates. See the Conference Proceedings, 13 May 1937 and 10 January 1938, f 10F G 1937-38 RDA: Conference Minutes 4,5 May 1938, f 10D3, G 1938-39 RDA.

- 126 Danby decided that the current rent rates, which averaged about five to six rupees per bigha, were too high, given flood damage and prevailing food grain prices, and recommended that rents be lowered so that in no instance they amounted to more than about four to five rupees per bigha. He also urged that a substantial portion of the rent arrears owing be cancelled. For these recommendations see his "Inspection report", 7 May 1938, f 6H2, C Padri, G 1938-39 RDA. A special officer was deputed by the Darbhanga Raj to implement these recommendations. In October 1938 this officer informed Danby that the rent arrears cancellations that had been authorized up to a maximum of 50 per cent had failed to substantially improve the position of the tenants. The reason for this, he explained, was "that the condition of the tenants is really very bad ... they are in great distress and the major number ... are not really in a position to pay rent in respect of Dahnal lands". On these grounds the special officer advised the complete cancellation of rent arrears on flood affected lands. Special Officer to Chief Manager, 31 Oct. 1938, f 6H2, C Padri, G 1938-39, RDA. There is no evidence to indicate that this advice was followed: the Darbhanga Raj, it seems probable, was willing to make some concessions but not to the extent of drastically reducing its profit margin. Nor, despite the opinions expressed by Danby in June 1938, do the Padri tenants seem to have had their rents substantially reduced. There is no evidence on this point, but perhaps Danby, in view of the financial interests of the Darbhanga Raj, had a change of heart and subsequently was supported in this stand when the monsoon of 1939 passed without serious flooding and when, in

the final months of 1939, food prices began to rise. What is clear is that the Padri tenants gained little from the rent reduction operations carried out by the provincial administration in 1939 and 1940 under the terms of a Tenancy Amendment Act passed by the Bihar Congress Ministry in 1938. (For details about the contents of this act see "Babu Rajendra Prasad's Comprehensive Statement addressed to the tenantry", 27 Dec. 1937, Bihar Landholders' Association Papers, Sinha Library, Patna). The rent reduction section of the act was nominally intended to reduce rents which had been increased during the period of high prices from 1911 to 1930 to a level more consistent with the depressed prices of the 1930s, but also contained compromise provisions designed to protect the zamindari interest. In his report for the year beginning September 1939, the Padri circle manager congratulated himself on successful counter-action, by means of "strong contest, representations to charge officer, rent officer and collector", to the activities of government appointed rent reduction officers, who in his opinion were characterized by "kishanite predilections", and concluded by remarking that "considering the vastly Dahnal areas of this circle rent reduction was very light". Padri AAR, 1347 F. (1939-40), f 16 D1, G 1941-42, RDA.

127 Padri AAR, 1347 F. (1939-40), f 16D1, G 1941-42, RDA.

128 *Ibid.*

129 Ramnandan Misra, "A short note". For Danby's response to Misra's charges, see *Indian Nation*, 16 July 1939.

130 *Indian Nation*, 1 July 1938.

131 Harcourt, "Kisan Populism", p. 332.

- 132 Wasi, *Bihar 1938-39*, p. 7.
- 133 Interview, Ramnandan Misra, Laheriasera town, 31 Oct. 1975.
- 134 The letter concludes: "So my labour is daily increasing and almost the whole day I have to remain in these cases. You were pleased to send word ... that special remuneration would be paid for this heavy work". Anup Lall Thakur, Raj Muktear, Madhubani to Pandoul circle manager, 8 June 1939, f 56A. C Pandoul L 1938-39 RDA. See also the other letters held in this file.
- 135 This was particularly the case in north Bihar. In south Bihar discontent over the bakast issue had been simmering from 1936 onwards, and there had been several violent clashes. For the development of the bakast campaign in south Bihar see Hauser, "Bihar Kisan Sabha", pp. 111, 113, 132.
- 136 Roy, "North Bihar Village", p. 306.
- 137 Padri AAR 1347 F (1939-40) f 16D1 C Padri G 1941-42, RDA.
- 138 Swami Sahajanand and his supporters contended that, though they hoped that kisan protest would be non-violent, the kisans had every right to use violence in self-defence. See Sahajanand quoted in the "All India Kisan Bulletin", 14 Jan. 1938, and Ramnandan Misra to Rajendra Prasad, 17 Jan. 1938, f G98, 1937-38, AICCP, NML. See also Ranga, *Peasants and Congress*, pp. 67-8.
- 139 For an account of a case in which a zamindar's tobacco crop was apparently sabotaged see K.P. Sinha to R. Russell, 13 March 1939, PSf 79, 1939, BSA.

140 On this point the comments of Hoskins and Wood are instructive.

Hoskins points out that

Most ... antagonism is due to landholders attempting to evict tenants and generally preventing them claiming any sort of occupancy rights, particularly at harvest time when a successful reaping of the crop by the landholder effectively puts the tenant in the position of being a hired labourer ... If the landholder successfully harvests the crop he effectively denies that the tenant has had any decision-making role in the cultivation of the plot and he implies that the tenant's labour has been contracted under the same conditions as hired labour ... most of the violence is associated with such behaviour .

Wood comments that

Although the underlying conflict simmered all the time, the flashpoints usually occurred at harvest time in the process of establishing rights over the harvested crop (or portions of it) when the peasant was asserting or reinforcing a claim to a certain tenancy status over the land on which the crop was cultivated. To lose a dispute in any one year weakened one's long term position since the previous *status quo* could be used to defend a claim in the following year. It is common even now [i.e. 1976] for the crop to be guarded at harvest time — perhaps by opposing sides to the claim — and for fights to occur in the fields.

See their articles on "Land-Holding and Development" and "Agrarian Structure", in Joy and Everitt, *Kosi Symposium*, pp. 82, 107.

141 GB FR (1) July 1939, HPf 18/7/1939 NAI; *Indian Nation*, 11 July 1939.

142 Interview with Ramnandan Misra, Laheriasera town, 2 Nov. 1976.

143 See for example, the *Indian Nation* for 21, 29 and 30 July 1939.

144 Hauser, "Bihar Kisan Sabha", p. 132; GB FR (1) Feb. 1939, HPf 18/2/1939 NAI.

145 This success was followed, however, by dissension among the kisans. In May the administration reported that a stalemate had developed because "the Bhumihaar tenants will not accept Jagunandan Sharma's socialist

distribution of the land in equal shares to the raiyats whether of high or low castes". GB FR (1) May 1939. HPf 18/5/1939, NAI.

146 GB FR(1) March 1939, HPf 18/3/1939, NAI.

147 GB FR(2) April, 1939, HPf 18/4/1939, NAI.

148 *Ibid.*

149 In May it was reported from the Dhaunali area in Darbhanga that the kisans "have divided the bakasht land of their malik between themselves without any opposition from the maliks". GB FR(1) May 1939, HPf 18/5/1939, NAI.

150 GB FR (1) June 1939, HPf 18/6/1939, NAI.

151 GB FR (2) June 1939, HPf 18/6/1939, NAI.

152 GB FR (1) June 1939, HPf 18/6/1939, NAI.

153 GB FR (2) June 1939, HPf 18/6/1939, NAI.

154 According to the *Indian Nation* of 21 July 1939 "A kind of madness has seized the peasantry and they are now unable to distinguish between right and wrong. That is why they are plundering what in no way belongs to them".

155 GB FR(2) June 1939, HPf 18/6/1939 NAI. At around the same time another prominent kisan leader, Dhanraj Sharma, was arrested and sentenced to six months rigorous imprisonment and to a 200 rupees fine. *Indian Nation*, 26 July 1939.

156 *Indian Nation*, 6, 16 July 1939; GB FR(1) July 1939, HPf 18/7/1939, NAI.

157 *Ibid.*

- 158 This and other confrontations are reported in a note by R. Russell dated 13 July 1939 in PSf 79(X), 1939, BSA.
- 159 GB FR(1) July 1939, HPf 18/7/1939, NAI.
- 160 "Account of the Bakast struggle", by the publicity officer, Darbhanga District Kisan Sabha, no date, but internal evidence indicates second half of July 1939, Land Reforms file 226, 1938, JPNP, NML.
- 161 GB FR(2) July, 1939, HPf 18/7/1939, NAI. According to the "Account of the Bakast struggle", up to 13 July a total of 210 kisan workers and their followers had been arrested in connection "with the Darbhanga Raj Bakasht dispute alone".
- 162 This incident occurred on 6 August. H.R. Krishnan, "Report on Enquiry", 29 Aug. 1939, PSf 79(X), 1939, BSA.
- 163 GB FR(2) July 1939, HPf 18/7/1939, NAI.
- 164 *Ibid.* Eighteen months earlier, in December 1937, when there had been, coincident with the harvesting season, an upsurge of kisan turbulence, the administration had praised the mainstream of Congress for taking a firm stand against what was described as "irresponsible action".
GB FR(2) Dec. 1937, HPf 18/12/1937, NAI.
- 165 In addition to the granting of concessions in individual disputes, there was also the general effect of reforms in the tenancy law which allowed for the reduction of rents. The rent reduction operations carried out by the administration in the late 1930s, as Hauser points out, affected only limited areas and did not always serve the interests of the tenants. (In some instances, indeed, tenants were impoverished by the legal costs they incurred while trying to take advantage of the reduction

legislation). But despite this, Hauser concludes, there is no question that the rent reduction operations did alleviate the situation in politically critical areas. Hauser, "Bihar Kisan Sabha", p. 27, footnote 1. See also note 126 above.

- 166 In July a kisan spokesman had claimed that the "dual policy of repression and appeasement "would not succeed". In the event, however, this prophecy was proved wrong. See "Account of the Bakast struggle".
- 167 GB FR(1) Aug. 1939, HPf 18/8/1939, NAI.
- 168 GB FR(2) Aug. 1939, HPf 18/8/1939, NAI.
- 169 GB FR(1) Sept. 1939, HPf 18/8/1939, NAI.
- 170 Interview, Ramnandan Misra, Laheriasera town, 4 Nov. 1976.
- 171 McDonald, "Unity on Trial", note 20, p. 312.
- 172 GB FR(2) Sept. 1939, HPf 18/9/1939, NAI.
- 173 GB FR(1) Oct. 1939, HPf 18/10/1939, NAI.
- 174 GB FR(2) Oct. 1939, HPf 18/10/1939, NAI.
- 175 Harcourt, "Kisan Populism", p. 333.
- 176 Congress was to remain out of office for six years. Because of the length of this period it is tempting to regard the decision to relinquish office as the epitome of idealistic self-sacrifice over a matter of principle. But as B.R. Tomlinson points out, in 1939 no one could predict the length of the period during which Congress would remain in the political wilderness, and hence the resignation can be seen as to some extent a bargaining ploy designed to pressure Britain into the making of further constitutional concessions. *National Congress and Raj*, p. 111.

177 *Ibid.*

178 *Ibid.*, chap. 3.

179 *Ibid.*, p. 111.

180 McDonald has argued that in Bihar "The bitterness and disillusionment unleashed during the period of the Congress ministry", in addition to leading to extensive militant kisan sabha campaigns had "also found an outlet in renewed vituperations against the British." The left-wing, though insistent that there be a new campaign against the British administration, was "... adamant that such a campaign could not be mounted by the 'rightist' dominated Bihar Congress." Confronted by this

... demand for a new campaign against the British, and fearful of the consequences if they stood aside from such a movement, the 'orthodox' Congressmen found themselves forced towards relinquishing office.

Ultimately, in 1939, they were obliged "to relinquish power in an attempt to re-establish unity, and redirect the agitation into less violent channels." But the only evidence McDonald presents to demonstrate the existence of a "rising tide of anti-British sentiment" is drawn from the official provincial reports for May and June of 1938 and consists of references to anti-British speeches and to an attack on a police constable. Incidents and speeches such as these were a not untypical feature of life in the province throughout the period from 1920 onwards, and do not, therefore, of themselves serve as strong evidence of the presence of a "rising tide" of feeling against the British. And if this tide did exist in mid-1938, it seems to have ebbed very quickly, or else to have been insufficiently significant to attract much attention from the compilers of the official provincial

reports from July 1938 to September 1939. "Unity on Trial", pp. 310-11, and notes 102-4 on p. 314; GB FRs 1938-39 NAI.

Harcourt contends that by September 1939, as a result of vigorous kisan protest,

the stage seemed set for a major conflagration
in the countryside accompanied by an irretrievable
split within the Bihari Congress party,

but that this "wave of kisan unrest ended in anti-climax with the outbreak of the Second World War." This anti-climax occurred, Harcourt argues, because the coming of the war led to an improvement in food grain prices and because the way the British handled the question of the involvement of India in hostilities supplied Gandhi with a justification for calling for the resignation of the Congress ministries, though his decision to do so was "In actuality ... directed as much at Congress' internal strife ...". Harcourt is mistaken in his claim that by September 1939, a "major conflagration" and "an irretrievable split" in the Bihar Congress were likely. As has been shown, agitation over the bakast issue had reformist rather than radical implications. Bakast protest, moreover, developed on only a small scale. In Darbhanga, the district where the bakast movement attained its greatest strength, the police effectively curbed the campaign by arresting the local leaders and 180 of their supporters. The Bihar administration viewed the bakast campaign with anxiety, but found the instruments of political and social control at its disposal perfectly adequate to contain it. Moreover, the bakast movement had subsided by the beginning of September, partly because the season for the planting of the winter crops had finished but also because of the effectiveness of the administration's efforts to pacify the tenantry through the combination of concessions with coercion. A revival of activity could be anticipated with the

beginning of the harvest season in December, but a "major conflagration" was not likely. Nor was there any likelihood of an "irretrievable split" in the Congress occurring at this time. Such a split had already occurred in 1937, and had clearly shown itself to be in existence in December of that year during the elections of the delegates to the Haripura conference. A facade of unity had been maintained, but unrelenting pressure had been put on the minority of left-wingers to oblige them either to obey the official party line or else to leave the party altogether. In 1937 and 1938 the left-wingers attempted, fruitlessly, to increase their influence within the Congress. In 1939, they involved themselves in mass protest only as a last resort, other alternatives having been closed to them. "At no time in the 1930s", as McDonald has pointed out, did the Left ever question "the primacy of the Congress in the struggle against the Raj ...". Even in 1939, their efforts sought to whip up popular feeling to force a transformation of Congress policy, rather than to pose a radical alternative. An "Irretrievable split" had already occurred, but the Left refused to accept this. All that the coming of the Second World War did was to delay, temporarily, the formal expression of this split. All this, of course, is not to deny that the resignation of the Bihar Congress Ministry did help further to defuse the agrarian issue. But this result, it must be stressed, was a by-product, rather than a major motivating factor, of the decision in favour of resignation.

Harcourt, "Kisan Populism", p. 333; McDonald, "Unity on Trial", p. 306. For an account of developments, in the early years of the war, in the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha, and their relationship to nationalist politics, see Hauser, "Bihar Kisan Sabha", pp. 143-8.

- 182 GB FR(1) Nov. 1939, HPf 18/11/1939, NAI.
- 183 GB FR(2) Nov. 1939, HPf 18/11/1939, NAI.
- 184 GB FR(1) Dec. 1939, HPf 18/12/1939, NAI; Hauser, "Bihar Kisan Sabha", p. 136.
- 185 There were, in addition, "good harvests in the 1939-40 season, which enhanced the restorative effects of high produce prices." Harcourt, "Kisan Populism", p. 334.
- 186 GB FR(1) Dec. 1939, HPf 18/12/1939, NAI.
- 187 GB FR(1) Jan. 1940, HPf 18/1/1940, NAI.
- 188 In the ensuing months there were some minor disturbances, but by late May the administration was able to report that "Purely agrarian agitation has almost ceased." See GB Fortnightly Reports for February, March, and for the second half of May 1940, HP files 18/2/1940, 8/3/1940 and 18/5/1940, NAI.
- 189 *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 20 Dec. 1937, clipping held in f G98, 1937-38, AICCP, NML.
- 190 On 4 March 1938 Rajendra Prasad wrote a detailed memorandum to Sri Krishna Sinha, Chief Minister of the Bihar government, complaining that although the Congress Ministry had now been in office for eight months it had done little "to fulfill all that was promised in the election Manifesto." Bihar Ministry Affairs, f 3B 1938, PP, NML.
- 191 In Bihar the Forward Bloc was a small cluster of intellectuals without a mass base. In Bihar during the 1930s the Communist Party devoted almost all its efforts to attempting to organize railway workers and the industrial workers of the mining towns in south Bihar, and did not involve itself in agrarian agitation. The Congress Socialist Party had

only a limited number of adherents, but exerted influence because of its penetration of the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha.

- 192 Ramnandan Misra argues strongly that though the bakast campaign was effectively contained it yet had an important long-term psychological effect in that it encouraged the kisans to stand up to oppression. Misra contends that before the campaign the kisans were in a state of virtual serfdom, but that afterwards the zamindars and their men treated them with more restraint and respect. Interview Laheriasera town, 1 Nov. 1976. Mishra's opinion on this point was shared by his adversaries. On 25 April 1938 the manager of the Jhanjharpur circle of the Darbhanga Raj noted that the "Tenants are not so submissive as they used to be". In February of the following year the Birnager Circle Manager reported that

Owing to the change in the angle of vision brought about by political change in the country, administration has become difficult. The methods which worked so well a year ago are ineffective. One has to be cool and sympathetic in his treatment of his tenant,

and in 1940 a Raj official recorded the opinion that increased difficulties in rent collection were due to "the process of transformation of "Prajās" [i.e. subjects] to "Kisans". Jhanjharpur Manager to Chief Manager, 25 April 1938, f 10F, G 1937-38, RDA; Birnager AAR 1345 F (1937-38) submitted 20 Feb. 1939, f 10K2, C Birnager, G 1938-39, RDA; Marginal note on the Chief Manager's note on the Rohika AAR 1348 F (1940-41) f 16D2, C Rohika, G 1941-42, RDA. See also Roy, "North Bihar Village", pp. 306-7.

- 193 GB FR(2) Nov. 1939, HPf 18/11/1939, NAI.

Chapter 5

1942 : THE QUIT INDIA REVOLT

Introduction; October 1939 to August 1942: the background to revolt; August 1942 and after: the Quit India Revolt; Conclusion: the collapse of formal control and the continuation of the social order.

Introduction

In August 1942, the All-India Congress Committee called on the British to "quit India", and in an attempt to force them to leave, initiated mass civil disobedience. In response the British administration implemented a carefully worked out programme designed to cope with the challenge of large-scale civil disobedience in time of war. The British arrested leading Congressmen, declared the Congress organization illegal and shut down Congress offices and printing presses.¹ Throughout most of India these measures succeeded and after three or four days of angry street demonstrations the situation quietened. But in Bombay city, in Gujarat, in the Deccan, in Midnapore district of Bengal and in the eastern United Provinces and in Bihar protest against the British intensified.³ In north Bihar police and administrative control over the countryside broke down, and was only re-established by the deployment of large bodies of troops. Before it was put down the "Quit India Revolt" caused extensive damage to government property and completely disrupted communications. In the opinion of the Viceroy the Quit India Revolt amounted to the most serious challenge to British control over India since the Revolt of 1857.⁴

The collapse of the law and order apparatus in August 1942 marked the culmination of that steady erosion of police and administrative control over north Bihar which had begun in the first decades of the 20th century. The collapse, moreover, indicated the success which the Bihar Congress had achieved in harnessing turbulence and directing protest. The following chapter describes the immediate background of the Quit India Revolt, discusses the course of the revolt, and examines the extent to which the collapse of formal control created a potential for anti-landlord protest.

October 1939 to August 1942: The background to revolt

The coming of the Second World War brought an abrupt end to the price depression of the 1930s.⁵ By the end of March 1941 the average price of coarse rice in Bihar had increased by 32.5 per cent over the average price in 1939 and by 13.2 per cent over the average price in 1940.⁶ As table 16 illustrates, primary produce prices rose higher and higher throughout the wartime period. With rising prices and the dislocation of the world economy by the war many commodities became scarce. For the zamindar and the big tenant, and particularly for those engaged in grain dealing and black marketeering, wartime conditions provided many opportunities to profit.

TABLE 16

Official wholesale price for rice and gram 1941-45
(At three-monthly intervals. Prices given in rupees per maund)

YEAR AND MONTH	RICE	GRAM
1941 January	4-12-0	3- 4-0
April	4-15-0	3- 4-0
July	5-10-0	2-14-0
October	5-12-0	3-12-0
1942 January	5-12-0	3-10-0
April	5- 9-0	3-12-0
July	6- 7-0	4-14-0
October	6-12-0	6- 8-0
1943 January	7- 4-0	5- 0-0
April	9-10-0	5- 0-0
July	25- 0-0	13- 0-0
October	18- 4-0	11- 8-0
1944 January	12- 8-0	11- 8-0
April	17- 0-0	11- 8-0
July	15- 0-0	9- 8-0
October	12- 8-0	9- 0-0
1945 January	13- 0-0	7- 0-0
April	13- 4-0	7- 0-0
July	14- 8-0	7- 0-0
October	18- 0-0	9- 0-0

Source: *Darbhanga District Census Handbook* (1951 Census), pp. 169-72.

The smaller tenant was vexed by the shortages of cotton, kerosene and other important consumer items, but found it easier to pay his rent and to profit from the sale of cash crops and rice. (The smaller producer was especially advantaged because the prices for rice and cash crops rose higher than did those for the 'inferior' grains, such as gram, on which he generally relied for the subsistence of himself and his family. Thus he could manage successfully even when his harvests were below average). However the dramatic rise in primary produce prices, by eroding real wages, had a catastrophic effect on the position of dwarfholders and landless labourers.

Intense economic pressure on the poor resulted in a dramatic rise in the crime rate and helped inspire market looting.⁷ Crime figures, an official report commented in December 1940, had been rising steadily "since 1939, if not before", and now indicated "a disquieting position".⁸ In April 1941 the Bihar government recorded 92 dacoities, an increase of 100 per cent on the monthly average figure for the previous three years.⁹ In June of the following year dacoities reached a record level,¹⁰ and a "serious outbreak" of market looting occurred at Raxaul town, Champaran, during which a crowd of 500 looted three cloth shops.¹¹ In the following week looting incidents occurred at six other places in the district.¹² The disturbances, the administration later established, partly resulted from antagonism to local mill owners who, to avoid prosecution under the anti-hoarding regulations, had shifted large quantities of grain over the border to Nepal so as to hoard it there.¹³ To lessen discontent the government attempted to control price levels and to ensure the supply of essential commodities. But the measures taken did not succeed¹⁴ and served only to provide opportunities for corruption, thus further increasing popular dissatisfaction.

Politically, the 1939-1942 period was characterized by increasing tension. The Congress leadership displayed reluctance to initiate mass civil disobedience against the British administration, but also did not intend to cooperate with the British in the war unless the British gave Indians a significantly greater share of power. But the British, engrossed in the war and unwilling to surrender control over India's resources, were not prepared to make any substantial concessions.¹⁵ To meet the challenge of this situation Gandhi launched, in October 1940, an "Individual Satyagraha" campaign. The Individual Satyagraha campaign of October 1940 to December 1941 set out to embarrass the British without seriously hindering the war effort, and concurrently to placate that section of the Congress which demanded that some initiative be taken.¹⁶ During the campaign individual satyagrahis came forward and publicly breached the government's wartime regulations restricting the right of free speech.¹⁷ The Individual Satyagraha campaign, in the words of M.V. Harcourt, "was not one of Gandhi's success stories".¹⁸ In Bihar, many of the Congressmen designated as satyagrahis did not wish to relinquish the influential positions they had gained on municipal and district boards, particularly when factional rivals were always ready to move into their places, and were extremely slow to answer the call to court arrest.¹⁹ Nor, because of the individual, ritual quality of the law breaking involved, did the campaign attract extensive popular interest and support, though because of this it did at least succeed, unlike previous mass based campaigns, in adhering strictly to the principle of non-violence.²⁰ But Individual Satyagraha, whatever its limitations, did serve to keep alive interest in the nationalist movement and to prepare the ground for the eventual initiation of mass civil disobedience.²¹

The initiation of a mass civil disobedience campaign became increasingly likely with the worsening of the war situation and the repeated failure of the Government of India and the Congress to reach a compromise

agreement. In December 1941 Japan entered the war, and within three months devastated Britain's position in East and South-East Asia.²² By March 1942, with the Japanese army thrusting through Burma and with Japanese ships and aeroplanes active in and over the Bay of Bengal the invasion of India seemed imminent.²³ At this juncture the British attempted to buy extensive Indian support by making some limited concessions. The suggested concessions were marketed in India by Stafford Cripps, a long-time friend of the Indian nationalist movement.²⁴ The terms offered, however, did not differ greatly from those of the limited "August Offer" of 1940, and the nationalist leadership rejected them. The failure of the negotiations with Cripps underlined the complete unwillingness of the British to make any substantial concessions until the end of the war and indicated that more than Individual Satyagraha was needed to force them to reconsider their position. Britain's worsening military position in Asia, moreover, encouraged the conclusion among Congressmen that now would be a tactically appropriate time to launch mass civil disobedience, and supported the suggestion, advanced by Gandhi, that the best way of averting a Japanese invasion of India would be to force Japan's enemy, Britain, to relinquish control over the subcontinent.²⁵ In Bihar, anxiety intensified because of the province's proximity to the war zone.²⁶ With the Japanese invasion of Burma, overseas Indians who originally hailed from Bihar returned to their native villages, impoverished and full of complaints about British mismanagement.²⁷ Trainloads of allied wounded from the Burma campaign travelled across north Bihar, arousing disquiet among the local population.²⁸ Labourers, sick and war weary after their exertions on the Assam border, returned to their homes in Bihar.²⁹ And from Calcutta, which seemed a likely target for serious Japanese attack, large numbers of casual workers returned to their Bihar homes, placing additional economic pressure on their families, swelling the petty crime rate and helping to encourage rumours of an impending

British collapse.³⁰

During the early months of 1942 the people of Bihar placed little faith in the future of British rule. People with liquid assets began buying buildings and land as a precaution against the collapse of the currency, and in the first three weeks of February, savings banks withdrawals "were nearly double those in the corresponding periods in the preceding years".³¹ Early in July the provincial government reported that

the defeatism prevailing in political and particularly in Congress circles in its turn produces its repercussions on the uneducated classes. The impending collapse of Government is freely talked about even by villagers.³²

Nor was the provincial government itself immune from the general decline in confidence. "The usual depression!" was the comment of the Home Secretary to the Government of India on the provincial report for the second half of May.³³ But pessimism on the part of the Bihar government was understandable, and certainly the view from Patna was even less rosy than that from Delhi. In January 1941, when there had been no threat of Japanese invasion and little immediate likelihood of mass civil disobedience, considerable doubt already existed about the ability of the police and the administration to fulfill their responsibilities.³⁴ Indian officers in both the lower ranks of the civil service and in the police force, the Director of the Government of India Intelligence Branch reported, were unwilling to engage themselves fully and vigorously in their work, because they felt that eventually a Congress government would return to power, and thus did not wish, for fear of future repercussions, to identify themselves overmuch as loyal servants of British rule. In the police force this lack of morale prevailed among both sub-inspectors and their superiors, but had not yet extended to the rank and file.³⁵ The police, in addition to the problem of officer morale, were also greatly

hampered in their work by their sparse numbers. In the 1930s, increases in the numbers of the police had kept pace neither with the rise in the size of the population, nor with the increase in the number of serious crimes. In 1930 the ratio of police to population had been 1 : 2364, and there were 44,449 cognizable crimes reported. In 1939 the ratio had declined to 1 : 2625, but the number of cognizable crimes had risen to 53,903.³⁶ Even though (the Director of the Intelligence Branch reported in 1941),

... a large proportion of the Province is very thickly populated and often contains as many as one thousand persons to the square mile, the ordinary rural police station has as a rule no more than about 1 Sub Inspector and 6 constables, and it is not unusual to find that the Sub Inspector has to contend with crime which may run to as many as 200 cases registered in the course of a year. My own experience of crime conditions is limited to the United Provinces, and there, although the average rural population is not often in excess of about 600 persons to the square mile, it is the exception rather than the rule to find a police station with fewer than 2 Sub Inspectors and 8 constables.³⁷

The Bihar police, moreover, found their work difficult because the people of the province viewed them with disdain. This disdain prevailed among the Magistracy, with the result that "when the police take a case to court they are up against the prisoner and his witnesses, the bar, and in very many cases the magistrate too."³⁸ The inadequacy of the number of police was a key reason, in the opinion of the Director of the Intelligence Branch, for the continuing rise in the crime rate, and particularly for the rising number of dacoities.³⁹ To assist the police in coping with the dacoity problem the provincial government formed, in 1940, a Village Defence Organization, a voluntary group made up of villagers willing to organize and train themselves, on a part-time basis, to defend their property against dacoity. The Village Defence Organization generally only attracted support from the "haves" rather than the "have nots" of village society.⁴⁰ And unfortunately for administrative prestige the speakers who went on tour calling on people to join the Village

Defence Organization were "to some extent, responsible for creating the impression that the Police are not strong enough to tackle the dacoits".⁴¹ Nor was it just the police force which was too small to meet its responsibilities. The districts of Bihar were large, roughly twice the size of those in Bengal and the United Provinces, which meant that Bihar had a lower ratio of district and subdivisional officers to the population.⁴² The demands of war service, furthermore, siphoned off district officials into overseas service in the army, seriously affecting the quality of British administrative personnel. In some districts the local officials were either well past their prime or else were young and inexperienced.⁴³ By the early 1940s the police and administrative system in Bihar experienced serious strain in meeting its routine responsibilities. It had nothing in reserve with which to meet a major crisis.

August 1942 and after: The Quit India Revolt

Within 24 hours of the acceptance, on 8 August, of the "Quit India" resolution by the All-India Congress Committee, meeting in session at Bombay, the authorities arrested almost all of the leading Congressmen, both in the All-India Congress Committee and at the provincial and district level, declared Congress an illegal organization, and took steps to paralyse its operation.⁴⁴

In Bihar, this government repression was greeted with consternation. At first the reaction centred in the towns, with students and members of the middle classes participating in rowdy street demonstrations and flag-waving processions. At Patna, on 11 August, police fired on a crowd trying to force its way into the grounds surrounding the Secretariat building, killing seven people, all of them students, and wounding several others.⁴⁵ In

reaction to official violence protest intensified. On 12, 13 and 14 August there were recurrent demonstrations in the towns, and disturbances began throughout the countryside.⁴⁶ The mechanics of the spread of the movement to the rural areas are not entirely clear, but it seems that the spread of news by word of mouth and the movement of students from the towns to their native villages both played a part.⁴⁷ As the movement spread to the countryside it became more and more violent, and there was extensive sabotage of government property. In Darbhanga

... the villagers ... cut all the roads and railways. The roads were cut where they were carried over embankments several feet high, trees felled across them, masonry bridges demolished, pontoons of the pontoon bridge on the main road sunk; railway lines torn up, 40-foot spans of the bridges removed and dropped into the rivers, the delicate and at that time irreplaceable electrical signalling apparatus at all stations destroyed; telephone and telegraph wires everywhere cut, rolled up and carried off home.⁴⁸

Crowds of villagers invaded post offices, destroying furniture and papers,⁴⁹ and made attacks on police stations. In some places they were repulsed but elsewhere they succeeded in overwhelming the local police.⁵⁰ Some police stations were demolished or burnt down, while in others furniture and documents were destroyed.⁵¹ Some policemen surrendered, and handed over their weapons and the control of their posts to the rebels, but others fought to the last. At Rupauli in Purnea, three policemen were burnt alive while defending their thana.⁵² In Darbhanga, between 14 and 20 August, 20 of the district's 25 police stations came under attack. At seven of the police stations the defenders opened fire and repulsed the attackers, but at the other 13 the occupying police either gave in or were overwhelmed and the rebels did extensive damage to the buildings and their contents.⁵³ In north Monghyr, by 24 August, all rural police posts had either been overrun or abandoned, and the district administration had concentrated their garrisons at Beguserai town.⁵⁴ Throughout north Bihar chaukidars stopped functioning, either because they had been intimidated or else because they sympathized with the movement. With the disruption of communications and the collapse of the police system the British lost control of most of the countryside. They retained control of the region's towns, in which they concentrated their forces, but elsewhere, according to one official account, "Perfect chaos and anarchy were reported to be reigning..."⁵⁵

The creation of "Perfect chaos and anarchy" was the achievement of a movement which was itself only very loosely organized.⁵⁶ The arrest of most of the senior Congress leadership and of the leading local nationalist activists resulted in a situation broadly similar to that which prevailed at the high points of official repression during the civil disobedience campaign of 1930-34. At the local level, lower rank and less important activists and other nationalist sympathizers attempted to fill the leadership vacuum. One

local activist who assumed a leading role in 1942 was officially described as follows:

Until some three years or so ago ... Jubba Mallah, who is a man in his middle thirties, appears to have earned an honest living, as his forefathers had done before him, by exercising his craft as a fisherman. Some three years ago, however, he became a congress volunteer, and since then has done little or no work and has moved about in the locality ... preaching the creed of the congress party.⁵⁷

During the uprising Jubba Mallah led the attack, bearing a Congress flag, on the Minapur thana in Muzaffarpur.⁵⁸ In the village of Garkha in the neighbouring district of Saran leadership was assumed by the devout Gandhian Jaglal Choudhury, assisted by two local men, Kumar Pashupati Singh and B. Firangi Singh. On 15, 16, 18 and 19 August they organized and spoke at meetings in the Garkha bazaar, building up feeling against the police and the British. They also visited the Garkha thana, and urged the sub-inspector in charge to hand over control of the thana to them. On 19 August they arrived at the thana supported by a crowd of about 1,000 people armed, according to a police report, with lathis, spears, swords and other weapons, and the sub-inspector, deciding that resistance was useless, surrendered. The crowd burnt the furniture, papers and other contents of the thana and demolished the thana building.⁵⁹ The police who had manned the thana were not, however, molested. The leaders of the attack adhered to the Gandhian notion of non-violence,⁶⁰ and ensured that the police were protected from harm that night before making arrangements for their journey to Chapra, the district headquarters town, the following morning.⁶¹ The initiatives of lower level leaders succeeded in getting local protests under way, but no effective co-ordination developed between different localities. Because of the arrests the movement lacked experienced cadres, and the extensive sabotage of communications hampered the organization of the insurgents as much as it did

that of their opponents.

The absence of effective overall coordination meant that those involved in the movement had no very clear idea of what tactics to adopt. At first, in imitation of what had been done in previous nationalist civil disobedience campaigns, protesters engaged in street demonstrations and particularly in slogan shouting processions behind the Congress banner.⁶² At this early stage some sabotage of government property occurred, but extensive sabotage did not begin until the police had violently repressed protests by means of lathi charges, gunfire, and mass arrests. In the initiation of extensive sabotage (and also of attacks on police stations throughout the countryside), some part was played, M.V. Harcourt has pointed out,⁶³ by those Congress left-wingers who, in the 1930s, had been critical of the deification of the tactic of non-violence by the members of the mainstream of the Congress. As early as 1938 and 1939 Congress Socialists had publicly emphasized the need, in any future mass-based campaign, to sabotage road and rail communications.⁶⁴ The Left was influential among students, who at first spearheaded the campaign, and during its course left-wingers distributed pamphlets calling on the people to sabotage communications and attack government property. But the importance of left-wing influence should not be over-emphasized. The Left was strongest in Darbhanga, and had some influence in Muzaffarpur, but was of little significance throughout the rest of north Bihar.⁶⁵ Both mainstream and left-wing Congressmen produced pamphlets calling for sabotage, and in both cases the pamphlets only seem to have appeared when sabotage was already under way.⁶⁶ Because the communications system was already in considerable disarray, these pamphlets did not have a wide circulation. The leading Left activist of the 1930s, Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, supported Britain and the USSR in what he regarded as the "peoples' war" against international Fascism, and hence he and his supporters took no part in

the revolt.⁶⁷ And Jay Prakash Narayan, Rammandan Mishra and most of the other leading pro-revolt left-wingers were in jail during the high point of the movement, at which time only those less influential left-wingers whom the British had regarded as too unimportant to be taken into custody in the first wave of pre-emptive arrests were still at large to engage in protest and propaganda.⁶⁸

Ironically the authorities themselves were in part responsible for the tactics adopted by Congress supporters. The government, to justify its draconian response to the passing of the Quit India resolution, alleged that Congress had planned a wholesale programme of sabotage and disruption. In the first few days after the arrest of the All-India Congress Committee leaders the government widely publicized this allegation. Arun Chandra Bhuyan argues convincingly that this publicity encouraged Congress supporters to believe that disruption and sabotage were central to the wishes of the Congress High Command.⁶⁹

But overall, perhaps, neither the role of the Left nor of the authorities decisively determined the measures adopted by the supporters of the Quit India movement. Sabotage was no new weapon in the armoury of the Congress, and had been used extensively against toddy tappers and liquor merchants during the 1930-34 campaign. There had also been, in the 1920s and 1930s, one or two incidents in which Congress supporters sabotaged communications.⁷⁰ Nor was strong antagonism to the police a new phenomenon. In north Bihar during previous mass civil disobedience campaigns there had been attacks both on policemen and on police thanas. On three occasions during the non-cooperation movement groups of demonstrators overran and occupied thanas⁷¹ and several times during the civil disobedience movement crowds of demonstrators attempted to raise the Congress flag over thanas but were repulsed

with gun fire.⁷² The key difference in 1942 was not that such events occurred, but that they occurred with a greater intensity and were concentrated within a shorter period of time than previously. The absence of the restraining influence⁷³ of the senior Congress leaders because of their imprisonment allied with the angry reaction to their summary arrest did much to cause this frequency and intensity of protest. The depth and extent of hostility to the authorities, and particularly to the police, meant that government property and personnel provided a natural target. And when, throughout the countryside, the administration buckled under the strain, many people who were not regular Congress supporters became further encouraged to participate in sabotage, assault and disruption.

The Quit India Revolt reached its height during the 10 days after 14 August. At this time the insurgents dominated the countryside and the authorities had to bring in large bodies of troops to recapture control.⁷⁴ During this period the revolt drew support from a broad section of the social spectrum. M.V. Harcourt, on the basis of information about the backgrounds of those taken prisoner during the movement, has concluded that, among those actively involved, young, high caste men predominated, but that many representatives from lower status groups were also included.⁷⁵ This finding is supported both by contemporary accounts⁷⁶ and by the evidence supplied by the official lists, compiled in 1953, of the "Martyrs" who died as a result of police and military violence.⁷⁷ Information on prisoners and casualties, of course, does not give completely reliable impression about those involved in the movement. No doubt a number of prisoners were wrongfully or maliciously arrested. When the police and the military opened fire, their shooting was not always accurate, and at times it was indiscriminate. But despite these problems, the evidence on prisoners and casualties, supported as it is by

contemporary accounts, does seem to give an accurate picture of those in the forefront of protests and demonstrations. But it does not give a fully accurate portrayal of those who, without necessarily being in the front line of agitation, did become actively involved. The evidence suggests that in north Bihar in August 1942 there developed not one but two distinct insurgencies, one a "nationalist protest" by Congress supporting, high caste peasants, and the other a "rebellion of desperation" by the poor low caste people of the region.

The "nationalist protest" began with the circulation of the news of the arrest of the Congress leaders and the initiation of wholesale repression of the Congress party, and intensified after the harsh official reaction to the first series of protests.⁷⁸ The essential motivation of this "nationalist protest" was political, but it also had an economic dimension. A significant section of those who actively supported Congress were small zamindars primarily dependent on their cash rental incomes.⁷⁹ At first, the price rises contingent upon the war had improved their position, because with higher prices for agrarian produce their tenants found it easier to pay up their rent. Subsequently, however, those zamindars who had no other source of income such as direct cultivation, money lending or grain dealing to supplement their rental income found themselves seriously pressured by rising prices and by acute shortages.

The "rebellion of desperation" got under way when the success of nationalist protest in temporarily paralysing the mechanism of formal control and the excitement generated by this protest stimulated the poor to join in demonstrations and attacks on government buildings and property. Often their main object was loot: they were, indeed, very much the same group of people who had engaged in market looting in the earlier months of the year and who

had swelled the figures for petty crime throughout the previous months. The Madhubani subdivisional officer reported that

Most of the Hindus who took part in the movement were from the higher castes ... There were agitators from other castes also. Generally people from lower castes or those belonging to the agricultural labourer class did not take part in the movement at first. They joined the movement in its later stage when they hoped that they would be able to make something out of it by looting ...⁸⁰

In north Monghyr, according to the subdivisional officer, the

Congress had their organisation in every village more or less: the young men ... specially the Bhumihars, had an inherent tendency to work as volunteers under Congress flag. These village organisations were in the best form at the time of Congress government. After the fall of Congress government there was marked decline but in many villages they maintained it; the village teachers played an important part in maintaining the organisation ... the school students started the [Quit India] movement; they were joined by all sections of Congress workers. The sober section of Congress tried to keep the movement under control, but when they allowed the village mass to join, it became an economic question: the vast properties, specially foodgrains at the railway station attracted them ... Of the villagers the Bhumihars and the poor labourers took prominent part in the loot. The merchants class in outlying stations were at the mercy of the Congress ... But somehow, they managed to get the leaders on their sides and thereby saved their property from loot: at some places, they got hold of the leaders by making payment to the Congress cause: at some places they joined the movement to some extent ... [By 14 August] the situation was completely out of the hands of the students: the looters got complete upperhand: in order to keep the hold the younger section of the Congress began to support the action of the looters and even joined: the sober section did not approve it but they had no hold at the time. [sic]

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And in Purnea, according to an official report, Congress workers used the protest of loot as a means by which to encourage people to participate in anti-government activities.⁸² It seems probable that those who joined in the revolt mainly because of economic necessity began taking part last and withdrew first when repression began. Because of this they are under-

represented in the casualty and imprisonment figures. The breakdown of the formal control apparatus, it should also be noted, supplied great opportunities for 'professional criminals'. The crime figures during the period ran at a high rate,⁸³ and it is impossible to discover what proportion of 'crimes' were committed by 'professional criminals', and what proportion were the work of impoverished villagers driven by economic necessity. Indeed, these categories overlap extensively, since every year in impoverished, inegalitarian north Bihar dire poverty forced many to make crime their profession.

Many of those active in the Quit India Revolt were driven by economic hardship, and for a period they operated in a context in which the formal control apparatus had temporarily dissolved. This might seem to have been an appropriate situation for the development of anti-landlord protest, particularly given the historical background, during the 1930s, of bitter criticism of the zamindari system and of numerous clashes between landholders and their occupany tenants and sharecroppers. Despite these apparently favourable circumstances, no anti-landlord protest movement developed during and immediately after August 1942. Quit India activists made no attacks on property other than on that belonging to the government.⁸⁴ Impoverished villagers and 'professional criminals' made some attacks on zamindari property, but these attacks were not given explicit ideological justification as part of an anti-landlord movement.

The non-development of an anti-landlord movement at the time of the Quit India revolt resulted partly from the dominant role in initiating and directing protest played by high caste members of the landed interest who had a vested interest in ensuring that an anti-landlord campaign did not get under way. It also resulted from the attitude taken by left-wing activists. Left-wingers were divided over the question of whether or not to support the

insurrection. Swami Sahajanand, the left-wing leader who had commanded the most extensive support in the 1930s, opposed the revolt on the grounds that India should support Britain and the Soviet Union in their "People's War" against the threat of Fascism. Jay Prakash Narayan and other left-wingers who supported the revolt emphasized the primacy of the nationalist struggle over the struggle for agrarian reform.⁸⁵ The authorities, moreover, clapped many of the pro-Congress left-wingers into jail in their initial pre-emptive wave of arrests. If they had been left at large some of these left-wingers may have decided in the heat of battle that the opportunity to engage in anti-landlord protest was too good to miss.⁸⁶ Anti-landlord protest also remained latent because, to the chagrin of the British who had always looked to them for support, most zamindars either remained strictly neutral or else supported the Congress.⁸⁷ The Maharaja of Darbhanga, for example, refused to supply the authorities with the assistance of the armed guards whom he employed to guard his treasury and property. He justified his refusal by claiming that the guards could not be relied upon to fire at demonstrators who might perhaps include their kinsmen, caste fellows or fellow villagers, but it was generally acknowledged that his real reason for refusal was that he had no wish to direct popular discontent against himself and his property.⁸⁸ In the event those involved in the Quit India Revolt took no action against the Darbhanga Raj. The manager of the Parihar circle, which lay in the Sitamarhi Sub-division of Muzaffarpur, subsequently reported that

In the month of August last there was an unprecedented congress movement in this sub division. The Sub Divisional officer and several Sub Inspectors of Police were murdered ... There was no agitation whatsoever against the Raj and in spite of the above movement Raj works were never suspended.⁸⁹

Similarly, the manager of the Nishankpur circle in north Bhagalpur reported that

... the political disturbances started in the month of August. It first took shape in the form of strikes in the Higher English school at Madhipura, the cutting of telegraph wires, the dislocation of railway communications and the forcible closing of both the Civil and Criminal courts at Madhepura and Supaul. Though the disturbances were widespread ... there was no harm done to the Raj anywhere.⁹⁰

From Padri circle, a storm centre of kisan protest in the 1930s, the manager reported that

... an unparalleled congress rebellion of terrible magnitude reared its head and within a week crippled and paralysed the Govt. ... Hasanpore road railway station was burnt down and looted, fish plates [were] removed, wires [were] cut and roads breached [and] culverts smashed ...⁹¹

The manager does not mention, however, any occasion on which this popular fervor was directed against the Darbhanga Raj. Indeed, it would seem that the activities of the insurgents received sympathy from the Darbhanga Raj management. The Padri manager's report continues with the comment that after order had been restored the Padri

tenants were saved ... from military and police atrocities by very prompt action taken by the Chief Manager and his constant attention towards this bringing pressure on [the] S[uperintendent of] P[olice], [the] District Magistrate and [the] Samastipur S[ub] D[ivisional] O[fficer] ... Protection from military tortures brought [the] tenants under very heavy obligation to the Raj. As a consequence [the] Padri tenants willingly contributed rupees 6,000 towards [the] Christmas fund. Not a single Padri tenant was allowed to be arrested although a huge number was made accused ... whose names still appear in the absconders printed list.⁹²

And in the Bhawanipur circle in Purnea, wherein the insurgents stormed a thana and burnt alive three of its defenders, there were again no attacks on the Darbhanga Raj.⁹³

The dominance of mainstream Congressmen, the attitude taken by the zamindars and the lack of effective left-wing leadership contributed to the

absence of an anti-landlord campaign. But the more fundamental reason for this absence was that the big and middle tenants who had formed the backbone of the kisan movement in the 1930s were, in the early 1940s, benefiting from the high prices prevailing for agricultural produce. In the 1940s they found it easy to meet their rent obligations, and through their involvement in money lending and grain dealing found themselves in a position of strength vis-a-vis the strata below them of dwarfholders, sharecroppers and labourers. Their grain dealing and money lending activities, moreover, meant that they profited handsomely from the acute wartime currency and credit shortage.⁹⁴ In the 1930s such people had suffered from the price depression, but in the following decade they moved from strength to strength. Hence their involvement in the Quit India revolt can not be explained in economic terms. It seems, rather, that when they did become involved they did so out of loyalty to the Congress, out of sympathy with nationalism, out of antagonism to the police, and out of the feeling that the collapse of British rule was at hand.

The Quit India movement in north Bihar drew in a broad cross-section of the population and temporarily succeeded in demolishing police and administrative control. But despite this striking initial success the authorities, by deploying large bodies of troops, soon re-established control.⁹⁵ Initially the authorities used troops to secure the headquarters towns and the lines of communication, and then they sent them out to pacify the villages and to support the police in the imposition of collective fines. Within a few days of the arrival of troops in an area, the mass participation phase of the movement ceased,⁹⁶ to be replaced by a long drawn out phase of sporadic guerilla warfare. Why were the authorities able to re-establish control so quickly? One reason was that at the time of the insurrection the British had a massive military force, concentrated in order to face the Japanese, at their disposal.⁹⁷

Given war censorship, they could repress revolt ruthlessly without worrying about domestic or international opinion.⁹⁸ By this crucial stage of the war, moreover, the British had developed a siege mentality, and had determined to cope relentlessly with internal dissidence.⁹⁹ M.V. Harcourt has argued that armament was the key difference between the insurgents and the authorities. The rebels, armed with spears, lathis, and axes first challenged policemen armed with muskets and then encountered soldiers armed with magazine rifles and machine guns and supported by air power.¹⁰⁰ This was certainly true, but it does not tell the whole story. Organization, or more exactly the lack of it, also contributed to the failure of the revolt. The usual procedure before an attack on a police station was for some meetings to be held nearby, at which speakers whipped up feeling against the police and the authorities. Next would come an all out frontal assault on the police station, almost always by broad light of day. This meant that the police got advance warning of the impending attack, and thus the rebels lost the advantage of surprise.¹⁰¹ Nor need the imbalance on weaponry between the two sides have been as great. The rebels captured guns in many of the early successful attacks on police stations,¹⁰² and fire arms were also held by private citizens who had been granted the privilege of bearing arms. There was, furthermore, an extensive arms "underground" which supplied arms to professional criminals.¹⁰³ It seems that the arms confiscated from policemen and officials were generally taken away by individuals and hidden. In the early stages of the revolt, the insurgents made little effort to gather arms from various sources and train people in their use.¹⁰⁴ The rebels could not hope to match the armament of the military, but they perhaps could have managed to arm themselves more effectively to carry on guerilla war. Moreover, if the rebels had been able to organize themselves sufficiently to direct effective attacks against district headquarters towns, the short-term success of the movement could have

been even greater than it was.

Until the arrival of the military, the towns were held only by small groups of officials and policemen. Many of the police, in the early days of the revolt, were wavering, and a number of police officers relinquished their posts. In the Madhubani subdivision of Darbhanga, for example, a Sub-Inspector gave up his thana and his pistol to the insurgents, and decamped to Nepal.¹⁰⁵ From Champaran, the Police Superintendent reported his dissatisfaction with the conduct of the Mounted Military Police, an elite unit within the Bihar Police force. When, on 24 August, he ordered them to disperse a crowd

there was a marked reluctance on their part to take any action and even after my order to clear the crowd with sword sticks this was not done and they merely waved their sticks over the heads of the crowd ... I also ordered them to dismount and to protect our flank during the mass attack on our force but without any orders they retired without firing a single shot. ... the whole troop should be disbanded and replaced ...¹⁰⁶

In Saran, lathi-bearing constables were moved by the use by demonstrators of the slogan, "Police Hamara Bhai Hai" (the police are our brothers) and showed great reluctance to break up a march led by several leading women nationalists.¹⁰⁷ And in Muzaffarpur, on 27 August, a group of police panicked when about 1,000 Congress supporters gathered at a village about a mile from the Belsand police station. The police station was manned by 33 policemen, namely one inspector, two sub-inspectors, three assistant sub-inspectors, 16 ordinary constables and 11 Armed Police Reserve constables. This garrison was armed with 11 muskets, eight shot guns, and some revolvers. According to the account of the Muzaffarpur District Magistrate,

The formidable police force ... could not stand the collection of the mob in that village, left the police station, and retreated to Parsauni, which is about six miles from Belsand. That such a force should leave the

police station without orders under such circumstances shows that their morale is very low indeed.¹⁰⁸

Even those policemen whose morale remained high were not always effective when faced with a determined attack. Some of the older constables called upon to use guns during the revolt had little knowledge of fire-arms and were terrified of them.¹⁰⁹ Nor, moreover, did all the subordinate Indian officials, when faced with a crisis, prove to be loyal and reliable servants of the British.¹¹⁰ Most official buildings, furthermore, had been built to suit the climate. They had wide verandahs and many windows and doors and could not be easily defended.¹¹¹ If, in the first days of the revolt, the rebels had made determined attacks on the towns, using sheer weight of numbers and all the available fire-arms, the short-term success of the movement could have been considerably greater. (Such a massed attack was actually attempted at Katihar in Purnea district on 26 August. Congress workers assembled a large crowd, brought in Santal bow men to add fire-power and placed women and children to the front to discourage the police from opening fire. Unfortunately for the members of the crowd a military detachment had arrived at Katihar a couple of days earlier and was on hand to disperse them with the aid of a bren gun).¹¹²

If the rebels had been able to take over the towns, even if only until the arrival of the military, the whole complexion of the revolt could have been changed. In the suppression of the revolt the police and officials acted as the 'eyes and ears' of the military, and also acted to lessen the ruthlessness of military repression.¹¹³ If the local police and officials had either been killed or driven out of the towns, then the military repression would have been more brutal and indiscriminate. The reaction to such repression might have been an intensification and lengthening of mass resistance and may well have greatly helped those who carried on guerilla activities in the

months after the initial rising was quelled.

The rebels, in addition to being ineffectively organized, also displayed great tactical naivety. There were few attacks under cover of night and little attempt at concealment. (One exception to this occurred at Marhowrah village in Muzaffarpur district, where a crowd of villagers emerged from the cover of a tall standing maize crop and overwhelmed and killed five British soldiers and an Anglo-Indian civilian).¹¹⁴ It was only later, after the high point of the movement had passed, that greater tactical sophistication developed. The influence of Gandhian ideology also played a part in the collapse of the mass movement. Rebel activists who were devoted Gandhians eschewed efforts to damage their opponents. They thought that dedicated activists should be ready to sacrifice themselves in encounters with their opponents, and therefore encouraged suicidal frontal confrontation. Such an approach, whatever its moral value, was militarily disastrous.

After the first, dramatic phase of the Quit India Revolt was brought to a speedy end by the arrival of troops, the expression of unrest rapidly declined. By early September officials were able to report that the situation was returning to normal.¹¹⁵ In the following months small groups of rebels engaged in intermittent guerilla warfare, but the mass of the population, intimidated by extensive arrests, police and military reprisals, military route marches and large collective fines, no longer participated.¹¹⁶ Small groups of rebels often allied themselves with professional dacoits, and not infrequently politically inspired banditry became difficult to distinguish from its non-political counterpart. The most successful band of rebel dacoits was led by Siaram Singh. Siaram Singh's band was active for several weeks in the south Monghyr and south Bhagalpur area, where it received considerable support from Sing's Bhumihar caste fellows.¹¹⁷ In April 1943 police pressure forced the band to move north of the Ganges, where it operated

successfully in the jungly country of the Kosi basin.¹¹⁸ Siaram Singh's band, until apprehended by the police in late 1944, engaged in a series of fund raising robberies, waged a campaign of terror against chaukidars and other collaborators with government, and made a well planned, though abortive, attack on a police outpost situated on the Gangetic diara lands in the Sonbarsa police circle of the Bhagalpur district.¹¹⁹ (The reason for the failure of the attack is instructive, since it reveals that support for the rebel bands was limited: the attack failed because the police were given prior warning of what had been planned as a surprise, pre-dawn attack by a member of a low caste group which suffered oppression from the locally dominant Bhumihars).¹²⁰ Other bands of rebels operating in north Bihar frequently took refuge over the border in Nepal. At first the Nepal authorities took no action against them, apparently because they had sympathy for the insurgents and wished to wait and see how the conflict developed.¹²¹ In response to strong pressure from the British, the Nepal authorities eventually began rounding up the insurgents, but their measures against them were never as vigorous and effective as those employed south of the border. The guerilla movement received a great fillip on 9 November when Jay Prakash Narayan, Ramnandan Misra and four other Left activists managed to escape from Hazaribagh jail in south Bihar.¹²² After getting in touch with rebel activists throughout India, Jay Prakash Narayan made his way to Nepal, where he attempted to coordinate guerilla activity and to lay the foundations for a renewal of mass agitation. He kept in touch with underground workers by special courier, and set up a training camp to give workers instruction in military tactics and in the use of fire-arms and explosives.¹²³ The Nepal authorities, prodded by the British, eventually arrested Narayan and some of his supporters and confined them in the Hanumannaggar jail. But in May 1943 a force of 50 rebels raided the jail and rescued Narayan and six other activists.¹²

Narayan returned to India and continued his underground work until captured in September 1943.¹²⁵ Narayan's arrest marked, as M.V. Harcourt has pointed out, the end of the main period of underground activity.¹²⁶ By the end of 1943 the British had arrested most of the important underground workers and had broken up most of the rebel bands. Siaram Singh and his men evaded capture until late 1944, but this was an exception to the general trend. By late 1943 the British had also managed to bring down the crime rate, which had been running at high levels throughout 1942 and 1943.¹²¹ To achieve these results the British authorities had been obliged to keep detachments of troops in the region and to improve the efficiency of the police force. Within three weeks of the initiation of the revolt they raised the pay of the police, recruited a large number of additional police, procured arms from far and wide to ensure that every police station was equipped with at least six efficient fire-arms, gave the police more training in the use of these weapons, and employed barbed wire to improve the defensibility of police stations.¹²⁸ In north Bhagalpur, where rebel bands were especially active, the authorities set up the new sub-district of Saharsa, and in north Monghyr and north Bhagalpur they established five new armed police posts.¹²⁹ Guerilla attacks occurred sporadically until late 1944, but by late 1943 the British had the situation under control.

Conclusion: The collapse of formal control and the continuation of the social order.

In north Bihar in August 1942 the formal apparatus of control temporarily collapsed. This collapse marked the culmination of that steady erosion of police/administrative control which had begun in the first decades of the 20th century. It also indicated the great degree of success which the Bihar Congress had attained in harnessing the region's potential for popular turbulence. In the 1917-23 period extensive popular protest, some of it led by Congress, had revealed the fragility of police/administrative control. In the early 1930s the Congress led civil disobedience campaign employed the technique of limited violence to put great strain on the formal system of control and to develop popular hostility to the police and the British administration. From 1937 to 1939 agrarian protest created difficulties for the Bihar Congress, tested the formal apparatus of control and had long-term effects on the popularity of the police and the morale of policemen and officials. In the early 1940s the erosion of police/administrative control reached a climax, and the Bihar Congress initiated a revolt which temporarily demolished the state structure.

The Quit India Revolt in north Bihar revealed that the British could no longer rely on their apparatus of police and administrative control. During the crisis of the insurgency, the chaukidars stopped functioning, some regular policemen went over to the rebels, and many more temporarily wavered. Among Indian officials, many were lukewarm in their activities in support of the British administration. During the guerilla phase of the revolt, many policemen and chaukidars were lackadaisical in their performance of anti-rebel operations, and low morale was all pervasive.¹³⁰ In future, so the administration decided in November 1942, every effort would be made to recruit policemen from outside the province, since Biharis could no longer be relied

upon.¹³¹ More and more often during the wartime years, Bihari policemen and officials began to wonder about their future once Congress returned to power, which was regarded as an inevitable development once the war was over.¹³² Among the mass of the population, anti-British feeling continued to prevail.¹³³ A large cross-section of the population had been actively involved in the revolt, and many of the rest of the people had been sympathetic to it. In the months after the revolt pro-British speakers seeking support for the war effort had to trade on the future by making large promises about the coming of Swaraj immediately after the war.¹³⁴

Because of its success in attracting extensive support and because it temporarily demolished the apparatus of police and administrative control, the Quit India Revolt has attracted considerable scholarly interest. Writers of the nationalist school have promulgated what has been called "The Myth of the '42 Rebellion".¹³⁵ For propaganda purposes and to supply Indian nationalism with a myth of heroic armed struggle these writers have exaggerated the extent, intensity and success of the movement in north Bihar and elsewhere and have neither looked closely at the social groups involved in the insurrection nor analysed why they became involved.¹³⁶ More recent writers, such as Bhuyan and Hutchens,¹³⁷ have used their material more rigorously but have still arrived at the conclusion that the revolt was essentially a "nationalist protest", failing to perceive that it also incorporated a "rebellion of desperation".

M.V. Harcourt offers another perspective. Harcourt sees the "small-holder peasant" as playing a central role both in the peasant agitations of the late 1930s and in the revolt in 1942. He describes the "small-holder peasant" as occupying the middle range of the social hierarchy and as producing both for subsistence and for the market.¹³⁸ Harcourt's interpretation

cannot be accepted without reservations, either for the late 1930s¹³⁹ or for the period of the Quit India movement. In the early 1940s many "small-holder" peasants were doing well because of high cash crop prices. For example in the Padri area, according to the local Darbhanga Raj manager, the tenants had benefited from the cultivation of sugar cane.¹⁴⁰ Small-holder peasants also profited from high food grain prices. Apart from the excellent harvest of 1939/40 the wartime harvests were below average and contributed to the scarcity of grain. Harcourt contends that from mid-1942 onwards the threat of worsening scarcity created anxiety among the peasantry so that they launched themselves into protest when the initiation of the Quit India revolt provided them with an opportunity to express their discontent. His argument does not take account of the fact, however, that in a situation of increasing scarcity and rising prices many peasants who produced both for subsistence and the market could afford to sell a smaller amount than hitherto of their crop to earn cash to pay their rent, and thus could either have more disposable income from the sale of the rest of their surplus or else store a portion of their crop as insurance against an adverse future season.¹⁴¹ In June 1943, when the scarcity was even worse than in the previous year the provincial administration commented that

One of the reasons why disorder has not appeared in the rural areas may be that ordinarily the Indian cultivator, after paying his rent, takes care to keep in hand sufficient grain for the next year's seeds.¹⁴²

The following month the administration commented that

The cultivator and the petty landlord who are prospering as a result of the high prices of grain are expected to remain aloof if there is any revival of trouble. But the daily wage earner in urban areas and the landless agricultural labourer in the interior might be a source of trouble.¹⁴³

Because they were doing well out of high grain prices, most small-holder peasants had no economic motive to engage in the Quit India Revolt. When they did become involved they did so because of antagonism to the police and the administration, because of sympathy for the nationalist cause, and because of encouragement from those above them in the social hierarchy. Harcourt suggests that peasant small-holders took the leading part in the Quit India Revolt. The evidence indicates, however, that the role of these middle peasants was secondary to that of groups from opposite ends of the social spectrum, namely the locally-dominant, Congress-supporting rich peasants at one extreme and the poor and the landless at the other.

Harcourt also errs in his suggestion¹⁴⁴ that kisan sabha activists played a leading part in the organization of the insurrection. His suggestion is perhaps true of Darbhanga, where socialist/kisan sabha activity had been intense in the late 1930s, and where kisan activists had done considerable propaganda work in 1940, 1941, and the first half of 1942. (Their propaganda, however, it should be noted, stressed the need for a united front against British rule rather than class conflict). But kisan sabha activists did not do much in the way of preparation and propaganda for insurrection in the rest of north Bihar, throughout which there was extensive protest in August 1942. Harcourt contends that the politicization and radicalization of the late 1930s paved the way for the 1942 revolt. In Darbhanga, and to some extent throughout the region, kisan activism in the 1930s helped develop anti-government feelings, and particularly anti-police feelings. But the 1942 movement was also intense in areas that had only been slightly touched by kisan agitation. In Purnea, north Monghyr and Bihpur thana in Bhagalpur, for example, the main politicizing force had been mainstream Congress activity from the 1920s on. Throughout the region, indeed, "nationalist protest" during the Quit India Revolt was a compressed version of the civil disobedience campaign of 1930-34, with its

intensity and fast-moving pace being a reaction to harsh and immediate official repression. This politically motivated "nationalist protest" overlapped with an economically motivated "rebellion of desperation" akin to some aspects of popular participation in the non-cooperation movement of 1920-22. These two upheavals combined to produce an insurrection which temporarily demolished the fragile structure of police and administrative control.

The collapse of formal control created a situation seemingly favourable to the development of anti-landlord protest. The dominance of conservative Congressmen, the lack of effective left-wing leadership¹⁴⁵ and the attitude taken by the zamindars helped ensure that this possibility did not become a reality. More fundamentally, prevailing economic conditions which suited the interests of big and middle tenants made them disinterested in anti-landlord protest. The high food grain and cash crop prices of the early 1940s meant that the interests of big and middle tenants coalesced with those of the landlords, and moved into opposition to those of dwarfholders and the landless. Hence better-established tenants did not wish to campaign against their landlords. The Quit India Revolt dissolved the formal apparatus of control but in the absence of anti-landlord protest¹⁴⁶ or any other radical initiative¹⁴⁷ it had little impact on the informal control apparatus. Because of the conservative policies of the imperial ruler (as will be detailed in the following chapter), the informal control apparatus remained resilient. The revolt temporarily demolished the state structure in north Bihar, but left the social order intact.

NOTES : CHAPTER 5

- 1 Datta, *Freedom Movement*, III, pp. 21-5, 27-30; Francis G. Hutchins, *India's Revolution. Gandhi and the Quit India Movement* (Cambridge Massachusetts 1973) pp. 217-20.
- 2 M.V. Harcourt, "The 'Quit India' Movement, August 1942: A Case Study in Militant Indian Nationalism", University of Western Australia, MA thesis, 1967, chap. 2, "The Geographic Distribution of the Disturbances".
- 3 *Ibid.*
- 4 Hutchins, *India's Revolution*, p. 282.
- 5 Harcourt, "Kisan Populism", p. 338.
- 6 GB FR (1) April 1941, HPf 18/4/1941, NAI.
- 7 GB FR (2) Jan. 1942, FMPf 76, 1942, BSA.
- 8 GB FR (1) Dec. 1940, HPf 18/12/1940, NAI.
- 9 GB FR (1) May 1941, GOI HPf 18/5/1941, NAI.
- 10 GB FR (2) July 1942, GOI HPf 18/7/1942, NAI.
- 11 GB FR (2) June 1942, GOI HPf 18/6/1942, NAI.
- 12 *Ibid.* For details of market looting in Purnea in January 1942, see GB FR (2) Jan., FMPf 76, 1942, BSA.
- 13 GB FR (1) July 1942, HPf 18/7/1942, NAI.
- 14 *Ibid.*

- 15 Johannes H. Voigt, "Co-operation or Confrontation? War and Congress Politics, 1939-42", in Low, *Congress and the Raj*, pp. 349-74, pp. 352-4, 362.
- 16 *Ibid.*, pp. 360-1; Datta, *Freedom Movement*, III, p. 382; Harcourt, "Kisan Populism", p. 335.
- 17 *Ibid.*
- 18 Harcourt, "Kisan Populism and Revolution", p. 335.
- 19 "Extract from provincial report", 19 March 1941, HPf 3/19/1941, NAI; GB FR (2) Dec. 1940, HPf 18/12/1940, NAI; GB FR (1) Jan. 1941, HPf 18/1/1941, NAI; GB FR (2) March 1941, HPf 18/3/1941, NAI; GB FR (1) April 1941, HPf 18/4/1941, NAI; Members of the Congress Party in Shahabad District Board to Rajendra Prasad, 7 August 1941, AICCPf P6, 1940, NML.
- 20 Voigt, "Co-operation or Confrontation?", p. 361.
- 21 "History of the Civil Disobedience movement, 1940-41", HPf 3/6/1942, NAI.
- 22 Datta, *Freedom Movement*, III, pp. 1-3.
- 23 *Ibid.*
- 24 D.A. Low, "The Indian Schism", *Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies*, IX, 2, July 1971, pp. 158-67, pp. 165, 167.
- 25 Voigt, "Co-operation or Confrontation?" pp. 366-8.
- 26 Harcourt, "Kisan Populism", p. 337.

- 27 Datta, *Freedom Movement*, III, p. 3.
- 28 GB FR (2) May 1942, HPf 18/5/1942, NAI; Datta, *Freedom Movement*, III, pp. 14-15.
- 29 *Ibid.*
- 30 GB FR (1) Feb. 1942, HPf 18/2/1942, NAI.
- 31 Datta, *Freedom Movement*, III, p. 3.
- 32 GB FR (1) July 1942, HPf 18/7/1942, NAI.
- 33 GB FR (2) May 1942, HPf 18/5/1942, NAI. See also FR (1) for the same month.
- 34 "D.I.B's report of the political situation in Bihar", 15 Jan. 1941, HPf 31/1/1941, NAI.
- 35 *Ibid.*
- 36 *Ibid.*, Appendix II.
- 37 "D.I.B's report of the political situation in Bihar", 15 Jan. 1941, HPf 31/1/1941, NAI.
- 38 *Ibid.*
- 39 *Ibid.*, "Notes", p. 5.
- 40 Datta, *Freedom Movement*, III, p. 16; GB FR (2) July 1942, HPf 18/7/1942, NAI.
- 41 GB FR (1) July 1942, HP 18/7/1942, NAI.
- 42 "Note by R.F. Mudie", 19 Sept. 1944, HPf 3/15/1943, NAI.
- 43 R.N. Lines, District Magistrate Darbhanga to Chief Secretary, 22 Dec. 1942, FMPf 84, 1920-42, BSA; Philip Woodruff, *The Men Who Ruled India*, (London, 2 vols., 1953-54), vol. II, *The Guardians*, p. 308.

- 44 Datta, *Freedom Movement*, III, pp. 28-30.
- 45 *Ibid.*, p. 41.
- 46 Chief Secretary GB to Home Secretary GOI 17 Sept. 1942, HPf 3/33/1942, NAI.
- 47 R.N. Lines, District Magistrate Darbhanga to Chief Secretary, GB 22 Dec. 1942, FMPf 84, 1920-42, BSA. According to K.K. Datta, "from the 10th August groups of students and other workers seized some railway trains and moved in them from place to place to disseminate the gospel of the Revolution ..." This statement is supported by Lines's comment that "All over the district, swarms of rioters and students took possession of the railways, and indulged in ticketless travel en masse, until the railways ceased to work". With the breakdown of railway communication due to sabotage, however, it seems certain that this technique of agitation soon ceased to be possible. See the letter from Lines cited above and *Freedom Movement* III, p. 51. The suggestion by Hutchins, in his *India's Revolution*, p. 227, that the uprising occurred spontaneously throughout Bihar without the lead being given by "urban and intellectual elements" is not supported by the evidence.
- 48 Woodruff, *Men Who Ruled* II, p. 308. See also "Report of damage to Telegraph and Telephone apparatus, north Bihar division", FMPf 65, 1940-42, BSA.
- 49 Chief Secretary GBO to Home Secretary GOI, 17 Sept. 1942, HPf 3/33/1942, NAI; Datta, *Freedom Movement* III, pp. 63, 65.
- 50 Woodruff, *Men Who Ruled* II, pp. 308-9.
- 51 Deputy Inspector General Police, Muzaffarpur, Memorandum 635C, 1 Oct.

- 1942, FMPf 49, 1910-23, 1942, BSA; GOI "Verbatim record of the proceedings of the Conference of Provincial Representative convened in connection with the Congress Disturbances, 1942-43", HPf 3/89/1942, NAI [hereafter Provincial Conference Proceedings] p. 56.
- 52 B. Sivaram, Purnea District Officer to Chief Secretary, 27 Aug. 1942, FMPf 93, 1942-44, para 9, BSA.
- 53 R.N. Lines, Darbhanga District Magistrate to Chief Secretary GB, 22 Dec. 1942, FMPf 84, 1920-42, BSA; Deputy Inspector General Police, Muzaffarpur, Memorandum 635C, 1 Oct. 1942, FMPf 49, 1910-23, 1942, BSA.
- 54 Monghyr District Magistrate, "Situation in the Beguserai Subdivision", FMPf 47, 1942, p. 26, BSA.
- 55 *Ibid.*
- 56 Writing several weeks after the August revolt had been crushed, Jay Prakash Narayan pointed out that the main weakness of the movement had been its lack of organization. See his "To All Fighters for Freedom", reprinted as Appendix J to Datta, *Freedom Movement* III. See also Arun Chandra Bhuyan, *The Quit India Movement. The Second World War and Indian Nationalism* (Delhi, 1975), p. 89.
- 57 Judgement in High Court, Patna on case of Jubba Mallah v/s King Emperor, HPf 3/31/1944.
- 58 *Ibid.*
- 59 Judgement in Special Cases 4 and 5, 1942, King Emperor v/s B. Jaglal Choudhary and others, 4 Nov. 1942, HPf 3/80/1942, NAI.
- 60 *Ibid.*

- 61 Justice C.M. Agarwala, "Criminal Review 2, 1942", 8 Dec. 1942, held with *ibid.*
- 62 Bihar Congress Committee, "Circular No. 1", quoted in Datta, *Freedom Movement* III, pp. 37-40; R.N. Lines, Darbhanga District Magistrate to Chief Secretary, 22 Dec. 1942, FMPf 84, 1920-42, BSA.
- 63 Harcourt, "Kisan Populism".
- 64 GB FR (2) Feb. 1939, HPf 18/2/1939, NAI.
- 65 For discussion of the limitations of the influence of the Left, see chapter 4 above.
- 66 According to K.K. Datta, a Congress meeting was held in Patna on the evening of 12 August, at which resolutions in favour of sabotage were passed. This was the first occasion mentioned by Datta on which the Bihar Congress sanctioned the use of sabotage as a tactic in the Quit India campaign. Already, before the meeting was held, sabotage had begun in the form of an attack, in the afternoon of the 12th, on the records held in the Kadamkuan post office. *Freedom Movement* III, p. 45. For pamphlets urging the employment of sabotage, see the appendices to *ibid.* See also Bhuyan, *Quit India Movement*, pp. 88, 89.
- 67 Walter Hauser, "Bihar Kisan Sabha", pp. 148-51.
- 68 Jay Prakash Narayan had been arrested, long before the revolt began, for anti-war propaganda. Ramnandan Misra was arrested in Cuttack, Orissa, during the course of August 1942. Ajit Bhattacharjea, *Jay Prakash. A Political Biography* (Delhi, 1975) pp. 77-80; Datta, *Freedom Movement* III, Appendix H.

- 69 The charges made by the government were based on a circular distributed by the Andhra Provincial Congress Committee in July 1942 which advocated, during the forthcoming campaign, the cutting of telegraph and telephone wires. Bhuyan, *Quit India*, pp. 53, 90.
- 70 See for example Champaran Police Superintendent, "Situation in Champaran up to 9 November 1921", PSf 539, 1921, BSA; United Provinces Government Press Communique, 6 Feb. 1922, HPf 563, 1922, NAI.
- 71 FR (2) Dec. 1920, PSf 7, 1920, BSA; Memorandum from Saran Police Superintendent to Inspector General Police, 6 Aug. 1930, BSA.
- 72 See the contents of HPf 5/80/1932, NAI.
- 73 It should be noted however that some of the local level Congress leaders who had not been considered important enough to arrest used their influence to deter groups of demonstrators from violent activity. Monghyr District Magistrate "Report on the Civil Disobedience movement", FMPf 45, 1942, p. 5, BSA; R.N. Lines, Darbhanga District Magistrate to Chief Secretary GB, 22 Dec. 1922, FMPf 84, 1920-42, BSA.
- 74 By 26 August Bihar south of the Ganges was generally under control, and the provincial government reported that "The position north of the river is expected to improve now that the forces of law have been reinforced". Bihar Government Communique, 26 Aug. HPf 3/22/1942, NAI.
- 75 "Kisan Populism", pp. 322-3, 346-8.
- 76 See for example R.N. Lines, Darbhanga District Magistrate to Chief Secretary, GB, FMPf 84, 1920-42, BSA.
- 77 "List of Killed", FMPf 69, 1942, BSA.

- 78 Contemporary official accounts noted the widespread sympathy for the movement, but particularly emphasized the leading role that was taken in the first stages of the movement by students. Given great social inequality, the great majority of high school and college students came from high caste, small landlord/big tenant backgrounds.
- 79 GB Fortnightly Press Report, 2nd half April 1944, FMPf 80, 1944, BSA.
- 80 Madhubani Subdivisional Officer to Darbhanga District Magistrate, 16 Dec. 1942, FMPf 84, 1942, BSA. The Darbhanga District Magistrate reported that
- ... the movement has first entirely been led by the upper castes, principally Babhans, Rajputs, Brahmins and Khattris, and the masses did nothing. As the feelings of the masses were, however, inflamed and promises of loot were held out, they also came in ...
- R.N. Lines, Darbhanga District Magistrate to Chief Secretary GB, 22 Dec. 1942, FMPf 84, 1920-42, BSA.
- 81 Beguserai Subdivisional Officer, "Report on Civil Disobedience Movement", 22 Dec. 1942, FMP 45, 1942, BSA.
- 82 B. Sivaram, Purnea District Magistrate to Chief Secretary, 24 Aug. 1942, FMPf 93, 1942-44, para 14, BSA; Sivaram to Chief Secretary, 3 Sept. 1942, FMPf 84, 1942, BSA.
- 83 GB FR (2) Sept. 1942, HPf 18/9/1942, NAI; GB FR (2) Nov. 1942, HPf 18/11/1942, NAI.
- 84 The only possible exceptions to this general absence consisted, in south Bihar, of the burning of three kutcherries of the Banaili Raj, and in north Bihar, of the burning of one of the kutcherries of the Grant estate in the Sonbarsa area. But the attack on the Grant estate kutcherry may well have been the result of anti-British as much as of

- anti-zamindar feeling. GB FRs (1) Oct. and (2) Nov. 1942, FMPf 76, 1942, BSA.
- 85 Harcourt "Kisan Populism" , p. 335; Hauser, "Bihar Kisan Sabha" pp. 141-51; Swami Sahajanand and Yadunandan Sharma, press statement 25 August 1942, quoted in M.A. Rasul, *History of the All India Kisan Sabha*, (Calcutta 1974) pp. 86-7; Jay Prakash Narayan "Within the Congress" in B.N. Ajuha (ed.) *"J.P." India's Revolutionary Number One* (Lahore 1947) pp. 40-54, 41.
- 86 Datta, *Freedom Movement* III, Appendices A and H. Interestingly, some local Communist Party workers defied the party's anti-Congress policy and took a leading part in the August revolt. GB FR (1) Sept. 1942, HPf 18/9/1942, NAI; Beguserai Subdivisional Officer, "Report on Civil Disobedience Movement" 22 Dec. 1942, FMPf 45, 1942, BSA.
- 87 For examples of zamindars who supported the revolt see GB FR (1) June 1943, HPf 18/6/1943, NAI; Chandrika Prasad, "Statement", 30 May 1952, FMPf 84, 1920-42, BSA.
- 88 Interview, Umarpathi Tewari, Dumeri village, Darbhanga 17 Oct. 1976. Some zamindars, however, did eventually offer support to the authorities. The Madhubani Subdivisional Officer reported that when looting had become widespread "... the zemindars and mahants began to be afraid and came forward to help the authorities for their own safety." Madhubani Subdivisional Officer to Darbhanga District Magistrate 16 Dec. 1942, FMPf 84, BSA.
- 89 Parihar AAR 1349 F. (1941-42), submitted 1 Aug. 1943, f 16D2, C Parihar, G 1942-43, RDA.

- 90 Nishankpur AAR 1349 F. (1941-42), submitted 17 Feb. 1943, f 16D1, C Nishankpur, G 1942-43, RDA.
- 91 Padri AAR 1349 F. (1941-42), f 16D3, C Padri G 1942-43 RDA.
- 92 *Ibid.*
- 93 Bhawanipur AAR 1349 F. (1941-42) 16D2, C Bhawanipur, G 1942-43, RDA.
- 94 Harcourt, "Kisan Populism", p. 328.
- 95 Bhuyan, *Quit India*, pp. 94-5.
- 96 H.P. Sinha, Saran District Officer to Chief Secretary GB, 29 Jan. 1943, FMPf 84, 1942, BSA.
- 97 Voigt, "Co-operation or Confrontation", p. 368.
- 98 *Ibid.*
- 99 *Ibid.*; Woodruff, *Men Who Ruled* II, pp. 307-8.
- 100 Harcourt, "Kisan Populism", pp. 320, 343.
- 101 R.N. Lines, the District Magistrate of Darbhanga, commented
Another curious feature of almost every attack made by the rioters, was that we received advance information of the impending attack, although this was of little use, on account of the inadequacy of our force.
See his letter to the Chief Secretary, 22 Dec. 1942, FMPf 84, 1920-42, BSA. For a detailed, dramatic account of an attack on a thana in the United Provinces see R.H. Niblett quoted in Harcourt "Kisan Populism", pp. 318-20.
- 102 In the attacks on police stations in Darbhanga the rebels captured four muskets, three shotguns and one revolver. Deputy Inspector General Police, Muzaffarpur, Memorandum 635C, 1 Oct. 1942, BSA. Throughout Bihar as a whole the insurgents were able to relieve the authorities of

1 sub-machine gun, 4 rifles, 20 shot guns, 12 muskets, 20 revolvers and pistols, and 4 bayonets. Chief Secretary GB to Home Secretary GOI, 17 Sept. 1942, HPf 3/33/1942, NAI.

103 *Freedom Movement*, II, p. 255.

104 In Bihar during the period when the rising was at its height groups of demonstrators carried fire-arms on only six occasions and used them on five. Chief Secretary to Home Secretary GOI, 17 Sept. 1942, HPf 3/33/1942. NAI.

105 Deputy Inspector General Police, Muzaffarpur, Memorandum 635C, 1 Oct. 1942, FMPf 49, 1942, BSA. See also *Freedom Movement* III, p. 65.

106 F.T, Parsons, Champaran Police Superintendent to Deputy Inspector General Police, Muzaffarpur, 1 Sept. 1942, FMPf 84, 1942, BSA.

107 Summary of incidents in Saran, Special Abstract 31, 24 August 1942, FMPf 84, 1942, BSA; *Freedom Movement* III, p. 60.

108 Muzaffarpur Collector to Chief Secretary, Demi-Official letter 1705, date not given, FMPf 49, 1942, BSA. A brief reference to this incident is given in Datta, *Freedom Movement* III, p. 108.

109 R.N. Lines, Darbhanga District Magistrate to Chief Secretary GB, 22 Dec. 1942, p. 9, FMPf 84, 1920-42, BSA.

110 *Ibid.*, p. 6; Monghyr District Magistrate, Report on Civil Disobedience Movement 1942, pp. 53, 54, FMPf 47, 1942, BSA.

111 On the subject of police stations one Bihar official noted that "We have 495 thanas and there is not a single one of those that could be called a defensible building." Another official noted that "... the average police station is built just like an ordinary bungalow. There is no fencing and obviously there is no idea of having to defend it against attack by mobs." Provincial Conference Proceedings, pp. 46, 56.

- 112 B. Sivaram, Purnea District Officer to Chief Secretary, GB, 27 Aug. 1942, paras 13, 14, FMPf 93, 1942-44, BSA.
- 113 For critical comments by District Officers on the tendency of the military to take extreme repressive measures, see *ibid*, para 13; F.J. Parsons, Champaran Police Superintendent to Deputy Inspector General Police, Muzaffarpur, 7 Sept. 1942, FMPf 84, 1942, BSA; Monghyr District Magistrate, "Report on Civil Disobedience Movement 1942", section entitled "Difficulties caused by the burning of houses and summary reprisals by certain military units without the knowledge of the district civil authorities", FMPf 47, 1942, BSA..
- 114 Neither the bodies nor the weapons of the slain men were recovered, and all the accused in the case were acquitted because of insufficient evidence. H.P. Sinha, Saran District Officer to Chief Secretary GB, 29 Jan. 1943, FMPf 84, 1942, BSA; GB FR (1) Dec. 1942, HPf 18/12/1942, NAI.
- 115 M.K. Sinha, Purnea Police Superintendent, Report VI, 4 Sept. 1942, FMPf 93, 1942-44, BSA.
- 116 For details of jailings, firings and the imposition of collective fines see Telegram from GB to Secretary of State, London, 10 Jan. 1943, HPf 3/15/1943, KW I, NAI; "Statement on Collective Fines", FMPf 84, 1920-44, BSA; HPf 3/52/1943, Appendix II, NAI; Datta, *Freedom Movement* III, Appendix D.
- 117 Bhagalpur Commissioner to Chief Secretary GB, 9 June 1944, FMPf 95, 1943-45, BSA.

- 118 GB FR (2) Mar. 1943, HPf 18/3/1943, NAI; GB FR (2) April 1943, HPf 18/4/1943, NAI; Purnea District Magistrate to Chief Secretary GB, FMPf 94, 1942, BSA: Datta, *Freedom Movement* III, pp. 275-88.
- 119 GB FR (2) Oct. 1943, FMPf 79, 1943, BSA; GB FR (2) Aug. 1943, HPf 18/8/1943, NAI; GB FR (1) Sept. 1943, HPf 18/9/1943, NAI; J.W. Houlton, Bhagalpur Commissioner to Y.A. Godbole, Chief Secretary 1 Sept. 1943, FMP 91, 1942-43, BSA.
- 120 Houlton to Godbole, cited in *ibid*, paras 3, 14.
- 121 Telegram, Foreign Office, New Delhi, to Minister, Kathmandu, 26 Nov. 1942; Extract from Demi-Official Letter 20388, 29 Dec. 1942; Note on Conference at Muzaffarpur, 27 Sept. 1942; all in HPf 3/39/1942, NAI.
- 122 Datta, *Freedom Movement*, III, 268-9.
- 123 *Ibid.*, pp. 272-4.
- 124 *Ibid.*, p. 274; GB FR (2) May 1943, HPf 18/5/1943, NAI.
- 125 GB FR (1) Oct. 1943, HPf 18/10/1943, NAI.
- 126 "'Quit India' Movement", p. 64.
- 127 See GB FRs for March to December 1943, HPf 18/3/1943; 18/4/1943; 18/5/1943; 18/6/1943; 18/7/1943; 18/8/1943; 18/9/1943; 18/10/1943; 18/11/1943; 18/12/1943, NAI. The second report for December 1943 notes that "The monthly number of dacoities has been halved since last July and is now not far from the Triennial average."
- 128 GB FR (2) Sept. 1942, HPf 18/9/1942, NAI; GB FR (1) Jan. 1943, GOI HPf 18/1/1943, NAI; Provincial Conference Proceedings, pp. 19-20, 56.

- 129 "Supplementary report for the second half of April for the Bhagalpur Division", enclosed with GB FR (1) May 1943, HPf 18/5/1943, NAI; GB FR (2) June 1944, FMPf 80, 1944, BSA.
- 130 J.W. Houlton to Godbole, Chief Secretary GB, 18 July 1943; District Magistrate Purnea to Chief Secretary GB, 24 June 1944; both in FMP 94, 1942, BSA.
- 131 Provincial Conference Proceedings", pp. 19-29.
- 132 GB FR (1) April 1943, HPf 18/4/1943, NAI; GB FR (1) Oct. 1945, FMPf 81, 1945-47, BSA.
- 133 A British railway official commented in June 1944 that very strong anti-British feeling prevailed in the interior of Bihar, and contended that were it not for the known presence of strong armed forces there could easily be a revival of the 1942 revolt. See Appendix to HPf 3/46/1944, NAI.
- 134 The Bihar Chief Secretary commented
- the common people are coming to believe more and more that the war is responsible for most of the troubles from which they are suffering and that the end of the war, accompanied by Swaraj, will bring relief. This belief is ... very widespread and is being supported by almost all pro-Government speakers to further the war effort, who have to combat Japanese promises of Swaraj and do so by pointing out that Swaraj has been promised by Great Britain to India as soon as the war is over. In fact in war propaganda we are inevitably living on the future to some extent.
- GB FR (1) April 1943, GOI HPF 18/4/1943, NAI.
- 135 "'Quit India' Movement", chap. 7.
- 136 See for example Datta, *Freedom Movement* III.

- 137 Bhuyan, *Quit India*. Hutchins, *India's Revolution*.
- 138 Harcourt, "Kisan Populism", pp. 323-5.
- 139 Harcourt's analysis, "Kisan Populism" (pp. 328-33), of kisan turbulence in the late 1930s correctly identifies the galvanizing effect of the depression in primary produce prices and provides a sensitive assessment of the leadership role assumed by the Congress Socialists. But Harcourt does not appreciate the pivotal part played in the kisan sabha movement by better established tenants and exaggerates the intensity and extent of kisan protest. See chapter 4 above, page 338 and note 180.
- 140 Padri AAR 1349F (1942-43) f 16D3, C Padri, G 1942-43, RDA.
- 141 Harcourt's analysis breaks down because it proceeds in an *a priori* fashion without sufficient reference to the evidence. His argument is based on the assumption that scarcity resulting from a poor harvest was calamitous for a small-holder because he "... would often have to buy back some of his cash-grain crop (usually pledged in advance to a usurer/grain dealer) for subsistence at scarcity prices." ("Kisan Populism", p. 328). This is true, but it is also true that small-holders could benefit from the high prices for their cash-grain crops which scarcity ensured. It all depended of course on how serious the scarcity situation became. In a situation of mild scarcity, only the poorest stratum of small-holders (tilling small areas of land and with limited resources) would suffer, whereas those who were better established would benefit. As the situation grew worse and reserves were consumed a greater proportion of the small-holder peasants would tend to find themselves in a difficult position. The scarcity which began in mid-1942 ("Kisan Populism" p. 338) initially affected only the poorest stratum of small-holders, and as has been noted, many of these poor

peasants were driven by hardship to take part in the rebellion of desperation. But the scarcity was insufficiently severe to affect more than this bottommost stratum, and most small-holders benefited from higher prices. (Indeed, they were particularly advantaged because, as table 16 illustrates, the prices for rice and cash crops rose higher than did those for the 'inferior' grains, such as gram, which they grew for their own subsistence. This meant they could manage successfully even when harvests were below average). Unable to establish that most small-holders suffered from the scarcity in the months leading up to the revolt, Harcourt suggests that the psychological effect of the threat of increasing scarcity created anxiety and encouraged small-holders to launch themselves into protest. His argument ("Kisan Populism" p. 339) on this point is lucid and intriguing, but its confirmation requires considerable further research.

142 GB FR (2) June 1943, HPf 18/6/1943, NAI.

143 GB FR (1) July 1943, HP f 18/7/1943, NAI.

144 "Kisan Populism", pp. 340, 342-3.

145 M.V. Harcourt comments

Probably the CSP agitators were quite sincere in their belief that a nationalist revolution would have to precede a social one and that they therefore should not antagonize rightist nationalists by measures exacerbating class hostility. Nevertheless if there is a moral in the story of the Gangetic valley rebellion it is this: revolutions are not made by half measures.

"'Quit India' Movement", p. 67.

146 The temporary absence of the formal control apparatus and the existence of widespread turmoil created a situation in which the initiation of an anti-landlord movement could have had revolutionary implications. It was perhaps because of this that at this time better established

tenants were unwilling to open the pandora's box of agrarian protest.

- 147 In any initiative, however, the leadership role of a section of the landed interest would seem to have been crucial because at this stage in the history of north Bihar the poor and the landless were too down trodden and too poorly organized to operate effectively as an independent political force.

Chapter 6

CONCLUSION

At the beginning of the 20th century the colonial agrarian society of north Bihar harboured a numerous, impoverished and rigidly stratified population. The region's poverty, combined with official support for the politically expedient but economically disastrous zamindari land-holding system, meant that the provincial administration had only limited funds and hence could perform only the minimum functions of government. Consequently the formal, police/administrative apparatus of control in north Bihar was skeletal, and hence the main burden of maintaining social control over the region was left in the hands of the groups which made up the landed interest, namely the great landlords, the European planter-landlords, and the locally dominant small landlords and big tenants. Partly because of the limitations which prevailing social, economic and cultural conditions placed on protest, and partly because of the effective informal control exercised by members of the landed interest, protest tended, until the first decades of the 20th century, to be sporadic, small scale and localized. The protest that did develop was effectively directed, contained and controlled by members of the landed interest. From around 1920, however, unprecedentedly intense and extensive popular protest became a recurrent feature of political life in north Bihar. This protest was led by members of the landed interest but commanded wide support among poorer and less powerful members of north Bihar society. Some of these poorer, less powerful people became mobilized because they were the clients, retainers, or servants of locally dominant peasants, while others participated in protest of their own accord because they saw an opportunity to air their grievances and protect and advance their own interests. Middle range tenants had some opportunity to assume leadership roles and take initiatives in protest movements, but economic constraints and social prejudices denied this chance to the poor and landless, low caste and Harijan and Adivasi people of

north Bihar. (The poor people of north Bihar did not assume an independent political role until, in the post-independence period, the limitations on their protest which had hitherto prevailed began to break down. The epilogue of the thesis gives a brief account of their involvement in protest movements during the 1960s and 1970s),

The key factor behind the emergence of mass protest in north Bihar was demographic. The long term repercussions of the imposition and consolidation of British rule had allowed a continuing increase in the size of the population, but the conservatism of British social and economic policies had thwarted the transformation of the agrarian economy. Such a transformation was necessary in order to produce an increase in wealth commensurate with the expansion of the population. But though population increase pressed hardest on the poor and raised the crime rate, it did not, of itself, inspire mass political protest. Protest only emerged when it could crystallize around particular sets of grievances, and when local and regional leaders, and particularly those organized into the Bihar branch of the Indian National Congress, assumed responsibility for its coordination and direction. The protest campaigns that developed in particular contexts reflected prevailing socio-economic and political conditions in their goals and social bases. In the late 1930s, for example, the depression-induced collapse of primary produce prices catastrophically affected the position of many people from the middle range of north Bihar society, impelling them to engage in a protest movement. At the time of the non-cooperation movement and of the Quit India Revolt, in contrast, the presence of scarcity and high prices impelled many people from the poorest strata of north Bihar society into political protest.

But whatever the particular character and context of individual protest movements, the Bihar Congress was generally extremely successful in controlling

and directing protest. The Bihar Congress was controlled by locally dominant small landlords and big tenants who sought to unite all sections of north Bihar society into opposition to alien rule. The Bihar Congress was particularly anxious to ensure that agrarian and nationalist protest did not fuse together, because such a development would both directly challenge the conservative, landed interests which it represented, and threaten the stability of the small landlord/big tenant alliance which was the foundation of its strength. The efforts of the Bihar Congress to keep nationalist and agrarian protest separate were greatly helped by the presence and character of the system of zamindari land-holding. Because Bihar had been settled under the zamindari system the mass of the population had only limited direct contact with the representatives of the alien administration in connection with rent and revenue matters. Hence protest over agrarian issues did not necessarily involve the administration. In Bihar, moreover, most of the zamindars were 'small' men with effective local ties. These people could easily adopt an attitude of ambivalence, or even antagonism, to the British. The contrast with the situation in the neighbouring United Provinces is striking. Most of the areas comprised within the United Provinces were only temporarily settled. In consequence the revenue administration was large and visible and impinged itself regularly upon the peasant consciousness when it engaged in settlement operations so as to assess the productivity of the land and to examine levels of rent. In the United Provinces, moreover, a highly visible group of large landholders existed which, with much official encouragement, had become clearly identified as a bulwark of British rule.¹

In the Congress organization in the United Provinces during the early decades of this century, furthermore, the dominating figures were Motilal Nehru and his son Jawaharlal, a pair of anglicized urban professionals with no kinship and only limited economic ties to elite groups in the countryside. In Bihar,

in contrast, the dominating figure was Rajendra Prasad, a man of traditional habits who hailed from a rural, small landlord background. For these reasons the tendency for agrarian and nationalist protest to coalesce was stronger in the United Provinces than in Bihar.

In addition to keeping the national struggle distinct from agrarian conflict the Bihar Congress also sought to defuse agrarian protest. By and large this attempt succeeded. In 1919-20 Swami Vidyanand led an intense and extensive peasant protest movement against the Darbhanga Raj. The Bihar Congress, in contrast to the eagerness with which it latched on to the issues raised during the more or less contemporaneous anti-indigo planter movement, gave the grievances being raised by Vidyanand only scant attention. The Congress found criticism of the predominantly European indigo planters was grist to its anti-administration and anti-British mill, but did not wish to raise the spectre of an anti-zamindar movement by supporting Vidyanand in criticism of the Maharaja of Darbhanga, the largest landlord in the region. Rajendra Prasad denounced Vidyanand's movement and accused him of being a charlatan out for his own ends. In the 1930s a small group of left-wingers within the Congress put themselves at the head of a peasant movement motivated by the disastrous impact of a slump in primary produce prices on the position of many tenants. The left-wingers sought to fuse agrarian with nationalist protest, but found themselves effectively outmanoeuvred by the mainstream members of the Congress organization. In the 1930s the main achievement of the left-wingers was rhetorical: as a result of their activity the Congress found it expedient to include some radical items in its platform, but not with any serious intention of implementing them. (The epilogue to this thesis comments briefly on the gap between rhetoric and achievement involved in the abolition of the zamindari system between 1947 and 1952, which left substantial wealth and power in the hands of the zamindars). The agrarian movements of 1919-20

and of the 1930s won some concessions, but were contained adequately by the Congress. Congress's task in containing these movements was made easier because the well-established tenants who dominated them had limited, reformist aims. (The big tenants of north Bihar had an ambivalent attitude towards their landlords. They quarrelled with them over particular issues, but also aspired to join their ranks by purchasing zamindari property. And, because people from high caste jatis dominated the ranks of zamindars and big tenants, the two groups were meshed together by kinship and caste affiliation.)

The Bihar Congress eschewed the use of agrarian grievances to fuel anti-administration protest. Despite this, however, it managed to mount extensive, intense and effective nationalist protests. The success of the Bihar Congress in mobilizing mass support contrasted markedly with the failure of the nationalist movement to do so in the other areas where the zamindari system prevailed. The success in Bihar resulted from the existence of strong kinship and mutual interest ties between the regional intelligentsia and the locally dominant peasants. Such ties did not exist elsewhere in the areas in which the zamindari system operated. (Midnapore was the only district in Bengal where an extensive nationalist peasant protest got under way. The success of the Midnapore movement resulted from the presence in the district of the Mahishya caste-cluster which formed an unusually large proportion of the population and which turned en masse against the British in response to police repression and economic hardship. The links of this group with the Bengali intelligentsia were tenuous.)²

The Bihar Congress drew on the potential for popular turbulence in north Bihar and played a directing role in successive waves of mass protest which progressively eroded formal police/administrative control to the point of collapse. Because of the financial weakness of the province the formal

control apparatus was fragile even before the erosion process began. In the first decades of this century, Bihar had the lowest proportion of police to population of any province in British India, and because its districts were twice as big as in the neighbouring, and broadly comparable, provinces of Bengal and the United Provinces, it had a lower proportion of district level officials. This skeletal apparatus of police/administrative control came under great strain from the popular turbulence of the years from 1917 to 1922. During this period the Bihar Congress shunned Vidyanand's campaign but turned the anti-indigo planter movement to useful propaganda advantage. The Congress, moreover, initiated and directed the non-cooperation movement, throughout which it was able to draw on a variety of popular discontents. The next test for the formal control apparatus came with the civil disobedience movement of 1934. Under the banner of the Congress nationalist activists employed the tactic of limited violence to bring pressure to bear on the British administration. Through the use of limited violence Congress activists hamstrung the *chaukidari* (village watchman) system, brought waverers on side, cut at government revenue from excise duties, and helped elicit a harsh response from the police the repercussions of which were of great propaganda value to the nationalist movement. The people of north Bihar distrusted and disliked the police, and the use by the administration of the police to bolster its rule turned popular feeling against the administration. The police/administrative control apparatus next came under test in the 1937-39 period, during which a Congress Ministry, elected under the terms of the Government of India Act of 1935, held office in Bihar. The success of the Congress Ministry in meeting the challenge of agrarian turmoil during the 1937-39 period had long term repercussions for the future of police/administrative control in north Bihar. Henceforth police and officials, knowing that in future a Congress government would return to power, became lukewarm in their

support for British rule. The police, moreover, further decreased their popularity with the public through their actions in support of the landed interest. The acid test for the police/administrative apparatus came in August 1942, when the Indian National Congress launched a mass civil disobedience campaign to force the British to quit India. Price inflation in the early 1940s increased popular discontent, helped increase the crime rate, but worked to the advantage of locally dominant peasants. Confidence in the administration declined because of the inability of the police to check the crime rate, and because the dramatic victories of the Japanese after they entered the Second World War in December 1942 struck grievous blows at the edifice of British imperial power in Asia. The Quit India Revolt combined a politically motivated nationalist protest by high caste, Congress-supporting big peasants and an economically motivated rebellion of desperation on the part of the poor, low caste and Harijan people of north Bihar. The revolt temporarily succeeded in demolishing the apparatus of police/administrative control, and thus created a potential for the development of an anti-landlord movement. This potentiality did not develop into a reality partly because of the organizational and intellectual dominance of the Congress, and partly because the better established tenant farmers of north Bihar had benefited from the price inflation conditions of the 1940s and hence had no interest in agitating against their landlords.

More fundamentally, a challenge to the social order did not develop because of the long-term impact of imperial policies on north Bihar society. After the 1857 Revolt the British had attempted to secure their rule by conserving existing social structures. This policy was especially well carried out in the remote, backward, under-administered region of north Bihar. In north Bihar, to use Anand Yang's perceptive phrase, the British operated a 'limited Raj' which left long established structures intact and which relied

on the support of the small number of great and middle range landlords in the region and on the acquiescence of locally dominant small landlords and big tenants. (When this acquiescence began to be replaced by opposition during the course of the 20th century the days of the British Raj were numbered). The British did nothing to modernize the agrarian economy of north Bihar, and hence long established patterns of social relationship persisted. The only significant body of European entrepreneurs in the region, the indigo planters, operated within the existing social and productive structure. "The impact of the indigo industry on the peasant economy," C.M. Fisher points out,

can be summarised as distortion rather than fundamental destruction. The indigo factories created tensions and difficulties in the operation of the indigenous economy, but did nothing to alter or undermine the structure ... The indigo industry created tensions in the peasant, subsistence economy, but instituted no radical change.³

Similarly the north Bihar agrarian social structure was merely distorted, rather than transformed, by British imperial rule. Consequently traditional patterns of deference, organization and leadership continued. When the Quit India Revolt dissolved the formal control apparatus the continuing strength of the social order precluded the emergence of radical initiatives.

The British further reinforced the existing social order by their policy of limited tolerance for social and political dissidence. The British administration allowed people to engage in constitutional political activity, and gave a grudging tolerance to non-violent and non-coercive agitational politics, but vigorously repressed militant and violent protest. This policy suited the interests of the locally dominant in north Bihar society. Locally dominant peasants wanted to capture governmental and administrative control, but did not wish to alter the existing social structure. Violent revolt and the violent repression it would inspire had the potential for polarising and

radicalising society, and hence locally dominant peasants were not interested in more than the limited use of violence to attain their ends. The area of tolerance allowed by British imperial rule (in contrast to the absence of tolerance for dissent in other European imperiums), nicely suited the interests of conservative, locally dominant peasants.⁴ In contrast, those north Biharis who took a more radical stance suffered under the burden of heavy and effective repression. The post-independence rulers of north Bihar have been true heirs of their British predecessors. They have controlled and directed dissidence by combining minimal tolerance with effective repression. And despite much rhetoric promising otherwise, they have consolidated rather than transformed the prevailing structures of economic, social and political power.

NOTES : CHAPTER 6

- 1 Reeves, "Landlords Response to Political Change", chap. 1. The great landlords of Bihar formed a smaller group and were less actively and exclusively pro-British than their counterparts in the United Provinces. In Bihar the tone was set by Kameshwar Singh, who became Maharaja of Darbhanga in 1929. Kameshwar Singh kept^{up} good relations with the British but also publicly identified himself as a 'moderate nationalist', maintained a friendship with Rajendra Prasad and covertly donated to Bihar Congress Party funds. One instance of his support for Congress came at the end of the Second World War. After his release from jail Rajendra Prasad visited the Maharaja. According to the eyewitness account given to me by Umarpathi Tewari, who was at that time on the head office staff of the Darbhanga Raj, Kameshwar Singh donated 15,000 rupees to Prasad. Interview, Umarpathi Tewari, Dumari village 17 Oct. 1976. For discussion of the flexibility which the last three Maharajas of Darbhanga displayed in their political activity see my unpublished paper, "Elite Adjustment and Social Control in Bihar: The Darbhanga Raj, 1879 to 1962". Australian National University, South Asian History Section seminar paper, July 1976.
- 2 I have learnt much about developments in Bengal from discussions with Dipesh Chakrabarty.
- 3 Fisher, "Indigo Plantations", p. 312.
- 4 The analysis in this chapter owes much to D.A. Low. See his "The Asian Background to Decolonization in Africa: Barebones of an Introduction", (paper presented at the Conference on the Transfer of Power in Africa, Bellagio, Sept-Oct. 1977), pp. 8-10 and "The Asian Mirror to Tropical Africa's Independence", (forthcoming in 1979 in a symposium based on the papers presented at the Bellagio conference) pp. 26-28, 30.

Chapter 7

EPILOGUE: THE MAINTENANCE AND CONSOLIDATION OF FORMAL CONTROL SINCE 1942

*Introduction; 1943-47: The maintenance of control;
1947-52: Zamindari abolition and rich peasant
dominance; The 1950s and after: The consolidation
of formal control and the development of unrest among
the poor.*

Introduction

In August 1942, police and administrative control over north Bihar temporarily collapsed. Even when re-established, formal control remained precarious. Turmoil persisted long after the climax of the 1942 revolt and was reflected in the crime rates, which continued to be much higher than before the war.¹ High crime rates and a high incidence of riots prevailed throughout the final war and immediate post-war years.² Among Bihari members of the public services and particularly among the Bihar police, low morale was pervasive.³ Policemen feared for their future when the Congress returned to power, and their fears intensified because of Congress propaganda critical of police excesses during the quelling of the 1942 insurrection.⁴ Among the police low wages and poor conditions continued to be a source of discontent, and this discontent heightened because of scarcity and high prices.⁵ In June 1946 many constables joined in strike action in protest against their wages and conditions. For three or four days, until the administration broke the strike by combining small concessions with the arrest and trial of 400 constables, large areas of the province were completely without the services of the police.⁶ But despite its fragility, formal control continued to operate during the years in which power was transferred from British to Indian hands and in which the new regime established itself. The formal control apparatus was maintained during the 1940s and consolidated during the 1950s. Meanwhile the abolition of the zamindari system allowed the crystallization of a class of rich peasants which exercised effective informal control over the countryside. Both formally and informally the social order was well prepared to meet the challenge issued to it during the 1960s and 1970s by protest from the poor.

1942-1947: *The maintenance of control.*

During the final years of the Second World War the British kept a strong military presence in north Bihar to deter a revival of mass protest and employed effective measures to contain the guerilla activity that continued after the crushing of the Quit India Revolt. During the last few months of the war they released Sri Krishna Sinha, Rajendra Prasad, and the other mainstream members of the Bihar Congress from jail but kept Jay Prakash Narayan and other left-wing activists in custody until several months later.⁷ Mainstream Congressmen saw no need for a renewal of direct action against the British Raj, being confident that Congress would soon come to power by constitutional, electoral means. This opinion strengthened when a Labour government came to office in Britain in June 1945, and undertook the restoration of representative government and the transfer of power over the subcontinent.

The Left failed to provide a coherent alternative to the mainstream Congress policy of constitutional advance. Sahajanand and his Communist associates, discredited by their support of the British war effort, exerted little influence.⁸ The Congress Socialists emerged from jail to find that their opponents within the Congress had already effectively re-established their position. The Congress Socialists eschewed direct action for an attempt, which proved fruitless, to expand their influence over the nationalist movement and to stop the rush, which became more marked as Independence drew nearer, of opportunists into the Congress party.⁹

Mainstream Congressmen gathered widespread support by reference to the heroism and determination of the Congress "Freedom Fighters" who had taken part in the mass protest against the British. In doing so, they put emphasis on the part played by those who had been involved in the insurrection of August 1942.¹⁰

Through their policy that under current circumstances Congress should concentrate on advance by peaceful, constitutional means the mainstream members of Congress drew extensive support from the better established sections of society. As table 17 illustrates, high prices prevailed throughout the late 1940s. The level of prices greatly benefited big and middle peasants. As early as February 1944 a kisan sabha organizer, while on tour in Monghyr had berated the local peasants for their apathy.

TABLE 17

Official wholesale rice, wheat and gram prices, 1945-50

(At three-monthly intervals. Prices in rupees per maund. See also table 16, p.383)

YEAR & MONTH	RICE	WHEAT	GRAM
1945 January	13-0-0	9-0-0	7-0-0
April	13-4-0	12-8-0	7-0-0
July	14-8-0	12-0-0	7-0-0
October	18-0-0	13-0-0	9-0-0
1946 January	15-8-0	13-0-0	9-0-0
April	19-8-0	13-0-0	10-0-0
July	19-0-0	13-0-0	12-0-0
October	19-0-0	14-0-0	12-0-0
1947 January	19-0-0	14-0-0	12-0-0
April	26-0-0	11-12-0	11-8-0
July	13-5-0	12-1-0	9-12-0
October	13-5-0	12-1-0	9-12-0
1948 January	23-0-0	26-0-0	16-0-0
April	18-0-0	26-0-0	16-0-0
July	26-0-0	25-0-0	18-0-0
October	24-0-0	25-0-0	16-0-0
1949 January	22-0-0	25-0-0	18-0-0
April	24-0-0	26-0-0	17-0-0
July	28-0-0	24-0-0	15-0-0
October	23-0-0	26-0-0	15-0-0
1950 January	23-0-0	24-0-0	15-0-0
April	26-0-0	26-0-0	16-0-0
July	30-0-0	25-0-0	20-0-0
October	33-0-0	29-0-0	22-0-0

Source: *Darbhanga District Census Handbook* (1951 Census) pp. 170-2.

In his view they were "... prosperous as a result of the boom in grain, and therefore absorbed in their selfish interest."¹¹ With the people who played a pivotal role in society and politics thus contented, no effective groundswell developed in favour of direct action politics. Among the poor and landless, discontent over high prices and scarcity expressed itself in crime and in sporadic rioting, but assumed no coherent, effective political form. Congress workers, moreover, defused popular discontent by raising expectations about the implementation of agrarian and social reforms once Congress had returned to power.

The mainstream of Congress also benefited from the diversionary effect of the extensive communal rioting that began in Bihar in October 1946 in response to news of communal clashes in Bengal during the preceding August and September.¹² The riots in Bengal began with the 'great Calcutta killing' of 16 August. "During the Calcutta killings", Jawaharlal Nehru later commented,

a large number of Biharis had lost their lives. Their relatives had returned to Bihar ... and had spread out all over the rural area carrying stories of what had happened in Calcutta. The people of Bihar were stirred profoundly. Then came news of Noakali in East Bengal. These stories and more especially the accounts of abduction and rape of women, of forcible conversion of large numbers of people, infuriated the populace ...¹³

The ensuing disturbances extended over five weeks. They severely strained the formal control apparatus, but eventually the authorities re-established order. The heightening of communal tension in late 1946 reinforced vertical ties between members of the two religious communities and drew attention away from horizontal and sectional cleavages of interest in north Bihar society as a whole. Communal clashes performed a 'safety valve' function, allowing the dissipation of tensions that may otherwise have been directed in ways which threatened the stability of the social order.

In December 1946, only a few weeks after the communal situation had been brought under control, elections were held to the provincial legislature. The Bihar Congress swept to power, winning 87 per cent of the vote in the general constituencies and gaining 98 of the 152 seats in the Bihar Legislative Assembly.¹⁴ The most pressing problem facing the newly elected government was that of reforming the zamindari system.

1947-1952: *Zamindari abolition and rich peasant dominance.*

In the years after the war the demand that the zamindari system be abolished was expressed even more vociferously than it had been in the immediate pre-war years. With the British about to leave India the zamindars faced an uncertain future. Outnumbered by the tenants and without their imperial ally they were obliged to give ground. In doing so, however, they fought an extended and successful rearguard action.¹⁵

In defending their position the zamindars benefited from the conservatism of the Bihar Congress, an organization controlled by members of the landed interest. Between 1947 and 1950 the Congress passed legislation which abolished the zamindari system. Like the bakast legislation of the late 1930s, the zamindari abolition legislation promised much but delivered little. The abolition legislation obliged the zamindars to relinquish their position as rent collecting intermediaries between the state and the cultivator, but allowed them to do so under very favourable terms. The state gave them generous compensation and allowed them to keep possession of both their 'homestead' land, and land on which they had their residence or on which they had a dwelling place let out for rent, and their khas land, or land held under their direct cultivation.¹⁶ F. Tomasson Jannuzi points out that under the provisions of the legislation the term khas lands

... referred not only to land cultivated personally by the intermediary, but also to lands cultivated by his servants, hired labor, or stock. This broad definition of possession allowed the ex-intermediary to claim land that he did not cultivate himself (prior to "zamindari abolition" legislation) — even though that land was in the personal, cultivating possession of a raiyat, so long as the raiyat did not possess the means (monetary or documentary) of establishing his right of occupancy.¹⁷

While the administration turned a blind eye, the zamindars took advantage of this legislation to force many smaller tenants and sharecroppers off their plots and then defined these plots as within their khas possession.¹⁸ The zamindars, moreover, disguised the extent to which they had been able to retain control over large areas by the device of partitioning their lands among a number of benami (fictitious) holders drawn from among their kinsfolk and retainers.¹⁹ Among the zamindars, those absentees who could not defend their interests against substantial tenants in particular villages lost out as a result of zamindari abolition.²⁰ But many zamindars managed to get round the provisions of the act and salvage much wealth and property.²¹ This was particularly the case if they had firm local ties. Tenants, as a group, favoured the abolition legislation because it helped lessen the local power of the zamindars,²² and big tenants benefited from it by winning against absentee landlords in local land disputes. But smaller tenants, sharecroppers, and the landless did not benefit from zamindari abolition. Many small-holders were forced off their land, and the poor as a group discovered that despite much rhetoric, the abolition of the zamindari system did not establish a foundation for effective measures to place a ceiling on land holdings and to distribute land more equitably.²³ In Darbhanga the peasant activist Rammandan Misra and the Communist activist Bhogendra Jha headed movements which attempted to defend the interests of sharecroppers and dwarfholders, but the campaigns which they led were curbed through a combination of coercion by the police and counter-action by the locally dominant peasants.²⁴

Once the zamindars had been removed as intermediaries between the state and the ryot the financial position of the Bihar government improved dramatically. Previously the state had only managed to get around 10 per cent of the rental income earned by the zamindars, but now it had a claim to the entire land rent of the region. But because of the absence of adequate land

records, because of the inefficiency and corruption of the provincial administration, and because the ryots often did little to assist the land revenue officials, the government only managed to collect some 60 to 70 per cent of the total rental amount which in theory was owing to it.²⁵ This meant that the tenants prospered. They also benefited because the government, for fear of electoral repercussions, could not raise the rental demand, even though continuing high prices and increased the profitability of agriculture. Tenants, moreover, were better off because they no longer had to pay abwabs to zamindars.

The abolition of the zamindari system allowed the crystallization of a new class of rich peasants, drawn from among former big tenants and small zamindars.²⁶ These people dominated the Bihar Congress, and had profited greatly from the high prices of the war and post-war periods. Most of them belonged to high caste groups, but some came from the numerous, and hence electorally powerful, middle caste Yadav, Kurmi and Koeri groups.²⁷ Prior to the dismantling of the zamindari system, small zamindars and big tenants had both been part of the landed interest in north Bihar, but on many occasions their interests had been opposed. The implementation of the zamindari abolition legislation transformed the tenurial structure and removed the basis for this opposition.

The members of the new class of rich peasants had a firm title to their land and held a disproportionate amount of the total area of land in the region. Their position, moreover, was much strengthened by government policy. The Bihar government spent a considerable amount of the extra revenue it gathered through direct access to the rental demand on measures of economic and agrarian amelioration. These measures were of the greatest benefit to the better established peasantry.²⁸ Because they lived well above subsistence level, the rich peasants had a surplus on hand with which

to invest and speculate. They were already geared to production for the market, and hence benefited immediately from improvements in rail and road communications and in storage facilities. Because of their dominance²⁹ over local society, moreover, rich peasants could ensure that they reaped most of the advantage from government investment in the agrarian sector. Congress politicians and government officials generally came from a rich peasant background, and usually acted in support of rich peasant interests.³⁰ In Kajha village in Purnea, for example, the government set up a cooperative society to advance short-term loans to the villagers. Under the rules of the cooperative only land-owning villagers were eligible for loans. Some local rich peasants borrowed from the cooperative at the annual interest rate of 6 to 8 per cent, and then lent to poor villagers at rates ranging from 36 to 72 per cent.³¹ The establishment of the cooperative had had the nominal intention of offering the villagers a cheaper source of credit than that offered by rich peasant money lenders, but instead it reinforced the existing credit mechanisms.

The class of rich peasants which had crystallized as a result of zamindari abolition exercised effective informal control over the countryside. Their dominance was supported by a formal control apparatus which was greatly strengthened during the 1950s.

The 1950s and after: The consolidation of formal control and the development of unrest among the poor.

During the late 1940s many north Bihar policemen had worried about their future when the British transferred power into Indian hands.³² Their apprehensions proved to be ill founded: once voted into office in 1947 the Bihar Congress, as in 1937-39, was more interested in the maintenance of law and order than in putting its election rhetoric into practice.

In the 1950s law and order was difficult to maintain because of the continuing frequency of crime resulting from the pressure of poverty and the prevalence of high food-grain prices.³³ Burglaries and petty thefts occurred at well above pre-war rates,³⁴ and in most districts large, well organized dacoit gangs operated.³⁵ The problem of coping with crime was compounded by the wider availability of fire-arms. "After independence", P.C. Roy Chaudhury comments,

the army was demobilized and illicit traffic in arms followed and this was taken advantage of by criminal gangs. Another opportunity to get firearms presented itself to the criminals in the year 1950 when there was political upheaval in Nepal due to the fight between the King and the Ranas ... some individuals were successful in obtaining illicitly firearms from Nepal. The rules for granting firearms have also been relaxed and it is possible that some of the anti-social gun-licensees may have been abusing their privileges.³⁶

As tables 18 and 19 illustrate, the Congress government responded to the challenge of increased crime and crime involving fire-arms by greatly strengthening the police force.

TABLE 18

Strength of Bihar Police Force, 1930-1960

1930	11,000
1940	13,800
1950	17,763
1960	32,566

TABLE 19

Numbers of armed and unarmed policemen in Bihar, 1950 and 1960

	ARMED	UNARMED
1950	1,443	16,293
1960	14,468	18,098

Sources: Appendix II: Number of Crimes reported in Bihar and proportion police to population, 1930-39, HPf 31/1/1941, NAI;
 David H. Bayley, *The Police and Political Development in India*, (Princeton 1964) p. 64, Table 2, "Growth of Police, Selected States, 1950-1960".

After the challenge of the Quit India Revolt the British had increased the size of the police force. In the 1950s, the Congress government increased the size of the force much more substantially. Between 1950 and 1960 the size of the police force increased by 80 per cent, whereas in the same period Bihar's population increased by approximately 14 per cent.³⁷ Even more striking was

the tenfold increase in the size of the armed police force. In 1950, only 12.5 per cent of the total membership of the Bihar Police force bore arms, but by 1960 some 44 per cent did so.³⁸

Throughout the 1950s the much strengthened police force was mainly occupied in containing the high crime rate which resulted from the pressure of scarcity and high prices on the poor and landless people of north Bihar. Since criminals often operated in distinctive gangs and characteristically acted in opposition to society as a whole the police found that they could contain, if not quell, their activities. In the 1960s and 1970s, however, the poor people of north Bihar began to express their discontent more directly through political protest demanding agrarian and social reform.

By the 1960s and 1970s the limitations on protest that had hitherto restricted the political expression of the poor³⁹ began to break down. Continuing population pressure dissolved the traditional relationships of mutual albeit unequal, obligation between prosperous peasants and their poor clients. The increase in the numbers of the poor created an over-supply of labour, weakening the bargaining position of dependents,⁴⁰ while the need of landholding families to provide for their own increasing numbers lessened their capacity to act paternally towards their employees.⁴¹ Post-independence improvement of road and rail communications helped lessen the parochialism of the villager. Increased access to education made it possible for some exceptional individuals from low caste and Harijan groups to gain a broader comprehension of the society in which they lived, and to give their kinsfolk and caste-fellows political leadership. Gambhira, a leader active in East Champaran, was born in 1947 and matriculated from a village high school before studying up to the Intermediate standard at the Motihari College. He then worked as a truck mechanic in Motihari town before returning to his village in

1971 to engage in political work among the poor peasants and landless labourers. Up until his death in mid-1977 Gambhira achieved considerable success in mobilizing a poor people's protest movement.⁴² (According to the account given by Arun Sinha, Gambhira was tortured to death by a group of rich peasants and policemen).⁴³

The beliefs and attitudes which supported the continuation of grave inequality also came under serious challenge because of the repercussions of the populist ideology which, in an electorate in which all adults are eligible to vote, had become the staple fare of political propaganda. This ideology criticized the rigidities of the caste system and promised extensive agrarian reforms including the effective implementation of land ceiling laws and the distribution of land confiscated from large landholders to the landless. The failure of the government to fulfill the expectations raised by populist ideology exacerbated tensions and inspired protest.⁴⁴ In several localities protest from the landless and the poor "began during the Emergency, partly spurred by the false hopes raised by the round-the-clock propaganda about the 20-point programme."⁴⁵

It can also be suggested that members of the poorest strata of north Bihar society became more willing to engage in protest because of the increase in the relative number of the poor due to continuing population pressure on a static agrarian base.⁴⁶ Downwardly socially mobile people who had become 'newly poor' were perhaps particularly likely to adopt militant means to protect their interests.

In recent years many poor people from north Bihar society have engaged in protest campaigns over such issues as the wages paid for agrarian labour, the distribution of the harvest between sharecroppers and landholders, and the

arrogant, exploitative behaviour of rich peasants and their retainers. Their protests have encountered harsh opposition. There have been a number of violent clashes, and armed police have been despatched to the countryside to support the rich peasants.⁴⁷ To date these challenges to the social order have been effectively contained. Protest by the poor and the landless has managed to shake but not to topple the rich peasant raj.

NOTES : CHAPTER 7

- 1 Because of constraints of space the overview given in this chapter of post-1942 developments is selective in its approach and touches only briefly on many important issues and events. On a later occasion I hope to deal in more depth and a greater length with the topics raised here. Concerning crime rates see GB FR(1) Feb. 1944, FMPf 80, 1944, BSA.
- 2 *Ibid.*; GB FR(2) Oct. 1945, FMPf 81, 1945, BSA.
- 3 GB FR(1) Oct. 1945, FMPf 81, 1945, BSA.
- 4 *Ibid.*
- 5 "Representation to the Prime Minister of Bihar", Miscellaneous Associations' Files, f 159, 1946.
- 6 GB FR(2) March 1947, FMPf 81, 1947, BSA; Datta, *Freedom Movement* III, p. 338.
- 7 Datta, *Freedom Movement* III, p. 326.
- 8 In March 1945 Sahajanand parted company with the Communist Party. Later that year he spoke at kisan meetings and urged his audience to vote for Congress. He also pointed out, however, that once a Congress government came to power the kisans should oppose if it failed to further their interests. *Searchlight*, 20 March 1945; GB FR(2) Dec. 1945, FMPf 81, 1945, BSA. See also Hauser, "Bihar Kisan Sabha", pp. 151-2.
- 9 The Congress Socialists were forced out of the Congress in 1948 and henceforth concentrated on attempting to gain influence via electoral competition. They won a substantial proportion of the vote in the

1952 national elections, but remained too weak to act as a counter-balancing force to Congress. Into the 1950's and beyond, moreover, Jawaharlal Nehru's democratic socialist rhetoric, which promised substantial advances via peaceful means, quietened dissidence by influencing many to believe that the creation of a better-off, more equitable society would only be a matter of time, and could be achieved by the Congress Party. Ramashray Roy, "A Study of the Bihar Pradesh Congress Committee, Bihar, India", (University of California, Berkeley, Ph.D. Thesis, 1966), pp. 191-2, 312;

Ram Padarath Vishwakarma to Secretary, AICC, 12 Oct. 1946, f P6, 1945-46, AICCP, NML; Suresh Chandra Mishra to President, AICC, 23 May 1947 f PC5 (part 1), 1947, AICCP, NML; B.B. Majumdar, "Bihar" in S.V. Kogekar and Richard L. Park (eds.) *Reports on the Indian General Elections 1951-52* (Bombay 1956), pp. 17-30; Paul R. Brass, "Radical Parties of the Left in Bihar: A Comparison of the SSP and the CPI", in Paul R. Brass and Marcus F. Franda (eds), *Radical Politics in South Asia* (London 1973) pp. 325-97, 329.

10 See the *Searchlight*, 1945-46.

11 GB FR (2) Feb. 1944, FMPf 80, 1944, BSA.

12 Datta, *Freedom Movement* III, pp. 339, 343.

13 J. Nehru, quoted in Percival Griffiths, *The History of the Indian Police* (London 1921), p. 308. This passage is also quoted in Datta, *Freedom Movement* III, p. 347.

14 "Provincial Assembly Elections, 1946", f ED-1, 1946, KW II, AICCP, NML.

15 F. Tomasson Jannuzi, *Agrarian Crisis in India, The Case of Bihar* (New Delhi 1974) pp. 12-13; Anand A. Yang, "Agrarian Reform and

- Peasant Dissidence: The Continuing Crisis in India", *Peasant Studies*, V, 3, July 1976, pp. 9-14.
- 16 Jannuzi, *Agrarian Crisis*, pp. 19, 30-1.
- 17 *Ibid.*, p. 31.
- 18 *Ibid.*, p. 32; GB FR (1) July, 1947, FMPf 81, 1944, BSA; Ramnandan Misra, *Peasant Revolt or the Great Challenge* (Darbhanga 1950?).
- 19 Interview, R.L. Chandapuri, Patna, 10 April 1975; "10,000-acre Benami land of Darbhanga Raj detected", *Searchlight*, 18 April 1976; Brass, "Radical Parties", p. 391.
- 20 Jannuzi, *Agrarian Crisis*, chaps. 3, 4; Geof Wood, "The Process of Differentiation among the peasantry in Desipur Village", in Joy and Everitt, *Kosi Symposium*, pp. 113-30, 114.
- 21 Jannuzi, *Agrarian Crisis*, chaps. 3, 4; Wood, "Differentiation in Desipur", p. 113.
- 22 Jannuzi, *Agrarian Crisis*, chap. 4.
- 23 *Ibid.*, chaps. 5, 7; Roy, "Bihar Pradesh Congress Committee", pp. 307-11.
- 24 Interview, S.K. Jha, Darbhanga town, 5 Oct. 1976; Interview, Ramnandan Misra, Laheriaseraï town, 1 Nov. 1976; Ramnandan Misra, *Peasant Revolt and Kisans are on the March*, (Darbhanga 1949?, 1950?). Ramnandan Misra kindly lent me copies of these two pamphlets.
- 25 Jannuzi, *Agrarian Crisis*, pp. 20-25.
- 26 Wood, "Differentiation in Desipur", p. 113 and "From Raiyat to Rich Peasant", *South Asian Review*, 7 (1), 1973, pp. 1-17,
- 27 Interview, R.L. Chandapuri, Patna 10 April 1975; Harry W. Blair, "Ethnicity and Democratic Politics in India. Caste as a Differential

Mobilizer in Bihar", *Comparative Politics*, 5, 1972-73, pp. 107-127 and "Caste, Politics and Democracy in Bihar State, India: The Elections of 1967" (Duke University Ph.D. Thesis 1969), *passim* and pp. 353-5.

- 28 Geof Wood, "Rural Development and the Post-Colonial State: Administration and the Peasantry in the Kosi region of north Bihar, India", in Joy and Everitt, *Kosi Symposium*, pp. 131-50. Wood also details how the compensation given for the abolition of zamindars' rights has been invested fruitfully in a variety of commercial enterprises. See his "Differentiation in Desipur", p. 113.
- 29 The control of the rich peasantry over the countryside has been further consolidated because from 1947 onwards, largely as a result of official corruption and favouritism, they have had easy access to fire-arms. For details of an allegation that the Congress government had given out gun licenses in return for electoral support, see "Statement on malpractice in Elections for Khagaria Subdivision, Monghyr", n.d., but internal evidence suggests 1951-52 f 369, 1937-52, JPNP, NML.
- 30 Wood, "Rural Development", p. 137; Interview, R.L. Chandapuri, Patna, 17 April 1976.
- 31 Dilip Hiro, *Inside India Today*, (London 1976), p. 6.
- 32 "Representation to the Prime Minister of Bihar", Miscellaneous Association's Files, f 159, 1946, JPNP, NML.
- 33 P.C. Roychaudhury, *Bihar District Gazetteer Champaran* (Patna 1960) p. 440; *Bihar District Gazetteer Purnea* (Patna 1963) p. 533; *Bihar District Gazetteer Saharsa* (Patna 1965) p. 360.

- 34 Roy Chaudhury, *Champaran*, p. 440.
- 35 Roy Chaudhury, *Bihar District Gazetteer Darbhanga* (Patna 1964) p. 467 and *Saharsa*, p. 358.
- 36 Roy Chaudhury, *Darbhanga*, p. 466. See also note 29 above.
- 37 David H. Bayley, *The Police and Political Development in India* (Princeton 1964), p. 63.
- 38 For discussion of the strengthening of the coercive capacity of the state at the all-India level in recent years see Ranajit Guha "Indian Democracy: Long Dead, Now Buried". *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 6, 1, 1976, pp. 39-53, 44-46. Guha comments that "During the last twenty-four years police expenditure by the central government has increased 52 times from 30 million rupees spent in 1950-51 to 1,564 million budgeted for 1974-75."
- 39 See above, chap. 1, pp. 34-7.
- 40 Wood, "Differentiation in Desipur", p. 114.
- 41 Hoskins, "Land-Holding and Development", p. 78; Interview, R.L. Chandapuri, Patna, 17 April 1978.
- 42 Arun Sinha, "Murder of a Peasant Leader", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 30 July 1977, pp. 1214-15.
- 43 *Ibid.*, p. 1215.
- 44 Jannuzi, *Agrarian Crisis*, chap. 8.
- 45 Arun Sinha, "Class War, Not 'Atrocities against Harijans'", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 10 Dec. 1977, pp. 2037-8, 2037.
- 46 Jannuzi, *Agrarian Crisis*, p. 167.

- 47 Sinha, "Class War:", p. 2037; Hiranmay Dhar and Kalyan Mukherjee, "Growing Peasant Revolt", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 14 Jan. 1978, p. 52; Jannuzi, *Agrarian Crisis*, pp. 134, 137, 148-155; Jayaprakash Narayan, "The Land Grabbers", *Searchlight*, 7 Aug. 1970; Brass, "Radical Parties", pp. 387-94.

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7. INTERVIEWS

R.L. Chandapuri (one-time President All India Backward Castes Association). Patna, 10 and 17 April 1976.

Buddhikar Jha (senior officer in the Raj Darbhanga administration).
~~Dar~~bhanga town, 20, 25, 27 September 1976.

Jageshwar Mishra (officer in the Darbhanga Raj administration).
Darbhanga town, 15, 23 September, 12 October 1976.

Rammandan Misra (Congress Socialist and Kisan Sabha activist),
Laheriasera town, 30, 31 October, 1 November 1976.

Umarpathi Tewari (one-time officer in the Raj Darbhanga administration
and one-time revenue officer with Bihar government). Dumeri village,
Darbhanga, 17 October 1976.

GLOSSARY

ANNA	Unit of currency amounting to $\frac{1}{16}$ th of a rupee.
ABWAB	Cess or additional due exacted from a tenant by a landlord or his agents.
ADIVASI	Member of a "tribal" non-Hindu or semi-Hinduized group.
AMIN	Accountant. Landlord's agent specializing in financial matters.
AMLA	Agent, retainer of a landlord.
BAKAST (BAKASHT)	Land held under direct control by a landlord, but in which a tenant can accrue occupancy rights.
BEGARI	Labour service exacted from a socially subordinate person by a superordinate person for which no wage or a wage below the current market rate is paid.
BENAMI	Holding of land under false name or in the name of a client or relative.
BIGHA (BEEGHA)	A unit of area. The extent of a bigha varies from locality to locality. In north Bihar roughly equivalent to 1 acre.
CHAUKIDAR (CHOWKIDAR)	Village watchman. Locally appointed member of auxiliary police force.
DACOIT	Member of a robber band.
DAFADAR	Senior village watchman. Member of village police force acting as supervisor over a group of village watchmen.
DAHNAL	Land which has had its productivity lowered due to flooding.
DAKHALDEHANI	Legal and administrative process whereby the new owner of a tenancy holding that has been sold up at an auction sale takes physical possession of the holding.

DIARA	Land subject to flooding. Particularly fertile land on river bank, or forming an island in a river.
DEHAT	Landlord's sphere of influence. A rural area, the countryside generally.
ELAKA	Local area. Unit of a landlord's estate.
JAMADAR	Supervisor. Head assistant of landlord or indigo planter.
JETHRYOT	Head tenant. Locally powerful peasant responsible for collecting a landlord's rents from his tenants.
KUTCHERRY (CUTCHERRY)	Landlord's store-house and/or office building.
KISAN	Cultivator. Farmer. Peasant.
HARIJAN	Gandhi's term for a member of an "untouchable" group. Now in general usage.
LAKH	100,000 (usually of rupees).
LATHI	Quarter staff carried by peasants as weapon. Standard weapon of Bihar constabulary.
MAUZA	'Revenue village'. An area of land, which may or may not cover the same area as a particular village and its lands, owned by a landlord or a group of landlords.
MUKHTIAR (MUKHTEAR)	Lower court lawyer.
MOFASSAL (MOFUSSIL)	The countryside. The interior.
MAHANT (MAHANTH)	Priest in charge of a temple who controls areas of temple-owned land nearby.
NILAMI	Tenancy holding which has been newly purchased at an auction sale from a tenant unable to meet his rent payments.
PATWARI (PATWARY)	Village accountant responsible to landlord for keeping land, rent and revenue records.

RYOT (RAIYAT)	A tenant with permanent or "occupancy" rights to his land. More generally, a cultivator or peasant.
RYOTI	Category of land held by an occupancy tenant to which he has permanent rights.
SATYAGRAHA	Non-violent civil disobedience.
SWARAJ	Self-rule. Independence from Britain for India.
SALAMI	Fee paid for settlement of tenancy holding.
SHARABESHI	Arrangement whereby a tenant pays a higher rent in return for no longer being expected by his landlord to grow a certain crop on a portion of his tenancy holdings.
SWAMI	Religious leader. Title assumed by a religious mendicant.
TAMASHA	Show. Exhibition. Public function. Festivity.
TAWAN	Lump sum paid by a tenant in return for being released from the obligation to grow a certain crop for his landlord.
THANA	Police station building. Rural area under jurisdiction of the staff of a police station.
THIKADAR	Lessee of proprietary rights from a landlord.
TINKATHIA	System under which a tenant grows a certain crop on $\frac{3}{20}$ th of his holding.
TEHSIL	Unit within a landlord's holdings.
TEHSILDAR	Collector of rents on behalf of landlord in a specified unit (the "tehsil") of the landlord's holding.
VAKIL	Higher court lawyer. Agent. Emissary.
ZAMINDAR	Landowner. Landlord whose rights were guaranteed by the Permanent Settlement of 1793.
ZIRAT (SEERAT, ZEERAT)	Land held by a landlord in which no other rights can accrue.