

INDIA AND THE RAJ 1919-1947
GLORY, SHAME AND BONDAGE
Volume Two

To my beloved ones

SHOMEE
SEVANTI
ABHI
APU

INDIA AND THE RAJ 1919-1947
GLORY, SHAME AND BONDAGE
Volume Two

Suniti Kumar Ghosh

RESEARCH UNIT FOR POLITICAL ECONOMY
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PREFACE TO THE SECOND VOLUME

Reviewing the first volume of this book, a professor teaching history at a university correctly referred to me as “not a trained historian”. But I hardly regret the fact, for if I had been what he called “a trained historian”, I might have been one of his kind.

Like Jean Chesneaux, the French historian, I believe that history and historians are not above class struggle. As he put it, “our knowledge of the past is a dynamic factor in the development of society, a significant stake in the political and ideological struggles of today, a sharply contested area. What we know of the past can be of service to the Establishment or to the people’s movement.” “In class societies”, he said, “history is one of the tools the ruling class uses to maintain its power. The state apparatus tries to *control the past* at the level of both political action and ideology.” “The revision of official history”, therefore, “is regarded as one of the essential points of departure for the people’s struggles.”

The history of the ‘Gandhian Era’ as well as of the earlier period, which is elitist, permeated with the ideology of the ruling class and full of half-truths and myths, needs to be re-written.

I remember now, as I often do, the debt – that can never be re-paid – I owe to those who, sharing my ideals and braving immense risks, gave me shelter and food when shelter was more precious than food. But for them this book could never have been written.

In the course of preparation of this book many friends have helped me with books and journals. Among them are Amit Sen, Asit Majumdar, Nimai Adhikari, Dr Muktesh Ghosh, Prof. Amit Bhattacharya, Tarun Bose, Anu Bose, and Amit Banerjee. For Communist Party publications or xerox copies of communist documents I am in deep debt to Ranjit Mukherjee, Samarendra Lochan Mitra, Professors Amitabha Chandra and Hari P. Sharma, and some former students of the Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. I sincerely thank Sri Chittaranjan Bhattacharya, in-charge of the Library, Indian Statistical Institute, Calcutta, who kindly permitted me to use the library even when I was not a member of the Institute. Besides the above friends, I owe much to several others, some of whom prefer to remain anonymous.

I cannot adequately express my thanks to the Research Unit for Political Economy, Bombay, specially to Rajani X. Desai, who kindly relieved me of the burden of publishing this volume and took it upon themselves. I gratefully acknowledge that my friends of the Research Unit (authors of the book *Indian National Congress: How Indian, How National?*) carefully went through the manuscript of this volume and offered me a number of suggestions which have

been of much help to me.

Several of my articles published in *Economic and Political Weekly* (Bombay), *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* (Colorado), *Frontier* (Calcutta) and *Kalam* (New Delhi) were early, concise versions of what appears in some chapters of this volume.

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NOTE FROM THE PUBLISHERS

This volume has been published by the Research Unit for Political Economy (R.U.P.E.), constituted under the People's Research Trust.

R.U.P.E. is concerned with analysing, at the theoretical and empirical levels, various aspects of the economic life of the country and its institutions. However, to understand any complex social phenomenon we have to turn to a study of its history; and thus we must seek the roots of the condition of present-day India in our past.

That was precisely the approach of Suniti Kumar Ghosh's earlier works, *The Indian Big Bourgeoisie: its Genesis, Growth and Character* and the first volume of *India and the Raj: Glory, Shame and Bondage*. They offered an interpretation of pre-1947 India that stood in dramatic opposition to the overwhelming weight of established historiography.

The interpretation offered by these works has broadly been shared by a stream of political opinion in India for decades. But these works offered for the first time a wealth of substantiation and tightness of argument which made it impossible for established historiography to dismiss. They thus constituted a landmark in modern Indian historiography.

The proponents of the established views chose neither to contend seriously with this newly substantiated interpretation, nor to budge even slightly in their own interpretation. Instead, they did their best to ignore it, as if it did not exist.

It is important to realise that these decisions are not merely academic, but political. S.K. Ghosh's works are not based on newly-discovered archival material, but on material that has long been available, and indeed has been the object of study by established historians. Still the facts he cites strike one as revelations, because there has been a remarkable silence about them – no doubt, precisely because they have a profound *political* implication.

For if the Indian National Congress did not win genuine independence for India in 1947, *we are as yet not free today*, and every act of the Indian State must indeed be seen in that light.

It is all the more necessary then for us to shatter the silence. It is against this background that R.U.P.E. takes pride in publishing this volume. It is our hope that those who are interested in historical truth promote this book or, failing that, seriously contend with it.

Given our paucity of resources, we would not have been able to publish this work without donations and generous interest-free loans from several persons, to whom we are very grateful. We also thank Mr. D.R. Amladi who prepared the index, and Sameer Bhole and Neeta Deshpande, who typeset the book.

Rajani X Desai,
for R.U.P.E.

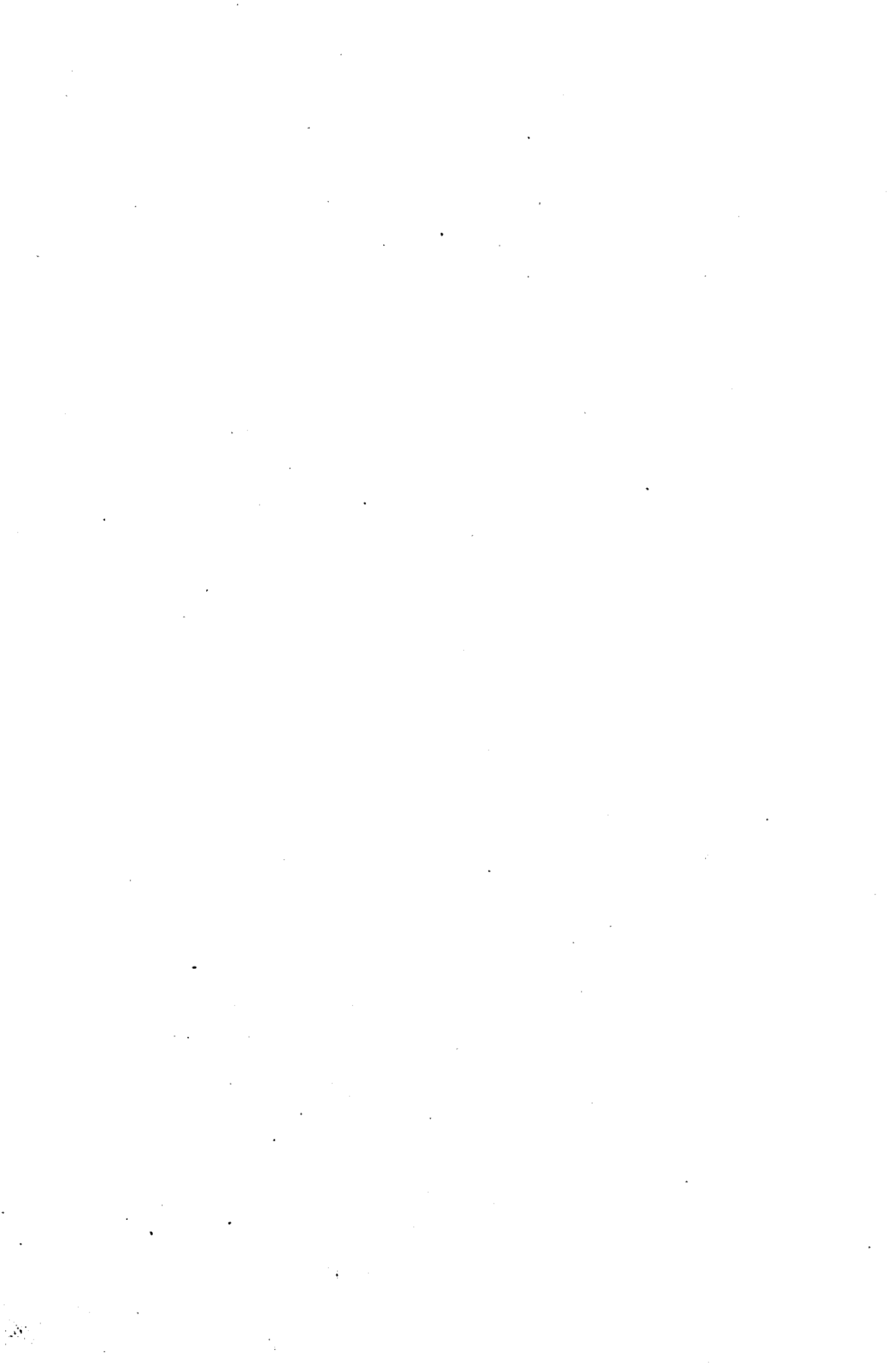
ABBREVIATIONS

AICC	: All India Congress Committee
AICC Papers	: All India Congress Committee Papers (Nehru Memorial Museum and Library – NMML – New Delhi)
AIKS	: All India Kisan Sabha
AIML	: All India Muslim League
AISF	: All India Students Federation
AISPC	: All India States People's Conference
AITUC	: All India Trade Union Congress
CC	: Central Committee
CI	: Communist International
<i>(The) Congress Encyclopaedia</i>	: <i>The Encyclopaedia of the Indian National Congress</i>
CPGB	: Communist Party of Great Britain
CPI	: Communist Party of India
CPSU(B)	: Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolshevik)
CSP	: Congress Socialist Party
CWC	: Congress Working Committee
CWG	: <i>Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi</i>
ECCI	: Executive Committee of the Communist International
EE	: <i>Eastern Economist</i>
FB	: Forward Bloc
FICCI	: Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry
GOI	: Government of India
IAR	: <i>Indian Annual Register</i>
IESHR	: <i>Indian Economic and Social History Review</i>
ILO	: International Labour Organisation
IMPRECOR	: <i>International Press Correspondence</i>
INA	: Indian National Army
JN Papers	: Jawaharlal Nehru Papers (NMML)
PB	: Polit Bureau
PCC	: Provincial Congress Committee
PT Papers	: Purshotamdas Thakurdas Papers (NMML)
RTC	: Round Table Conference
RTUC	: Red Trade Union Congress
SWM	: <i>Selected Works of Mao Tsetung</i>
SWN	: <i>Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru</i>
TOP	: <i>Constitutional Relations between Britain and India: The Transfer of Power 1942-7</i>
Wickenden Report :	<i>Quit India Movement: British Secret Report</i>

The Roman numeral after a book indicates the number of the volume and the Arabic numeral the page number.

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CHAPTER ONE

TOWARDS GREATER COLLABORATION BETWEEN IMPERIALIST AND INDIAN BIG CAPITAL

Revolution and War

With the end of World War I, the basis of a new world war was laid. World War I resolved no contradictions: only, *for the time being*, Germany ceased to be a rival of imperialist Britain and France. But other old contradictions became intensified and new ones emerged. The birth of the Soviet Union and the failure of all the aggressive campaigns launched by the imperialist powers to overthrow the new regime meant that a considerable part of the world dropped out of the capitalist-imperialist system. The Russian Revolution was followed by an upsurge of revolutionary struggles in different countries of Europe. Revolutions actually broke out in Hungary and Bavaria but met with defeat. There were revolutionary uprisings in some other countries. Land was seized by the peasants and factories by the workers in Italy. Italy was on the verge of a proletarian revolution when, in 1922, the fascists under the leadership of Benito Mussolini captured power. It was a regime of naked terror over the working people in the interest of big capital. The tide of revolutionary struggle retreated from about 1922, though there were fitful struggles in some country or another during the rest of the twenties.

The inter-imperialist contradictions became acute. Britain emerged out of the war much weaker than before. The old imperialist power, already past its prime, could hardly rival the U.S.A., the young imperialist power, whose star was in the ascendant. At the end of the war Britain changed from a creditor to a debtor country – heavily indebted to the U.S.A. It was squeezed out of its informal empire in Latin America by its trans-Atlantic rival, and much of its interests in Canada and Australia was taken over by U.S. capital. There was a clash between the two for markets, including the Indian market. To protect its imperial market in India and other parts of the empire, Britain imposed imperial preference, while U.S. capital was clamouring for an open door. Rivalry in other spheres too (for instance, building naval power to command the seas) was acute. Naval disarmament conferences and pacts like the Kellogg Pact (1928) between the leading capitalist powers proved to be of little worth. They all prated about peace while preparing for war.

With the rise of fascism in Germany and the beginnings of Japan's wars of aggression, Britain's contradictions with the U.S.A. were overshadowed by the clash of interests between Britain, the U.S.A. and France on the one hand and Germany, Japan and Italy on the other. We shall return to it later.

After a brief post-war boom in some capitalist countries there was economic stagnation in the entire capitalist world, followed by a devastating crisis with its attendant mass unemployment and ruin, lasting for about four years from 1929 to 1933. Only the Soviet Union was free from the horrors of this crisis. When the industrial and agricultural production in the capitalist world sank to very low levels, it was only the much-maligned Soviet Union that made spectacular economic advances at a rate never before attained anywhere in the world. The Soviet people had embarked on the uncharted path of building socialism – a task which, if successful, would have changed the course of history.

The economic crisis of 1929-33 in the capitalist world brought in its train bankruptcy of tens of thousands of joint-stock companies, closure of factories, unemployment and ruin of tens of millions of people. It intensified the struggle between rival capitalist groups for foreign markets, trade war, currency war, dumping and the like. The imperialists tried to stave off the effects of the crisis not only at the expense of their own workers, peasants and other toiling people but also at the expense of the toiling people of the colonies. As we shall see, the fall in the prices of agricultural products by almost a half as a result of the crisis hit the already-impooverished Indian peasant very severely.

The political and economic crisis in the capitalist world gave rise to two contradictory trends – trends towards revolution on the one hand and fascism and imperialist war on the other to avert revolution.

After the national uprising in Ireland and the defeat of the revolutions in Hungary, Bavaria and Austria in the early twenties, revolutions again broke out in the 1930s in Viet Nam (then a part of French Indo-China), Latin American and other countries. The Chinese revolution suffered initial defeat in 1927 but soon gathered strength and, under the leadership of Mao Tsetung, established extensive liberated areas in North and North-west China by 1939.

On the other hand, the seeds of war were sown by the Versailles treaty, which Germany, vanquished in World War I, was forced to sign with the Allied and Associated Powers in June 1919. The victor powers, chiefly Britain and France, sought to cripple Germany economically and militarily and to improve their own material prospects at the expense of Germany. They took away the German colonies, not to grant them freedom but to share them out among themselves under the League of Nations mandates.

Several German-speaking areas were separated from her and attached to neighbouring countries, and Germany was split into two by a 'corridor', which was given to Poland. Huge war reparations were demanded of her which she was not capable of paying. Stringent terms were imposed on her so that militarily she would remain weak and defenceless. Naturally, the Germans wanted nothing better than to tear up the Versailles Treaty. For several years after the end of the war Germany struggled to overcome her economic hardships, which were accentuated by the huge indemnities she was made to pay. The German working class was a quite powerful, but divided, force owing allegiance to two parties – the Communists and the Socialists. Before 1930 Hitler and his National Socialist Party were far from strong. But with the onset of the severe economic crisis in 1930, Hitler, who harped on the injustice of the Versailles Treaty and spouted venom against the Jews and Communism, went from strength to strength. Big industrialists and landlords rallied to his support. Fascism triumphed in Germany in 1933. Ruthless suppression of the working class and domination of Europe and ultimately of the world were its twin aims. Payment of war indemnities had already stopped: Hitler tore up the Versailles Treaty and started making feverish war preparations.

The monopoly bourgeoisie destroyed all vestiges of bourgeois democracy in Italy, Germany, Spain and some countries of Central Europe to maintain their rule and fulfil their imperialist aims. They launched war against their own people before they went to war against other peoples.

Japan invaded and occupied Manchuria in 1931, and in 1937 invaded North and Central China. By 1938 she reached Canton in the South. Italy conquered Ethiopia in 1935, and in 1936 Germany and Italy supported General Franco's war against Republican Spain, intervened militarily and entrenched themselves respectively in North and South Spain. Germany and Japan entered into an Anti-Comintern Agreement in 1935 : Italy signed it in 1937. Early in 1938 Germany annexed Austria and, then in the autumn of that year, the Sudetan region of Czechoslovakia. German troops marched in and the whole of Czechoslovakia was occupied in March 1939. These aggressive wars in the three continents brought within their ambit about 50 crores of people, and were a prelude to World War II.

These aggressions and conquests could not take place without the silent connivance of the ruling classes of Britain and France, especially Britain. These aggressions by Japan, Italy and Germany constituted a challenge to the imperial interests of Britain, France and the U.S.A., but they, though more powerful, avoided confrontation with the aggressive powers. They rejected the Soviet Union's repeated appeals for building collective security, for pursuing a policy of collective resistance to the aggressors. Instead, Britain, France and the U.S.A. followed a policy of

non-intervention, a policy of appeasement of the aggressors, even at risk to their own strategic interests. By their policies, Britain, France and the U.S.A. wanted to induce the fascist aggressors to advance towards the east and launch war against the Soviet Union. They hoped to embroil these powers in a war with the Soviet Union and to step in and share the spoils when both would be exhausted. When this hope withered away with the conclusion of a non-aggression pact between Germany and the Soviet Union in August 1939, and when Germany invaded Poland, they revised their policy. Then Britain and France marched against Germany as anti-fascist crusaders. World War II began early in September 1939 – vaster, more prolonged and much more costly in men and materials than World War I. Imperialist war was the inevitable consequence of the rivalry between the colonial powers to exploit and oppress the people and dominate the world. It is inseparable from the capitalist system. So long as the capitalist system prevails, there is no escape from war between classes and between nations.

The Crisis and the Indian Big Bourgeoisie

The world crisis of 1929-33, instead of giving rise to antagonistic contradictions between imperialist capital and Indian big capital, as V. I. Pavlov and others have argued, helped to bring them closer than before. It was not merely fear of the people but objective economic conditions that were driving them nearer to each other during the thirties, despite some contradictions.

While the economic crisis hit hard the Indian people – the peasantry, the workers, the urban petty bourgeoisie and the small bourgeoisie which had no foreign links – it contributed in certain ways to the further growth and development of the big bourgeoisie. The thirties were a period of unprecedented growth and expansion of Indian big comprador capital. Due to the catastrophic fall in the prices of agricultural products – about 50 per cent on an average, – the peasantry was ruined. The rise in taxes, such as those on salt and kerosene, added to their woes. The value of India's exports of merchandise (other than precious metals) fell from Rs 381 crore in 1928-9 to Rs 181 crore in 1931-2. The decline in the value of imports was no less steep: it fell by almost a half over the same years.

By curtailing imports of consumer goods, the depression afforded virtual protection to indigenous industry. Amiya Kumar Bagchi notes that "aggregate private investment in real terms during some years of the depression was higher than during the middle years of the twenties."¹ While the proportion of consumer goods to total imports decreased, imports

of machinery and industrial raw materials increased. This trend continued throughout the thirties, and the beneficiaries were the Indian big bourgeois, who, depending on imported capital goods and industrial raw materials, manufactured mainly consumer goods.

Besides, to make up the loss in customs duties due to decline in external trade, tariff was substantially raised in 1930 and 1931 for revenue purposes. Since 1922, the rate of import duty was 15 per cent, except on cotton piecegoods, on which it was 11 per cent. In February 1930 the import duty on cotton textiles was raised to 15 per cent. In 1931 the general tariff rate, including that on cotton textiles, was first increased to 20 per cent; but a preference of 5 per cent was granted to British low quality cotton imports.

Moreover, protection was granted to several industries like cotton textiles, sugar, paper, iron and steel in the thirties. Traditional imports from Britain and British colonies were being displaced by non-British imports. While protection was granted to certain Indian industries, differential duties were fixed for British and other foreign goods. British industries like cotton textiles could not compete with those of other countries like Japan. To salvage as much of the Indian market as possible for several British industries, the principle of imperial preference was introduced in 1927 and continued afterwards.

During the depression years the Indian bourgeoisie came to enjoy two other important advantages – the fall in the level of wages of workers and in the prices of raw materials. The Bombay millowners introduced the policies of rationalization and substantial wage-cuts in 1929 and, aided by the colonial state machinery, fought and overcame the workers' resistance.

All these factors contributed to a spurt in industrial development. Assuming industrial output in 1925-6 as 100, it rose to 100.7 in 1930, 132.4 in 1934 and 166.8 in 1938.² According to Rajat Kanta Ray, the industrial workforce grew annually at 1 per cent between 1921 and 1931 but the rate of growth quadrupled between 1932 and 1937.³

While the old, or relatively old, big bourgeois groups like the Tatas, Birlas, Shri Rams, Singhanias, and Walchands vastly expanded their industrial activities, there were several new entrants into industry who had previously been *banians*, brokers and big speculators, like the Goenkas, Dalmia Jains, Thapars, Chettiars, and Naidus. Many of the new entrants like the Goenkas and Chettiars were diversifying from trading and indigenous banking into cotton textiles and other industries. Speaking of the Madras Presidency, Raman Mahadevan observes: "The late twenties and thirties marked a turning point with regard to investment of South Indian capital in industry. The Depression by sharply turning the terms of trade between agriculture and industry in favour of the latter, brought about a significant

shift of capital from agriculture and money-lending to industry.... Particularly significant in the context was the phenomenal growth of the textile industry centred around the Coimbatore region.”⁴

Even during the depression years profits were quite handsome. For instance, Sir Shri Ram’s Delhi Cloth Mills paid a dividend of 135 per cent in 1930-31.⁵ This might be exceptional in the textile industry, but sugar earned huge fortunes for the big bourgeois – the Birlas, Shri Rams, Dalmias, Thapars, Walchands, Soorajmull-Nagarmulls and several others. George Schuster, then Finance Member of the Viceroy’s Executive Council, observed that the sugar industry earned a profit of 400 per cent in 1933.⁶ This, again, might be exceptional but the rates of profit were very high.

Paper mills had been owned and controlled mainly by British managing agencies like Heilgers, Balmer Lawrie and Andrew Yule. But from about 1936 the Birlas, Thapars and Dalmias entered the paper industry and set up large mills.

Between 1931 and 1939 the Birlas, Dalmias, Mafatlals, Shri Rams, Walchands and so on had a meteoric rise.⁷

The Gold Drain

England was forced to go off the gold standard on 21 September 1931 when the second Round Table Conference was sitting in London. The Government of India, without reference to the British cabinet, announced that the rupee was delinked from gold as well as sterling in order to minimize the impact of Britain’s economic crisis on the Indian economy. But Secretary of State Samuel Hoare instructed New Delhi to issue an ordinance linking the rupee back to sterling. Kanji Dwarkadas⁸ writes: “I was in Simla all that fortnight of this crisis in constant contact with Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyer, the Acting Member for Law, and Sir Ibrahim Rahimtoola, President of the Indian Legislative Assembly. Lord Willingdon [the Viceroy] and all the members of his Executive Council protested against Sir Samuel Hoare’s cable and offered to resign in a body.... Hoare got hold of Ghanshyamdas Birla, who was in London for the Round Table Conference...and between them, they managed to get a press interview from Gandhiji on this rupee-pound crisis. Reuters circulated Gandhiji’s interview that nothing hasty should be done at this crisis and the *status quo* [that is, the sterling-rupee link] should be maintained!” According to Dwarkadas, in his subsequent cable to Willingdon, Hoare referred to Gandhi’s advice, refused to accept the offer of resignation from the Viceroy and his Executive Councillors, called upon them to maintain the status quo by relinking the rupee to the pound as before.⁹ So the Viceroy, to quote

R.J. Moore, "vainly resisted to a point just short of resignation the Cabinet's decision to keep the rupee tied to the pound, regardless of the price of gold".¹⁰ And the rupee remained tied to the fluctuating pound at the old rate of one rupee to 1s. 6d. to serve imperialist interests.

G.D. Birla claimed that he had objected to relinking the rupee to sterling.¹¹ It was not unusual for men like Birla to take a public stance which was quite contrary to their private stand on an issue. They were ever eager to serve the raj in order to serve themselves.

The fact is, while as a result of such a step the Indian people were further impoverished, some big compradors like the Birlas, besides the imperialists, were the beneficiaries. Because of the severe economic crisis, the peasants and other toiling people, whose only savings consisted in gold and silver trinkets, were forced to bring them to the market. The buying-up and export of this 'distress gold' earned high profits for big Indian bullion merchants like the Birlas and saved the British raj from a worse financial crisis. The huge gold drain from India went to meet the payment of 'home charges' and to service the so-called 'national debts' – that is, as tribute to the colonial masters.

Speaking in the House of Commons on 29 February 1932, Samuel Hoare said: "More gold has been exported since last September or rather gold has been exported from India since last September at a higher rate than it has even been exported from the gold fields of South Africa."¹² R.J. Moore has observed that "Suspicion was rife that Britain had manipulated the rupee in order to snatch the vast private hoards of Indian gold.... The monetary experts on the Indian Council of the Secretary of State, Sir Henry Strakosch and Sir Reginald Mant, reported in February 1932: '[Britain] has been able to use the gold for the discharge of its foreign obligations and to that extent to avoid impairment of its exchange with gold standard countries'."¹³ Referring to the gold drain from India, R. Palme Dutt, who cited the London *Economist's* estimates of the huge size of the drain between 1931 and 1937, observed: "Once again, in a new form, as in the days of the Industrial Revolution, the measure of recovery of British capitalism in 1933-37 was built up on the spoliation of India."¹⁴

Who were the Indian accomplices of British finance capital in this massive spoliation of India? The bullion trade of the whole of India passed through Bombay, and the firm of Sir Chunilal B. Mehta, cousin of Sir Purshotamdas and "the king of the bullion trade in Bombay",¹⁵ along with four others, served as "the sole links between the London bullion merchants and the 'orthodox' bullion merchants of Bombay".¹⁶ Among the leading brokers in the Bombay Bullion Exchange were the G.D. Birla Brothers.¹⁷

When Gandhi, Patel and other top Congress leaders were in prison in 1932, the *Bombay Congress Bulletin*, issued by the Emergency Council,

Bombay Provincial Congress Committee, branded Purshotamdas Thakurdas and Birla as traitors. It stated:

“SIXTY MILLION POUNDS WORTH OF INDIAN GOLD¹⁸ was exported from this country to England during the last year. IT HAS BEEN A VERITABLE WINDFALL TO BRITAIN.... By helping to send Indian gold to England at a time like the present when India is fighting a desperate fight for liberty and life, the Indian Bullion merchant has literally supplied our enemies with valuable ammunition *at our own expense to be used against us*. By helping in the dangerous flight of gold from this country, the Indian traitors dealing in bullion have deliberately impoverished us to enrich the enemy, have helped to lower the already low credit of India in the economic world, have contrived to increase India's dependence on the worst enemy, on the murderous parasite which is living on her vitals.... Sir Purshotamdas and Mr Birla have made lakhs recently from this immoral traffic.... Meanwhile, we shall fight both the enemy and the traitor.”¹⁹

But their fight against the traitors had to be abandoned almost as soon as it began. When the news of their demonstrations in front of Sir Purshotamdas's palatial residence in Bombay reached Vallabhbhai Patel in prison, he immediately sent instructions to withdraw the Congress pickets. Patel was quite right in claiming that Sir Purshotamdas was “more *our* man than anyone else's”.²⁰

With the help of the big compradors the British imperialists were able to shift some of the burden of their financial crisis on to the shoulders of the Indian people.

Convergence of Interests despite some Contradictions

Britain's share in India's imports had been sharply declining since the end of World War I²¹. Britain's imperial market in India was increasingly threatened by other imperialist powers. As noted before, British goods were being replaced in the Indian market by foreign goods to a great extent and the competition between British and Indian goods was far less than that between British and foreign goods.

With the onset of the world crisis, the Federation of British Industries (FBI) “pointed to the increased importance of Empire for the British economy and prescribed imperial economic co-operation as the only possible way for the crisis-ridden and increasingly non-competitive British economy”.²² As the FBI noted: “Great Britain has the possibility of creating (with her empire) an economic group of unlimited possibilities”; without

it, her competitive position would be "extremely disadvantageous."²³

The Indian big bourgeois were no less eager to respond. In October 1931, when the Round Table Conference was in session, G. D. Birla told Edward Benthall, who represented expatriate British capitalists at the conference, that "henceforward, he desired to work in collaboration and to drop all his hostility".²⁴ On both sides there was a desire "to get together", "a more co-operative attitude".

While protective tariff was raised in the interest of Indian industries and, mainly, at the expense of non-British foreign goods, the principle of granting imperial preference was adopted as a tonic to the ailing British industries. The Ottawa Conference was held in 1932 to decide upon preferential rates of imports from empire countries. To quote Kate Mitchell, "In this way the tariff system of the early twenties, originally proclaimed as a means for accelerating Indian industrialization, was transformed into a system which assisted British industry to compete in the Indian market, while giving India in return the privilege of favoured rates for the sale of her raw materials and semi-manufactures in the British market..."²⁵ This imposition of imperial preference was designed to tie India and other British colonies and dominions closer to Britain and perpetuate the same old colonial economy.

Ottawa arrested the decline of British exports to India only temporarily.²⁶ Even with imperial preference, British goods could hardly compete with the goods from other imperialist countries as well as with certain Indian products like cotton textiles of certain varieties, that had the advantage of cheap labour. The main factor contributing to the decline of British exports not only to India but to the world as a whole²⁷ was the weakness of British industry compared to the rising industries of Japan, the U.S.A., Germany etc.

Was the attitude of the Indian big bourgeoisie towards Ottawa one of hostility, as is usually represented?

On behalf of the Committee of the FICCI, its president Walchand Hirachand in a representation in April 1932 to the Secretary of State for India, the President of the Imperial Economic Conference, Ottawa, and others, objected to the *composition of the Indian delegation nominated by the Government of India without reference to the FICCI*. He complained that "The Government had so far failed to acquaint the Indian community with the potentialities of the Ottawa Conference by not taking them into their confidence with regard to Government's attitude on these questions". He stated that "it should be left to the future popular Government of the country, that would be constituted by the new Government of India Act, to shape their policy regarding inter-imperial trade relations, including the application of reciprocal preferential tariff agreement..."²⁸ The main

objection taken by the different Indian Chambers of Commerce was to the personnel of the Indian delegation which consisted of the nominees of the Government.²⁹

It is interesting that contrary to the FICCI president's formal representation, the letters of the Secretary of the FICCI, dated 8 and 9 April 1932, to the Commerce Department, Government of India, showed eagerness of the apex body of Indian trade and industry to send its representatives to attend the conference. In those letters the FICCI Secretary asked "whether the Government of India intended to offer facilities of that nature [facilities just to attend the Conference and obtain relevant Conference papers] to such observers as might be deputed by the Federation at their own cost, and whether the Government of India proposed to invite the Federation to appoint representatives to attend the Conference". In his reply, dated 31 May 1932, the Government of India's Commerce Secretary, Drake, curtly informed the FICCI Secretary that no such facilities would be offered.³⁰

According to G.K. Lieten, a majority of the members of the Indian Merchants Chamber of Bombay lent their support to the Ottawa agreement.³¹ How did the most 'radical' among the Indian bourgeois, Birla, react to the proposal for the Ottawa Conference? In reply to the Secretary of State's letter of 28 February 1932,³² G.D. Birla informed him on 14 March 1932 that "Sir Purshotamdas would be delighted to accept the invitation [to attend the Ottawa Conference on behalf of "the Indian trade and commerce"] when it is extended to him" and that "The committee of the Federation will not be averse to this proposition". He assured him that they realized the importance of this Conference and "*you may rely on our support in the right direction*".³³

Contrary to the expectations of the Birlas and Thakurdases and to Hoare's advice, the Viceroy nominated the delegation excluding Thakurdas and his ilk. The objection of several Northern and Western Chambers of Commerce was actually to the composition of the delegation, not to the conference itself. It may be pointed out that Sir R.K. Shanmukhan Chetty, who was a leading member of the Indian Chamber of Commerce, Coimbatore and a member of the Committee of the FICCI, and became the first Finance Minister of India after the transfer of power, was included in the delegation to Ottawa, which concluded the Ottawa agreement.

On 25 November 1932 when Thakurdas, who participated in the third Round Table Conference in London, informed Birla that Samuel Hoare "complained to me about your taking a leading part in the agitation against the Ottawa bill",³⁴ Birla immediately sent Thakurdas a wire asking Thakurdas to inform Hoare that he had "done nothing to embarrass or organize any opposition" and to "assure him" that "he will not only find me *never* embarrassing but really helpful if only there was more trust

which is hopelessly lacking [in] India..."³⁵

Thakurdas, whom Birla wanted to represent India at Ottawa, was quite categorical about granting preference even to Lancashire goods. Earlier, in March 1930, Thakurdas had assured the raj that he would vote preferences. He promised the Indian Cotton Enquiry Committee, Manchester, that *he would do all he could to further its interests and "strengthen the relationship between India and Lancashire"*.³⁶ He denied that there was "any incompatibility of interest between England and India".³⁷

As A.D.D. Gordon observed, "Thus any condemnation was only show, and designed to cover from public view a secret process which involved short-circuiting the imperial chain of influence."³⁸

The year 1933, according to H. Venkatasubbiah, "saw a reconciliation between the two" – the government and the business magnates. "Both seemed keen to 'normalize' relations. Representatives of industry joined those of Government in the negotiations for concluding a trade agreement between India and Japan," and Joseph Bhore, India government's Commerce Member, "came in praise" for this trade agreement at the 1934 annual meeting of the FICCI.³⁹ Though resented by the Ahmedabad mill-owners, the Lancashire-Bombay agreement (or Lees-Mody Pact) granting Lancashire goods further preference "than that unanimously recommended by the Tariff Board",⁴⁰ was concluded in 1933. B. Chatterji writes that "the Lancashire men thought that they could see signs of a change of heart. [Raymond] Streat [of the Manchester Chamber of Commerce] cited as evidence Birla's talks with Lord Derby in the summer of 1934 when he had made 'vague suggestions' of a more co-operative attitude.... Even Kasturbhai Lalbhai [the leading mill magnate of Ahmedabad] spoke of the desirability of a period of soft pedalling so far as political agitation was concerned, and went out of his way to indicate that...he and his group were prepared to consider economic co-operation with the U.K. in general, provided that they should be admitted into the councils at which policy should be hammered out".⁴¹

An FICCI memorandum of January 1936 contended that the Ottawa agreement hampered the trade relations with a number of foreign countries, suggested that it should be terminated and fresh negotiations should be started with the U.K. as well as other countries for trade treaties in consultation with representatives of commerce, agriculture and industry in India.⁴² In March 1936 the Central Legislative Assembly recommended that "the Ottawa Agreement be terminated without delay".⁴³

But it would be wrong to regard such opposition to the Ottawa agreement or the Indo-British Agreement of 1935 as reflecting the Indian big bourgeoisie's antagonism towards imperialist capital. What it sought was not the termination of the phase of its co-operation with British capital but

a better bargain within its framework. Seeking to remove all misgivings about "the attitude of the Federation on the question of co-operation with Government", Padampat Singhanian, presiding over the annual session of the FICCI in 1936, emphasized "the importance of rapport between the Federation and the Government" and stated that the Committee of the FICCI "would always be willing to co-operate with the Government of India in negotiating trade treaties either with the U.K., the Dominions or India's foreign customers on a genuinely reciprocal basis..."⁴⁴

To quote B. Chatterji, "denunciations did not mean the end of the principle of economic co-operation. Among the Indian commercial classes, as the Viceroy gloomily observed, there was 'a conviction that if India denounced the agreement, the U.K. would, for political as well as economic reasons, hurry forward with offers of an agreement much more favourable to India'..."⁴⁵

During the thirties both the Indian big bourgeoisie and British capital felt the need for a joint front against foreign trespassers into this British colony as well as indigenous rivals. A process of greater integration between the two started taking place. The growth of British expatriate managing agencies was sluggish in the thirties and whatever fresh British capital was forthcoming could not fulfil their needs. During the inter-war period, especially in the thirties, a new relationship developed between the British managing agencies and Indian big capital. The *banians* and brokers of British firms, whose industrial career had just begun or was about to begin – the Birlas, Goenkas, Bangurs, Jantias, Jalans, Bajorias, etc. – increasingly invested in the companies controlled by British capital. They were allowed seats on the boards of the companies in which they invested but no share of control. Control remained firmly in the hands of the British managing agencies. "From the First World War onwards", writes Tomlinson, "British-controlled firms, starved of capital from London, were forming alliances with Indian businessmen..."⁴⁶ This process was going on not only in Calcutta but in Bombay and other places, too. A fusion of European and Indian big capital was taking place and large chunks of Indian big capital, subordinated to foreign capital, played the role of a junior partner.⁴⁷

Besides, in the thirties and the early forties, British and Indian managing agencies combined and merged their cement units in a monopolistic organization like the Associated Cement Companies (ACC) as well as set up cartel-like organizations like the Indian Sugar Syndicate and a joint syndicate of ACC and the Dalmia Jain group-controlled cement companies. They also joined hands to establish the Employers' Federation of India in 1933. The 1930s was a period of getting closer together as partners for the joint exploitation of India.

Two significant processes were at work at this time. First, the character

of British investment in India began to change in the late twenties and in the thirties. Previously the typical foreign investment was small, made by individuals and directed by expatriates through managing agency firms. But these firms – Andrew Yule, Bird-Heilgers, Jardine Skinner, Ralli Bros, Killick Nixon, Brady and Co., British India Corporation and others – had served their *main* age-old purpose: that of mediating between metropolitan capital and the Indian market and sources of raw materials. Though they controlled some manufacturing units like jute mills, cotton mills and engineering units, mining companies and tea plantations, they were *chiefly* exporters of jute, jute goods, tea, raw cotton, shellac, etc. and importers of manufactured goods like cotton textiles and yarn, paper, various other consumer goods and machinery.

A change had come over metropolitan capital itself during the inter-war period. Till World War I, Britain's staple industries were cotton textiles, coal, ship-building and iron and steel. Even before the War these British industries, except ship-building, were losing their competitive strength. The supremacy of the first great industrial power of the world was challenged by the U.S.A., Germany, France and Belgium. By the early 1890s, Britain was surpassed by the U.S.A. and Germany in the production of steel, 'the crucial commodity of industrialization'. British industries like cotton textiles relied for their market mainly on the colonies.

British capital had lagged behind the new industrial powers in the formation of monopolies and cartels and the adoption of mass production methods. But during the inter-war period there was increasing concentration and centralization of capital and, as a result, monopoly capitalism developed in Britain. It was the period which saw the rise of giant monopoly firms like Imperial Chemical Industries, Unilever, Guest, Keen and Nettlefold and G.E.C. As Eric Hobsbawm observes, "in 1914 Britain was perhaps the least concentrated of the great industrial economies, and in 1939 one of the most". And while the old industries declined, the new growth industries like electricals, automobiles, aircraft, rayon and silk prospered from about 1924.

Taking advantage of the protection afforded to industries in India, new giant corporations set up their branches and subsidiaries here. As Hobsbawm puts it, "gradually the sun of the old-fashioned rentier was setting" and the sun of the giant transnational was rising.⁴⁸ The days of the old expatriate managing agencies were numbered. British and other foreign transnationals like ICI, Unilever, Philips, Union Carbide, Metal Box, Guest, Keen and Nettlefold, Dunlop, British Oxygen, Glaxo and Swedish Match established their manufacturing units in India to dominate its industry. By 1947, according to Tomlinson, "about half of British private capital holdings in India was direct foreign investment (DFI) in the subsidiaries of British-

based companies.... direct investment (which can be associated with the activities of multinational enterprises, or MNEs) was mostly in the 'new' industries of chemicals, processed foods, pharmaceuticals, paints and varnishes, and so on." On account of changes in the structure of the British capital and employment markets, the British expatriate sector in India found it difficult to raise new capital and recruit suitable personnel from Britain during the late twenties and thirties, and could hardly respond to the new opportunities that were opening up. It was the "subsidiary companies of British multinational firms, which became the dynamic sector of foreign business enterprise from the 1930s onwards".⁴⁹

Another event of far-reaching importance was taking place. As Britain was no longer the leading capitalist country of the world, the inter-war period marked the beginning of the transition from India's unilateral dependence on Britain to its multilateral dependence on several advanced capitalist countries led by the U.S.A. The process had started: from a monopoly possession of Britain, India was changing into a happy hunting ground of the monopolists of different imperialist countries.⁵⁰ It was the humble beginning of a process that was to culminate in every major industrial unit set up in India after the transfer of power in 1947 becoming dependent on the technology and capital from imperialist countries.

The establishment of branches by foreign transnationals – the 'India Ltd.s' – was viewed with suspicion by a section of Indian business magnates during the late thirties. But what they were opposed to was not "the increasing influx into India of foreign-controlled industrial establishments", but the setting-up of *fully-owned* subsidiaries of the powerful transnationals. Already, in 1929, the Tatas had joined a Morgan subsidiary to set up a company to control its three big hydro-electric companies. In the late thirties Walchand Hirachand was inviting U.S. transnationals to build automobile and aircraft factories in India with him as a collaborator, and the Birlas were exploring chances of collaboration with U.S. (and later, British) automobile giants to set up an automobile plant in India. They knew, as everybody else should know, that advanced technology and capital goods embodying it are the key to power – the key which the transnationals possessed and they did not (and do not even today). What they wanted was a stake in the luscious enterprises of the multinationals.⁵¹ Truly, "the 1930s saw the start of a new era, an era which contained the origins of many of the prominent features of post-independence [sic!] India".⁵²

In the late twenties and in the thirties the Indian business magnates resented the raj's monetary policy – pegging the rupee to sterling at the fixed ratio of 1s. 6d. and currency restriction. But, as Markovits observes, "As far as commercial policy is concerned... in the 1930s the strengthening of India's imperial connection proved largely beneficial to its traders and

industrialists'' and that the positive aspects of the raj's commercial and financial policies – positive from the point of view of the business magnates – “tended to overshadow the negative aspects of the currency restriction and financial stringency”.⁵³ And during this period there was closer interweaving of Indian big capital with foreign, especially British, capital than before. Coming events were casting their shadows before.

References and Notes

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2. B.R. Tomlinson, *The Political Economy of the Raj*, 32.
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4. Raman Mahadevan, "The Politics of Business Interest Groups" (mimeo), 14.
5. Arun Joshi, *Lala Shri Ram*, 227.
6. Khushwant Singh and Arun Joshi, *Shri Ram*, 206.
7. See Claude Markovits, *Indian Business and National Politics*, Appendix I, 190-3.
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18. Capitals and italics in the original.
19. *Bombay Congress Bulletin*, No. 247 of 17 Oct. 1932, PT Papers, File 101; see also *Bombay Congress Bulletin*, No. 241 of 10 Oct. 1932, *ibid*.
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26. Bagchi, *op cit.* 91, fn.56.
27. See Tomlinson, *op cit.*, 46-7.
28. *IAR*, 1932, I, 428.
29. *Ibid*, 61; see also PT Papers, File 42, Part VI.
30. *IAR*, 1932, I, 428-9.
31. G.K. Lieten, *Colonialism, Class and Nation*, 235.
32. G.D. Birla, *Bapu : A Unique Association*, I, 174-5.
33. *Ibid*, 178-82, esp. 181 - emphasis added.
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37. Enclosure to letter from the Oriental News Agency, London, to Thakurdas, 28 July 1933. *ibid*, File 142 - emphasis added.
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45. Chatterji, *op cit.*, 557. He quotes from Viceroy to Secretary of State, private telegram, 11 April 1936.
46. Tomlinson, *op cit.*, 53-4.
47. See Suniti Kumar Ghosh, *The Indian Big Bourgeoisie*, 210-11.
48. Eric Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire*, 214, 223, 259.
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50. See Vol. I of this book, 63-4.
51. *Ibid.*, 64-5.
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CHAPTER TWO

IN QUEST OF PERPETUAL FRIENDSHIP

"A New Age Has Begun"

With the signing of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact in March 1931 Gandhi announced: "An age has passed.... *A new age has begun.*" He declared that while "civil disobedience and jail-going, or direct action was the method to be followed before the settlement, *the way of argument and negotiation takes its place*" after it.¹

During his negotiations with Irwin Gandhi had confided several times to the Viceroy his hope that "*it would never be necessary at all*" to resume civil disobedience and his resolve "to throw his whole heart and soul into trying to co-operate in constitution-building..."² After concluding the pact Gandhi affirmed time and again that he would "strain every nerve to make *absolutely final* what today is provisional" and hoped that *the conflict with the raj would end "for all time"* and that the truce would be *permanent*.³ So while embarking "on a career of co-operation", he directed his appeals to the princes of the native states as well as to the English. "If India is to come to her own through conference and consultation", he said to them, "the goodwill and active help of Englishmen are absolutely necessary."⁴

Now it was "*perpetual friendship*" he longed for. "*If a permanent settlement*", wrote Gandhi to Walchand Hirachand, "*is the aim of the provisional settlement, as it undoubtedly is, boycott or exclusion, by whatever name we call it, should cease whilst an attempt at perpetual friendship continues.*"⁵

A new age had dawned—an age when all semblance of direct action was ruled out. "The settlement", he told his audience in Gujarat, "has been made in the hope that what has now to be secured will be done through talks, discussions and negotiations."⁶ And he declared: "*Having suspended civil disobedience, we now enter a period of disciplined obedience.*"⁷

What did the Gandhis and Nehrus hope to achieve through discussions and negotiations at the next Round Table Conference with the representatives of the British raj and a crowd of princes, business magnates and various other Indian agents of imperialism—all hand-picked by the raj? Gandhi had already agreed with Viceroy Irwin that "the scope of the further constitutional discussions" would be confined to considerations of "the

scheme for the constitutional government of India discussed at the [first] RTC". Gandhi and the Congress Working Committee had already agreed to the Crown control of defence, external affairs, the position of minorities, emergency situations, an overwhelmingly large part of India's finance and so on.⁸

Besides the 'reservations and safeguards' to ensure the continuity of *direct* imperial rule, there would be the princes, as envisaged by the all-India 'federation', to buttress it. As R.J. Moore writes, even the Indian demand for dominion status was diverted 'to the nebulous formula: central responsibility with reservations and safeguards upon the creation of an all-India federation'.⁹ The 'new age' which Gandhi and other Congress leaders looked forward to would confer neither independence nor dominion status but some doses of self-government which would do no harm to the imperial order.

What the Congress leaders wanted above everything else was an end to conflict with British imperialism and resolved to stick to the constitutional path, the path of 'talks, discussions, and negotiations'. The fear of flaming mass discontent or uncontrolled, violent, popular upsurge had persuaded Gandhi to initiate controlled, limited mass actions in 1919, 1920, and 1930 in order to defuse the revolutionary situations, to 'sterilize the forces of violence', as he said.¹⁰ But what followed them exceeded the worst fears of the Congress leaders as well as those of the big bourgeois. Sholapur, Peshawar, Chittagong, etc., were pointers. The militant peasant struggles in U.P. and elsewhere were no less disquieting. The Gandhis, wiser after these experiences, wanted to abandon for all time even innocuous satyagrahic mass action and enter an era of co-operation with the British raj.

The most outstanding leaders of the Indian big bourgeoisie – Sir Purshotamdas Thakurdas and G.D. Birla – hailed the Gandhi-Irwin agreement as the model to be followed. Thakurdas described it as 'a return to political sanity'.¹¹ Birla, the 'radical nationalist', was more eloquent. 'The Irwin-Gandhi Pact', he wrote, 'was a great step towards binding India and Great Britain together....It struck at the roots of the method of securing political advance by means of disorder, and substituted the method of mutual discussion and confidence.'¹²

Though the big bourgeoisie enthusiastically welcomed the pact, wide sections of the people condemned it as 'betrayal'. Several provincial Congress Committees like that of Bengal were opposed to it. At their conferences, which were held at the same time as the Karachi session of the Congress, the Workers and Peasants Party and the All-India Youth League denounced it as well as the Congress decision to attend the next RTC. The youth of Bombay 'were completely opposed to the peace negotiated by Gandhi'. Instead of looking forward to co-operation with

imperialism, the Bombay Youth League, at a meeting held in June 1931, exhorted the leaders to 'launch a further campaign of civil disobedience'. The non-communist militant leaders of Bombay's working class, like G.L. Kandalkar, president of the Girni Kamgar Union, who had earlier tried to rally the working class behind the Congress, "denounced the settlement as a betrayal of the interests of the workers and peasants in the sub-continent".¹³ In Gujarat, the Patidar peasantry had responded to the call for civil disobedience by refusing to pay land-revenue and were subjected to severe repression. But what broke their morale, according to David Hardiman, was not the official repression but the Gandhi-Irwin Pact. Neither were their confiscated lands restored to them nor was land-revenue halved, as one of Gandhi's 'Eleven Points' had stipulated. "The Patidars therefore considered the pact a betrayal."¹⁴ So did the peasants of coastal Andhra.¹⁵ The reaction was not different elsewhere.

As Gandhi was faced with mounting criticism of the pact, he went on declaring: "The Congress is out to win *purna swaraj* at the earliest possible moment"; "We are pledged to the Lahore resolution"; "The settlement does in no way commit us to a position less than the Lahore resolution".¹⁶ Gandhi seemed to have a unique capacity of equating Crown control over defence, foreign affairs, a large part of finance, internal administration and so on with complete independence, the demand of the Lahore resolution. While this was his *public* stance, he told Irwin *in private* that his goal was not complete independence, not secession from the empire, not the break-up of the empire.¹⁷ He told journalists that "*purna swaraj* would be possible within the British empire...." Then, as if by sleight of hand he caused the empire to disappear and declared: "The Empire no longer remains, it having turned into a Commonwealth, and *swaraj* within the Commonwealth is perfectly possible."¹⁸

The Hindu-Muslim Problem

But the road to *purna swaraj* within the empire was not wholly smooth. There were problems ahead. One such problem was differences between the elite Hindus and the elite Muslims.

The imperial strategy of devolution of power by stages killed two birds with one stone. It helped the raj to build collaborative structures at every stage to ensure the security of its vital interests as well as exacerbated the communal conflict and helped to implement its policy of 'divide and rule'. The Congress strategy of attaining its goal by stages "through conferences and consultation", which was intended not to disturb the status quo violently, ideally fitted into the imperial strategy and suited its interests as well as

those of the big bourgeoisie, the princes and big landlords. But devolution at every stage was preceded by protracted negotiations between the raj and the elite leaders of the different communities and interests (except the toiling people). The negotiation table—round or rectangular—gave rise to violent disunity between the elite leaders, for each section fought for a larger share of the British concessions and tried to rally its co-religionists to add strength to its demands.

In the course of his presidential address to the Cocanada (Kakinada) session of the Congress at the end of 1923 Maulana Mohammed Ali rightly said:

“The adjustment of communal shares in representative institutions, local, provincial and all-India, and in the administration also, give rise to bitter communal dissensions, and here it is clearly impossible to shift the blame on the masses. Once more personal ambitions, well or ill disguised as communal interests, play a great part...”¹⁹

Personal ambitions worked havoc only when these were closely interwoven with the interests of certain powerful classes or strata playing for bigger stakes. It was only when highly ambitious individuals became the front-men of these classes that they became strong enough to sway the masses. It is not surprising that in a colonial and semi-feudal society (or societies) the poison of communalism churned up at the top flowed down and infected the ordinary, unsophisticated people of the two communities, whose real interests were the same—both economic and political—and were opposed to the interests of the alien rulers and of those whom, ironically, they looked up to and followed as their leaders. This process was initiated and guided by the British imperialists, who “regarded”, as Churchill did, “the Hindu-Moslem feud as a bulwark of British rule in India”.²⁰

Actually two processes were at work—the process which started from below, the people irrespective of castes and creeds uniting and resisting alien rule and domestic oppression, and the process initiated from above by the elites of the different communities who could not come to a reasonable compromise over their demands, roused communal animosity and disrupted the unity of the people. The upsurge of people’s struggles at different times, led by little-known heroes thrown up by the struggles, showed that the people of different communities often united to resist oppression; and that the genuine resistance against foreign and domestic exploiters submerged their communal and caste differences and integrated them with one another. In the absence of a revolutionary party it was the politics of the elite leaders that disrupted their unity.

The solution of the communal problem lay in the lasting revolutionary unity of the people against imperialism and its native allies. Alternatively,

there could be an elite-level unity, which, though not a solution of the problem, would not have excited communal passions and diverted anti-imperialist, anti-feudal struggles into the communal channel and carnage. Even such unity remained a mirage.

It appears that Muslim leaders laid the greatest emphasis on the federal character of future India and on the autonomy of the federating units with the residuary powers vested in the units. On the other hand, Congress leaders wanted a unitary India with a strong centre. There lay the crux of their differences. Muslim leaders offered to give up separate electorates not only in 1927²¹ but several times afterwards, if this demand of theirs was met.

In *Last Words of Maulana Mohammed Ali*, which he dictated in the form of an open letter to the British Prime Minister just on the eve of his death in London early in January 1931, Mohammed Ali, then a delegate to the first RTC, a former Congress President and Gandhi's erstwhile militant associate, said:

"The small monopolistic caste that desires to remain in control of the destinies of the Hindu community and that being the majority community, of the Indian nation as a whole through it – is the caste... of the Banya... I am more anxious than any [other] Indian perhaps to get rid of the foreign incubus...of a 'nation of shopkeepers' controlling our destinies.... I do not wish to create a home-made incubus of shopkeepers of our own.... To my mind most of the agitation today is being financed and partly for selfish reasons, by the banias of Bombay and Gujarat.... The Mussalmans desire – and *this is the crux of their 14 points and not separate electorates* – that there should be federal government so that the central government with a permanent Hindu majority should not override them everywhere.... Unless in these few provinces²² Muslim majorities are established by the new constitution, I submit, not as a threat but as a very humble and friendly *warning*, there will be civil war in India. Let there be no mistake about that."²³

In March and April 1931, several Muslim conferences were held. It is significant that, despite differences on other issues, it was the unanimous demand of all these conferences, organized by Congress, pro-Congress as well as anti-Congress Muslim leaders, that the future constitution of India should be federal with full autonomy for the federating units and with residuary powers vested in them. This was the demand of the Council of the All India Muslim League, which met on 15 March 1931. The same demand was raised by the All India Muslim Conference, the All India Shia Political Conference as well as the All India Muslim Nationalists' Conference – all held in April 1931. The leading lights of the Muslim Nationalists'

Conference were Congress leaders like Dr Ansari, Abbas Tyabji, Dr Syed Mahmud and Tasadduq Sherwani.²⁴

Maulana Mohammed Ali or the League looked at this demand for autonomy of the units *from the communal angle*, for the Muslim leaders hoped that the Muslim elite would be able to dominate Muslim-majority provinces, if these were autonomous within a federal India with a weak centre. The Muslim business elite, much weaker than its Hindu and Parsi counterparts, was afraid that it could hardly expect to enjoy a share of power in a unitary India with an overwhelming Hindu majority.

The demand of the Muslim leaders was directed against the Congress leaders' aim of building an autocratic state embracing the whole of India – the state mainly of Hindu and Parsi big compradors and feudal elements. But the Muslim leaders' demand for provincial autonomy was quite distinct from the incipient demand of the various nationalities of India for autonomy, for the right of every nationality to govern its own affairs and to *decide its own future* – including whether or not to remain a part of the federation. Such a demand depended for its fulfilment on the abolition of colonial rule and the abolition of feudalism – anathema both to the Congress and the League. It was colonial rule which had subverted the historical process of the formation of nations in this sub-continent. Provinces of 'British India' and 'native states' were so constituted as to split up nationalities – Oriya, Telugu, Malayali, Kanarese, Maharashtrian, Gujarati, Rajasthani, Punjabi and so on – into fragments, tagged to different provinces and 'states', and had subjected them to 'multiple partition'. The Congress leaders' determination to have a strong Centre armed with overriding powers over the provincial units in this multi-national, multi-lingual sub-continent, the home of about one-sixth of the human race, was most pernicious. But the Muslim leaders' demand actually amounted to the demand for domination of Muslim-majority provinces by Muslim compradors and landlords. They trampled underfoot provincial autonomy when Pakistan became a reality and adopted an equally autocratic concentration of powers in the structure of the Pakistani state.

Abul Kalam Azad expressed the fears of the Muslim leadership inside and outside the Congress when he said: "All over the world, the tendency was for the decentralization of power. In a country so vast as India and with people so diverse in language, customs and geographical conditions, a unitary government was obviously most unsuitable. Decentralization of power in a federal government would also help to allay the fears of the minorities."²⁵

As it will be seen, it was this struggle for centralization of all powers *versus* decentralization, for a unitary state *versus* a sort of federation, that ultimately led to the emergence of Pakistan.

The Nehru Constitution, framed by the Nehrus— father and son— and Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru in 1928 and acclaimed by the Congress leaders, envisaged India as a unitary state and empowered the central government to override elected provincial legislatures and ministries and even to dismiss them.²⁶

Pestered with the insistent Muslim demand for a federal constitution and autonomy for federating units with residuary powers vested in them, the Congress Working Committee, which met from 7 to 13 July 1931, adopted “a scheme for communal solution”, which *inter alia* stated: “The future constitution of the country shall be federal. The residuary powers shall vest in the federating units, *unless, on further examination, it is found to be against the best interests of India.*” This was transparently evasive, rather deceptive, as most of the important resolutions and statements of the Congress leaders were. As the author of the official history of the Congress and Gandhi’s long-time associate pointed out, *the mahatma*, “with his usual resourcefulness, added the subjunctive clause, ‘unless, on further examination, it is found to be against the best interests of India’”.²⁷ Gandhi’s “usual resourcefulness”, which helped the Congress leaders to tackle inconvenient situations and won the admiration not only of Sitaramayya but of his other associates, prompted Viceroy Wavell much later to comment that Gandhi was “a consummate master of evasive tactics” and that Gandhi “has brought to a fine art the technique of vagueness and of never making a statement which is not somehow so qualified or worded that he cannot be pinned down to anything definite”.²⁸

Writing to Dr Syed Mahmud, one of the Congress leaders who had taken a prominent role in the All India Muslim Nationalists’ Conference in April 1931, Nehru said: “About the residuary powers vesting in the provinces, I do not agree. This is bound to encourage provincialism...” Nehru was always for a strong Centre, so devoutly wished for by the big Hindu bania, as Mohammed Ali said: Nehru insisted that “We must continue taking a strong line regardless of what others may do”. Even the claim for genuine autonomy for the provinces— not sovereignty and secession— which a Muslim delegate to the RTC demanded, upset Nehru,²⁹ as it does India’s ruling classes even today.

In 1931 the prospect of achieving elite-level unity appeared to Gandhi none too bright. Neither a meeting of the delegates to the second RTC on 21 March 1931, convened by the Viceroy, nor his discussions with Muslim leaders brought them any nearer to a settlement of the rival claims. During his prolonged interview with Home Secretary Emerson from 13 to 16 May 1931, “Gandhi made the suggestion that Lord Irwin might even act as an arbitrator”.³⁰ Gandhi and the Congress leadership would not seek what might be a basis for the solution of the problem but were prepared to

entrust the proverbial 'monkey' for finding it out and deciding the fate of the people.

Gandhi's earlier optimism somewhat faded and with the differences between the elite leaders remaining unbridged, he felt quite diffident about attending the RTC.³¹ But the Working Committee decided in favour of participation in the conference.

'A Help and Not a Hindrance'

There were other unpleasant developments. Gandhi was quite anxious to fulfil the terms of the agreement with Irwin and instructed Congress Committees to do so and to see that land revenue and rent were paid by the peasants.³² Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh and, to a minor extent, the NWFP caused much worry to Gandhi, Patel and Nehru. In Gujarat, according to the terms of the Gandhi-Irwin agreement, the Patidar peasants, whose movable and immovable properties had been confiscated during the Civil Disobedience Movement and sold away for a song, would not get them back; the *mukhis* or village patels who had resigned their jobs in response to Gandhi's call and had been replaced would not be reinstated. Gujarat was sullen and all Gandhi's exhortations and promises to redress the wrongs failed to cheer the people up. Gandhi exhorted "the Satyagraha Farmer" in the name of "*dharma*" to pay up the land revenue "even at the cost of some hardship to ourselves".³³

Emerson, the Home Secretary, appreciated that "Gandhi himself had done his utmost to get the revenue-payers to play the game.... There seemed to be no difference in principle between the Government of India, the local Government and Mr Gandhi."³⁴ In April Lord Willingdon succeeded Irwin as Viceroy of India. The raj was relentless in extorting, even by using force, not only current revenue but also arrears at a time when prices of agricultural produce had fallen steeply and when the peasants had suffered greatly during the civil disobedience movement. Vallabhbhai Patel wrote to Nehru from Ahmedabad: "The opponent is firing heavily and the Congress here is completely out of action. Poor peasantry believing in Bapu's word paid all their current dues. Now they are being prosecuted for past arrears."³⁵

Uttar Pradesh, Nehru's province, was another headache for the leaders. When Nehru informed Gandhi of large-scale evictions of tenants because of their inability to pay high rents on account of the catastrophic fall in prices of agricultural products, Gandhi advised him to seek an interview with U.P. Governor Malcolm Hailey. He added: "We must not be in any shape or form, directly or indirectly, party to the breach [of the settlement]....

Government and the Congress are supposed to be co-operating with each other." Earlier, on 23 May, after seeing the U.P. Governor and prominent talukdars of U.P., Gandhi issued a manifesto. While describing the governor as sympathetic and suggesting some remission in certain districts, he asked the statutory and non-occupancy tenants to pay 50 per cent of the rent and the occupancy tenants 75 per cent. He advised them to pay more if they were able to do so. He said: "*Congressmen cannot, we do not, seek to injure the zamindars.... When millions become untruthful and violent, it will mean self-destruction. You will therefore suffer injury without retaliation.*"³⁶

"Forcible collections" and "wholesale ejectments" of tenants from their lands led to a situation which, as Nehru said, "in most other countries would have resulted in a big peasant rising". "I think", Nehru added, "it was very largely due to the efforts of the Congress which kept the tenants from indulging in violent activity. But there was an abundance of violence against them." In a "Note on U.P. Rent and Revenue Situation", dated 18 April 1931, Nehru wrote that Congress leaders like him were trying to bring under control the peasants "embittered by economic misfortune and by harassment from the landlords and sometimes the police". "In spite of this great provocation however", wrote Nehru, "*the peasantry has been generally kept in control and the lapses on their part, regrettable and unfortunate as they were, have been few.*"³⁷

The raj was "hopeful, in the words of the U.P. Governor, of 'being able to utilise his [Gandhi's] influence' in the solution of rural difficulties".³⁸

In mid-June, Gandhi was advising Mohanlal Saksena, an important Congress leader of U.P.: "On your side it is all well, *so long as you hold the kisans in check.* But Jawaharlal's presence must now ease the situation. *He has no difficulty with the kisans and restraining them.*" Nehru, after regretting the "great hardships" and "miserable condition", chided the kisans of Allahabad for having resorted to violence at some places. He asked them to "remember, whether the zamindars ill-treat you or not, you will not ill-treat them". He exhorted the peasants who were evicted from their lands and homes, harassed in the law-court, forced into debt-slavery or oppressed in other ways to suffer all such persecutions "patiently and courageously".³⁹ He decried every kind of resistance by the kisans - violent or non-violent. He was opposed to peasant panchayats⁴⁰ deciding civil and criminal cases, imposing fines and advising social boycott. While he claimed that he was "a greater socialist than perhaps others", he assured Raja Rampal Singh, a big landlord: "I do not want to accelerate a class war between the zamindars and the tenants."⁴¹ But in the fierce class war that was raging he, like Gandhi and other big Congress leaders, played a role that helped the zamindars to suppress the tenants.

But despite them, "peasants in many places", to quote Gyanendra Pandey, "took matters into their own hands and resisted oppression in whatever way they could". There was "agitation among groups of peasants in districts from Farrukhabad to Azamgarh. Violent clashes occurred in several districts where the Congress was not strong enough to bring about 'compromise' solutions and 'discipline' the peasants. In June-July 1931 the situation was considered particularly dangerous in Bara Banki, Rae Bareilly, Unnao and parts of Allahabad, and in Bara Banki gatherings of armed villagers were reported to have become common."⁴²

Naturally, Nehru heartily disliked the 'extremist' peasant leaders like Kalka Prasad, who were preaching 'no rent', organizing peasants on militant lines and helping to develop what was "almost an insurrectionary situation" (to borrow Pandey's expression). Nehru tried by all means to isolate them, and the raj on its part co-operated by trying to put them behind bars. In order to suppress the peasant struggle against the agrarian system and the colonial state machinery, led by Baba Ramchandra, Kalka Prasad and other militant leaders, the Nehrus set up in May 1931 a separate Kisan Sangh as a Congress wing flaunting the creed of non-violence with Sitla Sahai, close to the Congress leadership, as its president. The Congress leadership took disciplinary action against those who "offended against the creed [of non-violence] or otherwise misbehaved [sic] themselves". To quote Gyanendra Pandey, the "Intelligence Department observed in October 1931 that all had been quiet in Rae Bareilly since Nehru's visit in June.... What, however, is astonishing is the amount of unexpected (and indeed unrecognized) aid that the regime received from the conscious actions of an ostensibly 'radical' Congress leadership."⁴³

Quiet prevailed in Rae Bareilly but several other districts remained unquiet. Gandhi and Nehru also appealed to the government to be reasonable and grant certain concessions. They sought to play the role of intermediaries between the government and the peasants, but the raj would not allow them to play that role. The raj was remorseless. In U.P., it not only helped the landlords to extort as much rent from the tenants as possible but also imposed in certain areas a punitive tax of 20 per cent of the rent. "Brutality of combined Government-landlord action" was a feature.⁴⁴

The situation became a desperate one. On 15 October the Allahabad District Congress Committee was forced to seek permission from the UPPCC to start a no-rent and no-revenue campaign, much to the anguish of Nehru, who greatly regretted the step in his communications to the Chief Secretary, U.P. Government and the Private Secretary to the Viceroy.⁴⁵

On 16 October Nehru wrote to Gandhi, who was then in London:

"It is really deplorable to what a pass we have reduced the tenants largely because of the advice we gave. They followed the advice for a

while and talked of paying 8 annas and 12 annas... but... they were proceeded against and finally ejected. Meanwhile of course there were all manner of acts of oppression.... Not only were they ejected from their lands but they were sent to prison and fined for trespass."

On the same day he sent two cables -- one to Gandhi, informing him of the Allahabad DCC's request for permission, and the other to Congress president Patel, wanting the Working Committee to consider the situation. Gandhi authorized him to take whatever steps he thought necessary. U.P. Governor Hailey "felt that Jawaharlal was bluffing, and that the telegraphic correspondence with Gandhi was as much meant for the official censor as for themselves".⁴⁶

Though armed with Gandhi's permission as well as the Congress president's, Nehru said on 23 October at the Allahabad District Kisan Conference: "Satyagraha is the only effective weapon which could allay the distress, but *that weapon has to be laid aside for the moment* on account of the truce. The Congress therefore is helpless...." But, despite his advice, the Kisan Conference resolved that the tenants of the whole district would resort to a no-rent campaign if the government refused to accept their demands. So, on 28 November, Nehru conveyed his "deep regrets" to the Viceroy that the Congress had been "*compelled to advise the peasantry in Allahabad district to withhold payment of rent and revenue till relief is obtained*", but assured him "*that we tried our utmost to avoid it [this course] and to find a way out of the difficulty*".⁴⁷

Nehru was in the somewhat difficult situation of a person who must save his face before the people for the sake of his political career and must at the same time collaborate with the imperialist-feudal combine and invoke 'ideological' and political 'principles' to thwart any peasant resistance. In a statement to the press on the U.P. Instigation and Emergency Powers Ordinance of 14 December, issued by the raj to stamp out all peasant resistance, Nehru congratulated himself and his colleagues on the work accomplished by them: "...I make bold to say that there is no instance anywhere of an agrarian movement on such a vast scale and accompanied by so much suffering and repression remaining peaceful to such a remarkable extent. This has solely been due to our insistence on non-violence."⁴⁸

Writing in the *Communist International*, a contributor correctly observed:

"Gandhi and his inseparable pandit Jawaharlal Nehru... constantly called on the oppressed and enslaved India to give up any idea of violence, thus clearing a path for themselves through the mass movement to negotiations with the Viceroy and to the Round Table Conference."⁴⁹

The North-West Frontier Province, where rebellion was widespread, was another province which Gandhi tried to bring under control. With the restoration of British rule in the Peshawar city on 4 May 1930, violent anti-imperialist struggle engulfed different districts including the tribal areas. A British author wrote:

“For the first time in nearly a century of British rule has the Frontier capital been attacked and threatened, not by a foreign enemy, but by tribesmen, in theory subjects of the British Crown. Never in history has sedition been allowed such complete freedom to paralyse the authority.”⁵⁰

Machine-gunning, bombing from the air—dropping as many as 6,000 bombs in a single day—and so on were resorted to to quell the revolt. More of it later.

After signing the agreement with Irwin, Gandhi sought the government's permission to proceed to the NWFP to restore peace there, sent his son Devdas Gandhi on the same mission, and directed Ghaffar Khan to “smooth [the] trouble”.⁵¹ He prescribed khadi work for the rebellious Pathans expecting that it would have a calming influence on them.

Gandhi also did whatever he could to “counteract the growth of the violent revolutionary movement”.

Before his execution, Sukhdev, Bhagat Singh's comrade, wrote from his prison cell to Gandhi that Gandhi's *open* calls to the revolutionaries to give up their struggles were helping the colonial rulers to isolate them from the people and hunt them down. Pointing out that Gandhi's “appeals amount to preaching treachery, desertion and betrayal among them”, Sukhdev suggested that, if Gandhi did not really want to join hands with the alien rulers, he should either discuss the problem in detail with “some revolutionary leaders—there are so many in jails—and come to terms with them” or he should “stop these appeals”. In his open reply to Sukhdev's letter *after* his execution, Gandhi, condemning the Sukhdevs as “political assassins”, refused to do either of the two things suggested by Sukhdev.⁵²

As days passed and as the activities of the national revolutionaries scaled new heights with the Chittagong uprising, Gandhi's denunciations of them grew more fierce keeping pace with the intensification of the savage repression on them and on the people by the colonial rulers.

A moderate delegate to the second RTC remarked: “Bengal is treated as in a state of war.” From 1930 onwards every engine of repression was being used. Ordinance after ordinance was issued and black acts were passed to gag the press and stamp out every manifestation of resistance by the people. State terrorism was at its height. More of it in the next chapter.

One instance may be cited here. There was indiscriminate firing and

bayonet-charge on the detenus in the Hijli detention camp on 16 September 1931, two detenus were killed and many wounded.⁵³ The mass rally held in Calcutta to denounce the brutal murders was presided over by Rabindranath Tagore, then more than seventy. Rabindranath had always been frankly critical of the methods of the national revolutionaries but he admired their cause and their heroic self-sacrifice and stood by them whenever they were victims of savage repression. And he hated the imperialist oppressors.

Several DCCs in Bengal urged the Congress leadership to register the protest of the people against the atrocities. The North Calcutta DCC sought permission for starting satyagraha on these issues. J.M. Sengupta, then president of the Bengal PCC and member of the Working Committee, wired on 17 September to Congress president Patel: "Chittagong and Bengal appeal to you as President to fix all-India day for protest against Chittagong atrocities."⁵⁴ Far from responding to the appeals, the 'national' leaders joined the imperialist chorus in full-throated denunciation of the national revolutionaries.⁵⁵

On 8 May 1931 Gandhi, whom Nehru's trusted friend V.K. Krishna Menon called "the so-called apostle of truth and non-violence", assured Sir Darcy Lindsay: "*many of us are doing everything we can to counteract the growth of the violent revolutionary movement.*" All this should not be construed as the mahatma's flights of disinterested idealism. Lest his useful work, complementary to that of the colonial rulers, should be overlooked, Gandhi assured the British monarch's deputy in India: "*I am trying in all humility to overtake the mischief as far as it is humanly possible.*" In his reply of 31 July, the Viceroy expressed his appreciation of Gandhi's role.⁵⁶

Gandhi and Nehru sought to mobilize the Congress and the people against the revolutionaries— a task which the alien rulers could not do. At the AICC meeting, held on 6 August, Gandhi moved a resolution calling upon "Congress organizations to carry on special propaganda against all acts of public violence [violence by the people, not by the rulers] even when provocation is given for such deeds". It also appealed "to the nationalist press to use all its influence in this behalf". Gandhi deprecated "harping on the violence of Government and applauding the sacrifice and courage of our youths". His complete silence over the reign of terror unleashed by the British imperialists in Bengal was eloquent. In the lengthy memorandum that Gandhi submitted to the Home Secretary of the Government of India in July, detailing the "breaches of peace" by the government and acts of repression, there is not a word about the savage atrocities on the revolutionaries and the people in Bengal.⁵⁷

Nehru preached: "we do not follow the military method. The beauty is that even one man can fight a whole army. It is a fight of the soul, of

the inner strength'' (as if the Nehrus possessed greater strength of the soul than those who courted indescribable suffering, even death, for what they believed to be the cause of Indian freedom). Nehru wrote: ``...it becomes essential for us even from the lower ground of expediency to counteract with all the strength that we have any attempts at violence.... Thus they [the revolutionaries] must be condemned on human grounds as well as on political grounds.'' Nehru condemned the cries of ``Down with Union Jack'' and they were stopped by the Congress.⁵⁸

The contradiction of the Congress leaders with British imperialism was non-antagonistic: they wanted it to be resolved through ``conference and consultation''. But their contradictions with peasants, workers and petty bourgeois youth who followed the path of struggle against imperialism was antagonistic. While trying to put down their resistance they invoked the ``creed'' of non-violence, in which, according to G.D. Birla, Gandhi's 'pet child', nobody believed.^{58a}

A Hurdle Surmounted

Despite the Congress leaders' co-operation and ``disciplined obedience'' and their fervent appeals, British rulers refused to grant even minor concessions to make matters somewhat easy for them in Gujarat or U.P. Already in April 1931, the British Indian government under the new Viceroy, Willingdon, had begun to draft a new, comprehensive emergency powers ordinance.⁵⁹ Home Secretary Emerson's note on his four-day long interview with Gandhi in mid-May states that Gandhi ``realizes the renewal of the Civil Disobedience Movement will compel Government to hit hard and hit at once, and I have made this perfectly clear to him on many occasions.... *he does not want another fight*''.⁶⁰

The raj, as noted before, dismissed the Congress leaders' claim to act as the intermediary between the government and the peasants and Gandhi submitted. All appeals of Gandhi to Willingdon and even to Irwin that the Viceroy should nominate M.A. Ansari, a former Congress President, as a delegate to the RTC, as had been agreed to by Irwin, were rejected. (Interestingly, the Congress Working Committee, keen on Ansari's participation in the RTC as a counterpoise to the other Muslim delegates, could, if it wanted, nominate Ansari as a Congress delegate, but it chose to have Gandhi as its sole plenipotentiary.)

Gandhi's lengthy memorandum of 21 July, complaining of various ``breaches of truce'' by the government, was ignored. He was most worried about the government's coercive acts in Bardoli and Borsad and appealed to the Viceroy for granting relief. As no relief was forthcoming despite his

earnest appeals, he communicated to the Viceroy his decision not to attend the RTC and gave wide publicity to it. While endorsing this decision, the Working Committee hastened to clarify that this did not mean the repudiation of the Gandhi-Irwin agreement and asked Congress Committees and Congressmen to abide by it.⁶¹

Instead of feeling perturbed at the prospect of the Congress not attending the RTC, the Viceroy sent Gandhi curt replies. When Gandhi's announcement of his decision failed to put any pressure on the raj to make concessions, he sought the intervention of the two "sub-Viceroy" - Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru and M. R. Jayakar - to enable him to attend the RTC. Instead of "relief", he would be satisfied with an "impartial and public" inquiry. When "the negotiations that so many friends are carrying on with the Central Government" yielded no fruit, Gandhi gave up his demand not only for "relief" but also for a public inquiry and sent a telegram to the Viceroy seeking an interview with him. The Viceroy agreed to see him, "If you consider that a further discussion will help to remove your difficulties".⁶²

A "satisfactory talk" produced a face-saving device, if it could save face, to help Gandhi to attend the RTC. The government agreed to hold an inquiry only in a few villages of Bardoli taluk and Valod Mahal, by a British civilian - no "impartial and public" inquiry - into the allegations that the revenue collectors had made the peasants there pay more with the assistance of the police than in other villages without such assistance. Gandhi had started with the demand for an impartial, public inquiry into all breaches of the pact by the government in different places - Gujarat, U.P., etc., climbed down step by step and agreed at the end to no inquiry at all except by a British civilian into excess revenue payment by some peasants in a few villages in Gujarat.

As Gandhi prepared to rush to Bombay in a specially-arranged train to catch the last ship carrying delegates to London, he conveyed his regrets for causing "endless worry" to the Viceroy, begged the Viceroy's forgiveness for the same and sought their "joint blessings", which Willingdon, though stingy in other matters, readily gave. Gandhi beseeched the Viceroy to trust Patel and other members of the Working Committee and justly assured him that "*your trust will not be misplaced*". He requested U.P. Governor Malcolm Hailey to send for Nehru and affirmed "*that the Congress may be trusted and all necessary help requisitioned from it*". He added: "*I am certain that the trust will not be misplaced if the cause is common as I take it is the case between us.*"⁶³

Gandhi sailed from Bombay with G. D. Birla, Madan Mohan Malaviya and a few others on 29 August. As he embarked, a black flag demonstration was staged by workers led by communists.

Gandhi's aims were quite modest. He disliked "the Congress demands [which]", as he wrote to C.F. Andrews on 2 June, "are strung in a high pitch". The mahatma exuded faith in the British colonialists. In a statement he issued to the Associated Press before sailing, he hoped "that Provincial Governments, the Civil Service and English mercantile houses will help the Congress to realize the mission it has set before itself".⁶⁴

On his part the Viceroy, appreciating Gandhi's role in Indian politics, expected the Secretary of State to make an ally of Gandhi in London. On 28 August he wrote to Secretary of State Samuel Hoare: "You will find him I think *amenable* and *anxious to help*, with a real desire to work out a satisfactory constitution.... Still, I feel that in his new surroundings.... *he will be a help and not a hindrance*."⁶⁵

Interviewed at Marseilles on 11 September by the Associated Press, the sole plenipotentiary of the Congress stated: "*we must have an effective dominion status, but that does not exclude India's partnership in or alliance with the Empire.*" And during his interview to the *New York Times*, he said: "It is open to the *Muslims* to block the way to a settlement of the future of India as it is equally open to the British Government to make their opposition an excuse for not granting India *self-government*." But he wished that the raj would "make a friendly settlement" with the Congress without taking "shelter behind the Muslims".⁶⁶ He seems to have written off the Muslims and pined for "a friendly settlement" with the British raj, ignoring his Muslim counterparts.

On the eve of Gandhi's departure for England, a curious story appeared in the *Free Press Journal*, a Congress daily of Bombay, reproduced from the *Evening Standard* of London. It was by George Slocombe, the *Daily Herald* correspondent, who had interviewed Gandhi in prison in May 1930 and Motilal Nehru in June. According to Slocombe, during the visit of the Prince of Wales to India, when India was convulsed by the Non-Co-operation movement, Gandhi called informally one day at the Government House, New Delhi, to discuss some matter with an Indian member of the Government of India. When he was in the member's room, the door suddenly opened and the Prince of Wales, followed by an aide-de-camp, entered. To quote Slocombe, "Gandhi did an unexpected thing. He went swiftly forward, bent to the floor and with both hands embraced the feet of the Prince of Wales.... And, still crouching at the Prince's feet, he appealed to him, 'Sir, be kind to India?'"

When Nehru inquired of Gandhi about the truth of the report, Gandhi denied it and asked Nehru to write to Slocombe and ask his "authority for the story". In a letter of 31 August Nehru requested Slocombe "to enlighten me on this point". In reply, the latter affirmed that he had got the story from a reliable source.

Nehru sent Gandhi two copies of his letter to Slocombe – one by air mail and the other by ordinary mail.⁶⁷ Gandhi chose to remain silent. No denial by Gandhi appeared in any of his numerous press statements, speeches or letters, nor did he send any contradiction to *Evening Standard* or *Free Press Journal*, nor did Nehru or anybody else pursue the matter further. After the initial query and Slocombe's categorical statement, the matter was dropped.

One may recall that in late 1913 when, under Smuts' directions, Indian workers in South Africa, whose leadership Gandhi had assumed, were being arrested in large numbers, flogged, fired upon and killed, Gandhi sat in prison making a pair of sandals for the feet of Smuts.⁶⁸

Gandhi presents his Scheme at the RTC

At the RTC Gandhi "tabled the Congress scheme for a settlement which was in the main a reproduction of the scheme of the Nehru Report".⁶⁹ While claiming dominion status – "in fact, even less", as Nehru said – the Nehru Report envisaged British control over defence and foreign affairs; the power of the British Government to override and set aside legislations passed by the Indian legislatures; special powers of the Governor-General and of the Governors appointed by the British Government, including their right to dissolve or extend the lives of the legislatures; protection and "special treatment" for British capital; federation between British India and the princely states, whose rulers would enjoy unfettered rights, and so on. Addressing the Federal Structure Committee of the RTC on 15 September, Gandhi stated: "I have aspired – I still aspire – to be a citizen, not of the Empire, but in a Commonwealth, in a partnership – if God wills it, an *indissoluble partnership*." Gandhi wanted an India that would "conduce to the prosperity of Great Britain", become "an esteemed partner with Britain to share her sorrows" and "at her own will, fight [without offence to Gandhi's non-violence] side by side with Britain...." He promised that "the Congress will never think of repudiating a single claim or a burden that it should justly discharge" (though the Lahore resolution had stood for the repudiation of what was called India's "public debt" to Britain that was used by the imperialists as a means of India's continuous blood-letting). At another meeting Gandhi said with all emphasis that he did not ask for the withdrawal of British troops from India.⁷⁰

Speaking at the plenary session of the RTC on 1 December, Gandhi sought to remove all misunderstanding and distrust. He made a fervent appeal to the British Government:

"It is friendship I crave. My business is not to throw overboard the slave-holder and tyrant.... I do not want to break the bond between England and India.... I am here to compromise.... I shall be here as long as I am required because I do not want to revive civil disobedience. I want to turn the truce that was arrived at, at Delhi, into a permanent settlement. But for heaven's sake give me, a frail man, 62 years gone, a little bit of a chance. Find a little corner for him and the organization that he represents ... and if you find me a place, if you trust me, I invite you to trust the Congress also.... If you will work the Congress for all it is worth, then you will say good-bye to terrorism; then you will not need terrorism."

Gandhi raised the spectre of revolutionary violence to convince the British imperialists of the expediency of making some concessions to him and the Congress. He asked them: "Will you not see the writing that these terrorists are writing with their blood?... I urge you then to read that writing on the wall."⁷¹

Gandhi agreed to "safeguards and reservations" which would ensure the continuity of British rule and protection for British capital and welcomed federation with the native states which was intended by the raj not to weaken but to consolidate its rule.⁷²

The Indian big bourgeoisie were anxious that all, even satyagrahic, mass action should be abjured and that Indian politics should be directed along the constitutional or imperial channel, as Irwin had desired. They too agreed to "safeguards and reservations" but wanted a share of control over central finance. Addressing the plenary session of the RTC on 30 November, G. D. Birla, one of the FICCI delegates to the conference, stated: "If there was a genuine desire to do so, it is possible to arrive at an amicable solution." He argued that the civil disobedience movement would be neither in the interest of India nor in the interest of England, which, in that event, would have to pour unnecessarily its own money to govern India, though *it could be governed in other ways better, cheaper, and really satisfactorily*". G.D. Birla did not quarrel with British rule in India but advised the raj to co-opt Indians for the purpose.

Birla concluded his speech with a warning as well as an appeal:

"I know the youth of my country. It is quite possible that a few years hence you will not have to deal with men like Mr Gandhi who has proved in many respects a greater Conservative than many of you; you may not have to deal with Princes; you may not have to deal with capitalists like myself; you may have to deal with new men, new conditions, new ideas and new ambitions. Beware of that.

"There are two clear paths: one of them will lead to ruin, destruction, strife and anarchy; *another to peace, contentment and prosperity....* I hope, Sir, that the statesmanship of England will rise to the occasion and

choose the path of goodwill, contentment and prosperity."⁷³

Concluding his speech at the same session of the RTC, another FICCI delegate and outstanding leader of the Indian big bourgeoisie, Sir Purshotamdas Thakurdas, made the appeal:

"May Great Britain look at the problem which faces her Prime Minister tomorrow, which we have faced here and which we have come to help her to solve, in a manner which will reflect credit and glory on all her statesmen of the past, *who by their utterances in the House of Commons gave us hope that Great Britain was prepared to lead India on the path of liberty and freedom.*"⁷⁴

The Indian big bourgeoisie fervently hoped that imperialist Britain would lead them to 'liberty and freedom' – of course, of their conception.

What was Gandhi's conception of independent India? As he said in London, the King of England might continue as the king of 'independent' India; a 'British Agent' called 'a Viceroy or a Governor-General' might remain; and the British troops might stay on "to protect India against foreign aggression, *and even against internal insurrection*" with the British Commander-in-Chief in India becoming Gandhi's "technical adviser on military matters". And there would be 'safeguards' as "*a guarantee for the safety of every British interest to which India pledges her honour*".⁷⁵

In Gandhi's future India, capitalism would be abolished but not capital; the capitalists would remain owners of their wealth but act as "trustees", and the princes and the landlords would retain their possessions. As he stated, the Congress was "trying to serve" the landlords, millowners and millionaires and the princes, besides, of course, the peasants. "There is a States People's Conference", he said, "*and it is held back under my iron rule. I have been holding them back.... I have asked them to be satisfied with their present position.*"⁷⁶

Gandhi was "most anxious" that the princes should join the proposed Federation. "So far as it lies in me", he declared, in a statement to the press, "I should make every effort to induce the Princes to join Federation."⁷⁷ In this respect his policy was complementary to that of the colonial rulers. They too wanted the princes, their puppets, whom they could manipulate according to their desires, to join the proposed federation for, besides the special powers of the Viceroy and Governors, and other "reservations and safeguards", the princes' participation would be another very important 'safeguard' ensuring protection of British rule.

Obviously, the corollary to this policy was to help the raj to put down those who tried to rise against the imperial order, against the status quo, and for the people and national freedom. In London Gandhi refused to put his signature on a mass petition – sent him by Fenner Brockway – protesting

against the arrest and detention of the Meerut prisoners and demanding their release as well as the release of the Garhwali prisoners who had refused to fire on an unarmed gathering of their fellow-countrymen at Peshawar. He refused to do anything for Lester Hutchinson, Meerut prisoner, who, he knew, was then seriously ill, as he would "do nothing for the Meerut prisoners". He did not think it advisable to start then a campaign for the release of political prisoners in India. The day he reached London he condemned the young men who belonged to the "school of violence". He prided himself on the fact that "the Congress creed of non-violence" had "kept the forces of terrorism in check" and declared that Irwin had "opened up" a "course of co-operation" between him and the raj for fighting terrorism or revolutionary violence on the part of the youth.⁷⁸

The Sole Spokesman of India

Gandhi repeatedly claimed at the RTC that he and the Congress represented all classes – from princes to landless peasants – and all communities – Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and so on.⁷⁹ He questioned the representative character of the delegates who claimed to speak on behalf of their respective minorities. Interestingly, referring to Gandhi's claim to the sole right to represent the depressed classes and other minorities, Dr B.R. Ambedkar remarked at a meeting of the Minorities Committee of the RTC: "to that claim, I can only say that it is one of the many false claims which irresponsible people keep on making although the persons concerned with regard to these claims have been invariably denying them."⁸⁰

The Congress had recognized the representative character of other organizations, especially of the Muslim League, in earlier years. In 1916 the Congress had entered into what is called the Lucknow Pact with the League and in the twenties Congress leaders convened several All Parties Conferences and Conventions. But with the growing alienation of the Congress from the Muslims from the beginning of the thirties and with the British raj drafting a new constitution for India, Gandhi staked the claim that the Congress represented the entire people of India and should be recognized as such in any future constitutional settlement. During his interview with British Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald on 30 September 1931, Gandhi claimed that "he could represent the Muslims and the Depressed classes better than those who purported to do so", and urged the British Government to "*settle the whole question*" with him alone.⁸¹ At the plenary session of the RTC on 1 December 1931, Gandhi, while insisting that the Congress represented "the whole of India, all interests" and "all the minorities", wished that he "could convince all the British

public men, *the British Ministers, that the Congress is capable of delivering the goods*".⁸² As it will be seen, these were no casual utterances but represented the deliberate policy of the Congress. This resolve to arrogate to themselves a monopoly of power as the sole heir to the British colonial rulers further widened the gulf between the Congress and the Muslim community.

Gandhi and Communal Award

During this Conference there arose a fresh opportunity of forging an elite-level agreement between the Hindu and Muslim elites. The Muslim leaders, including Sir Muhammad Shafi of Punjab, were prepared to accept *joint electorates* if Muslims were assured of a majority of seats in Bengal and Punjab. Gandhi first agreed and then surrendered, as usual, to the pressure of the arch Hindu communalists, Madan Mohan Malaviya, Jayakar and Moonje, and refused to conclude an agreement with the Muslim leaders.⁸³ G. D. Birla, who was a member of the Minorities Committee of the Conference, wrote: "Mr Jayakar and others ought to thank themselves for the [Communal] Award. Had they a little more grace to settle things with Muslims things would have been different." The main responsibility for the failure was indeed Gandhi's for the Muslim leaders were prepared to conclude an agreement with him, that is, the Congress. In a letter to Gandhi Jinnah complained that, after accepting "provisionally certain terms", Gandhi backed out on the ground that the other Hindus did not accept them.⁸⁴

Muslim leaders had proposed joint electorate in 1927 and in 1930 (at the first RTC), and Hindu communalists and Congress leaders claiming to be nationalists refused to accept their proposals which were reasonable under the circumstances prevailing then.⁸⁵

Gandhi's failure to reach an agreement with the Muslims in 1931 had disastrous consequences. It was this that invited the Communal Award of the British Prime Minister MacDonald, which did incalculable harm. Instead of coming to a settlement with their counterparts of other religious communities, the Gandhis preferred to rely on the Irwins and MacDonalds for a settlement of this problem.

While Gandhi went on claiming that he represented all the communities and all the classes, the delegates who claimed to represent the Muslims, the depressed classes, the Indian Christians and the Anglo-Indians, combined with the representatives of the European expatriates in India, who too claimed the status of a minority, and entered into what is known as the Minorities Pact. This pact sought separate electorates and weightage for

all the minorities, even the European expatriates, and upheld the Muslim demands including the demand for their statutory majority in Bengal and Punjab.⁸⁶

When the Indian delegates found that they were unable to reconcile their respective claims to what the British imperialists might dole out, they asked the British Prime Minister to arbitrate. Gandhi was not a signatory to the joint letter but he persuaded Moonje to sign it.⁸⁷ He himself wrote a separate letter to MacDonald assuring him that he had no objection to MacDonald's playing the role of the sole arbitrator and that "the Congress cannot object to your award". (Earlier, Gandhi was quite willing if Viceroy Irwin would play the same role.) He wrote that separate electorates for the Muslims and the Sikhs would be acceptable to him, but "the position regarding the other minorities is different.... In any case, *the Congress will never be reconciled to any further extension of the principle of separate or special statutory reservation*". In an interview to the press he spoke on this question in the same vein.⁸⁸

As it will be seen, Gandhi and the Congress leaders easily reconciled themselves without a murmur of protest to the "further extension of the principle of separate electorate or special statutory reservation" to the other minorities, even to the European expatriates, when the British Prime Minister's Award was announced. Gandhi's only objection was to what had been awarded to the depressed classes. More of it later.

The sole plenipotentiary of the Congress who, in terms of the Karachi Congress resolution, was to fight at the RTC for complete independence including "control over the army, external affairs, finance and fiscal economic policy" and so on, ditched the fight and authorized the British Prime Minister to decide how many seats in the legislatures the different communities would be entitled to under a constitution for India to be framed by the British rulers. One may note that like the Lahore resolution on complete independence, the Karachi resolution and many other Congress resolutions and statements were "for show purposes only" (to quote S. Satyamurthi's expression), for the consumption of the trusting people – never acted upon and never intended to be so.

Dragged Unwillingly into a Conflict

Though Gandhi was eager to accept any settlement that would save face for the Congress, if possible – "such that I can make much of it" – it eluded him. On 1 December, before the conference broke up, he told the plenary session : "I am here to compromise; I am here to consider *every formula* that British ingenuity can prepare, every formula that the ingenuity

of such constitutionalists as Mr Sastri, Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, Mr Jayakar, Mr Jinnah, Sir Muhammed Shafi, and a host of other constitutionalists can weave into being." He said that he would "negotiate" and "plead" with them and "go down on bended knees" before he would "take the final leap and the final plunge".⁸⁹

The British Government was neither taken in by his talk of "the final leap and the final plunge" nor did it heed the appeals of Gandhi. It was resolved to give him no longer the importance that Irwin had given him by entering into an agreement with him. The imperialist caravan refused to be diverted by Gandhi's earnest entreaties. While closing the second RTC on 1 December, the Prime Minister re-affirmed the government's policy as formulated in his statement of January at the close of the first RTC. He specifically pointed out that Britain would "recognize the principle of responsibility of the Executive to the Legislature if both were constituted on an All-India Federal basis" and that "*Defence and External Affairs* must be reserved to the Governor-General, and that, in regard to *Finance* such conditions must apply as would ensure the fulfilment of the obligations incurred under the authority of the Secretary of State, and the maintenance unimpaired of the financial stability and credit of India. Finally, it is our view that the Governor-General must be granted the necessary powers to enable him to fulfil his responsibility for securing the observance of the constitutional *rights of Minorities*, and for ultimately maintaining the *tranquillity of the state*." The Prime Minister added that the British Government "intend to pursue this plan unswervingly..."⁹⁰

Gandhi's participation in the RTC did not advance India even by a single step. Instead, it allowed the British Government sufficient time to perfect its machinery of repression. All the struggles and sufferings of innumerable people were frittered away by the Congress leadership's negotiation, consultation and conference with the colonial rulers.

In the typical Gandhian way the mahatma, before the actual collapse of the conference, was diversifying his fervent appeals to the raj with threats that the failure of the conference would lead to the revival of civil disobedience. But after it actually failed, his talk of "the final leap and the final plunge", of the resumption of civil disobedience, was no longer heard. Instead, he went on assuring, before and after he left the shores of England, that he was "determined to make every effort to continue co-operation..."⁹¹

On reaching India Gandhi told a meeting held at Majestic Hotel, Bombay on 28 December with Sir Stanley Reed as president: "I am dying for co-operation.... I appeal to you, Englishmen and women, to ponder over the facts I have placed before you tonight and do your bit for creating an atmosphere of love and peace in this country."⁹²

When Gandhi was preaching love and peace, he knew that Nehru, Abdul Ghaffar Khan and a number of other Congress leaders were under arrest; that drastic ordinances had been issued not only in Bengal but also in the North-West Frontier Province and U.P.; that troops had been sent into some rural areas of not only Bengal but also of the NWFP and firings had taken place at Peshawar. A veiled form of martial law had been introduced in Chittagong in November 1931.⁹³ Indeed, the "truce" had been scrupulously observed by the Congress leaders but not by the raj. War had already been declared by the British imperialists against the people and the Congress.

In reply to Gandhi's wire of 29 December seeking an interview and guidance, the Viceroy agreed to grant it, if Gandhi did not approve of recent Congress activities. But the Viceroy refused to discuss the official measures of repression already enforced. Meeting from 29 December 1931 to 1 January 1932, the Working Committee passed a resolution which first deplored the assassination of a notorious British official by two school girls in Comilla in Bengal and then called upon the people to resume civil disobedience under conditions of strict non-violence "*in the event of a satisfactory response from the government not forthcoming*". The Committee enjoined the people to observe non-violence "*in thought, word and deed in the face of the gravest provocation*" and not to undertake "social boycott" of Government officers, police or anti-nationalists. The zamindars were assured that the Congress had "*no design upon any interest legitimately acquired*".⁹⁴

On 1 January 1932 Gandhi sent a long cable to the Viceroy's private secretary, clarifying that the Congress had not the slightest desire to promote disorder in any shape or form. On the contrary, he assured the Viceroy that "*As to Bengal, the Congress is at one with the Government in condemning assassinations and should heartily co-operate with the Government in measures that may be found necessary to stamp out such crimes*". He also asserted that civil disobedience was "*an effective substitute for violence or armed rebellion*". While enclosing a copy of the Working Committee's resolution, he again made a request for an interview and stated that "*pending our discussion operation of the resolution will be suspended in (the) hope (that) it may result in (the) resolution being finally given up*".⁹⁵ There would be no revival of the civil disobedience movement if he had a good discussion with the Viceroy.

Among those who had discussions with Gandhi before his arrest were Sir Homi Mody (Chairman, of the Bombay Millowners' Association); F. E. Dinshaw (the leading financier of Bombay); mill magnates like Sir Ness Wadia, Sir Cowasji Jehangir, Sir Phiroze Sethna, Lalji Naranji, Sir Edward Benthall; cloth and bullion merchants and other members of the Indian

Merchants' Chamber. They advised him not to resume civil disobedience.⁹⁶

Gandhi, too, was unsparing in his efforts to avoid any conflict. He wanted M. R. Jayakar and Sir T. B. Saprú to intercede with the government and sent a cable on 3 January, assuring Lord Irwin that he would "retain the spirit which you believed actuated me during that sacred week in Delhi" and would not "believe your certificate".⁹⁷ In another cable to the Viceroy on the same day, Gandhi pleaded for the third time for an interview, assuring him that he was still out for co-operation.

But Willingdon, who, on his own admission, was emerging as a second Mussolini,⁹⁸ refused to grant him any interview, and in the early hours of 4 January, Gandhi and most other members of the Working Committee were clapped in prison. A pre-emptive strike was launched against the people by the British raj. The engine of repression was set working. It was for this moment that the British imperialists and their men in India had prepared for several months. When Gandhi was enjoining the people to follow the path of "disciplined obedience", the raj was completing all preparations to deal a knock-out blow to the Congress as soon as the occasion would arise. As D. A. Low writes, "If Gandhi had carried out his threat not to attend the Round Table Conference...the full force of 'civil martial law' [the draconian measures] would there and then have been applied. As it was, his stay in London gave the raj three more months to perfect its arrangements for its subsequent introduction, which its officials evidently employed to considerable effect."⁹⁹

On the other hand, as Subhas Bose wrote, "...the movement of 1932 was not planned and organized by the leaders, as it should have been but that they were dragged into it." Not only had Emerson, the Home Secretary, warned Gandhi more than once that the government would "hit hard and hit at once", but proofs that the Emergency ordinances had been prepared by October 1931 were received by Dr Ansari and passed on to Patel, then Congress president. To the Congress leaders the question of preparing for a fight did not arise; they were concerned with how best to escape from it. Dr Syed Mahmud, a member of the Working Committee, said to the India League delegation: "The Mahatma was bent on co-operation.... The Government did not want co-operation. From my inside knowledge I can say that the Congress was not prepared for the conflict."¹⁰⁰

Why did the British raj drag the Congress leaders into battle from which they tried hard to escape?

As noted in Chapter One, British imperialism was then beset with many problems, economic and political, both at home and abroad. Long before the world economic crisis had its devastating impact on the economy of British and other countries of the capitalist world, Britain's economy was far from healthy. Rather, from about the end of World War I, it entered

into a long-time decline. Unable to compete with other industrial countries, she had remained content with being, until World War I, "the greatest commercial power" and "the greatest source of international capital"—the advantages she enjoyed mainly because of her political control over a large empire. But that pre-eminence, too, was lost after the war. As Hobsbawm writes, "The Victorian economy of Britain crashed in ruins between the two world wars." She became a debtor country while the USA changed from a debtor to a creditor country. Britain's external commerce began to decline. Her traditional industries like cotton textiles were in the doldrums. To quote Hobsbawm again, "In human terms the ruin of the traditional industries of Britain was the ruin of millions of men and women through mass unemployment, and it was this which stamped the years between the wars indelibly with the mark of bitterness and poverty."¹⁰¹

The crisis was accentuated by the world crisis of 1929-33. Many old centres of industry wore a deserted look. In 1931 British sterling went off the gold standard. The British imperialists were a worried lot. Victorian confidence and complacency were a thing long lost: those halcyon days were never to return. The Great Depression, as Tomlinson observes, "conspired to strike at the heart of the established relationship that still existed between the British, imperial and world economies".¹⁰² The fall in the prices of agricultural produce led to much reduced demand for Britain's export staples in a country like India.

India had long been a milch-cow to the British colonialists. Besides the profits of unequal trade and of capital invested in industry and commerce in India, they obtained from India in 1913-14 £ 2,03,12,000 (when the Government of India's gross expenditure amounted to £ 6,34,40,000) as interest payments of Government sterling 'debt' and 'Home Charges'. This annual tribute increased to £ 3,18,88,776 in 1924-25 and amounted to £ 2,85,03,796 in 1934-5.¹⁰³ Though commerce declined, India's importance to the British imperialists grew both as a source of vast unearned income to salvage the crisis-ridden British economy and as a strategic linchpin of the empire, a large base of imperial power in the east and a never-failing source of huge manpower and materials. As noted before, the massive drain of gold from India in the early thirties helped Britain to overcome its financial crisis. At the same time imperial preference, Ottawa, the Bombay-Lancashire Pact and so on served as instruments for salvaging British commerce. That is why "reservations and safeguards", the levers of control over Indian finance and administration were deemed essential to the preservation of imperial interests when inter-imperialist contradictions assumed menacing proportions and when a second world war cast its shadow before.

From about 1928 vast strike-struggles of the workers and anti-feudal

struggles of the peasants swept large parts of India. Sholapur, Peshawar and Chittagong seemed ominous. The mantra of satyagraha, the 'world-regenerating creed of non-violence', could hinder but could not contain all anti-imperialist, anti-feudal struggles. In the inflammable situation in the early thirties, even non-violent civil disobedience, though designed to disarm the people ideologically and divert them from the path of genuine anti-imperialist, democratic struggle, ran the risk of achieving the opposite. Despite the mahatma's sermons, it might turn into vast no-rent, no-revenue struggles of the peasantry and industrial strikes and other struggles of the working class and the urban petty bourgeoisie. Even the innocent spark of satyagraha might kindle a wild, uncontrollable fire. As the times were out of joint, British imperialism was not prepared to face any risk in India, when hectic war-preparations were being made by all the imperialist powers in anticipation of a war greater and more devastating than the First Great War. At such a time the British imperialists wanted the Congress leaders to stick strictly to the constitutional path, to forswear mass action, however non-violent, limited and well-intentioned. Irwin had said: "The real question [is] whether all this Indian nationalism that is growing and bound to grow can be guided along imperial or will more and more get deflected into separatist lines."¹⁰⁴ It was the policy of the British imperialists to use the services of the Congress leaders to guide 'Indian nationalism' along the imperial channel. The Congress leaders like Nehru would be free to pour out their anti-imperialist ardour in words, but in practice they would have to adhere strictly to the constitutional path – the plan as mapped out by the raj. It would be playing with fire to allow the Gandhis and Nehrus to deviate from it. It was to coerce them to conform to the British strategy that the Congress leaders were dragged into a conflict which they intensely disliked and of which the Indian big bourgeoisie strongly disapproved.

British imperialism felt confident that the Indian bourgeoisie would play the game and remain 'a loyal opposition'; it considered only the 'masses' and 'revolutionary Communism' as its irreconcilable enemies.¹⁰⁵ But revolutionary communism was weak and the masses were disorganized and awaited revolutionary leadership which was absent. Besides the Government of India's Despatch on Proposals for Constitutional Reforms 1930, other official documents, too, exuded the same faith in the bourgeoisie and so-called nationalist politicians¹⁰⁶ – a confidence which was far from misplaced as we have seen and as we shall see more of it later.

References and Notes

1. CWG, XLV, 305-6 —emphasis added.
2. *Ibid*, 196,205,245 — emphasis added.
3. *Ibid*, 251,255-6,260; XLVI, 10,99,151,152 — emphasis added.
4. *Ibid*, XLV, 253.
5. *Ibid*, 260 — emphasis added.
6. *Ibid*, 285.
7. *Ibid*, 273 — emphasis added.
8. *Ibid*, 185,233,234,242; for MacDonald's declaration, see *ibid*, 424-6 and for the Gandhi-Irwin agreement, see *ibid*, 432-6; see also Vol.I of this book, 359-61,364-5.
9. Moore, *Endgames*, 48.
10. CWG, XV, 105-6,107,121-2,171-6; XVII, 151,304,502,503,504; XVIII, 77; XLII,421,423, 425-6; *passim*. See also Vol.I of this book, 188-201,204-8,339-41,343-4.
11. Quoted in Ravinder Kumar, "From Swaraj to Purna Swaraj", in D.A.Low (ed.), *Congress and the Raj*, 102.
12. G.D. Birla, *In the Shadow of the Mahatma*, 176 — emphasis in the original.
13. See Ravinder Kumar, *op cit.*, 102-3.
14. David Hardiman, "The Crisis of the Lesser Patidars", in D.A. Low (ed.), *op cit.*, 68; *Peasant Nationalists of Gujarat*, 234.
15. Brian Stoddart, "The Structure of Congress Politics in Coastal Andhra, 1925-37", in Low (ed.), *op cit.*, 111,121-2.
16. CWG, XLV, 278,301,306.
17. Irwin Collection, 27; cited in Moore, *The Crisis of Indian Unity*, 186. For the understanding that Gandhi gave to Home Secretary Emerson, see CWG, XLV, 445-6.
18. *Ibid*, 264.
19. *The Congress Encyclopaedia*, VIII, 262.
20. See Johannes H. Voight, "Co-operation or Confrontation? War and Congress Politics, 1939-42", in Low (ed.), *op cit.*, 354-5.
21. See Vol. I of this book, 276-83.
22. The provinces where the Muslims formed the majority. Besides the federal character of the Indian constitution, Mohammed Ali and other Muslim leaders wanted statutory Muslim majority in the legislatures of the provinces—Bengal and Punjab—for a certain number of years, ten or twenty.
23. AICC Papers, File G-85/1931.
24. IAR, 1931, I, 284-8,291,294-5,295-301.
25. Azad, *India Wins Freedom*, 140.
26. See Vol. I of this book, 283-5.
27. CWG, XLVII, 141; B. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *The History of the Indian National Congress*, I, 482. Emphasis added.
28. G.D. Birla to Gandhi, 15.2.1935, Birla, *Bapu*, II, 30; Azad, *op cit.*, 40; TOP, IV, 260; *Wavell the Viceroy's Journal* (ed. by Penderel Moon), 314.
29. SWN, IV, 523,524; V, 43 and fn.5; see also V, 282-3,285.
30. CWG, XLV, 322; XLVI, 412.
31. *Ibid*, 10,25,64,87,275-6, *passim*.
32. *Ibid*, XLV, 250,256,272-3,405.
33. See "Provisional Settlement", *ibid*, 434-6; XLVI, 41.
34. Emerson's Note on Discussions with Gandhi, 15-16 July 1931, *ibid*, XLVII, 430; see also *ibid*, 400.
35. Patel to Nehru, 21 July 1931, AICC Papers, 1931, File G-60; quoted in Judith Brown, *Gandhi and Civil Disobedience*, 230.
36. Gandhi to Nehru, 20 June 1931, AICC Papers, File G.40, K.W. iii, 1931; CWG, XLVI,

- 201-2. Emphasis added.
37. J. Nehru, *An Autobiography*, 277-8; AICC Papers, 1931, File 4, Part 1, cited in Brown, *op cit.*, 217.
38. Hailey to Emerson, 2 May 1931, H. Poll. 33/XI/31; cited in Judith Brown, "The Role of a National Leader: Gandhi, Congress and Civil Disobedience 1929-34", in Low (ed.), *op cit.*, 155.
39. CWG, XLVI, 384 – emphasis added; SWN, V, 69-70,90.
40. Panchayats set up by the militant peasants.
41. SWN, V, 104; VII, 167; V, 172.
42. G. Pandey, *The Ascendancy of the Congress in Uttar Pradesh 1926-34*, 192; see also 185.
43. *Ibid*, 180,184-6,188; also 223.
44. SWN, V, 107; Pandey, *op cit.*, 185.
45. See Nehru to Chief Secretary, U.P., 15 Oct. and Nehru to the Private Secretary to the Viceroy, 16 Oct. 1931, SWN, V, 151 and 155.
46. *Ibid*, 155-8,155, fn.2; S. Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru*, I, 166.
47. SWN, V, 162,163,fn.3,182.
48. *Ibid*, 189.
49. G. Safarov, "The Congress Socialist Party and the New Manoeuvres of the National Congress in India", *Communist International*, 20 Nov. 1934; reprinted in *Radical Periodicals in the United States*, 1934, 788.
50. William Burton, *India's North-West Frontier*, London 1939, 167; quoted in Amit Bhattacharyya, "The Great Peshawar Uprising (1930)", *Revolt Studies*, Calcutta, June 1986, 108.
51. CWG, XLV, 259; XLVII, 179,223,300.
52. *Ibid*, XLVI, 397-9,29-31.
53. See Kali Charan Ghosh, *The Roll of Honour*, 508-9.
54. AICC Papers, File P-6/1927, Part I; cited in Gitasree Bandyopadhyay, *Constraints in Bengal Politics 1921-41*, Calcutta, 1984, 299-300. Obviously, the date of the file has been given wrongly.
55. See CWG, XLVII, 209,231-3,243-4,255-7; SWN, V, 291.
56. CWG, XLVI, 120; XLVII, 223,445; see also *ibid*, 39. Emphasis added.
57. *Ibid*, XLVII, 260-65,166-77.
58. SWN, V, 307,291,294.
- 58a. Birla, *Bapu*, IV, 30-1.
59. Brown, *Gandhi and Civil Disobedience*, 215.
60. CWG, XLVI, 416 – emphasis added.
61. *Ibid*, 403; XLVII, 121,200,281,291.
62. *Ibid*, 286,287,fn.1,299 and fn.1,305, and fn.1,330 and fn.1,331,352 and fn.1.
63. *Ibid*, 365,371. Emphasis added.
64. *Ibid*, XLVI, 275; see also XLV, 458; XLVII, 384 – emphasis added.
65. Templewood Papers, MSS, EUR. E. 240(5), India Office Library; quoted in Brown, *Gandhi and Civil Disobedience*, 239 – emphasis added.
66. CWG, XLVII, 416,419. Emphasis added.
67. See SWN, V, 322-3 and 323,fn.2; AICC Papers, File 57/1931.
68. See D.G. Tendulkar, *Mahatma*, I, 151; Penderel Moon, *Gandhi and Modern India*, 54; Vol. I of this book, 152-3.
69. See Reginald Coupland, *The Indian Problem 1833-1935*, 126. For the main features of the Nehru Report; see Vol. I of this book, 279-85.
70. CWG, XLVIII, 18-9,20,310. Emphasis added.
71. *Ibid*, 362-5.
72. *Ibid*, 28-9, 363.
73. See Vol. I of this book, 107; G.D. Birla, *The Path to Prosperity*, 377,380-2,386-9,389-90 – emphasis added.

74. Quoted in Frank Moraes, *op cit.*, 143.
75. CWG, XLVIII, 147,177,246,306,309; also 256. Emphasis added.
76. *Ibid*, 16,34,242-3,245,247,257,277,296. Emphasis added.
77. *Ibid*, 313-4.
78. *Ibid*, 3,39,45,87 and fn.1,289,341,376.
79. *Ibid*, 14-5,117,277,357. See also XLV, 253.
80. *Ibid*, 116,160,205,207,257; B.R. Ambedkar, *What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables*, 65.
81. *Ibid*, XLVIII, 96 – emphasis added.
82. *Ibid*, 357 –emphasis added.
83. Frank Moraes, *Sir Purshotamdas Thakurdas*, 134 and *Witness to our Era*, 32; David Page, *Prelude to Partition*, 243; Kanji Dwarkadas, *op cit.*, 404; Bipan Chandra, *Nationalism and Colonialism in India*, 268-9; C. Khaliquzzaman, *Pathway to Pakistan*, 113.
84. Birla to Thakurdas, 22 Aug. and 1 Sept. 1932, PT Papers, File 126, Part 2; Jinnah to Gandhi, 3 Mar. 1938, CWG, LXVI, 481.
85. See Kanji Dwarkadas, *op cit.*, 383-4; M.A.H. Ispahani, "Factors Leading to the Partition of British India", in Philips and Wainwright (eds.) *The Partition of India*, 33q; Vol. I of this book, 276-83.
86. Uma Kaura, *Muslims and Indian Nationalism*, 76.
87. See Brown, *Gandhi and Civil Disobedience*, 250.
88. CWG, XLVIII, 300,302.
89. *Ibid*, 352,364-5,367.
90. See *ibid*, 371-2 –emphasis added.
91. *Ibid*, 208,301,333,340,389,399,426-7, *passim*.
92. *Ibid*, 458. See also 44,447,449-50.
93. Subhas Bose, *The Indian Struggle*, 235.
94. See CWG, XLVIII, 470-2 – emphasis added; *The Congress Encyclopaedia*, X, 219.
95. CWG, XLVIII, 474-6 – emphasis added.
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99. Low, "Civil Martial Law": The Government of India and the Civil Disobedience Movement, 1930-34", in Low (ed), *op eit.*, 173.
100. Bose, *op cit.*, 363; CWG, XLVI, 416; Palme Dutt, *op cit*, 310; see also Sitaramayya, *op cit.*, II, 456; Nehru, *An Autobiography*, 327,328; Rajendra Prasad, *Autobiography*, 343.
101. E.J. Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire*, 191,207-8.
102. Tomlinson, *The Political Economy of the Raj*, 121.
103. *Ibid*, 17; Rajat K. Ray, *op cit*, 11-2.
104. See John Gallagher and Anil Seal, "Britain and India between the Wars", in Christopher Baker *et al* (eds.), 406.
105. GOI, *Despatch on Proposals for Constitutional Reforms 1930*, 9,56; cited in *Communists Challenge Imperialism from the Dock* (General Statement of the eighteen Communist prisoners before the Sessions Court at Meerut, 1931), 73.
106. See Moore, *The Crisis of Indian Unity*, 235-6; Brown, *Gandhi and Civil Disobedience*, 61.

CHAPTER THREE

'CIVIL MARTIAL LAW' AND PEOPLE'S STRUGGLES

On entering prison Gandhi felt immense relief as it was for him an opportunity to escape from the turmoil of politics. To him it was an act of "God's infinite mercy", and when Patel and Mahadev Desai joined him, they became, as Gandhi said, "a merry company" and were "practically enjoying ourselves".¹ As we shall see, immediately after arrest, Gandhi, in his appeals to the Viceroy and the Secretary of State, assured them of his co-operation and desire to restore 'peace'.

The people were not as fortunate as their leaders. They found themselves in the midst of a situation for which they had not been prepared. Rather, they had been lulled into complacency when the raj carried out the threat "to hit hard and hit at once". What D.A. Low called "civil martial law" – martial law under a civil cloak – was imposed. A bunch of ordinances poured out of the raj's armoury to add to those which were already in force in the NWFP, Bengal and U.P. To quote Michael Brecher, "Together they gave the Government of India powers even more far-reaching than those of 1930 which Lord Irwin's biographer had termed 'this catalogue of absolutism'." As Hoare admitted in the House of Commons, they were "very drastic and severe. They cover almost every activity of Indian life". The Congress and various other organizations including peasant associations and youth organizations were banned, large-scale arrests were made. Bans were imposed on political meetings and processions. Every preparation was made to subdue the people by sheer terror. It was an all-out offensive against the people. Samuel Hoare declared that "there would be no drawn battle this time", and adding insult to injury, said: "though the dogs bark, the caravan passes on".²

During the phase that started, the people's struggles assumed different forms. Broadly, they were of two categories: 'civil', and what the Congress leaders would describe as 'criminal' and try their utmost to prevent.

Civil resisters hoisted the Congress flag, held meetings, brought out processions, raised slogans, picketed foreign cloth and liquor shops – all defying the authorities – and courted imprisonment in large numbers. 'Boycott foreign cloth' was one of the main slogans. In Bombay the closing of markets by traders was another feature. In a few areas non-payment of revenue and rent and *chowkidari* tax was attempted: response varied from area to area. In even fewer areas salt was manufactured.

There were other forms of struggle which were more militant and did not forswear violence. There were also some peasant struggles which were not of the satyagrahic type and were led by people thrown up by those struggles.

Between January 1932 and March 1933 there were as many as 120,000 arrests. Firing on unarmed crowds was also resorted to from time to time. Physical torture and intimidation were used by the government on a wide scale to break the morale of the people. Even army units were posted in villages. Prisoners in jails, even women prisoners, were subjected to inhuman torture. Cases of torture, savage beatings, confiscation of property, loot, rapes of women, killings and so on – illustrative, not exhaustive – were documented in the Report of the India League delegation which toured India from 17 August to 7 November 1932 as a fact-finding mission. One of the three members of the delegation was Ellen Wilkinson, a former M.P. In the Preface to the Report Bertrand Russell wrote:

“There has been no lack of interest in the misdeeds of the Nazis in Germany, they have been fully reported in the press, and have been commented on with self-righteous indignation. Few people in England realize that misdeeds quite *as serious* are being perpetrated by the British raj in India.”³

“To a greater or less degree”, wrote Nehru, “all the provinces of India went through this fire of fierce repression, but the Frontier Province and Bengal suffered most.”⁴

The NWFP had been in revolt since April 1930. Leaders like Abdul Ghaffar Khan, the ‘Frontier Gandhi’, were in prison. In their anti-imperialist struggle the Red Shirts and other Pathans showed scant respect for the ‘creed’ of non-violence. In the late 1920s the Red Shirts organization (which affiliated itself with the Congress in 1931) came in close contact with the Youth League which was under Communist influence. As an official communique issued on 5 May 1930 said, the members of the Naujawan Bharat Sabha propagated communist doctrines in the villages of Peshawar district. In 1930, after the uprising in the Peshawar city was suppressed, members of the Youth League and the Red Shirts carried on wide propaganda among the peasantry and waged a guerrilla warfare in the rural areas. Of the British-administered districts of the NWFP, the most turbulent was Bannu.

The British responded with savage repressive measures. Troops, tanks and planes were used to suppress the revolt. Yet the people’s resistance grew more determined. The number of the Red Shirts increased from 750 to 25,000 within a short time after the arrest of the leaders. By the end of 1930 there were 54,000 men in prison in that small, sparsely-populated province.⁵

Thousands of Pathans from the tribal areas of the province, which enjoyed some local 'independence' – the Waziris, the Afridis, etc. – marched on Peshawar and other administered areas and attacked British posts. The raj sent machine-guns and tanks to confront them and bombed tribal villages from the air. As the official publication *India in 1930-31* said, it was remarkable that "during the course of their numerous incursions into the settled districts, the tribesmen altogether abstained – except on two occasions – from looting in their customary manner the villages they passed through" and, during negotiations with the raj, raised "the demands for the release of Gandhi and the repeal of the special ordinances in India".⁶ It is significant that 3 May 1930 was observed in Punjab as 'Peshawar Day' and that a Sikh detachment from Amritsar set out to help the Pathan rebels but was stopped by the British at Jhelum and 200 of its men were arrested.⁷

Again, in 1931-2 the NWFP played a leading role in the no-tax campaign, which spread to wide areas in the province.

Fierce repression could not suppress the revolt of the tribesmen. They were being regularly bombed from the air by the British. It appears from Gandhi's letters to Agatha Harrison and Nehru, written as late as November 1933, that the flames of struggle in the Frontier province had not died down and atrocities were being committed there by the British even then. Gandhi warned Agatha and Nehru that the cases of atrocities should "be dealt with privately" and *should not be given publicity*. He said that, since the press was gagged and censorship was strict, the outside world could hardly know anything of what was happening in the different parts of the country. He, too, did not desire that the people should know these dark deeds of the British rulers. He did not "want any public propaganda", he wrote.⁸

In Bengal, the anti-imperialist and anti-feudal struggles did not cease when Gandhi called off civil disobedience in March 1931. The Bengal Provincial Conference at Behrampur (Baharampur), Murshidabad, adopted resolutions in 1931 proposing to intensify the no-tax movement, to boycott Union Boards, British goods, British-owned banks, insurance and steamship companies, Anglo-Indian newspapers, etc.⁹

Thanks mainly to Gandhi and G.D. Birla, Gandhi's man on the spot, the Bengal Congress was disorganized when the second phase of the civil disobedience movement opened. Subhas Bose's anti-imperialist, militant activities did not suit the tastes of Gandhi, "the born co-operator", as he often described himself. During his talks with Irwin in February-March 1931, Gandhi had confided to the Viceroy that "*Subhas is my opponent*".¹⁰ Since the beginning of the twenties, Gandhi had been trying to establish his undisputed control over the Congress in Bengal as he did in other provinces – Gujarat, Bihar, Tamil Nadu, Andhra, the Central Provinces and Berar, U.P. and so on – through his deputies like Vallabhbhai Patel, Prasad,

Rajagopalachari, Sitaramayya, Jamnalal Bajaj, Jawaharlal Nehru, etc. Jawaharlal did not belong to the Gandhian core *in words* but followed Gandhi faithfully *in deeds* until 1946. Gandhi was never deceived by his words. His radicalism in words was of help to Gandhi; with his 'left' and 'socialist' rhetoric, as S. Gopal, his biographer and admirer, and many others have noted, he was "the best shield of the Congress against left-wing groups and organizations".¹¹

In Bengal there were groups of 'pure' Gandhians and from 1925, after C.R. Das's death, Gandhi tried to set up J.M. Sen Gupta as his deputy in Bengal, whom in spite of the protests of other Congress leaders of Bengal he gave the 'triple crown'—presidentship of the BPCC, leadership of the Swaraj Party in the Bengal Council, and mayoralty of Calcutta. But neither Sen Gupta, Bidhan Chandra Roy and Nalini Ranjan Sarkar, whom Gandhi cultivated, nor the 'pure' Gandhian groups had that popularity among the masses and ordinary Congressmen that Subhas enjoyed. That was a problem for both British imperialism and Gandhi. The former put Subhas behind bars frequently or forced him to go into exile for a considerable period—about ten years in jail or in exile between 1921 when Subhas returned after resigning from the ICS and January 1941, when he left India never to return. In September 1931 Gandhi asked Subhas to resign as president of the BPCC on the plea that his resignation would put an end to factionalism within the BPCC. The elected president resigned at the behest of Gandhi, together with several others from the provincial committee, and the Sen Gupta group was put in charge of the Bengal Congress. "But Sen Gupta's group", wrote Nehru to Gandhi on 24 September, "is not acting very graciously."¹² Subhas was removed to prison by the raj on 2 January 1932 before civil disobedience was resumed, as he had been before the first phase of it.

Some Congress leaders of Bengal, close to Gandhi like Bidhan Roy and Nalini Sarkar, and Calcutta-based big bourgeois like G.D. Birla, closest to Gandhi and his associates, did not like civil disobedience to flourish. Bidhan Roy served as mayor of Calcutta during much of the period of civil disobedience. Instead of leading or participating in the struggle, Bidhan hauled down the Congress flag from the Calcutta Corporation's buildings at the dictate of Calcutta's police commissioner. According to K.P. Thomas, "From 1925 onwards Bidhan became an intimate friend of Gandhiji". On 30 January 1932 Gandhi wrote to him: "I love and accept your correction and say with you that we are near to each other..."¹³

Bidhan was also very close to G.D. Birla. Birla, who became president of the All India Harijan Sevak Sangh in 1932, nominated him president of its Bengal branch. In *India during and after the Second World War, 1939-49* (in Russian: Moscow, 1952, p.220), Dyakov observed that Bengal's

Chief Minister B.C. Roy was hand in glove with the Central Government because he was a "stooge of the Marwaris".¹⁴

Nalini Sarkar's role during the civil disobedience struggle was no less patriotic than Bidhan's. As Nehru wrote, Nalini, who then belonged to "the dominant part of the Bengal Congress", which Gandhi had helped to install, "rejoiced to entertain Government officials, Home Members and the like, when most of us were in prison and C.D. was supposed to be flourishing.... The Congress from top to bottom is a caucus and opportunism triumphs". In July 1934 Sarkar managed to get himself elected as mayor of Calcutta with the support of Government-nominated as well as European councillors of the Calcutta corporation,¹⁵ who were "magnates of Clive Street", the seat of British expatriate capital in India.

But he did not lose the friendship and trust of the top leaders of the Congress. He was very close to G.D. Birla. He was Birla's candidate when he became a member of the Indian Central Banking Inquiry Committee 1929-31.¹⁶ It is quite certain that without Birla's support he could not be elected president of the FICCI in 1933-34.

G.D. Birla, who called himself Gandhi's "pet-child" and whom Gandhi called one of the "mentors" whom "God has given me", was effusive in his expressions of loyalty to the British imperialists during the second phase of civil disobedience and worked hard to terminate it "once and for all". We shall return to his role later. One of Birla's chief lieutenants, D.P. Khaitan, saw Bengal governor Anderson in May 1932 and conveyed "the distinct impression that...he would be ready to co-operate with the Government in any constructive work".¹⁷

When the second phase of civil disobedience opened, there was no all-India centre to direct the struggle, no programme, no plan. In urban Bengal, mainly the petty bourgeois youth and students came out to defy the official measures, held meetings, took out processions, hoisted Congress flags, picketed shops selling Lancashire cloth and liquor, were thrashed mercilessly by the police, and many of them were sent to prison.

Contraband salt was manufactured in Tamluk and Contai (Kanthi) in Midnapore (Medinipur) district as a symbolic anti-imperialist protest. Movements for boycott of union boards and non-payment of the *chowkidari* tax developed in some areas of Medinipur and other places. Peasants in the Arambagh sub-division of Hooghly district and in some *thanas* of Bankura district waged a no-rent struggle. The survey and settlement operations were boycotted in Arambagh. The leadership of these struggles was provided by local Congressmen.

In the rural areas of East Bengal the Muslim and Namashudra peasantry remained aloof from the Congress-led civil disobedience movement. In the urban areas the Muslim petty bourgeoisie had little interest in it.

During these years of world-wide economic depression, when the prices of jute and paddy fell steeply, peasant discontent was widespread. Peasant associations sprang up in several districts – Tippera (Tripura), Noakhali, Mymensingh, Rangpur, Rajshahi, Bogura, Faridpur, Jessore, Medinipur. They launched campaigns for withholding payment of rent to landlords and interest to moneylenders.¹⁸

The Tripura Krishak Samiti, led by both Hindus and Muslims, had started a powerful no-rent movement in the district of Comilla in 1930-31. It was directed against moneylenders, too. It spread to Noakhali and other neighbouring districts towards the end of 1931.

What most alarmed the rulers was the upsurge in the activities of national revolutionaries which followed in the wake of the Chittagong armed uprising. In 1930, 11 British officials (including Lowman, Bengal's inspector-general of police; Hodson, Dacca's district superintendent of police; and Col. Simpson, the inspector-general of prisons), and 10 non-officials were shot dead by national revolutionaries; and 12 British officers and 14 non-officials were injured.¹⁹

In 1931, among the British officials shot dead were Peddie, a particularly notorious district magistrate of Medinipur, and Stevens, district magistrate of Comilla. Durno, Dacca's (Dhaka's) district magistrate and Villiers, president of the European Association, were seriously wounded. In 1932, Douglas, Peddie's successor as Medinipur's district magistrate, and Ellison, district superintendent of police, Tripura, were among those killed. An unsuccessful attempt on the life of Bengal Governor Stanley Jackson was made by a girl student at the convocation of the Calcutta University in February 1932. Burge, who succeeded Douglas as the district magistrate of Medinipur, was shot dead in 1933 and in the following year an unsuccessful attempt was made to kill John Anderson, then governor of Bengal. The wave of revolutionary violence, the immediate targets of which were individuals notorious for their crimes against the people, did not die down until 1934.

To combat the revolutionary violence, black acts and ordinances, giving sweeping powers to the police to arrest and detain without trial and adopt other measures, setting up special procedures and tribunals to hold trials, and gagging the press, followed one after another. Twenty separate Acts were framed to deal with the national revolutionaries.²⁰ By January 1932, 272 institutions were declared illegal. Thousands were arrested, tortured and sent to prison or detention camps. Many were shot or hanged.

To poison the relations between the two communities, Hindu and Muslim, a serious riot was engineered by the raj's men and non-official Europeans in August-September 1931 in Chittagong town, which was left at the mercy of hooligans for three days after the assassination of a

notorious police officer Ashanullah. In September 1931, as noted before, unprovoked firing and assault with bayonets and *lathis* on the political prisoners detained without trial at the Hijli Detention Camp were resorted to.

John Anderson, who was "credited with the worst features of the 'Black and Tan' operations in Ireland",²¹ was sent by the British government in March 1932 as governor of Bengal to suppress the wave of revolutionary violence.²² Arriving in Bengal, he introduced "methods of repression that had no precedent anywhere in India". Learning from his rich experience in Ireland, he created in Bengal some of the horrors perpetrated there. Let us quote Nehru:

"...the world remembers Jallianwala Bagh and the 'crawling order' and the many other ferocious accompaniments of Martial Law. Soon followed the era of the Black and Tans in Ireland with their blood lust and reprisals. And now we see the government in India again excelling itself in this manner in parts of Bengal. Chittagong and Midnapur, like Amritsar, have become black symbols of the working of imperialism and of the attempt to humiliate a great nation."²³

The issue of identity cards in large areas to all Hindus – men and women – between 12 and 25, externments and internments, even forced internments of the entire people of an area in their homes for weeks, sunset law, curfew, the stationing of punitive police forces, imposition of collective fines, the death penalty for possession of arms, flag marches by British and Garhwali soldiers in the villages of several districts, deployment of army battalions, including one British infantry battalion, in Medinipur, Chittagong, Dhaka, Mymensingh, Rangpur, Comilla and Bankura were a few of the measures undertaken.

Yet fear gripped the minds of many British officials and other Britishers. For instance, Barisal's district magistrate, Donovan, grew panicky, resigned his post and left the country. "Panic was so great at Chittagong that a force of several thousand policemen had to be stiffened by regular troops and a Royal Navy flagship came up to the harbour to raise sagging morale."²⁴

For about three years Surya Sen, the leader of the Chittagong uprising, and some of his associates remained underground in the villages near the town. The villagers gave them shelter and protected them, undeterred by official intimidation and terror or by baits like remission of punitive taxes. Not only Hindus but also many poor Muslims – peasants, boatmen and others – gave the rebels their willing help.²⁵ In an encounter with a joint military and police party led by a British captain in June 1932, which had surrounded the house in which Surya Sen and four of his comrades had taken shelter, the captain and two of the revolutionaries were killed, while

Surya Sen and two others escaped. But, after an exchange of fire in February 1933 with a unit of Gurkha Rifles, Surya Sen and one of his comrades, Tarakeswar Dastidar, were captured; they were executed on the night of 12 January 1934. Their dead bodies were taken before dawn to a battle cruiser on the high seas and sent to watery graves. The rulers seemed afraid of cremating them on land.

The national revolutionaries started losing faith in terrorist methods in 1931 and felt attracted towards Marxism. An Intelligence Bureau publication noted that "the early months of 1931 witnessed a remarkable manifestation of the Communist spirit amongst all classes of terrorists in Bengal....The demand for Communist literature [from "detenus in the various jails and detention camps up and down the country wherever Bengal terrorists were confined"] exceeded all bounds and when it was refused by the authorities it was smuggled in by sympathetic extraneous hands."²⁶

The regime of terror in Bengal lasted several years. As Nehru wrote on 4 October 1937,

"Bengal, as in the past, so today, keeps the lead in repression and suppression of civil liberties. Even now hundreds of organizations are banned there, especially in the districts of Midnapur and Chittagong. It takes one's breath away to learn that in Chittagong district alone about 23,000 persons (official figure) are interned or restricted in their activities by government orders. Large numbers of detenus are still there in Bengal, untried or unconvicted, but kept in concentration camps for years."²⁷

Besides, there were many hundreds of political prisoners in Bengal jails and in the Andamans.

In U.P. civil disobedience in its second phase was more or less an urban phenomenon with flag-hoistings, meetings, demonstrations and picketing of foreign cloth and liquor shops in defiance of official bans. Women also participated in them. Arrests and beating, even caning, were regular features.

True to the assurance the Congress Working Committee, at its meeting between 29 December 1931 and 1 January 1932, had given to the landlords, the Congress would not "let Civil Disobedience in rural areas develop into an anti-landlord campaign".²⁸

Several districts of U.P. had been a storm-centre of anti-feudal and anti-imperialist struggle during 1930 and 1931 despite the Congress leaders' efforts to contain it. Owing to the combined efforts of the big landlords and their musclemen, the raj and the Congress leaders, there was an ebb-tide in the U.P. peasant movement during the second phase of civil disobedience.

Though some remissions in payment of revenue and rent were granted

by the government, the peasant distress showed few signs of abatement. Nor did repression on them cease. Peasants put up some resistance against extortion of rent and taxes but, as Gyanendra Pandey observes, "In general however the movement had lost its momentum".²⁹

The Patidars of Gujarat did not respond quite warmly to the call of the Congress for a fresh fight. As noted before, they regarded the Gandhi-Irwin pact as a betrayal and nursed the grievance that their confiscated lands sold away to others had not been returned. Moreover, the government relentlessly extorted from them not only the current revenue but arrears, even punitive fines in some cases. Repeated appeals of Gandhi to the government brought them no redress. So they had no heart in a renewed fight.

The local Congress leaders of Kheda district used the adjoining towns and villages of the princely state Baroda as a sanctuary and led processions carrying Congress flags into Kheda villages. Only in six villages the Patidars withheld revenue payment by February 1932. The government repression on them was severe and, by the middle of the year, only two villages still refused to pay the revenue. Gradually the no-revenue campaign was over.³⁰

Bombay city caused some worry to the raj and to the millowners who were opposed to civil disobedience. It was not the workers who rallied to the struggle but the petty bourgeoisie and, curiously, the comprador merchants, whom A.D.D. Gordon calls 'marketeers'. While the petty bourgeoisie wanted freedom from the British yoke, the 'marketeers' had a more limited aim. Since 1919 they had been fighting for control over the raw cotton market. Their speculative activities harmed the interests of the millowners, big Indian and European cotton merchants and exporters. The latter and the government sought to establish their control over the market in raw cotton through legislation and in other ways. The 'marketeers' were also troubled by the slump in the cotton market since early 1930. They observed frequent *hartals*, and the Mulji Jetha market, the main cotton market in Bombay, remained closed on many of the days—93 out of the 159 working days between January and August 1932.³¹ H.P. Mody, then President of the Bombay Millowners' Association, wrote: "the 'continuous' *hartals* being observed in various markets, and the suspension of business activities on the part of certain sections of the trade have completely dislocated business, and brought about a paralysis of the economic structure, particularly in Bombay."³² Exasperated by the frequent *hartals* and boycott of British firms, the millowners tried to bypass the Bombay market and go in for cheap American cotton. The marketeers' move to agitate for boycott of the mills which opted for foreign cotton was scotched by Gandhi. One reason which prompted *hartals* was the desire

of the brokers to escape ruin caused by the disastrous fall in raw cotton prices. When the Bombay government introduced a new legislation, 'Cotton Contracts Bill' of 1932, and made some concessions to the brokers their 'civil disobedience' came to a happy end.³³

The Hindus of Bombay, as Ravinder Kumar writes, answered the call for renewed civil disobedience "with a muted response", while the Muslims were more active than before in opposing it. On his return from the second RTC, Shaukat Ali, who was given a rousing reception in the city, held Gandhi responsible for the 'communal tangle' and the failure of the RTC. Bombay witnessed an ugly communal riot in April and a worse one followed in May 1932. According to Kumar, "the riots of 1932 marked the end of civil disobedience in Bombay..."³⁴

In north Bihar, there were massed attacks on the police and police stations between January and March 1932, breaking all the norms of Gandhian satyagraha. As Stephen Henningham says, it was the members of the rural elite – small landlords and rich peasants – who took the leading part in the civil disobedience movement. The attachment of property by the government was not relished by the landed elements and the movement could hardly be sustained. "By mid-March [1932] the Viceroy reported that in Bihar and Orissa protest was on the 'downgrade', and he repeated this assessment throughout the year."³⁵

At this time anti-feudal struggles broke out in the princely states – Jammu and Kashmir, Alwar (in Rajasthan), etc. Jammu and Kashmir had been sold by the British to a Dogra chieftain, who became the maharaja of Kashmir. The people, steeped in poverty and deprived of all basic democratic rights, rose in revolt against the feudal prince and landlords in 1931-2. The Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference, later renamed Jammu and Kashmir Political Conference, was set up to lead the people's armed struggle. It was with the help of British troops that the ruler was able to put down the uprising by the end of 1932.

In Alwar, too, an armed struggle developed against the feudal lords in 1932. The main participants were the Muslim peasants inhabiting the northern part of the state. They besieged the state capital, disrupted all communications between it and the outside, and attacked both Hindu and Muslim landlords. British troops rushed to the help of the prince and suppressed the revolt with extreme savagery by the end of 1933.

There were uprisings also in several other native states, besides Jammu and Kashmir and Alwar. They were all put down by British troops.

It may be irreverent but not irrelevant to ask what treatment was meted out by the British colonialists to the Indian leaders who were (and are) supposed to have been leading India's freedom struggle, when those who responded to their call and defied official bans *non-violently* were victims

of extreme savagery.

The following cases are illustrative, not exhaustive.

As the 'dictator' of the all-India Congress, Sarojini Naidu, a former Congress president and member of the Congress Working Committee for many years, was leading the civil disobedience struggle for liberation from colonial rule in March 1932 from the residence of a member of the Viceroy's Executive Council. This fact was disclosed in the Central Legislative Assembly on 23 March 1932.³⁶

One more instance of the exemplary kind of relationship that existed between the British imperialists and the Congress stalwarts. Mangaldas Pakvasa, a Bombay solicitor, who later rose to high positions during the Congress regime, wrote to Sir Pheroze Sethna on 16 September 1933 that Vallabhbhai Patel had been suffering from want of a *political* companion since 9 September when Pakvasa was released. Sir Pheroze immediately wrote to Sir Samuel Hoare, the Secretary of State, to redress the wrong. Sir Purshotamdas Thakurdas, when informed by Pakvasa, saw the Bombay governor and wrote to the Secretary of State with the same request. Both these big compradors who had close relations with the British colonialists showed remarkable solicitude for Patel in distress and his grievance was removed.³⁷

These big compradors were close to the Congress leaders. Sir Purshotamdas, on whom the British raj showered many honours for his loyal services and who was a comprador *par excellence*,³⁸ opposed the non-co-operation movement and actively combated the civil disobedience movement in 1930-1 and 1932-3. But as we have noted, he was, as Vallabhbhai Patel observed, 'more our man than anyone else's'. The Birlas were even closer to both the Congress high command and the British imperialists.

The struggle suffered from some inherent weaknesses. It was neither planned nor organized by the leaders whom the people looked up to. Instead of waging an anti-imperialist struggle, they were anxious to co-operate with the raj.

Second, because of Muslim alienation from the Congress, for which the Congress leaders were no less, if not more, responsible than British imperialism and Muslim and other communal organizations, Muslim participation in the struggle was negligible. Since the failure of the non-co-operation movement, the Muslims feared that a Congress-initiated movement was a movement intended to achieve Hindu domination.

Third, the Communist Party, though weak and disorganized at the time, made the mistake of not participating in it. The working class, which joined it at some places at the initial stage in a militant way, became indifferent soon after. The Congress leaders' hostility to their demands and

indifference to their plight caused by the economic crisis of 1929-33 did not inspire much confidence in them.

Fourth, the participation of the peasantry also was far less than in the earlier periods - 1920-2 and 1930-1. In U.P., Gujarat, Bengal, Andhra and so on, the Congress leaders and the Gandhi-Irwin pact had stifled, more or less with success, the anti-imperialist, anti-feudal struggles of the peasantry.

References and Notes

1. CWG, XLIX, 1,21,31,236,237,238.
2. Michael Brecher, *Nehru: A Political Biography*, 183; IAR, 1932, I, 9,414.
3. Quoted in R.C. Majumdar, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, III, 347. For long extracts from the report, see *ibid*, 340-87.
4. Nehru, *An Autobiography*, 342-3; the quote is on page 342.
5. Amit Bhattacharya, *op cit.*, 103, 107-8; Ram Gopal, *Indian Muslims*, 226.
6. Cited in *ibid*, 225-6.
7. *Morning Post*, 5 May 1930, cited in V. Balabushevich and A.M. Dyakov (eds.), *A Contemporary History of India*, 235.
8. See *Statesman*, 11,12,13 March 1932; CWG, LVI, 179,180; LVII, 77.
9. Home Poll 18-12/1931, cited in Tanika Sarkar, *Bengal 1928-1934*, 120.
10. CWG, XLV, 200.
11. *Ibid*, XLII, 353; LXVII, 332; LXIX, 211; LXXV, 224; *passim*; S. Gopal, *op cit.*, 137.
12. SWN, V, 328 and n.2.
13. K.P. Thomas, *Dr. B.C. Roy*, Calcutta, 1955, p. 163; CWG, XLIX, 47; see also *ibid*, LIX, 267-9.
14. Cited in Selig S. Harrison, *India: the Most Dangerous Decades*, 157. Roy became Chief Minister of West Bengal early in 1948.
15. Nehru to Gandhi, 13 Aug. 1934, *A Bunch of Old Letters*, 115; *Statesman*, 5 July 1934.
16. See G.D. Birla-Purshotamdas Thakurdas correspondence, 12.7.29, 16.7.29, 27.7.29, 29.7.29, 30.7.29, 1.8.29, PT Papers, File 42, Parts I and II.
17. Gandhi to G.D. Birla, 20.7.1924, Birla, *Bapu*, I, 10; Anderson's letter, 9 May 1932, Templewood Collection, cited in Tanika Sarkar, *op cit.*, 140.
18. *Ibid*, 160.
19. R.C. Majumdar, *op cit.*, III, 415.
20. Tanika Sarkar, *op cit.*, 136.
21. Kali Charan Ghosh, *The Roll of Honour*, 543.
The 'Black and Tan' force was created by the British imperialists to suppress the Irish revolutionaries in the early twenties. "The political significance of this Black-and-Tan force—...which had exactly the same social composition as that of the S.A. and the S.S. force of Nazi-terrorism, and that of Mussolini's *fascisti*—was that, for diplomatic reasons, Lloyd George and his counter-revolutionary backers found it imperative to pretend that nothing was called for in Ireland beyond 'police measures'.... The Black-and-Tans were deliberately a fascist device—which Mussolini, Hitler and others copied.... Murder, arson, torture of prisoners, rape and the systematic beatings-up and looting of whole areas developed into a routine of monotonous horror" (T.A. Jackson, *Ireland Her Own*, ed. with an introduction by C. Desmond Greaves, London, 1985, pp.414-5).
22. For Anderson's speech at the luncheon given in his honour by the Royal Empire Society in London on the eve of his departure for Bengal, see *Statesman*, 3 March, 1932.
23. SWN, VI, 152; also 153-5.
24. Tanika Sarkar, *op cit.*, 150.
25. *Ibid*, 153,154.
26. *India and Communism* (with a preface by Horace Williamson, director of the Intelligence Bureau, Government of India), 232.
27. SWN, VIII, 263.
28. Gyanendra Pandey, *op cit.*, 188,192-3.
29. *Ibid*, 187.
30. See David Hardiman, *Peasant Nationalists of Gujarat*, 240-2; Hardiman, "The Crisis of the Lesser Patidars", in D.A. Low (ed.), *op cit.*
31. See A.D.D. Gordon, *op cit.*, 86 ff.,213.

32. Mody's Draft, PT Papers, File 100.
33. Gordon, *op cit.*, 295, note 85; 214.
34. Ravinder Kumar, "From Swaraj to Purna Swaraj", in D.A. Low (ed.), *op cit.*, 104-5.
35. Stephen Henningham, *Peasant Movements in Colonial India*, 134.
36. *Statesman*, 24 Mar. 1932.
37. See Hoare to Sethna, 2.10.33; Sethna to Thakurdas, 4.10.33; Hoare to Thakurdas, 2.10.33; Thakurdas to Hoare, 16.10.33; Pakvasa to Thakurdas, 24.10.33. PT Papers, File 132.
38. See Frank Moraes, *Sir Purshotamdas Thakurdas*; see also Vol.I of this book, 54-9 and Chapter One above.

CHAPTER FOUR

ABJECT SURRENDER AND SECRET COMMITMENTS

Wooing the Raj

Soon after entering prison, Gandhi appealed to the Viceroy "to reconsider his position" and repeated his request for the fourth time within about a fortnight to allow him to see him. This communication was not even acknowledged. In a letter of 15 January 1932 he wrote to the Secretary of State that he had tried his "best to keep up co-operation but failed in my opinion through no fault of my own". He went on assuring the raj that he would be more delighted than anybody else "to endorse any worthy suggestion for co-operation by the Congress with the Government and the Round Table Conference" and that "by instinct I am a co-operator". In his long cable of 13 November to Lord Sankey, he expressed his deep regret at *the Viceroy not permitting him even a chance to suspend civil disobedience*. Again, he assured Sankey that he was "actually dying for co-operation" and that the Lord "would find 'Gandhi in his pocket' if a genuine gesture of co-operation is forthcoming from the Government side".¹

Gandhi's British emissaries were also trying their best to promote this spirit of co-operation between the Congress leaders and an intransigent British government. Among them were C.F. Andrews and members of the India Conciliation Group – Agatha Harrison, Professor Horace Alexander and others.² With Gandhi's blessings they were making behind-the-scene approaches to British ministers like Irwin, Sir Samuel Hoare and Ramsay MacDonald. Gandhi was "quite sure that all of you over there are doing your best and *what is proper*".³

"But neither the appeals and assurances of the mahatma nor these approaches by his British friends yielded any fruit. *The raj wanted from the Gandhis unqualified surrender and refused to provide them with any fig-leaf of negotiations.* They sought to coerce the Gandhis to give up even their *seemingly* oppositional role and to cast them in a new role – junior partners in the imperial enterprise of exploitation and oppression. In the critical years that were ahead, they wanted the Congress leaders to assume charge of Indian affairs under their aegis.

Contrary to what the Indian academicians and the Pavlovs say, the Indian big bourgeoisie was no less interested in preventing all conflicts with the raj. As noted before, when, at the invitation of Gandhi and Patel,

the Bombay millowners saw Gandhi before his arrest, Sir Homi Mody, Chairman of the Bombay Millowners Association, warned that the civil disobedience movement, if launched, would not have their support.⁴ Rather, they rallied to the support of the raj and British capital. Boycott of foreign cloth was one of the key planks of the programme of the civil disobedience movement, but Mody was the architect of the Mody-Lees Pact, which agreed to a lower tariff for Lancashire textiles than that recommended by the Indian Tariff Board. The pact was concluded in 1933 and approved by the Bombay Millowners Association. Purshotamdas Thakurdas attended the third RTC in London, which opened in November 1932, when repression was in full swing, and held that India's salvation "lies in coming to some understanding with British commerce".⁵ Thakurdas was doing his best to assure the British raj of Gandhi's devotion to the cause of peace between imperial Britain and colonial India and to restore "friendly relations between the Congress and the government". He pointed out to the Secretary of State in his letter of 4 September 1933 that it looks as if *in substance the difference between the Government and Gandhiji is not fundamental*" and that Gandhi also seeks "the withdrawal of the Civil Disobedience movement".⁶ While trying to get the civil disobedience movement withdrawn, Thakurdas was anxious to see that the boycott of British firms in cotton trade was removed and to arrange a meeting between leading Indian merchants and big British merchants to end the unsatisfactory state of affairs.⁷

After the second phase of civil disobedience movement had opened, G.D. Birla, who has been acclaimed by Bipan Chandra and many others as India's foremost 'nationalist' bourgeois, was pledging loyal co-operation of his own and of the Indian business community to the Secretary of State. On 14 February 1932 Birla wrote to Samuel Hoare: "The best service I can render to my own country as well as to the cause of co-operation [between Britain and India] is to persuade the Federation [FICCI] to officially offer its co-operation.... I shall discuss there [in Calcutta] with Mr Benthall and others the question of closer co-operation between the two communities interested in trade and commerce." Forwarding a copy of a resolution which the Committee of the FICCI adopted at the instance of Birla and Thakurdas, Birla wrote to Hoare on 14 March that *the resolution "definitely commits us to a policy of co-operation"*. He went on to say:

"I always make a distinction between Gandhiji and the Congress. and I again submit that it is possible for you to give us a constitution which, though not acceptable to the Congress, may not be rejected by Gandhiji... *what I want is a permanent peace between the two countries.... I wish I could convert the authorities to the view that Gandhiji and men of his type are not only friends of India but also friends of Great Britain.*

and that Gandhiji is the greatest force on the side of peace and order. He alone is responsible for keeping the left wing in India under check. To strengthen his hands is, in my opinion, therefore to strengthen the bond of friendship between the two countries.... Probably the best way to success in this mission [of explaining Gandhi] is to give you our co-operation as far as possible."

He assured Hoare that he could rely on Birla's "humble services" in bringing about happy relations between the imperialist metropolis and the colony. Referring to the Ottawa Conference, Birla said, as we noted in Chapter One, that Thakurdas would be delighted to accept an invitation to represent Indian trade and commerce at this conference. "We", wrote Birla, "realize the importance of this Conference and *you may rely on our support* in the right direction." Before concluding the letter, the 'radical' Indian 'nationalist' gave Hoare the assurance that "*you will find us always ready to work for the economic interest leaving aside sentiments and politics*".⁸

Similar appeals and assurances Birla conveyed to Lord Lothian, Under-Secretary of State for India in 1931-2, Chairman of the Indian Franchise Committee in 1932 and, later, British ambassador to the USA.⁹

As early as July 1923, M.R. Jayakar, then a prominent Congress and Swarajist leader of Maharashtra, observed with some regret:

"The internal control of politics in Gandhi's time is often exercised through the influence of wealth and patronage and a community like the Deccanis, which can boast of no commercial magnates like the Tatas, Birlas and Kasturbhais, cannot possibly control politics from the inside. The influence that such men, by their patronage and capacity to finance, wield over political movements may not be obvious. It is none the less real."¹⁰

What Jayakar wrote from his rich experience was no doubt true. But sometimes the comprador big bourgeois not only employed their funds and exerted behind-the-scene pressures to control Congress politics but played an *active* role in the making and implementation of major Congress policies – a role little known to the people and ignored by historians. It appears that Gandhi and Birla, who together formed "a unique association" (as Birla claimed), were the two major architects of the new policies which brought about a transformation in the very character of the Congress – from a party treading from time to time the path of non-co-operation and civil disobedience to a 'parliamentary' party, a Swarajist party of old but with a very important difference. When the Swaraj Party vowed to carry the fight against the raj to the legislative councils, to put up "uniform, continuous and consistent opposition to the Government" and refuse office

to make the Government of India Act of 1919 unworkable, the Congress decided in 1937 to form ministries in as many provinces as it could and work the new British-imposed constitution. Encouraged and applauded by Gandhi, Birla played an active role in bringing about this transition from the politics of non-violent satyagraha to constitutional politics, the politics of collaboration with the raj as an adjunct to the colonial state machinery.

As Birla wrote later, he hated *civil disobedience* or any kind of mass action. He was afraid that "if this psychology continues any Government, even our own, would become an impossibility.... Hence my dread at anything that will lead us towards a mass movement.... Hence my horror at any talk of civil disobedience."¹¹ His political goal was, as he wrote to Professor J.M. Keynes on 28 May 1932, "a decent place in the household of King George the Fifth"¹² – in other words, self-government within the British empire. He believed that India would attain this goal through negotiations, persuasion and personal contacts and by following the constitutional path, for he held that the British since Macaulay's days were eager that "Indians should progressively learn to govern themselves and do so as soon as they could". As Birla said, he "sought to prevent the growing distrust, which the British in India entertained of Gandhiji's high motives and the passionate distrust which Indians felt in regard not merely to the English in India but towards British statesmen and the British Parliament".¹³ What he wanted was that the Congress should abjure mass action for all time, strictly stick to the constitutional path and rely on negotiations and the 'personal touch' to arrive at the goal. Birla held that the two countries, India and Britain, "by destiny are bound together".¹⁴

In 1932 Gandhi and the Congress leaders entered a blind alley. They were anxious to shirk all conflicts with the raj, yet they were trapped in a conflict. The British imperialists would not allow them to beat an honourable retreat. The raj would not be content with anything less than an unabashed capitulation, that is, withdrawal of the civil disobedience movement without going through the ritual of interviews, talks and negotiations as a face-saving device. In such a situation G.D. Birla took upon himself the task of conciliating the rulers, disabusing their minds about the true intentions of the Congress leaders, making commitments on behalf of Gandhi, and bringing them closer. In his "Foreword" to G.D. Birla's *In the Shadow of the Mahatma*, first published in 1953, Rajendra Prasad, then our *Rashtrapati*, commended the book, saying:

"Little, however, is known of what was passing behind the scenes both in Mahatma Gandhi's camp and the Government's. This volume to an extent fills this gap.... One can see from this book how he [Birla] undertook visit after visit to England on his own and utilized the opportunity for keeping those in places of authority there well informed about the way

Gandhiji's mind was working. He never claimed to act as an appointed agent on behalf of Gandhiji and yet having studied and understood his philosophy and his programme, he took upon himself the responsibility to convey its implications to those that counted. And it may be said that he succeeded in no small measure in this self-appointed role."¹⁵

The gap to which Prasad referred is also partly filled by the letters and other writings compiled by Birla in the four volumes of *Bapu: A Unique Association* as well as Gandhi's writings published in his *Collected Works*.

In 1932 and subsequent years Birla worked hard to remove the misunderstanding and mistrust between Gandhi and his associates on the one hand and the British colonial rulers on the other. His objects were to put an end to direct action for all time, get the Congress to work the new constitution as "partners in this repression and in the exploitation of our people" (to borrow Nehru's phrase), build an alliance between the raj and the Congress leadership, and to curb the growth of "the left wing", that is, to deal effectively with the oppressed people.

As a true comprador that he was, Birla wrote to Sir Walter Layton on 20 May 1932 that "if I would be dealing entirely with businessmen I should not find any difficulty in convincing them that the *interest of India as well as of Great Britain lay in a friendly and permanent settlement*". As "an Indian who has got a large stake in the country", he yearned for "permanent peace between the two countries" and assured Sir Walter that Gandhi was "as much a friend of Great Britain as of India".¹⁶

In order to conciliate the raj Birla was not only conveying the "implications" of Gandhi's "philosophy" and "programme" to "those that counted" in London but was also wooing leading representatives of expatriate British capital in India like Sir Edward Benthall¹⁷ and the King's deputies in India. In his pursuit after "permanent peace" Birla saw Sir John Anderson within a few days of his arrival and had several interviews with him. Eloquent in praise of the man who came to Bengal trailing clouds of notoriety for his role in the 'Black and Tan' operations in Ireland, he sought his help to persuade the raj to relent. Anderson agreed with Birla that Gandhi "was a most reasonable man and very modest in outlook", of whom Findlater Stewart, Permanent Under-Secretary of State for India, "had spoken to him very highly".¹⁸

The Communal Award

On 17 August 1932 the 'Communal Award' by the British Prime Minister, who had been invited by the Indian delegates, including Gandhi, to give his award, was announced. As noted before, Gandhi had assured

MacDonald that the Congress would abide by his award and would be content with separate electorates for the Muslims and the Sikhs, but would resist if separate electorates or statutory reservation of seats in the legislatures were provided for other minorities. But when MacDonald granted separate electorates not only to the Muslims and the Sikhs but to all other religious minorities including a handful of European expatriates, Gandhi and the other Congress leaders did not utter a single word of protest except in the case of "depressed classes".

The Communal Award gave the Europeans in Bengal and Assam incredibly high representation. In Bengal 14,175 Europeans, forming less than .01 per cent of the population, were awarded 25 seats in a house of 250 – 10 per cent of the total, while the Muslims constituting 54.8 per cent of the population were allotted 119 seats – 47.6 per cent of the total seats – and the Hindus, forming 44.8 per cent of the population, 80 seats, no more than 32 per cent.

As regards communal representation, the Communal Award was manifestly unjust especially to the Hindus but also to the Muslims. In Punjab, too, the Muslims, though the majority community, were given less than half the number of seats.

Gandhi went on a fast on the issue of separate electorate for the depressed classes but he and the other Congress leaders swallowed the rest of the Communal Award on the specious plea that they were out to reject the entire Government of India Act of 1935. Though they claimed to represent all classes and all communities, they did not oppose British imperialism's deliberate policy to split the Indian people on the communal basis in order to perpetuate their rule. The resistance to only one provision of the Communal Award clearly shows that, while claiming to fight for independence, they submitted to the imperial policy of 'divide and rule' and were eager to participate in constitutional politics on the basis laid down by British imperialism.

It was obvious that a handful of Europeans, non-nationals dominating India's trade, commerce, industry, plantations, banking, etc., were given fantastic representation so that they might *directly* exercise sinister influence on Bengal's politics, which was conducive to the interest of the big compradors like Birla. It was in the interest of the big Marwari compradors based in Calcutta, with whose compatriot agents the urban and rural markets of Bengal and Assam were honeycombed, that the Congress leaders did not make even a whimper of protest against this representation of the Europeans in Bengal and Assam.

Long before, at the Delhi Congress session in 1918, C.R.Das had spoken in support of a resolution which stated:

"That the non-official Europeans should not be allowed to form

separate electorates...and if they are allowed such representation it should be limited to their proportion compared to the population of the provinces concerned."

But all this was ignored by other eminent Congress leaders – then as well as later.¹⁹

Lying on his death-bed early in January 1931, Maulana Mohammed Ali, too, strongly opposed the principle of giving any weightage to the Europeans in Bengal.²⁰

At the Congress session in 1934, both Hindu and Muslim delegates from Bengal raised objections to the over-representation of the Europeans in Bengal, but in vain.²¹

The Congress leaders broke their silence over this issue about fourteen years after the announcement of the Communal Award. In about mid-1946, when the British Cabinet Mission announced its plan about the future constitutional set-up in India, the Congress came out in sharp denunciation of the European representation. They were afraid that the Europeans in Bengal and Assam Assemblies voting in the elections to the proposed Constituent Assembly might affect its composition to the detriment of their interests. Nehru rhetorically asked what did the "tremendous over-representation [of the Europeans] in Bengal and Assam signify except the patent fact that a colonial economy has been translated into the political sphere". Gandhi said:

"Till now they had used their vote to uphold the British power and acted as a wedge between the Hindus and the Mussalmans."

He belatedly questioned their right "to be in the Assemblies at all".²² Gandhi and Nehru were quite right when they accused the Europeans of acting "as a wedge between the Hindus and Mussalmans" of Bengal and of helping to strangle "the dumb millions". In fact, the Europeans could play this role since the inauguration of the Government of India Act 1935 because the Congress policy was complementary to theirs. We shall return to this point later. It may be noted here that the Congress leaders had no objection to the Europeans continuing to play the same role in Bengal and Assam. In his letter of 14 June 1946 to Viceroy Wavell, Congress president Abul Kalam Azad made it explicit that they objected *only* to the British "participating in and influencing the elections to the constituent assembly".²³

Gandhi's Fast and Opening of the Harijan Front

On 18 August 1932, the day after the announcement of MacDonald's Communal Award, Gandhi wrote to him that unless his government revised its decision in respect of separate electorates for the depressed classes, he would go on fast from 20 September. As he confided to his associates, Patel and Mahadev Desai, he felt worried that "the separate electorate will create division among Hindus so much that it will lead to bloodshed. *Untouchable hooligans will make common cause with Muslim hooligans and kill caste Hindus.*"²⁴ The Muslims were already alienated from the Congress; Gandhi could hardly permit the 'untouchables' to break away from the Hindu or Congress fold. To avert the disaster the mahatma decided to undertake a fast.

It was Gandhi's public stance that separate electorate for the depressed classes would erect a wall between them and the caste Hindus and be destructive of the Hindu religion. Replying to Gandhi, MacDonald contended that under the government's scheme no wall of separation would arise and the unity of the Hindu community would in no way be impaired. Under the scheme the depressed classes would remain a part of the Hindu community and vote in the general Hindu constituencies. The scheme proposed to create only a small number of special constituencies in seven provinces, from which the depressed classes, despised by the upper castes, might return members of their own choosing to the legislatures "to voice their grievances and ideals", besides voting in the general Hindu constituencies.

Gandhi replied: "Without arguing I affirm that for me this matter is one of pure religion." So the supreme leader of India's 'freedom' struggle resolved to go on a fast to put pressure on the British raj to withdraw a provision in a constitution then under preparation by the raj for enforcement in colonial India – not on the issue of national freedom, which would see the end of colonial slavery and all British-made constitutions, and for which the civil disobedience movement is supposed to have been launched.

It had been announced by MacDonald that any alternative scheme mutually agreed upon by the caste Hindus and the depressed classes would be accepted.

Before embarking on his fast at God's call, Gandhi did not spare his efforts to organize public opinion so that he might not have "to carry the fast to its logical end".²⁵ On 18 September, two days before the fast began, G.D. Birla, Thakurdas, Sir Chunilal Mehta (Bombay's bullion king and Thakurdas's cousin), Mathuradas Vasanji – all business magnates – had seen Gandhi in prison "to sound Gandhi on some sort of compromise on a system of joint electorates with the reservation of seats".²⁶ The mahatma's

fast put the required pressure on B.R. Ambedkar and other leaders of the depressed classes to arrive at a settlement, which was immediately endorsed by the British raj. Though the mahatma had been opposed in London to both separate electorates and reservation of seats for the minorities except the Muslims and the Sikhs, the compromise that was achieved, known as the 'Poona Pact', provided for reservation of seats for the depressed classes as well as a modified form of separate electorate for them. Under it there would be a primary round of elections in which the members of the depressed classes alone would participate to send up a panel of depressed class candidates *for the reserved seats*, who would have to face a mixed electorate of caste Hindus and depressed classes for final election; and there was a considerable increase in the number of reserved seats for them from what had been granted by MacDonald – from 81 seats in the whole of India to 148. G.D. Birla played a leading part in arranging the settlement and bringing the fast to a happy end. The 'Poona Pact' was signed, among others, by the two Birla brothers (Ghanshyamdas and Rameswardas), Thakurdas, Sir Lallubhai Samaldas, Sir C.V. Mehta, Walchand Hirachand (all tycoons), besides Malaviya, Ambedkar, Rajendra Prasad, Rajagopalachari, Sapru, Jayakar and Devdas Gandhi.²⁷ Perhaps Bengal, where the scheduled castes were allotted 30 seats, was represented by G.D. Birla.

When the fast had commenced, Nehru, sitting in prison, noted in his diary: "...was not his [Gandhi's] action a recognition and in part an acceptance of the Communal Award and the general scheme of things as sponsored by the Government?... was there not danger of our movement trailing off into something insignificant after so much sacrifice and brave endurance?" He criticized Gandhi's religious approach to a political question and frequent references to God. "What a terrible example to set!" he commented.

But, as usual, the "emotional crisis" was soon over and when the news came of the settlement he was ecstatic in praise of Gandhi and his action. "*By his fast*", wrote Nehru, "*he has changed the face of India and killed untouchability at a blow.*"²⁸

Whether untouchability was killed or not, the civil disobedience movement was killed with this blow. Immediately on ending his fast Gandhi declared in a press statement: "None would be more delighted than I would be to endorse any worthy suggestion for co-operation by the Congress with the Government and the Round Table Conference." He promised that "when the proper time comes, I should throw the whole of my weight in favour of co-operation".²⁹

The Harijan Sevak Sangh was formed with G.D. Birla as its all-India president. Birla was authorized to nominate the presidents of the provincial

boards. "Centralization [of powers in the Sangh] was insisted upon by Sheth Ghanshyamdas Birla and Shri Amritlal Thakkar [the nominated general secretary] for the decisive reason that money was found by the Centre... and the policy was also evolved by the Central Board." Gandhi coined a new name, 'Harijan' – God's own man – for a member of the depressed classes – 'the untouchable'. The Harijan Sevak Sangh became an exclusively caste Hindu organization after the resignation of Ambedkar and another 'Harijan' from the Central Board for, the Sangh, as Gandhi argued, was intended to expiate the sin of the caste Hindus and there was hardly any room for 'Harijans' in it.³⁰

A campaign was started for opening the doors of Hindu temples to the 'untouchables': Gandhi himself was leading it from within the prison, all facilities for which were generously provided by New Delhi's Mussolini and his men. In February 1933 *Harijan*, an English weekly, was started as Gandhi's mouthpiece and was followed in quick succession by several language editions – Hindi (with Birla Mills, Delhi, as its address), Bengali, Gujarati and Tamil.

When Ambedkar was asked for a message for *Harijan*, he refused to give any, saying: "The outcaste is a by-product of the caste system. There will be outcastes as long as there are castes. And nothing can emancipate the outcaste except the destruction of the caste system."³¹ But the mahatma was among the most eloquent defenders of the *hereditary* caste system – the *varnashrama* – minus the later proliferations of castes and sub-castes. "If abolition of castes", wrote Gandhi, "means the abolition of *varna* I do not approve of it."³²

The untouchables were and are mostly scavengers, leather-workers, poor or landless peasants, often bond slaves of caste Hindu or other landowners. This section of the most wretched on earth had and still has in many rural areas to perform various social obligations to caste Hindus, crippling and most degrading. In some areas landlords and their sons abuse their women sexually, with impunity. The leaders of the untouchables were not much interested in temple entry. What they were interested in was improvement in their social, economic and political status. Ambedkar told Gandhi in October 1932 "that I have no interest in the temples being thrown open, common dinners and the like, because we suffer thereby.... I only want that social and economic hardships should end".³³ Ambedkar was right when he said that "it is a mistake to suppose that it [untouchability] is only a religious system.... It is also an economic system which is worse than slavery.... History shows that where ethics and economics come in conflict, victory is always with economics."³⁴

But the mahatma was opposed to any change in the social and economic status quo. He extolled the occupation of scavengers as "a holy profession"

and their services as indispensable, and advised them "to be conscious of the dignity of your profession, to learn to practise it [disposal of night-soil] in a clean manner". His "ideal Bhangi" [scavenger] was one who would approach his profession "only as a sacred duty... would not dream of amassing wealth out of it" (!) and "would consider himself responsible for the proper removal and disposal of all the dirt and night-soil within the area which he serves and regard the maintenance of healthy and sanitary condition within the same as the *summum bonum* of his existence". The mahatma wanted the 'untouchables' to continue as helots but better helots with improved knowledge of their work and greater devotion to their "sacred duty" – more contented, cleaner, and free from weaknesses like drinking and meat-eating, for which he often upbraided them. He said: "I would, therefore, suggest to reformers that they should not persuade Bhangis and Chamars to leave their occupation but they should, on the contrary, give them proper knowledge about their work."³⁵ "Under Gandhism", said Ambedkar, "the Untouchables are to be eternal scavengers."³⁶ In June 1936 the Adi-Karnataka Sangh deputation told Gandhi that it was no use concentrating on temple-entry when Harijans' economic and social conditions badly needed improvement. The leader of the deputation said to him that "instead of devising means to help them you are devising new means to keep them down".³⁷

It was Gandhi's injunction during the temple-entry movement that the untouchables should not "seek to force entry into the orthodox temples *even through the method of satyagraha*". The privilege of entering them should be a gift of the caste Hindus.³⁸

It appears that the mahatma's temple-entry agitation was intended to kill several birds with one stone.

First, it was expected to divert attention from the basic social and economic issues. The social and economic problems which, if raised, might do harm to the semi-feudal social structure, were swept under a religious carpet. One of the main problems was the problem of landlessness or near-landlessness of the 'untouchables'. If any attempt was made to tackle this problem, the very roots of feudalism or semi-feudalism would be shaken. So the concrete realities of life were meant to be obscured by the religious outpourings about 'sin' and 'penance' and 'sacred duty' and so on. The entire movement sought to maintain the social and economic status quo by appealing to the good sense of the dominant castes and classes to curb the grosser manifestations of the caste system. Even these the movement failed to eradicate. Despite the brave declarations of Gandhi and Nehru, made quite frequently before and after the campaign, that "Untouchability is on its last legs"³⁹, or untouchability has been "killed at one blow", the actual results were far from encouraging. In March 1946, after a long

campaign of many years, Gandhi was informed by the Gujarat Harijan Sevak Sangh that in his home-province "apart from Karadi nowhere are temples open to Harijans, and nowhere may they use public wells". A few weeks before his death he said that the Harijans' conditions had become worse than during British rule.⁴⁰

Second, the political situation in the early thirties demanded that Gandhi should step up the campaign against untouchability and for temple-entry. The Muslims were already alienated from the Congress; the representatives of the depressed classes had been asking for separate representation from as early as 1917;⁴¹ during the Round Table Conference in 1931 a Minorities Pact had emerged and the depressed classes were also granted some separate constituencies under the MacDonald award. Years before, Gandhi had drawn the lesson from the Moplah revolt in 1921 that "If we do not wake up betimes, we shall find a similar tragedy⁴² enacted by all the submerged classes. The 'untouchables' and all the so-called semi-savage tribes will presently bear witness to our wrongs against them if we do not do penance and render tardy justice to them".⁴³ Besides, conversion of his 'Harijans' to Christianity or Islam posed a problem. To quote Ram Gopal, "In the competition for the 'untouchables' between Muslim leaders and the Hindu Mahasabha (which may be considered as including all other movements like the Arya Samaj, the Shuddhi Sabha, etc.), the Muslims were winning all along the line;... whatever the motive, they indeed were the pioneers to focus attention on the plight of the depressed classes."⁴⁴ Gandhi was afraid of the danger of the "poor Harijans [who] have no mind, no intelligence, no sense of difference between God and no-God", some of whom were according to him, "worse than cows in understanding", might be enticed by the "Christian Missions" and "Mussalmans and others" to leave the Hindu fold and swell their numbers. While he admonished the Christian missionaries and Muslims for converting the untouchables to their faiths, he warned the caste Hindus: "So long as the poison of untouchability remains in the Hindu body, it will be liable to attacks from outside."⁴⁵

Though Gandhi denied it, many people held that the purpose of the anti-untouchability movement was "to secure domination of a consolidated Hindu majority, overwhelming all minorities by its numbers".⁴⁶

The stepping-up of the movement was particularly necessary when constitutional changes were in the offing. These impending changes, as Gyanendra Pandey wrote, "inspired some of the institutional arrangements within the Congress in the early 1930s, particularly those connected with the establishment of a Harijan Sevak Sangh and the launching of a concerted Harijan programme". The campaign against untouchability, to quote Gyanendra Pandey again, "brought rich dividends to the Congress, especially

in elections".⁴⁷

The third bird that Gandhi's fast and the anti-untouchability movement killed was the civil disobedience movement. As noted before, the government allowed him all facilities of interview, correspondence, etc., to lead his campaign from within the prison. Interestingly, when the struggle for freedom from British rule was on, its supreme leader was busy soliciting the support of the Viceroy and other high officials for temple-entry bills which would remove legal obstacles for the trustees of Hindu temples to open them to the depressed classes. Subhas was right when he said: "As the year [1932] came to a close... resolutions were being passed from many a platform, at the instance of the Congress leaders, asking the Viceroy to accord sanction to the Temple Entry Bills in the Madras Legislative Council and the Indian Legislative Assembly. Civil Disobedience indeed!"⁴⁸

The Viceroy informed the Secretary of State on 1 November 1932: "We think... there may be definite advantages in getting Gandhi involved in untouchability. It will rouse strong feelings on both sides and will divert attention from strictly political issues and Civil Disobedience." "The interest of many Congress workers", declared Secretary of State Hoare with considerable satisfaction, "has now been diverted to Mr Gandhi's campaign against untouchability."⁴⁹

An article in the *Communist International* correctly put it: "The Congress, hiding behind the 'struggle' for the abolition of the pariah system, is preparing the ground for adopting the constitution worked out by British imperialism. Thus the National Congress is literally repeating the manoeuvre which it carried out in 1922."⁵⁰

Formal Withdrawal of Civil Disobedience

G.D. Birla had a long interview with Gandhi in prison after the fast was over. Birla informed Hoare that Gandhi gave him "a clear indication that he was himself very eager to see peace restored and also promised that if I came back with permission to talk these matters he would give me something in writing".⁵¹

A little earlier, in July 1932, Birla was trying to arrange an interview between Anderson and Gandhi. Though Anderson was quite willing, it did not come off. The raj wanted Gandhi's capitulation – total and unqualified – without the figleaf of an interview and negotiation. The raj knew that the Congress leaders were panting to accept the dose of self-government that the new constitution it was drafting would give them and it refused to oblige Gandhi. Nothing availed – neither Gandhi's own appeals and assurances of co-operation, nor the behind-the-scene approaches of his

Indian and British intermediaries, nor the fast, nor the Harijan movement. The ice refused to melt.

On 17 March 1933 the White Paper on Indian Constitutional Reforms, an outline of the constitution then in the making, was issued by the British Government. The mahatma, driven into a corner, received "God's peremptory command"; "the voice became insistent". "At half past twelve came the clear, unmistakable voice: 'you must undertake the fast'." So he announced on 30 April 1933 that he would go on another fast – a fast for three weeks – from 8 May. He informed the Home Secretary, Government of India, that the "reasons [were] wholly unconnected with Government and solely connected with Harijan movement".⁵²

Immediately after the commencement of the fast on 8 May, the Government released him "in view of the nature of the object of the fast and the attitude of mind which it disclosed" – a possibility which Gandhi had anticipated beforehand.⁵³ He repaired to the textile magnate Sir Vithaldas Thackersey's mansion at Pune to carry on his fast, which prompted Verrier Elwin to remark wryly: "Gandhi fasting to death in a marble palace is like Jesus Christ going to crucifixion in a Rolls-Royce."⁵⁴

On the same day – 8 May – Gandhi issued a press statement condemning "the secrecy that has attended the [civil disobedience] movement". Pitying the "civil resisters [who] would be in a state of terrible suspense during the next three weeks", he asked acting Congress president M.S. Aney (who was afterwards appointed a member of the Viceroy's Executive Council) "to officially declare suspension [of the movement] for full one month or even six weeks". And, while assuring the raj of his co-operation, if he survived the ordeal, he made an appeal for the release of "all the civil resisters".⁵⁵

In a communiqué issued on 9 May, the Government of India stated that the civil disobedience prisoners would not be released unless the movement was unconditionally withdrawn; and that it had "no intention of negotiating with the Congress for a withdrawal of the civil disobedience movement or of releasing prisoners with a view to arrive at any settlement".⁵⁶

As usual, Gandhi did not think of observing democratic norms in getting the country-wide movement suspended for six weeks. His "comprehension of the difficulties of the Government" was truly remarkable. He always decried secret methods adopted by political workers when all open political work, except rendering support to the raj, was banned. But he never hesitated to carry on secret negotiations, directly or through intermediaries, with British imperialists and making secret commitments to them and getting the Congress to fulfill them. More of it later.

The suspension of the movement provoked Subhas Bose and V.J. Patel

to issue a statement from Vienna (where Subhas had gone for treatment of tuberculosis of which he was a victim). The statement said: "The events of the last thirteen years have demonstrated that a political warfare based on the principle of maximum suffering for ourselves and minimum suffering for our opponents cannot possibly lead to success." It criticized the suspension as "a confession of failure" and called "for a radical reorganization of the Congress on a new principle and with a new method", for "a change of leadership" and, if necessary, for a new party within the Congress, "composed of all radical elements".⁵⁷

Nehru reacted to the suspension by noting in his prison diary that it had come as "A shock – and then a willing acceptance of the fact..." He wrote:

"As I watched the emotional upheaval during the fast I wondered more and more if this was the right method in politics. It is sheer revivalism and clear thinking has not a ghost of a chance against it.... His [Gandhi's] continual references to God irritate me exceedingly.... *more and more I realize the gulf between Bapu and me* and I begin to doubt if this way of faith is the right way to train a nation.... *And then I cannot understand how he can accept, as he seems to do, the present social order; how he surrounds himself with men who are the pillars and the beneficiaries of this order.... How can we get anything worthwhile with these people as our hangers-on? No doubt they will profit and take advantage of both our movement and of any constitutional changes that may come.... I want to break from this lot completely...*"⁵⁸

This was one of Nehru's passing moods. As usual, discretion would soon prove to be the better part of his ideological and political valour; as usual, he would sacrifice his better feelings at the altar of his towering ambition; as before, he would accept "the present social order" and prove to be one of its ablest and staunchest bulwarks. He, too, would surround himself with the same, or the same type of, hangers-on as Gandhi, and while Gandhi invoked religion, he would, as before, invoke his non-violent 'socialism' – 'socialism' without tears – for the same end.

The fast went off well and, soon after it ended, Gandhi's son Devdas was married with Rajagopalachari's daughter Lakshmi in the Thackerseys' marble palace amidst rejoicings.

On 1 June, immediately after the fast was over, Gandhi confided his desire to Rajagopalachari to seek an interview with the Viceroy. Rajagopalachari said: "But they say we should go to them only after first completely withdrawing civil disobedience.... Then the mass struggle comes to an end." "That exactly is going to be the key to the whole affair", replied Gandhi.⁵⁹

Yet there was no favourable response from the raj, for which Gandhi was pining. Writing to Andrews, who, besides other British friends, was contacting British ministers, he sounded a note of dejection and yet hoped that the work Andrews and the others were doing "will tell in the end". He promised that there was "no danger on this side of any precipitate action". Gandhi wired to Agatha Harrison that he would seek an interview with the Viceroy when his health permitted and that "for my part there will be no condition".⁶⁰ (These letters and cables, no doubt, passed through the official censorship, yet the raj remained deaf to all pleas.)

In June civil disobedience was suspended for another six weeks. In his prison diary Nehru wrote: "Civil Disobedience again suspended for six weeks – to end of July! And *among the mighty ones so deciding was G.D. Birla!* Heigh ho! This is a funny world and not an easy place to live in."⁶¹ Nehru might be right but this again was a fleeting mood, so usual with him.

On 12 and 14 July a meeting of select Congress leaders convened by Gandhi and Aney, was held at Pune. Mass civil disobedience was withdrawn while Gandhi retained the right of offering individual civil disobedience – the fig-leaf. He sought an interview with the Viceroy to reach "*an honourable settlement*".⁶² He was informed that unless civil disobedience was completely withdrawn, no interview would be granted. He repeated his request and assured the Viceroy: "I hanker for real peace...."⁶³ Yet there was no real change in the heart of New Delhi's Mussolini.

While discontinuing *mass* civil disobedience, Gandhi and Aney urged in their statements abandonment of secret methods and dissolved all Congress organizations, including the AICC office.⁶⁴ All this was done under the facade of no-surrender. Later, in another statement Aney said he had not dissolved the AICC and other regular Congress organizations but the Congress Committees that had sprung up during the struggle. Gandhi and other Congress leaders had been worried at the emergence of such committees. As the Congress was under ban, clandestine arrangements had been made by middle-level and ordinary Congress workers to carry on the struggle, much to the dislike of the leaders, for they had little control over them. They had reasons to be perturbed. Things like the picketing of Sir Purshotamdas's mansion and the clandestine bulletins issued by the Emergency Council of the Bombay Provincial Congress Committee dubbing Purshotamdas and G.D. Birla as traitors were enough evidence of "unwary hands" causing mischief that could hardly be tolerated.

Gandhi's telegram seeking an interview with the Viceroy upset Nehru in prison. On 18 July 1933 he noted in his diary:

"'Peace', '*Honourable Peace!*' What about? With whom and on what basis? It is amazing how flabby-minded our people have got. They

meet at Poona [now Pune] at a critical moment after nearly 2 years and they do not even trouble to discuss, much less lay down, the objective before us. Only talks of peace with a government that has insulted us in every way." [He felt sure that] "*there can be no further political co-operation between Bapu and me.... we had better go our different ways. My way will keep me in jail. That is dull work and depressing, but perhaps it is just as well.*"⁶⁵

But when the moment came to make the choice between the quest for "honourable peace" of the Gandhian kind and fight against imperialism, he would invariably follow in the footsteps of Gandhi. In his statement issued on 4 September 1933 (one may mark the two dates), after leaving prison, Nehru completely changed his tune. He said to the press on 14 September: "*I feel that the methods he [Gandhi] taught us to follow are fundamentally right for us and we must continue to pursue them till we gain that objective [the political and economic objectives which Gandhi had in view] and for these methods his leadership is essential.*" And on 19 September he declared: "*There is not the slightest difference between Gandhi and myself.... there is a fundamental unity in regard to our line of action.*"⁶⁶

The General Secretary of the Congress, Nehru, discouraged those who wanted that a meeting of the AICC should be convened for a discussion of the Congress programme. He did not "consider that a meeting at the present moment would serve any useful purpose". "For all his rhetoric", writes S. Gopal, "he had no new policy and, seemingly, no use for democracy either, for he refused to consult other Congressmen."⁶⁷ A little later, on 19 December, Nehru wrote that "the Congress is undoubtedly today *the most advanced revolutionary organization in action in India.... Personally I hold that under existing circumstances the present programme is suitable and gives us scope to develop our struggle.*"⁶⁸

What Nehru wrote in the privacy of the prison, which should be distinguished from his usual rhetoric, exhibits a duality of character. These notes are sometimes tinged with a genuine passion for freedom and a vague desire for the amelioration of the conditions of the people – his 'socialism' – "the divesting" of the vested interests in India, "the British Government, the Indian princes and others", "and with every effort to avoid injury". But there was another self within him – more dominant – which, despite brave talks, believed in the same goal as the Gandhis and Birlas – self-government within the British empire or commonwealth – and the preservation of the social and economic status quo. Moreover, as Rajagopalachari, his colleague of many long years, said, Nehru "had always been a worshipper of success".⁶⁹ Whatever might be his true feelings at times, he had to suppress them for the sake of his overmastering

ambition.

Gandhi knocked and knocked at the Viceregal door but the door refused to open. In a letter to Bombay's Home Secretary, he regretted that "the Government do not seek or desire peace, they want an abject surrender...." He also complained of the lack of "chivalry and gentlemanliness on the part of the officials. The insatiable desire for humiliating everybody and every organization is terrible".⁷⁰ He complained of the humiliation he had to suffer but not about the atrocities of which the people were victims.

'Amidst the encircling gloom' Gandhi announced on 30 July that he would begin on 1 August a march with some companions, men and women, and that during the march he would invite individuals to offer *individual* civil disobedience, to give up drinking, etc. He was arrested before the march commenced, and was sentenced to one year's imprisonment. He demanded that all the facilities that he had been enjoying during his previous spell in prison for leading his anti-untouchability campaign should be restored to him. When the government provided him with several, but not all, facilities, he went on a fast from 16 August.

Released on the eighth day of his fast, Gandhi returned to the Thackerseys' palace. He announced that until 3 August next year his own *individual* civil disobedience would remain suspended. He repeatedly declared that he was "dying to co-operate with anybody and everybody and certainly with the Government in restoring peace" and that another approach to the Viceroy for an interview "was quite on the cards".⁷¹

Gandhi discouraged those Congressmen who proposed that the AICC should be convened to reconsider the Congress policy. As he explained to Pandit Malaviya and Nehru, he would welcome an AICC meeting if it gave up civil disobedience and adopted a council-entry programme, but he feared that a majority of AICC members would insist on a civil disobedience programme.⁷² Nehru too, as noted before, opposed the convening of an AICC meeting at that stage.

Gandhi's British intermediaries were playing their behind-the-stage roles. On 2 September 1933, C.F. Andrews saw Home Secretary Hallett and "gave him his impressions of Gandhiji's mind". Besides, Andrews saw Harry Haig, the Home Member of the Government of India, and the Viceroy and then wrote pleadingly to Haig.⁷³ At Gandhi's instance Muriel Lester, his hostess in London in 1931, saw the Bengal Governor Anderson as well as the Viceroy in February and March 1934. She carried a letter to Anderson from Gandhi. Agatha Harrison also landed in India in March 1934. Like Andrews, Agatha Harrison, Horace Alexander, Mirabeau (Madeleine Slade), Muriel Lester tried to persuade the raj to unbend. On 19 February Gandhi wrote to G.D. Birla that things like Lester's interview

with the Viceroy could "bring about no result at the moment. Still, *we do not want to miss any opportunity of compromise[!]*. Whatever the Congressmen may say Bidhan Roy should make full effort to seek an interview."⁷⁴

Why did not the British imperialists relent after Gandhi had practically killed the civil disobedience movement and given so much evidence of his friendliness? They refused any contact with Gandhi until he formally withdrew civil disobedience including the *individual* variety, until he capitulated completely. At the moment they had no need of Gandhi since they were convinced that most Congress leaders would vie with one another to lap up whatever concessions the raj would make; that they would be quite eager to work the constitution that was being drafted in London. This impression was conveyed to Home Member Haig by Gandhi's friend Henry Polak and Jamnadas Dwarkadas.⁷⁵ Anderson, whose source of knowledge might have been G.D. Birla, made a similar report to Hoare.⁷⁶ On 9 June 1935 Madras Governor Erskine communicated to the Secretary of State: "Down here, the leaders are simply panting to take office."⁷⁷

In the meantime Gandhi was quietly leading the Congress towards the constitutional path. Since July 1933, he had been advising S. Satyamurthi, Asaf Ali, M.A. Ansari, K.F. Nariman, K.M. Munshi and others to form a 'parliamentary' party for entering the legislatures.⁷⁸ In March 1934 Satyamurthi, the Madras Congress leader, approached Haig and received assurances that the government would not interfere with the formation of such a party. Among others who sounded the Home Member on the same issue was Sir Cowasji Jehangir, who was sent by K.F. Nariman, then president of the Bombay PCC.⁷⁹

The Indian big bourgeoisie also wanted the Congress to convert itself into a 'parliamentary' party. This desire was publicly expressed in the presidential address of N.R. Sarkar, who was quite close to Birla, to the annual session of the FICCI held on 31 March and 1 April 1934. He called for "a reconsideration of our political methods and tactics" and pleaded for a programme of council-entry.⁸⁰

An earthquake occurred in March 1934 and devastated large parts of North Bihar. Gandhi blamed the sin of untouchability as the cause of the grim tragedy that overwhelmed hundreds of thousands of men, women and children – both the sinners and the sinned. Gandhi visited Bihar and a relief committee was set up by the Congress with Rajendra Prasad as president. A resolution declaring that the Committee tendered "its *respectful* co-operation to the Government in the prosecution of the common object of relieving the unparalleled distress that has overtaken Bihar" was adopted. It was Gandhi and Malaviya who pushed through the resolution despite opposition.⁸¹

In a statement released on 7th April 1934 to the press Gandhi announced unconditional suspension – practically withdrawal – of the civil disobedience movement for reasons highly spiritual.⁸²

Nehru who had gone back to prison in the meantime was “bowled” over by this statement. He recorded in his prison diary: “*After 15 years I go my way, perhaps a solitary way not far – But meanwhile there is prison and its lonely existence.*” Again, he wrote: “How can one work with Bapu if he functions in this way and leaves people in the lurch?”⁸³ This too, was just a passing mood.

On Gandhi’s withdrawal of civil disobedience, the government declared in the Legislative Assembly that it would have no objection to a meeting of the AICC.

As desired by Gandhi, the decision was taken to revive the Swaraj Party and to contest the elections to the Central Legislative Assembly.⁸⁴ Among those who took the initiative were Ansari, B.C. Roy and Bhulabhai Desai. Most of them had not participated in the Civil Disobedience Movement.

This decision was in flagrant contradiction with the resolution adopted at the Lahore Congress which had resolved upon “complete boycott of the Central and Provincial Legislatures and Committees appointed by the Government”. This resolution was neither withdrawn nor amended either by any subsequent Congress session or by the AICC. The decision was adopted not even by the Working Committee but by a few individual Congressmen who had kept themselves aloof even from sham struggles. It was actually a one-man decision – the decision of Gandhi – which he was carrying out through obliging men. This was Congress democracy in action.

Speaking to the press on 18 April, Gandhi said that the members of the old Swaraj Party, who had not resigned from the Central and Provincial Legislatures, violating the decision of the Lahore Congress, would be members of the revived Party “for the asking”. Writing to Birla, Gandhi said: “*It is this group [that favours Council-entry] which should have the reins of the Congress, for it alone needs the label of the Congress.*” He wrote to Patel: “It is absolutely necessary that it [the Swaraj Party] should be revived.... *I don’t think this is a temporary phase; it has come to stay.*”⁸⁵

On 1 May there was a conference at Ranchi, which Gandhi, Jamnalal Bajaj, Rajendra Prasad and some Swarajists attended. Birla too was invited by Gandhi to attend it.⁸⁶

So it was decided to take part in the elections to the Central Assembly, which were scheduled to be held before the end of 1934. Gandhi told the press that there would be and should be many instances of co-operation with the British raj.⁸⁷ It was decided to take part in elections when Congress

Committees were banned and when thousands of Congressmen including some leaders were in prison.

On 7 April, after the withdrawal of civil disobedience by Gandhi the Viceroy wrote to the Secretary of State: "Gandhi has in effect capitulated." Willingdon wired to Hoare on 19 April: "At present our policy has triumphed. Congress appears to be in a chastened mood and there are at least a large number of them genuinely anxious to resume constitutional activities and enter the legislature. *This is a development we should welcome.*"⁸⁸

D.A. Low points out that the aim of the British imperialists "was to make them [the Congress] play by the constitutional rules they had laid down. Having failed in 1929-31 to *persuade* them to this, between 1932 and 1934 they successfully *coerced* them instead." They expected that by abjuring mass action and following the constitutional path, the Congress leaders would isolate the revolutionary elements from the Congress as a whole, reorganize it and build up its strength. They decided to withdraw restrictions on Congress Committees and enable the AICC to meet and convert itself into a party wedded to constitutional politics. The Congress leaders pursued the course as the raj desired. The AICC met at Patna in May 1934 and appointed a Parliamentary Board to contest elections.⁸⁹

Birla and Thakurdas were quite happy.⁹⁰ Birla wanted Gandhi to have full control over the newly-formed Swaraj Party or not to take any interest in it. Interestingly, writing almost at the same time from the Birla Mills, Delhi, Rajagopalachari pleaded in the same vein.⁹¹ Their wishes were respected. The new Swaraj party was stillborn: the entire Congress changed itself into an electioneering party.

The Working Committee met about mid-June 1934 and adopted a resolution, which declared that "confiscation and class war are contrary to the Congress creed of non-violence".⁹² Earlier, Gandhi had observed that he did not believe in class-conflict and was opposed to the abolition of the rule of the princes, elimination of landlordism, cancellation of the debts of peasants and workers and nationalization of the instruments of production. He did not support the "repudiation of the so-called public debt of India" to Britain; instead, he wanted it to be referred to an impartial tribunal. Assuring the zamindars, Gandhi said that he would be "no party to dispossessing the propertied classes of their private property without just cause.... Our socialism and communism should... be based on non-violence and the harmonious co-operation of labour and capital and the landlord and the tenant." "The Ramarajya of my dream", said Gandhi, "ensures the rights alike of the prince and pauper."⁹³

In the same meeting the Working Committee recorded that the White Paper "falls short of the Congress goal" and stated that the "only satisfactory

alternative to the White Paper is a constitution drawn up by a Constituent Assembly, elected on the basis of adult suffrage or as near it as possible, with the power, if necessary, to *the important minorities to have their representatives elected exclusively by the electors belonging to such minorities*'. Thus, the Committee agreed to separate electorates for the minorities for election to a constituent assembly that would draft the constitution of future independent India. On the Communal Award, it declared that it could "neither accept nor reject the Communal Award..." and held out the hope that "The White Paper lapsing, the Communal Award must lapse automatically".⁹⁴

The Congress Parliamentary Board issued on 29 July 1934 its election manifesto, presumably drafted by Gandhi and approved by the Board meeting jointly with the Working Committee. While reiterating the Working Committee's stand on the Communal Award, the manifesto said: "The Parliamentary Board has, therefore, to concentrate the attention of the voters on the rejection of the White Paper and, as the only alternative to it, upon securing and convening a constituent assembly". The manifesto clarified that "*such an assembly can be convened only by an agreement between the Governing Powers and the people unless it is after a successful revolution. We have in contemplation the former*".⁹⁵ Significantly, a constituent assembly elected on the basis of separate communal electorates and set up under the aegis of British imperialism became the goal of the Congress instead of independence.

Again, in an incomplete note on the Congress programme, written in prison, Nehru said:

"...there is hardly any common ground between me and Bapu and the others who lead the Congress today. Our objectives are different, our ideals are different, our spiritual outlook is different and our methods are likely to be different.... 'Independence' is almost a forgotten thing so far as our leaders are concerned – a brave plain word submerged under various 'points', 'interpretations', speeches, safeguards and assurances. That has been the fate of our political ideal.... Interpretation is our strong point after we have made our equivocal statements....

"It [the Congress] is aggressively anti-socialist and politically it is more backward than it has been for fifteen years.... That statement [Gandhi's statement of 7 April withdrawing the civil disobedience movement] seemed to me to be an insult to the nation, to the Congress and to any person with a grain of intelligence."⁹⁶

Almost immediately after release from prison on parole, Nehru wrote a long letter to Gandhi. He stated that what had happened was not merely a set-back or temporary defeat but a spiritual defeat. Congress ideals had

been betrayed and the people "who had co-operated with the opposite party in the time of our direst need", who had actually hauled down "the flag of Indian freedom", emerged as the leaders of the Congress. "The Congress from top to bottom", he wrote, "is a caucus and opportunism triumphs." Referring to the Working Committee's resolution on socialism, confiscation and class war, Nehru observed that it "showed such an astounding ignorance of the elements of socialism that it was painful to read it and to realize that it might be read outside India. It seemed that the overmastering desire of the committee was somehow to assure various vested interests even at the risk of talking nonsense."⁹⁷

Replying to this letter Gandhi assumed "full responsibility of the resolutions and the whole conception surrounding them". While defending them, he tried to apply the healing touch to Nehru's fevered mind and, as usual, he was successful. Writing to Patel, Gandhi said: "Jawaharlal's explosion is not as frightening as it seems from the flames. He had a right to let off steam, which he has exercised. I think he has calmed down now."⁹⁸

Patel was the key person among those who were in charge of elections to the Central Legislative Assembly held in 1934.⁹⁹ The Congress won 46 out of 142 seats in the Central Assembly but failed to obtain a single Muslim seat. Bhulabhai Desai, a former Advocate-General of Bombay, who 'came on the political horizon in 1932', became the leader of the Congress Assembly Party. He was also a member of the Congress Working Committee. Early in 1935 this member of the Working Committee and leader of the Congress Party in the Central Assembly "stated that *the establishment of self-government in India 'consistent with the interests of India and England' would make direct action 'a thing of the past'*".¹⁰⁰

Hindu-Muslim Question

Another attempt at forging elite-level unity was made in 1932 when the Gandhis and Nehrus were in prison. Again, even after MacDonald's 'Communal Award' had been announced, the Muslim leaders, undeterred by a warning from the Viceroy, sought to arrive at a settlement with Hindu leaders on the basis of joint electorates, but at the end the Muslim leaders were lured away by some concessions which the British government announced, perhaps to frustrate the move. And it failed. Gandhi had shown little interest in the negotiations when informed by Abul Kalam Azad.¹⁰¹

Jinnah was elected permanent president of the Muslim League in 1934. On his return to India after his voluntary exile to England, he again

tried to bring about an elite-level unity. He "was still thinking in terms of co-operation between Hindus and Muslims, and in the [central legislative] assembly he pursued a non-communal policy still in line with his policy of pursuing Hindu-Muslim unity".¹⁰² He said to Patel: "The Congress I admit would have to change its attitude in some respects, but looking to the great interests at stake Congress leaders should not flinch. I think that the future is with the Congress Party and not with me or the Aga Khan."¹⁰³ Jinnah wanted a joint attack on the White Paper, issued by the British government. Poor Jinnah was unaware that the Gandhis, as we shall see, had already made commitments through Birla of not opposing the Act under preparation.

However, talks between Jinnah and Congress president Prasad started in January 1935 for arriving at a settlement of the communal problem. "Jinnah and I", wrote Prasad, "had heart-to-heart talks and as far as I could see, we liked each other." Among others who were associated with the talks were Patel, Malaviya, G.D. Birla and Bhulabhai Desai. The formula agreed to by the Congress leaders and Jinnah proposed that joint electorates should replace separate electorates; that in all the provinces of India, other than Bengal and Punjab, and in the Central Assembly the number of seats reserved for the Muslims under the communal award should stand; that in Bengal and Punjab the franchise should be differential, that is, the electoral rolls should reflect the proportion of population formed by Hindus and Muslims in Bengal and by Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs in Punjab; that the seats allotted to the Muslims in these two provinces under the award should remain reserved for them and that the seats surrendered by the Europeans, if any, should be divided between Hindus and Muslims in proportion to their population.

Jinnah insisted that the formula should be endorsed not only by the Congress but by Malaviya (the high priest of 'Hindutva'), the Hindu Mahasabha and the Sikhs, without whose agreement he could not "risk trying to push the scheme through the Muslim League".¹⁰⁴ One more attempt foundered on the rock of Malaviya's refusal.

The Congress Socialist Party

Several groups which styled themselves as socialist were formed in different provinces like Bihar, U.P., Delhi, Punjab and Bombay between 1931 and 1934. While confined in the Nasik Jail in 1933, a group of political prisoners who had participated in the civil disobedience movement – Jayaprakash Narayan, Ashok Mehta and a few others – decided to weld the different groups together and form a Congress socialist party on the

basis of a programme. The first all-India conference of Congress socialists, convened by Jayaprakash Narayan of the Bihar Socialist Party, was held at Patna with Narendra Dev as president in May 1934, at about the time when the AICC met there. At this conference emerged the All India Congress Socialist Party. The party held its first conference in Bombay in October with Sampurnanand, who later became a Congress chief minister of U.P., as its president. Jayaprakash became its general secretary and E.M.S. Namboodiripad one of its joint secretaries.

The party held that the Congress was the main 'national-organization' – the organ of struggle against British imperialism for national freedom. But it disputed the Congress claim to represent the workers and other 'dumb millions'. Its professed objectives were "the achievement of complete independence in the sense of separation from the British Empire" and "the establishment of a Socialist Society".¹⁰⁵ Its programme included among other things, "the elimination of landlordism", "the progressive nationalization of the instruments of production, distribution and exchange", "state monopoly of foreign trade", the "abolition of the rule of princes", the "liquidation of the so-called Public Debt of India" to Britain. The programme stated its 'plan of action' would be to "work within the Indian National Congress with a view to secure its acceptance of the objects and programme of the party". The constitution it adopted at the Bombay conference restricted membership of the party to the members of the Congress. From its inception its leaders sought to build the party as a wing of the Congress, submitting to its political leadership. The CSP also upheld the Congress 'creed' of peaceful and legitimate means as its forms or methods of struggle.

Among the leading members of the CSP were Narayan, Narendra Dev, Ashok Mehta, Achyut Patwardhan, M.R. Masani, Sampurnanand. "There were from the start", wrote M.R. Masani, "two clear tendencies discernible among the participants, which continued to survive for well over a decade in the Party's life..." He added: "One tendency, then represented by Jayaprakash Narayan, was Marxist.... The other tendency, that of Democratic Socialism, was represented by M.R. Masani.... Also, without being able to formulate it, they were – despite their allegiance to Marxism – deeply and increasingly influenced by Gandhism."¹⁰⁶ There were, again, some Congress socialist leaders like Sampurnanand who were Vedantists. Those like Jayaprakash who were supposed to be Marxists wanted their followers to submit to the political leadership of the Congress and adopt 'peaceful and legitimate means' for overthrowing imperialist rule.

Jayaprakash was very close to Gandhi from the very beginning. G.D. Birla's biographer, R.N. Jaju, writes: "It was Gandhiji who had introduced G.D. [Ghanshyamdas Birla] to Jayaprakash Narayan. He found J.P. very

enthusiastic at the beginning and made him his secretary from 1926 to 1927."¹⁰⁷

The Congress socialist leaders pinned their hopes on Nehru and devoutly wished that he would assume their leadership. At the conference at Patna in May 1934, President Narendra Dev referred to Nehru as "our beloved friend" and as "our great leader".

Nehru influenced many of their important decisions and was able to keep them on the right rails (or wrong), though, as Sampurnanand notes, he felt only "amused contempt" for them.¹⁰⁸

At first Gandhi and his associates disliked the formation of the CSP and its programme. Presiding over a meeting of the Gujarat PCC early in October 1934, Patel warned the Congress socialists that "he would not tolerate any interference from them in Gujarat..."¹⁰⁹

It was the emergence of the CSP that provoked the Congress Working Committee to adopt in June 1934 the resolution drafted by Gandhi, declaring that class war and confiscation of private property were contrary to the Congress creed of non-violence. Immediately, four leading members of the CSP, including Narayan, pointed out that the Congress Constitution laid down that the Congress 'creed' was 'peaceful and legitimate means' and there was nothing in the CSP programme which militated against this 'creed', and that they were resolved to follow it scrupulously. As for confiscation of private property, they clarified that their programme was meant to be carried out by the Indian state *after* the achievement of independence and *by legal means*. As an article in the *Communist International* stated, the Congress socialists "are for peaceful and lawful methods of struggle! They do not want to go outside the framework of British imperialist 'legality'. Within the framework of this imperialist lawlessness and licence, the Congress socialists promise to bring about political freedom and the further introduction of socialism by 'legal means'."¹¹⁰

In his book *Why Socialism?* Jayaprakash held that the princes and the landlords as well as the Indian bourgeoisie would not join the anti-imperialist united front. According to him, the Indian industrial class which grew up under the aegis of imperialism played a servile role and any united front with it was out of the question. He was of the view that the right-wing should be ousted not only from leadership but from the Congress altogether. The 'Faizpur thesis' that the CSP adopted at its third conference towards the end of 1936 stated that the leadership of the anti-imperialist front belonged to the working class. It said: "The working class in India, though organizationally weak and politically not conscious of its role, is none the less potentially the most revolutionary class. But the struggle of the Indian masses for freedom will not reach its objective unless the working class

is the vanguard of that struggle. Therefore, it is our task as socialists to see that it assumes a historic role in the national movement."¹¹¹ Though critical of the right-wing leadership of the Congress, CSP leaders were respectful to Gandhi and believed in his 'revolutionary' role. The reaction of the Congress leadership to the emergence of the CSP was far from friendly. It was G.D. Birla's complaint that the CSP's agitation within the Congress had a harmful effect on labour relations where the employer was a Congress supporter. On 3 August 1934 Birla wrote to Thakurdas:

"You know the mischief that is being done by the so-called Socialist Party.... Gandhiji has taken up a very hostile attitude to this. Vallabhbhai, Rajaji and Rajendra Babu are all fighting Communism and Socialism. It is therefore necessary that some of us who represent the healthy Capitalism should help Gandhiji as far as possible and work with a common object.... I can, however, say this much that even the Government is gradually getting attracted towards Gandhiji as they are finding in him a man who will be the greatest guardian of an ordered society.... I do not think there is the slightest disagreement between us and Gandhiji as regards the representation of the commercial community."¹¹²

The resolution that the Congress Working Committee adopted in June 1934 'was intended to ban any Congressman who "preaches class war" from membership of an executive committee.'¹¹³

In January 1936 the CSP invited communists to join it individually. On his election as General Secretary by the CPI in April 1936, P.C. Joshi asked communists to work within the CSP. The units in the South – Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Andhra – came to be controlled by the communists. They acquired considerable influence in the North too. A section of the CSP leadership – Masani and others – wanted to expel the communists from their organization while bitter polemics raged between the two parties. Ultimately, in 1940, the CSP executive expelled all communists from their party and broke off the 'united front' with the CPI.

During these years there were many discussions and much correspondence between Gandhi and CSP leaders. Very soon Gandhi thought it wise to assimilate the CSP. It was Gandhi who included three Congress socialists – Jayaprakash Narayan, Narendra Dev and Achyut Patwardhan – in the Congress Working Committee when Nehru became Congress President in April 1936.¹¹⁴ Gradually, the CSP leaders moved closer and closer to Gandhi and Gandhism.

Congress Reorganized for the Tasks Ahead

Discontent was brewing within the Congress and outside at the manner in which civil disobedience was terminated and at the direction in which the Congress was being led. Though respectful to Gandhi, groups like the CSP had emerged which spoke in voices not pleasant to the ears of Gandhi and his associates. Wooing the workers and peasants and harping on class contradictions were particularly distasteful and seemed subversive of the existing social order. Besides, Gandhi could anticipate that, with the pursuit of constitutional politics, the Congress would be invariably an arena of struggle between individuals and groups for pelf, power and patronage.

Gandhi felt the need for two things at this moment when he was bringing about important changes in Congress politics. First, there was the need for disciplining the Congress elements which struck a discordant note. Second, when the battle for positions and privileges would be hot, he might appear to be above the battle.

So, after consulting Rajagopalachari, Patel and other associates, Gandhi decided to withdraw into the background leaving his tough lieutenants like Patel to crush all dissent – political and personal – with his blessings and assuring them that his services would always be at their disposal.¹¹⁵ Welcoming this decision, Patel said in a statement: “*Outside the Congress, he [Gandhi] will be more powerful and more helpful to the Congress.*”¹¹⁶ At a public meeting in Ahmedabad, Patel warned that, unlike Gandhi, he “would deal toughly with anyone who came in his way and tried to undo what Congress had done”.¹¹⁷

It was a shrewd move: the policy would be Gandhi's, every step the Congress was to take would be determined by him. Yet he would not be a member of the Congress and *formally* responsible for the policies and measures. Whenever some questions uncomfortable for him would arise, for instance, when Jinnah asked him for a categorical answer on the communal issue, he could by-pass it, claiming that he was not even a four-anna member of the Congress. In a press statement, Gandhi announced in about mid-September 1934 that he had agreed with the Working Committee and the Parliamentary Board “that it might be safer for me to leave the Congress, *if at all*, after the forthcoming session”. Explaining the reasons he said that there were sharp differences between him and many Congressmen on several issues – the question of *khadi*, the formation of the Parliamentary Board, the formation of the CSP, the policy towards the native states, non-violence and so on. To test the loyalty of Congressmen to his ideals, he proposed to place before the next Congress session certain resolutions which were all intended to amend the Congress constitution and concentrate all powers in the Working Committee, that is, himself.¹¹⁸

While announcing his intention to leave the Congress, if Congress members did not prove sufficiently loyal, Gandhi saw to it that one of his most trusted lieutenants, Rajendra Prasad, succeeded Patel as president of the Congress for the next year.

It was Gandhi who piloted the revised Congress constitution through the Bombay session. One of his proposals – that the words ‘legitimate and peaceful’ in the Congress ‘creed’ should be replaced by ‘truth and non-violence’ – was referred to the provincial committees and the other amendments were adopted.

Besides making spinning obligatory for a Congress member, Gandhi made the habitual wearing of wholly hand-spun and hand-woven *khadi* an essential qualification for membership of an elected Congress Committee.

Some of the other amendments empowered the Working Committee to de-recognize elected provincial and subordinate Congress Committees, if they failed to comply “with *all* the conditions laid down in this [amended] constitution or any rules framed thereunder by the Working Committee”, and authorized the latter to form new provincial committees. Another amendment empowered the Working Committee “to frame rules and issue instructions in matters not provided for in the constitution”. By another amendment the President was authorized to select the members of the Working Committee, including secretaries and treasurers, from among the delegates to the Congress session. Obviously this amended constitution violated all democratic norms. Such an important organizational matter like dissolution of a provincial or subordinate committee and formation of a new one in its place depended on the Working Committee, not on the AICC, nor was the decision subject to ratification by the AICC or the next Congress session. Previously, half of the members of the Working Committee were elected by the AICC and half nominated by the president. The amended constitution dispensed with all election: all the members were to be the nominees of the president. And how was the president selected in actual practice? Before and after the amended constitution was adopted, the president was actually Gandhi’s nominee. Rajendra Prasad, who became president in 1934, was also his nominee.¹¹⁹ His prerogative to choose the president remained though he left the Congress after the revised constitution was adopted at the Bombay Congress. Only once his selection of the Congress president – of Pattabhi Sitaramayya in 1939 – was successfully challenged by Subhas Bose, but it proved a Pyrrhic victory for Bose. He had to pay the price by being hounded out of the Congress.

The amended constitution concentrated all powers in the hands of one man – Gandhi – though he was no longer a four-anna member of the Congress. It was he who selected the president and, through the president, the members of the Working Committee,¹²⁰ which was endowed with all

arbitrary powers. Virtually, he became the supreme *extra-constitutional authority* after his so-called retirement from the Congress. Few people who knew Gandhi were fooled by his manoeuvre. "Particular leaders", writes Shankardass, "condemned the move towards excessive centralization of Congress; they saw Gandhi's retirement as a ploy to make Congress disagreeable for non-Gandhiites and regarded the constitutional changes as harmful to the Congress mass character (criticisms of Madan Mohan Malaviya, Swami Sahajanand, Acharya Narendra Dev and Satyamurthi in *The Leader*, 29 October 1934; *Congress Socialist*, 29 Sept. 1934; *Bombay Chronicle*, 21 Oct. 1934)." ¹²¹ In a letter to the provincial governments, the chief secretary to the Government of India, Hallett, wrote:

"By freeing himself from Congress bodies Gandhi has full power to issue a 'directive' whenever he thinks fit, without any reference to anyone else." ¹²²

Before his so-called withdrawal from the Congress Gandhi added one more organization to the cluster of organizations which were under his sole control. On 24 October 1934 he moved a resolution at the Subjects Committee meeting during the Congress session, which stated that "Mr J.C. Kumarappa is hereby authorized to form under the advice and guidance of Mr Gandhi an association called the All India Village Industries Association as part of the activities of the Congress". Though set up by the Congress, it would be independent of the Congress like the Gandhi Seva Sangh, the All India Spinners Association, the Harijan Sevak Sangh, the Hindustani Talimi Sangh and more such organizations to be set up later, with their all-India network of branches staffed by wholtime workers. They were intended to establish grassroots contact with the people and work to eliminate any chances of a revolutionary upheaval. As Gandhi told Guy Wint on 1 April 1939, he regarded "the revolt of the younger intelligentsia" and "the labour unrest" as dangers but "*the agrarian unrest is a much greater danger*", which, he believed, "is bound to be disciplined" provided "the Congress retains non-violence" and produced "the real type of workers for the villages". ¹²³

Most of his organizations were intended "to cope with" the unrest arising out of the appalling misery and oppression of the peasantry and get it "disciplined" with his weapon of non-violence. He was interested in preserving the existing social order, not in abolishing it. He hoped that the meagre palliatives that these organizations would offer to some rural people and the expectations that they would rouse would reduce the sense of iniquity and minimize class conflict. These organizations were sometimes started and always funded mainly by the big bourgeois – Jamnalal Bajaj,

the Birla brothers and so on. These organizations under the sole control of Gandhi constituted a formidable apparatus in his hands: their executive committees and office-bearers were selected by him and they enjoyed no internal democracy. "If you will be soldiers in my army", said Gandhi to his 'constructive' workers, "understand that there is no room for democracy in that organization. The army may be a part of a democratic organization, but there can be no democracy in it...as there is none in our various organizations – All India Spinners Association, All India Village Industries Association, and so on. In an army, the General's word is law, and his conditions cannot be relaxed."¹²⁴

More on Birla's Role

As already noted, G.D. Birla had an important hand in arranging the 'Poona Pact', played a prominent role on the Harijan front, and actively helped in terminating civil disobedience (as Nehru said) and in guiding the Congress along the constitutional path. More tasks lay ahead. The new constitution that would be imposed by the British raj had to be worked, ministerial offices under the constitution had to be assumed, and the role of "partners in this repression and in the exploitation of our people" (to borrow Nehru's phrase) had to be played by the Congress in the coming days.

The Joint Parliamentary Committee's Report, which formed the basis of the Government of India Act of 1935, appeared towards the end of 1934. Birla realized that all appeals to the Government to have talks with Gandhi – appeals for a 'personal touch' – *before* the framing of the constitution, were fruitless. Now he started emphasizing the value of personal contact after the constitution bill was passed. *He stressed that personal contact would be necessary for creating the proper atmosphere in which the constitution to be imposed by the raj could be worked.*

Early in 1935, helped by Anderson, Birla saw the Viceroy, Commerce Member Joseph Bhore and Home Member Henry Craik. He also arranged interviews between Craik and Patel.

Birla said to the Viceroy:

"There must be a proper understanding between the ruler and the ruled so that leaders like Gandhiji and his lieutenants may begin to teach people to treat the Government as their own institution."

Birla told Joseph Bhore that "If there was sincerity and goodwill, *Mr Gandhi may find a formula to work the constitution*".¹²⁵ While, as usual,

his appeal that the raj should establish "personal contact" with Gandhi ran as a refrain throughout the interview with Craik, Birla told the "man who broke heads of thousands and issued ordinance[s]" that *Gandhi endorsed Birla's view "that the proposed scheme could be worked successfully and to the advantage of India, if there was sympathy and good-will from both the sides"*. He stated to the Home Member:

"There is already a section growing up gradually which believes that even the best should not be achieved by constitutional means.... Gandhiji is fighting against this mentality.... It is essential that *some settlement should be made in Gandhiji's lifetime which may bring the Government and the people closer to each other. This would be the beginning of the new kind of education which would teach people to believe that the Government is their own institution, which should be mended and not ended.*"

Birla warned that, otherwise, "A revolution of the bloody type may become an inevitable factor. And *this would be the greatest calamity not only to India but also to England. Tories may say this would be India's funeral. I say it would be of both.*"¹²⁶

Birla was right. As the interests of the Birlas and those of imperial Britain were tied together, the ruin of one would spell the ruin of the other.

Meeting Craik in Birla's house, Patel assured him that "So long as both the sides recognized sincerity and honesty of purpose, there was no reasons [sic] to fear racial bitterness". Gandhi was pleased with Patel's interview with the Home Member and wrote to Patel: "It was good that you met. Keep up correspondence now." Gandhi himself toyed with the idea of writing to Craik and informed Birla that if he wrote, he would send the letter to Birla and that, if Birla approved of it, he was to send it to Craik.¹²⁷

In June 1935 Viceroy Willingdon informed Secretary of State Lord Zetland that he had "every reason to think that when the Bill is through even Congress will work it, and work it properly".¹²⁸

Though Gandhi was still denied a 'personal touch', a thaw had set in. Birla now undertook a visit to London to disabuse the minds of the British rulers of all misgivings about the Congress leaders, generate trust and help destiny to bind imperial Britain and colonial India still closer. Birla said: "*I had in my enterprise the blessings of Bapu and also of the Governor of Bengal, both of whom gave me letters of introduction to important persons.*"

Towards the end of February 1935 Gandhi's secretary Mahadev Desai informed Birla that, before he left for England, he "*should concentrate on giving finishing touches to the task you have undertaken and have brought*

to the present stage of fruition." Then, on 7 March, Gandhi advised Birla that "now that you have laboured so hard on this task, you should give finishing touches to it during your sojourn in England".¹²⁹

Before he set sail in the summer of 1935, Birla went to the Bengal Governor "to seek his advice and guidance". He told him that the Congress could throw an open challenge to socialism and fight the firebrands, if the raj strengthened the hands of the Right wing. Anderson assured him that *Anderson too was "in a way fighting India's battle for freedom"*.¹³⁰

In London, as Birla wrote, "Determined to pull every possible string on Gandhiji's behalf, I sought out everyone who might be of assistance" He had interviews with Findlater Stewart, Butler (another Under-Secretary of State), Zetland, Lothian, Ramsay MacDonald, Halifax, Hoare, Linlithgow, Attlee, Churchill, Prime Minister Baldwin, various other politicians, economists, businessmen and other prominent men. During his talks he expatiated on the efficacy of 'personal touch', that is, personal contact with Gandhi. He told them that *the constitution that the British government was imposing could be worked, but what was needed was the 'personal touch'*. He warned Findlater Stewart that the "defeat of Gandhism will create forces of Communism". At one of the interviews Stewart assured him: "We do not like Mr Gandhi to be on the other side of the fence."¹³¹

In a letter of 29 June, Birla communicated to Gandhi the gist of his talks with the British politicians. In his talks he emphasized that, *though "the Bill is the most reactionary piece of legislation", it was necessary to create the right spirit, "a different psychology about the reforms so that it may be worked and the intention of the friends here may be fulfilled and the present strife ended once and for all"*. He complained that they were "killing a man [Gandhi] who is your friend in the world" and wanted them to "establish personal contact" with Gandhi "and come to an agreement about the working of the reforms". He informed Gandhi that he had told them that "Mutual trust and friendship should be the basis. *The constitution should be worked with a view to leading India towards progress and Dominion Status. Great Britain to help.*" Before he concluded his letter to Gandhi he assumed that "I am representing you correctly and faithfully".¹³²

Gandhi assured Birla that he was representing him quite faithfully and encouraged him to "go ahead with your endeavour..."

Gandhi's secretary, Mahadev Desai, warmly congratulated Birla on his exploits in London: "you may be sure that *we greedily devour your letters. There is no doubt that you are making the best out of your visit, and I should be content even with what you have so far achieved.*"¹³³

Birla was keeping Gandhi fully posted with records of his interviews in London. He was also keeping Anderson informed of his talks. In his letters of 5 and 12 July Birla wrote to Anderson that he had told Zetland and Sir Austen Chamberlain that though "Lord Halifax put 60,000 men in jail and you have interned 2,500 men without trial...there is no bitterness".

Birla told Halifax that Patel was "very capable, very sound and shrewd". Asked by Halifax if Nehru was "not too much on the left wing", Birla said: "*I do not think so, although he talks a lot...*"¹³⁴

Birla assured Linlithgow that "the Congress and Government are on common ground" on the issue of fighting terrorism, though their methods might differ". Churchill said to him: "You have got the things [the Government of India Act of 1935] now and you make it [a] success and if you do it I will support that you should get much more."¹³⁵

Birla made a summary of what he had been saying to British politicians and sent a copy to Halifax. It stated :

"The Irwin-Gandhi Pact was a great step towards binding India and Great Britain together *It struck at the roots of the method of securing political advance by means of disorder, and substituted the method of mutual discussion and confidence* [emphasis in the original]... The Government is helping the Socialists indirectly by ignoring the right wing. If the new Constitution is to work successfully to the advantage of both countries, it is imperative that something be done immediately to change the existing atmosphere.... A new spirit must be created; *the spirit that dominated the Irwin-Gandhi Pact must be restored* [emphasis in the original].... *Sensible men and women realize their need of British help; they want British friendship.*"¹³⁶

To sum up :

First, before the Government of India Act of 1935 was enacted in August of that year as well as after, Birla on behalf of Gandhi and the other Congress leaders repeatedly gave the raj the assurance that it would be worked by the Congress. Gandhi approved of the commitment Birla made to the raj.

Second, on behalf of Gandhi and the other Congress leaders, Birla assured the raj that they would abandon the path of mass action "*once and for all*" and take to the road indicated by the raj – the peaceful, constitutional road to self-government and expect to be guided there by British imperialism.

Third, Birla held that an understanding between the raj and Gandhi and the other Congress leaders was necessary so that the latter could teach people that "the Government is their own institution, which should be mended and not ended". Such understanding would also create the proper atmosphere in which the constitution could be worked. In the absence of

such an understanding a violent revolution might spell "the funeral" of both Tory Britain and the Birlas' India.

Fourth, Birla, who held that imperial Britain and colonial India were bound together by destiny, urged that the raj and the right wing of the Congress should combine to crush the left wing.

One should note that *Birla's views and commitments to the raj received Gandhi's unqualified approval.*

Birla was asked to make another commitment. The Government of India Act of 1935 was passed and Birla's and Gandhi's entreaties for a 'personal touch' were rejected by the raj. Yet Zetland, Hoare, Halifax and Lothian insisted that Gandhi should make "no new commitments" (that is, should not come to, and announce, any decision) in respect of the new constitution until the new Viceroy arrived in India in April 1936.¹³⁷

A few words about the GOI Act of 1935, which seemed attractive to the Gandhis and Birlas.

This constitution envisaged India as a sham 'federation' of the eleven provinces of 'British India' (while separating Burma from India, it created two more provinces – Sind and Orissa) and 'Princely India' comprising more than 560 states. The 'federation' and a 'responsible government' at the centre would emerge provided the princes of the states having at least half the total population of all the states would voluntarily agree to accession. The constitution gave the states, which together had only about one-fourth of the population of India, two-fifths of the seats in the upper house and one-third in the lower house of the 'federal' legislature. 'British India' would have separate electorates for the different communities. Franchise, based on property and educational qualifications, would be very much restricted.

Under the Act, the 'responsible government' at the centre would have no control over defence, foreign affairs, tribal areas and ecclesiastical affairs, which would be administered by the Governor-General. The 'responsible government' at the centre and the federal legislature would also have no say in regard to about 80 per cent of government finance, which would be spent on defence and so on. Besides, the Act armed the Governor-General with special powers for the prevention of grave menace to 'peace and tranquillity', for the promulgation of ordinances, for the protection of the rights of the minorities, for ensuring the 'financial stability' of the country and so on. Under the Act, pending the establishment of 'federation', the Central government and the Central legislature would function as before, that is, according to the provisions of the 1919 Act.

The legislation passed by the 'federal legislature', if it ever came into being, wrote Reginald Coupland, "would be subject to refusal of assent or to reservation by the Governor-General, acting under the control of the

Secretary of State, and to disallowance by the Crown on the Secretary of State's advice..." and the British Parliament could "legislate for British India without regard, if so it chose, to Indian wishes".¹³⁸

Under the new Act, the provinces of 'British India' would be 'autonomous'. There would be three lists of subjects – central, provincial and concurrent – defining the respective powers of the Centre and the provinces. About 11.5 per cent of the population would be enfranchised, cut up into different communal segments. The provincial administration would be under a governor appointed by the British government and assisted by a council of ministers responsible to the provincial legislature. The governor would enjoy "special responsibilities" as regards the peace and tranquillity of the province, safeguarding the rights of the minorities and so on and could overrule his ministers when he would be pleased to do so. On the plea that the administration of his province could not be carried on in accordance with the provisions of the Act, he could dissolve the ministry and take upon himself the administration of the province. There was nothing in law to prevent the Governor-General and the governor from acting as they liked. The civil services and the police enjoyed protection and were not amenable to the control of the ministers.

The constitution bristled with things like "reserved subjects", "special responsibilities" and "safeguards". The British-owned industry, trade, banking, etc., were protected by "safeguards" against any interference with their right to fleece this country as before.

The Act was devised to build up a *constitutional* alliance between the imperialist masters, princes, big landlords and the compradors – all reactionary forces, foreign and native – to thwart the aspirations of the people.

When the Act was at the stage of preparation, an article in the *Communist International* stated :

"In its scheme of a pseudo-federal colonial India British imperialism seeks to create such a system as would enable it to preserve and consolidate in the safest possible manner its rule over India, by utilizing to the utmost the feudal relics and all the different contradictions (of a national, religious character, etc.).... The Constitution which imperialism seeks to introduce is aimed not only at strengthening the British yoke but at consolidating all the exploiting classes for the struggle against the Indian people, against the Indian revolution."¹³⁹

Gandhi and his close associates and the Indian big compradors like Birla were quite optimistic. Even when the constitution was under consideration in the British Parliament, Gandhi "realized that the 'Bill' was capable of producing benefit, if worked in the right spirit". Indeed, the Act,

which Gandhi later described as "the creation of the best British brains" and behind which "there were honourable motives", was capable of producing benefit for the classes Gandhi represented. Birla was quite emphatic that the Act "did contain seeds which were to germinate, blossom and bear fruit giving us ultimately the full independence that we aspired for". He was indeed right as he added: "we have embodied large portions of the Act, as finally passed, in the Constitution which we have framed ourselves which shows that in it was cast the pattern of our future plans."¹⁴⁰

Before leaving England, Birla wrote to Anderson that he had "been told that in the fullness of time my visit will bear fruit, so *I am returning now to India with the blessings of the new Viceroy, the Secretary of State and those others who count*".¹⁴¹

On his return to India in September, Birla "immediately went to Wardha to stay with Gandhi and give him a first-hand report of my impressions" as well as the messages from Hoare, Halifax and others.

Gandhi had sent his secretary to Bombay to bring Birla and Patel. He had invited Rajendra Prasad to come. Rajagopalachari had already arrived.¹⁴²

As Birla informed Lothian, Zetland and others, "Gandhi was very much impressed" and promised Birla that "*he would use his influence with the Congress, so that no new commitments in respect of the Reforms be made until after the arrival of Lord Linlithgow*". Writing to Zetland on 23 September, Birla said: "*I have found Mr Gandhi extremely responsive and this is a great satisfaction.*"¹⁴³

Now Gandhi prepared to lead the Congress step by step in his own quiet way to work the constitution, while keeping his plans secret from the Congress and the people – even from Nehru. Gandhi remained eloquently silent when the GOI Act of 1935 saw the light of day. He sent a message to Nehru, offering him presidentship of the next Congress session and trying to impose a vow of silence on him about the Act.¹⁴⁴

Why did Gandhi offer presidentship of the Congress to Nehru? It seems that Gandhi wanted to attach him to his bandwagon in order to work the provincial part of the constitution without meeting with any serious challenge from within and outside the Congress, for Nehru was "the best shield of the Congress against left-wing groups and organizations".¹⁴⁵ Gandhi was sure, as he said at an AICC meeting in January 1942, that Nehru "says whatever is uppermost in his mind, but he always does what I want". Nehru's rhetoric would lull the people into complacency and suit Gandhi's purpose. Though Gandhi could not repose the same trust in Subhas,¹⁴⁶ yet two years later he took his chances seeking to utilize his leftist image, make Subhas amenable to his control by making him president, neutralize opposition to the federal part of the constitution and get the Congress to accept and work it. But his calculation went awry. Of that later.

The decision about whether to accept ministerial office under the new constitution was deferred by the Congress Working Committee and the AICC till the Lucknow Congress due to be held in April 1936. The Lucknow Congress under the presidency of Nehru rejected the new constitution "*in its entirety*". The resolution it adopted was eloquent on the fact that the constitution was "designed to facilitate and perpetuate the domination and exploitation of the people of India and is imposed on the country to the accompaniment of widespread repression and the suppression of civil liberties".¹⁴⁷ On the issue of office acceptance Nehru proclaimed from his presidential chair: "*it would inevitably mean our co-operation in some measure with the repressive apparatus of imperialism, and we would become partners in this repression and in the exploitation of our people.*"¹⁴⁸ But, characteristically, Nehru refused to support the socialist amendments committing the Congress to a policy of rejecting ministerial office. Though the Lucknow Congress rejected the new constitution "*in its entirety*", it resolved to contest the next provincial elections under the new Act and left the question of accepting ministerial office "to be decided at the proper time by the AICC..."¹⁴⁹ The Faizpur Congress in December 1936, with Nehru as president, while reiterating "its *entire* rejection of the Government of India Act of 1935" and making radical noise, again deferred the question of acceptance of office – a crucial question.

In the meantime – on 20 April 1936, after the Lucknow Congress – Birla wrote to Thakurdas that he was "perfectly satisfied with what has taken place [at Lucknow]. *Mahatmaji kept his promise and without uttering a word, he saw that no new commitments were made. Jawaharlalji's speech in a way was thrown into the waste paper basket* because all the resolutions that were passed were against the spirit of his speech.... the things are moving in the right direction. The election which will take place will be controlled by 'Vallabhbhai Group' and if Lord Linlithgow handles the situation properly, there is every likelihood of the Congressmen coming into office."¹⁵⁰

Nehru's verbal radicalism did not cease. On 16 June 1936 he declared: "If the Congress decides to accept office under the new Act, I am quite sure that to that extent it will co-operate with and *strengthen British imperialism.*"¹⁵¹

In July 1936 the Congress Parliamentary Board Executive with Patel as President and Rajendra Prasad and G.B. Pant as Secretaries was appointed by the Working Committee. *The Executive "declared that its main purpose was to transform the Congress organization into an electoral organization and to revitalize and reorientate it to this end"*.¹⁵² As desired by the British imperialists, the Congress and Gandhian organizations like the Gandhi Seva Sangh were converted into vote-getting machines to work the new Act.¹⁵³

During his interview with Viceroy Linlithgow on 5 August 1936, Birla said that "Gandhiji has kept his promise" but that there was yet no personal contact with him. Linlithgow hoped "to make a substantial contribution after the election is over" but he would not make any promise. Birla assured him that Gandhi would agree to acceptance of office. Receiving a report from Birla on the interview, Gandhi approved of it. Writing to Lothian next day, Birla said: "*The whole question is, 'should we make a serious effort to direct the energies of India once for all towards constitutional channels ?'*"¹⁵⁴

Birla had another interview with the Viceroy in March 1937 after the elections were over. The Viceroy was happy at the Congress's success in the elections and said: "*In fact, in substance the difference between Gandhiji's position and my own position does not at all exist.*" He asked Birla: "Would Gandhiji rise against Jawaharlal if the latter disagreed with him on any compromise?" Birla unhesitatingly replied: "*Jawaharlal would simply follow.*" Linlithgow agreed with Birla.¹⁵⁵ They knew the limits of Nehru's verbal anti-imperialism and socialism.

"*Play Fair and We Will Play Fair*"

Meeting on 17 and 18 March 1937, the AICC acknowledged that people had voted for the Congress for its declared policy "to combat the new Act and end it" and instructed the elected Congress members of the legislatures *to adhere to this policy*. Surprisingly, the same resolution decided in favour of "acceptance of office in provinces where the Congress commands a majority", provided the leaders of the Assembly parties received assurances from the respective governors that they would not interfere when the ministers acted within the framework of the constitution.¹⁵⁶ Wrecking the constitution came to mean in the Congress leaders' parlance working it. Earlier, on 28 February, a similar resolution had been adopted by the Working Committee.

Referring to this resolution, Gandhi said :

"The practical part of that resolution concerning acceptance of office has been drafted by me. Jawaharlal thought that it was not in conformity with the remaining three-fourths of the resolution and with the [election] manifesto.... The language is open to two different interpretations; of this there is no doubt. But a *satyagrahi* can use language which may be interpreted in two different ways."¹⁵⁷

In other words, a *satyagrahi* like Gandhi was privileged to use language which was capable of contrary interpretations and was deceptive.

Rajagopalachari, the leader of the Congress party in the Madras Assembly, told Erskine, Madras Governor, that "*there was a real chance to get rid of the Civil Disobedience mentality for good, and that it would be a thousand pities if the chance was missed*".¹⁵⁸

The deferment in making the crucial decision or rather in announcing it, until the elections were over, was no doubt a clever tactical move, for it reduced the chances of the Congress losing the support of many Congress workers and of many voters who took the main slogan of wrecking the constitution seriously and voted for the policy to combat the new Act.

Gandhi's formula of conditional office acceptance, like the observance by the Congress of 1 April 1937, the day of the inauguration of the constitution, as a day of protest, was a kind of political tactic, a sop to the anti-imperialist political workers and people who had believed in the Congress leaders' strident rhetoric about wrecking the constitution. This face-saving device would "enable the would-be Congress ministers to satisfy their own followers without demanding from Provincial Governors specific assurances which they were debarred by the Constitution from giving".¹⁵⁹ The Working Committee's resolution was described by the Congressmen of Bombay as a "typical Gandhian move".¹⁶⁰ Perhaps it is already clear that Gandhi and his closest associates had decided in favour of office acceptance much earlier. A few more facts may be cited. Kasturbhai Lalbhai, the leading Gujarati business magnate, close to Gandhi and Patel, told members of the British Textile Mission to India in December 1935 that he thought "Congress would take office and rule in the provinces". Before adopting the conditional office acceptance resolution, the Working Committee had already formulated a legislative programme "which assumes that Congressmen will form Ministries and settle down to work the constitution for a number of years".¹⁶¹

Interestingly, when in 1935, Bhulabhai Desai, a Working Committee member and leader of the Congress party in the Central Legislative Assembly, and S. Satyamurthi, the deputy leader, were lashing out in high-pitched rhetoric at the Report of the Joint Parliamentary Committee, the Law Member of the Government of India said: "I again ask, what is the good of this heroic language of rejection – 'inconsistent with our self-respect and so on' – when we know perfectly well that this constitution is going to be worked?"¹⁶²

The Working Committee met from 5 to 9 July and decided in favour of office acceptance "even though the assurances asked for had not been forthcoming, either in form or in substance".¹⁶³

This issue, like all other important issues, was not referred to the AICC for decision, though a resolution moved at the AICC meeting held on 24 and 25 April 1935, by a CSP leader that the Congress should refuse to accept office, had been withdrawn on the assurance of the Congress President

Prasad that "no decision on the subject should be taken without consulting the House".¹⁶⁴

Madras governor Erskine described the Working Committee's decision as an "abject and unconditional surrender" to the British position.¹⁶⁵

Mahadev Desai wrote to Birla :

"Your jubilation...is shared by numerous people here [at Wardha]. The resolution is another personal triumph for Bapu. Jawahar and his friends of course behaved splendidly."

Desai also informed Birla: "When Jawahar came to Wardha three days before the W.C. [Working Committee meeting] Bapu's mind had been made up and I must say to the credit of Jawahar that he did not prove difficult to persuade." Gandhi too was highly appreciative of Nehru's readiness to co-operate and thought that it would "be most difficult to replace him [as Congress President] next year".¹⁶⁶ Nehru's *volte-face* was not unexpected: it had been anticipated by Birla and even by Linlithgow.

This interlude of conditional office acceptance, to be candid, was part of the Congress leaders' double-deal and double-speak. On the one hand, there were secret contacts and secret talks with the raj and promises of compliance with the raj's dictates, secretly communicated; on the other hand, there were brave resolutions and statements for the consumption of the people, breathing firm determination to wreck the "charter of slavery".

During this interlude Birla, as usual, played his part. In June he went to England as the government's non-official adviser in respect of Indo-British trade negotiations and saw Secretary of State Zetland, Halifax, Lothian and others. Birla was encouraged by Gandhi to pursue his mission. On 25 June Gandhi wrote to him that if Birla felt that his activity helped "the national cause", "Congress is bound to set its seal of approval on it".

Gandhi did not fail to compliment Birla for his contribution. On 18 July he wrote to Birla: "What you have been doing is good.... Good you will be. Good you remain."¹⁶⁷ Birla gave the benefit of his ideas and advice not only to Gandhi but to other leaders. As he wrote, "I always post one copy [of his letters to Gandhi] to Devdas [Gandhi's son and managing editor of Birla's *Hindustan Times*] in Delhi, one to Rajaji and one to my brother Rameshwarji who shows it to Sardar."¹⁶⁸

In an article "Congress Ministries" in *Harijan* of 17 July, Gandhi wrote that as a result of office acceptance, Englishmen and Indians would "now be thrown together as they never have been before... *If the Englishmen or Anglicized Indians can but see the Indian which is the Congress viewpoint, the battle is won by the Congress and complete independence will come to us without shedding a drop of blood....* In the prosecution by the Congress of its goal of complete independence, it [office acceptance] is a serious

attempt on the one hand to avoid a bloody revolution and on the other to avoid mass civil disobedience on a scale hitherto not attempted."¹⁶⁹ In other words, the contact with Congress ministers would improve the British rulers' understanding of *"the Congress viewpoint"* and persuade them to make a gift of *"complete independence"*, and no further struggle would be necessary.

It was along the road of constitutional co-operation and under the aegis of British imperialism that the Gandhis decided to proceed towards their goal of 'complete independence'. This was the road indicated by the raj for the Congress to travel along. Senior British officials expected that *"Congress would now become the controller of India's political forces under their aegis"* – *"a domesticated animal harnessed to the constitutional cart of which the British still held the reins"*.¹⁷⁰

In a speech on 28 July the Secretary of State welcomed the *"great change for the brighter in the outlook of the political situation in India – change of very profound significance"*. As Birla wrote, Gandhi's stocks in England rose very high: those who counted, the ruling classes, were very fond of him.¹⁷¹

The Congress leaders and the Birlas were anxious that they should attain the goal of self-government *"without plunging into catastrophe"*. There were indeed two roads before India, as pointed out by Irwin in 1929, by Viceroy-designate Linlithgow in 1935 and Secretary of State Zetland in 1937.¹⁷² One was the road of dependence on the British imperialist masters and close collaboration with them, which would lead to self-government within the imperialist framework; the other was the road of anti-imperialist revolution which would lead to freedom outside the imperialist orbit as well as to the elimination of feudalism and comprador capital – the main domestic props of colonial rule. The Congress leadership, which dreaded the revolutionary *"catastrophe"*, chose the former road. The decision *"to avoid a bloody revolution"*, even *"mass civil disobedience"*, was a consummation devoutly wished for by the British imperialists and the Indian comprador big bourgeoisie. In May 1937 Birla told the Viceroy's private secretary, George Laithwaite, that *"If once the Congress realizes the potentiality of constitutionalism"*, it would *"stick to it to the end"*. The Congress leaders would, no doubt, have stuck to it to the very end if World War II did not intervene. That is another story to be told later.

Early in 1937 G.D. Birla wrote to Winston Churchill: *"Let me assure you that Mr Gandhi and others of his way of thinking honestly wish to work the Constitution for the good of the people."*

The arch-imperialist replied on 30 April :

"The duty of the Indian electorate and Congress is to take up the

*great task which has been offered them, and show that they can make India a happier country, and at the same time do everything they can to win the confidence of Great Britain, and offer to her gratitude and loyalty...*¹⁷³

On 22 July, Birla called on Churchill. Immediately on seeing him, Churchill said: "Well, a big experiment has begun." When Birla replied, "yes, it has begun but it will require all your sympathy and good wishes", Churchill "assured me of it but all the same said, 'It depends entirely on you.... if you can make this experiment a success, you will reach your goal automatically.... *Play fair and we will play fair*'." While asking Birla to convey his greetings to Gandhi and wishing him all success, Churchill advised Birla not to "feel shy of fighting socialism". "Accumulation of wealth", said Churchill, "is a good thing...but of course capitalists have to be servants and not masters."¹⁷⁴ Gandhi would have only added that capitalists, besides being servants, should also be trustees for the welfare of the people.

It was, indeed, "a big experiment". Whatever the rhetoric, the acceptance of office meant that struggle, real or sham, by the Congress against the raj was a thing of the past. There began a period when the Congress leaders would be tested. If they 'played fair' according to the rules of the imperialist game, the raj too would 'play fair'. They would then be trusted with further doses of self-government – 'freedom would broaden down from precedent to precedent' – as Zetland, Lothian, Churchill and others were promising.¹⁷⁵ The prospect was alluring to the comprador big bourgeoisie. Like a true comprador, Birla hoped that "both sides will make mutual adjustments and perhaps it will be realized that there was a lot of good on both sides which was not appreciated so far". He expected the Britishers to take "a far-sighted view" and "help us to realize our goal".¹⁷⁶

Gandhi had full faith in Birla. In his letter of 25 August 1937 he asked Birla to "do what is in the interest of India *irrespective of the opinion of Congressmen*". He added: "Rest assured that the Congress will have to accept what is for the country's good"¹⁷⁷ – as conceived by the Birlas.

References and Notes

1. See CWG, XLIX, 10-1; LI, 146,205,413-5; LII, 38.
2. The India Conciliation Group was set up in England at Gandhi's behest in 1931 "to promote mutual understanding between Great Britain and India". Among the members were Carl Heath, Agatha Harrison, Horace Alexander and Lady Parmoor, step-mother of Sir Stafford Cripps. At a later stage Lady Cripps became its president and Sir Stafford, then a member of the British Cabinet, would sometimes meet the group (see R.J. Moore, *Churchill, Cripps, and India*, 4-5, 45-6, 58; R.J. Moore, *Escape from Empire*, 74; SWN, VII, 42, fn 9). Gandhi kept them informed of the trends within the Congress and used them as intermediaries to communicate with the British rulers. Their task, as Alexander put it, was to provide "a link between the people [i.e. the Congress leaders, especially Gandhi] and the Government" (See CWG, LXXXIII, 269) and to try to persuade the raj to conciliate the Congress leaders. Agatha Harrison, who was its secretary, was paid (CWG, LVIII, 333); others served voluntarily.
3. CWG, XLIX, 189 — emphasis added; also 235-6; L, 39, 45 and fn 1; LI, 154, 156; *passim*.
4. D.R. Mankekar, *op cit.*, 101.
5. Thakurdas to Birla, 4 July 1932, PT Papers, File 107, Part I. See also Markovits, *Indian Business and Nationalist Politics*, 81, 84.
6. PT Papers, File 132 — emphasis added.
7. Thakurdas to Birla, 4 July 1932, *ibid*, File 107, Part I.
8. Birla, *Bapu*, I, 172-3,178-82. Emphasis added.
9. Birla to Lothian, 4 and 14 May 1932, *ibid*, 187-92.
10. M.R. Jayakar, *The Story of My Life*, II, 126.
11. Birla to Mahadev Desai, 8 March 1940, in Birla, *Bapu*, IV, 30-1.
12. PT Papers, File 107, Part II.
13. Birla, *In the Shadow*, 246; also 1-2.
14. Birla to Secretary of State, 19 Jan. 1935, *Bapu*, II, 4-5.
15. Birla, *In the Shadow*, Foreword by R.Prasad, pp. V, VI. The *Rashtrapati* claimed that it had been his "privilege and joy to watch and observe this relation [between Birla and Gandhi] over a number of years. Because if he was intimate with Gandhiji, he was no less intimate with me", *ibid*, p vi.
16. PT Papers, File 107, Part I — emphasis added.
17. Birla to Thakurdas, 30 June and 2 July 1932, *ibid*, File 107, Part I.
18. Birla, *In the Shadow*, 55-6; *Bapu*, I, 298.
19. Kalipada Biswas, *Yukta Banglar Shes Adhyay*, 157.
20. "Last Words of Mohammed Ali", AICC Papers, File G-85/1931.
21. *The Congress Encyclopaedia*, X, 317, 320-1.
22. SWN, 2nd series, I, 427; also *ibid*, XV, 204-5; CWG, LXXXIV, 325.
23. SWN, XV, 204.
24. CWG, L, 469.
25. CWG, LI, 50, 62; Gandhi to Devdas Gandhi, 13 Sept. 1932; Gandhi's cable to Sapru, 16 Sept; statement to the press, 16 Sept.; *ibid*, 51-2, 60, 64.
26. D.G. Tendulkar, *Mahatma*, III, 203.
27. Birla, *In the Shadow*, 63; *Bapu*, I, 379; CWG, LI, 464-5.
28. SWN, V, 407-8,410 — emphasis added.
29. CWG, LI, 146; also *ibid*, 205, LII, 37-8.
30. *Ibid*, LXI, 336-7; Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi: The Last Phase*, II, 667; CWG, LV, 278-9.
31. Tendulkar, *op cit.*, III, 236.
32. CWG, LI, 264; see also *ibid*, 350; XXVI, 289,540; XXVII, 10,172-3; *passim*.
33. *Ibid*, LVII, 43-4,414; LI, 462.

34. B.R. Ambedkar, *What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables*, 196-7.
35. CWG, XX, 173; LV, 278; LXIV, 86-7; XLVI, 340.
36. Quoted in Eleanor Zelliot, "Congress and the Untouchables, 1917-1950", in R.Sisson and S.Wolpert (eds.), *Congress and Indian Nationalism*, 193.
37. CWG, LXIII, 32; see also LXII, 44-5.
38. *Ibid.*, XLIII, 265 — emphasis added.
39. *Ibid.*, XXIX, 335; LVI, 385,386; LXII, 37,64-5; *passim*.
40. CWG, LXXXIII, 239; see also LVI, 1-3,110-1; LXXXVII, 351; XC, 92-4.
41. See Eleanor Zelliot, *op cit.*, 183-4.
42. Gandhi here referred to the attacks of the Moplah peasants on Hindu landlords and moneylenders. See Vol. I of this book, 224-5.
43. CWG, XXI, 322.
44. Ram Gopal, *op cit.*, 195-6.
45. CWG, LXXIV, 18,35-6; LXII, 417; LXIII, 174,235,267; LXIV, 18-9,36-7; LXIII, 210.
46. *Ibid.*, LVI, 383-4.
47. Pandey, *op cit.*, 71,209.
48. Bose, *op cit.*, 258.
49. Quoted in D.A. Low, "'Civil Martial Law': The Government of India and the Civil Disobedience Movements, 1930-34", in Low (ed.), *op cit.*, 181; see Tendulkar, *op cit.*, III, 219.
50. Valia, "The Constitution for the Enslavement of the Indian People and the Policy of the Indian Bourgeoisie", *Communist International*, Vol.X, No.11, 15 June, 1933; reprinted in *Radical Periodicals in the United States, 1933*, p.389.
51. Birla to Hoare, 2 Nov. 1932, *Bapu*, I, 223.
52. CWG, LV, 74,76,77,106.
53. Bose, *op cit.*, 261,fn.2; CWG, LV, 157.
54. Frank Moraes, *Witness to an Era*, 33.
55. CWG, LV, 158-60.
56. Sitaramayya, *op cit.*, I, 560-1.
57. Bose, *op cit.*, 357.
58. SWN, V, 478-9 — emphasis added
59. CWG, LV, 446-8 — emphasis added.
60. *Ibid.*, 196-7,202.
61. SWN, V, 484 — emphasis added.
62. CWG, LV, 262,265-7 — emphasis added.
63. *Ibid.*, 264 and fn.3, 271 and fn.1; see also 281,301.
64. *Ibid.*, 275,295-6,301,450-1.
65. SWN, V, 489 — emphasis added.
66. *Ibid.*, 532, 538 — emphasis added; also 534-7.
67. *Ibid.*, 535; Gopal, *op cit.*, 180.
68. SWN, VI, 136 — emphasis added.
69. *Ibid.*, V, 527; Gopal, *op cit.*, 243.
70. CWG, LV, 303; LVI, 276.
71. *Ibid.*, LV, 373,376,392; LVI, 108.
72. *Ibid.*, 30,96,197-8.
73. *Ibid.*, LV, 469; Low, "'Civil Martial Law'...", *op cit.*, 186.
74. *Ibid.*, LVII, 152,185,272.
75. Low, "Civil Martial Law", *op cit.*, 182,183-4
76. Secretary of State to Anderson, 7 April 1933, cited in Tanika Sarkar, *op cit.*, 147.
77. Quoted in David Arnold, "The Politics of Coalescence", in Low (ed.), *op cit.*, 274.
78. CWG, LVII, 363; LVI, 167-8,459; LVII, 268,338,352-3.

79. See B.B. Misra, *The Indian Political Parties*, 300,302-3; Low, "Civil Martial Law", *op cit.*, 187.
80. *IAR*, 1934, I, 451-2.
81. See Judith Brown, *Gandhi and Civil Disobedience*, 359 — emphasis added.
82. See *CWG*, LVII, 348-50.
83. *SWN*, VI, 248,251. Emphasis added.
84. *CWG*, LVII, 338,352-3 and fn.1.2; 363.
85. *Ibid*, 407,413,425.
86. Birla, *Bapu*, I, 377; *CWG*, LVII, 413.
87. *Ibid*, 407.
88. See Low, "Civil Martial Law", *op cit.*, 187,189 -- emphasis added.
89. *Ibid*, 188; see Misra, *op cit.*, 283-4; *CWG*, LVIII, 8.
90. PT Papers, File 126, Part I.
91. Birla, *Bapu*, I, 366; see Misra, *op cit.*, 304-5.
92. *SWN*, VI, 259 and fn.38.
93. *CWG*, LVIII, 28,36-7,136-7,247-8.
94. See *CWG*, LVIII, 455 — emphasis added.
95. *Ibid*, 255-6 — emphasis added.
96. *SWN*, VI, 271-2.
97. Nehru, *A Bunch of Old Letters*, 112-7.
98. *Ibid*, 117-9; *CWG*, LVIII, 330.
99. See Rani Dhavan Shankardass, *Vallabhbhai Patel*, 128.
100. See *SWN*, VI, 330 n.96 — emphasis added.
101. Bombay Congress Bulletin, 10 Oct. 1932, PT Papers, File 101; *IAR*, 1932, II, 310-4; *CWG*, LI, 265 and fn.2.
102. C.H. Philips, 'Introduction', in Philips and Wainwright (eds.), *op cit.*, 35.
103. "Summary of Conversation between Mr Jinnah and Myself", Vallabhbhai Patel Papers; quoted in John Gallagher, *The Decline, Revival and Fall of the British Empire*, 194.
104. Rajendra Prasad, *Autobiography*, 400-2; Gallagher, *op cit.*, 196-8.
105. L.P. Sinha, *The Left-Wing in India (1919-47)*, 323.
106. M.R. Masani, *The Communist Party of India*, 54.
107. Ram Niwas Jaju, *G.D. Birla: A Biography*, 246; see also *CWG*, LIX, 191.
108. L.P. Sinha, *op cit.*, 322.
109. See *CWG*, LVIII, 27-9,36-7; Shankardass, *op cit.*, 118.
110. G. Safarov, "The Congress Socialist Party and the New Manoeuvres of the National Congress in India", *Communist International*, Vol.XI, No.22, Nov. 1934, in *Radical Periodicals*, 1934, 785.
111. See Sinha, *op cit.*, 350,352-5.
112. Birla to Rajendra Prasad, 12 July 1936, AICC Papers, G43 (KW)/1935, cited in Tomlinson, *The Indian National Congress and the Raj, 1929-1942*, 52; PT Papers, File 42, Part VI.
113. Jamnalal Bajaj (then acting Congress president) to Uma Nehru, 21 June 1934, AICC Papers G29/1934, cited in Tomlinson, *ibid*.
114. See Gopal, *op cit.*, 210.
115. *CWG*, LVIII, 371,403-4.
116. See Subodh Roy (ed.), *Communism in India: Unpublished Documents 1935-45*, 33; see also Shankardass, *op cit.*, 122-3.
117. *Times of India*, 4 Oct. 1934, cited in Shankardass, *ibid*, 119.
118. *CWG*, LIX, 3-12; also 174-83.
119. See Nehru, *An Autobiography*, 287n.; *CWG*, LIX, 23.
120. *CWG*, LXI, 385,406,411; LXVI, 285; LXII, 424-5,455,476.
121. Shankardass, *op cit.*, 126; Bose, *op cit.*, 306.
122. GOI, Home, Poll, File No.3/16 of 1934, cited in Gitasree Bandyopadhyay, *op cit.*, 310.

123. Birla, *Bapu*, III, 267.
124. *Harijan*, 30 March 1940, quoted in Pyarelal, *op cit.*, II, 667.
125. Birla to Gandhi's Secretary Mahadev Desai, 18 Dec. 1934, *Bapu*, I, 456; II, 9,14,17. Emphasis added.
126. *Ibid*, 10-14 — emphasis added.
127. *Ibid*, 20-2; CWG, LX, 116,227.
128. Willingdon to Zetland, 24 June 1935, quoted in Moore, *Endgames of Empire*, 63; see also Sitaramayya, *op cit.*, I, 604.
129. Birla, *In the Shadow*, 156; *Bapu*, II, 28-9,34,41; CWG, LX, 281,406. Emphasis added.
130. Birla, *Bapu*, II, 44-7 — emphasis added.
131. Birla, *In the Shadow*, 173; *Bapu*, II, 51-4,61.
132. *Ibid*, 67-75 — emphasis added. See also "Despatch to Gandhiji from London", 14 June 1935, *ibid*, 51-4.
133. CWG, LXI, 253-4,310; Birla, *Bapu*, II, 106,112 — emphasis added.
134. *Ibid*, 83-7,104-5,140,123 — emphasis added.
135. *Ibid*, 136,143.
136. Birla, *In the Shadow*, 176-9 — emphasis added where not otherwise mentioned.
137. Birla, *Bapu*, II, 91,122,123,131.
138. Reginald Coupland, *The Indian Problem 1833-1935*, 146.
139. Valia, "The Economic Crisis and the Policy of British Imperialism in India", *Communist International*, 15 May 1932, in *Radical Periodicals*, 1932, 285.
140. Birla, *In the Shadow*, 131; *Bapu*, III, 268.
141. Birla, *Bapu*, II, 140 — emphasis added.
142. Birla, *In the Shadow*, 181; CWG, LXI, 405, 424.
143. Birla, *Bapu*, II, 143,145,146,147,150,152. Emphasis added.
144. Mahadev Desai to Nehru, 6 Sept. 1935, JN Papers, Vol.No.17.
145. Gopal, *op cit.*, 137.
146. CWG LXXV, 224; LXVI, 285.
147. *The Congress Encyclopaedia*, XI, 116-8.
148. SWN, VII, 185 — emphasis added.
149. Gopal, *op cit.*, 205; *The Congress Encyclopaedia*, XI, 118.
150. PT Papers, File 177.
151. SWN, VII, 142 — emphasis added; also 149; VIII, 251.
152. *Leader* (Allahabad), 4 July and 9 July 1936, cited in B.R. Tomlinson, *The Indian National Congress and the Raj, 1929-42*, 60.
153. See D.G. Tendulkar, *op-cit.*, IV, 191.
154. Birla, *Bapu*, II, 261-5,265-7,270 — emphasis added; Gandhi to Birla, 7 Aug. 1936, CWG, LXIII, 204.
155. Birla, *Bapu*, II, 327-30 — emphasis added.
156. *The Congress Encyclopaedia*, XI, 253-4.
157. CWG, LXV, 118-9.
158. Gopal, *op cit.*, 219 — emphasis added.
159. Home (Pol.) File F4/16/37-Poll of 1937, 89; cited in Misra, *op cit.*, 326-7.
160. *Times of India*, 3 Mar. 1937; cited in Shankardass, *The First Congress Raj*, 35; see also 36,40.
161. See Markovits, *op cit.*, 105, fn.22; Shankardass, *The First Congress Raj*, 36. Shankardass quotes from Rafi Ahmed Kidwai's statement to the press, *Times of India*, 5 Mar. 1937.
162. Legislative Assembly Debates, Vol.I, No.10, 558; quoted in Sarat Bose to Satyamurthi, 1 Sept. 1935, *Advance* (Calcutta), 26 June 1936.
163. Minutes of the CWC meeting, Wardha, 5 to 9 July, 1937, AICC Papers, File 42/1936.

164. Minutes of the AICC meeting, Jubbulpur, 24 and 25 Apr. 1935, AICC Papers, File G31-1934 (Part I).
165. David Arnold, *op cit.*, 283.
166. Birla, *Bapu*, III, 6-7 — emphasis added; 9.14; CWG, LXV, 380.
167. Birla, *Bapu*, II, 373; III, 14-5 — emphasis added.
168. *Ibid*, 57.
169. CWG, LXV, 408 — emphasis added.
170. D.A. Low, "Introduction: The Climactic Years 1917-47", in Low (ed.) *op cit.*, 30; Arnold, *op cit.*, 281.
171. Birla, *Bapu*, III, 32-3, 13.
172. *Ibid*, II, 81; III, 32.
173. Birla, *In the Shadow*, 230-1 — emphasis added.
174. Birla, *Bapu*, III, 21-2 — emphasis added.
175. *Ibid*, II, 153; III, 6, 13, *passim*.
176. *Ibid*, 56.
177. CWG, LXVI, 71 — emphasis added.

CHAPTER FIVE

“PARTNERS IN THIS REPRESSION AND IN THE EXPLOITATION OF OUR PEOPLE”

The “Central Authority” and Congress Ministries

Out of the election battle of 1937 the Congress emerged with 711 out of 1,585 seats in the provincial assemblies, mainly from the ‘general’, that is, Hindu constituencies. It did badly in Muslim constituencies; contesting only 58 out of 485 Muslim seats, it obtained 26, about 17 of them from the NWFP. It did not win a single Muslim seat in eight out of eleven provinces.

The Muslim League, which organized its election machinery rather late, did not fare well; it won only 108 seats.

The Congress obtained an absolute majority in Madras, C.P., U.P., Bihar and Orissa and a near majority in Bombay. In July 1937 the interim ministries which had assumed office in April resigned and Congress ministries were formed in Bombay, Madras, U.P., Bihar, Orissa and C.P. By September 1938 the Congress assumed office either by itself or as part of coalition in the NWFP, Sind and Assam.

While permitting acceptance of office in the provinces where the Congress commanded a majority, the Working Committee warned that Congressmen in other provinces should not accept office. Again, at its meeting held in August 1937, the Committee stated that a minority Congress party in a provincial assembly could co-operate with other groups in the assembly without sacrificing Congress principles but warned against making commitments regarding the possible formation of a ministry to which the Congress was a party.¹ But opportunism triumphed while forming ministries in provinces like Sind and Assam. In Punjab, where the Unionist Party dominated by landlords – Muslim, Hindu and Sikh – was in office, the Congress, a negligible minority in the assembly, had no chance of forming a ministry. Bengal’s case was different. Of that, later.

The ultimate selection of Congress candidates for the elections was made by a Congress Parliamentary Sub-Committee with Patel as president. The sub-committee also supervised the election campaign. There were allegations that “candidates had been chosen in such a manner that only the right-wing had found their way into the list, and that the whole plan

was to find men who were rich, would endorse the constitution and accept office when the time came". This sub-committee with two other members – Prasad and Azad – had the task of guiding the flock of Congress ministers and all legislature parties. "The arrangement between the Congress ministries and the Parliamentary Sub-Committee", writes Shankardass, "was that the former had to do the bidding of the latter in everything.... The Parliamentary Sub-committee had the power to choose the cabinet in each Congress province."²

In an article on the Functions of the Working Committee in *Harijan* of 6 August 1938, Gandhi stated that the purpose of the Congress was "to fight the greatest imperialist power living". So, like an army, "*it ceases to be democratic. The central authority possesses plenary powers enabling it to impose and enforce discipline on the various units working under it. Provincial organizations and Provincial Parliamentary Boards are subject to the central authority.*" What was expected, he said, was "*unquestioned obedience*". This claim of "fighting the greatest imperialist power living" was a ploy to justify the dictatorial methods and practices of the Congress leaders. Gandhi added: "The Ministers are mere puppets so far as the real control is concerned." The CSP was not wrong when it accused the Working Committee of "assuming the role of a Fascist Grand Council".³

The choice of the leader of the Bombay Assembly Congress Party, who would be Bombay's Prime Minister, showed that truth and justice were casualties so far as "the central authority" was concerned. On 3 March 1937, before the AICC met and adopted the conditional office acceptance resolution, Patel had a meeting with K. M. Munshi, who was close to Gandhi and became Bombay's Home Minister, and discussed ministry-formation in Bombay. They decided to nominate B. G. Kher, Munshi's friend, for prime ministership. Unaware of this secret development, the Congress legislators from Maharashtra, the largest provincial contingent of the Bombay Assembly Congress Party, met informally and recommended the name of K. F. Nariman, the president of the Bombay PCC, as the leader of the party. When this news appeared in the press on 9 March, Patel manipulated the election of Kher as the leader at a meeting of the party.⁴ When this was known there was an outburst of resentment in Bombay. Summoned by the Working Committee, Nariman accused Patel of influencing the election while Patel claimed to be innocent. Gandhi himself took up cudgels on behalf of Patel. On 21 June he wrote to Patel: "It seems Nariman will fall into the pit he is digging himself." As usual, Nehru mounted the high horse of moral indignation, certified that Patel was blameless and shouted down Nariman at the meeting of the Working Committee. The Committee adopted disciplinary measures against Nariman, who resigned as president of the Bombay PCC. Azad wrote later: "We

all know that truth had been sacrificed in order to satisfy Sardar Patel's communal demands [Nariman was a Parsi]."⁵

Towards Pakistan

The ministry-formation led to a development which had far-reaching impact on the history of this sub-continent. In 1936 and 1937, until the formation of Congress ministries, Jinnah and the Muslim League leaders were strongly in favour of a close alliance with the Congress, and their statements, resolutions and approaches were quite conciliatory and friendly. As regards the goal and the means of achieving it, there were actually no differences between the Congress and the League. To quote S. Gopal, "the Congress no longer claimed to be a revolutionary organization and there was no difference on that score between it and the League." The social and economic programmes presented in their election manifestos in 1936 were quite similar.⁶

Before the election in 1937, the Congress did not expect to win a majority of seats in the U.P. legislature; the two parties co-operated with each other and there was a tacit understanding between them that they would form a coalition after the elections. Pattabhi Sitaramayya stated that in U.P. Congress and League leaders had even co-operated "in the selection of candidates". When, after the elections, the Congress leaders for reasons of their own did not immediately accept office, the leader of the League Assembly Party in Bombay, under Jinnah's instruction, rejected the Bombay Governor's invitation to form a ministry. A Leaguer who joined the interim ministry in U.P. was expelled from the League. When a Muslim constituency from which a Leaguer had been elected fell vacant, the U.P. Muslim League left the seat uncontested in favour of a Congress Muslim, Rafi Ahmed Kidwai. Jinnah and the League wanted what he called 'a united front' of Congress and League. In a press statement soon after the election, Jinnah affirmed that "nobody will welcome an honourable settlement between the Hindus and the Muslims more than I, and nobody will be more ready to help it", and he made a public appeal to Gandhi to take the lead. Jinnah declared that the League was willing to work with any other group or party in the legislatures on the basis of an agreed programme. It was prepared to fight for the country's freedom and wanted full self-government for its people.⁷

Jinnah wanted Congress-League coalition ministries, particularly in Bombay and U.P., where the Congress had set up very few candidates to contest from Muslim constituencies and was defeated in each of them. When the Congress "agreed to accept office", writes K. M. Munshi,

“Jinnah told me...that ‘we’ (Congress and the Muslim League) should work together. I promised to convey his wishes to Sardar [Patel] and Gandhiji, which I did. I understood at the time that Jinnah had a similar discussion with [B.G.] Kher.” Munshi says that Jinnah also formally approached Patel and Azad through Sir Cowasji Jehangir.⁸ But the Congress leaders wanted absorption, not alliance or ‘united front’: they insisted that the Muslim Leaguers must resign from the League, join the Congress and abide by its discipline in order to become ministers. Jinnah, writes Kanji Dwarkadas, “wanted to co-operate with the Congress Ministry but not by liquidating and sabotaging his own party”.⁹

Acknowledging Jinnah’s message through B.G. Kher, proposing a Congress-League coalition ministry in Bombay, Gandhi, in his letter of 22 May 1937 to Jinnah, pleaded utter helplessness as he saw “no daylight out of the impenetrable darkness and in such distress” he cried out “to God for light”.¹⁰ The prayer remained unanswered and Jinnah’s message was lost in that darkness.

In U.P., Nehru agreed to include two Muslim League MLAs in the Congress ministry provided the League dissolved the League Assembly Party and its members joined the Congress Party, accepting its programme, policy and discipline *in toto*, liquidated the U.P. Muslim League Parliamentary Board and promised not to put up League candidates in by-elections in future and so on – “pretty stringent conditions”, as Nehru himself described them. What the Nehrus wanted was not a coalition with the League but wholesale defection from the League – its peaceful, voluntary liquidation as the price for two ministerial posts. According to Nehru, when the U.P. League leaders “made an approach to the Congress” for formation of a coalition ministry, “They pointed out that last March their parliamentary board had offered co-operation to the U.P. Congress party on the basis of the ‘Wardha Programme’ as laid down by the [Congress] Working Committee, and were prepared to work under the discipline of the Congress Party”. U.P. League leader Khaliqzaman “agreed to all the conditions except two: the winding up of the parliamentary board and not to set up separate candidates at by-elections.... In effect, he pointed out, this might happen anyhow.” Nehru refused to “alter our previous conditions at all; if they were accepted *in toto* we would agree, not otherwise”. Khaliqzaman’s suggestion to defer the question for a few days was not accepted.¹¹

It appears that the Congress, which had been rejected by the Muslims in the elections in the whole of India except in the NWFP, was seeking to establish itself among them by buying over their elected representatives. Whether this move was ethical or not, it was the Congress leaders’ aspiration to become the sole heir to the British raj and monopolize power in a future

self-governing India that stood in the way of the formation of a coalition with the League even on the basis of a Congress programme. The result was disastrous for the people of India. K. M. Munshi, the Congress stalwart, called it "the beginning of the end of United India". This view was shared by many others including Azad, who laid the blame on Nehru.¹² But the policy was not Nehru's alone but that of the entire leadership.

This refusal of the Congress leaders to form a coalition with the League and share whatever little power the British raj had conceded convinced the Muslim leaders that they could not hope to enjoy a share of power in a unitary Indian State with an overwhelming Hindu majority, except as camp-followers of the Congress leaders. Later, Viceroy Wavell said: "Pakistan was the creation of the Congress, for it was the refusal to establish Coalition Governments in the Provinces that alarmed the Muslims and drove them to extremes." Thus V.P. Menon, who became India's Reforms Commissioner and afterwards Patel's right-hand man, wrote in July 1945:

"Thanks to the Congress policy of excluding all the other parties from the Provincial Executive, the minorities learnt that the majority in the legislature could set at nought the wishes of the minorities and that representation in the legislatures would not alone be a sufficient safeguard. This was the real motive power behind Jinnah's cry of Pakistan. Exclusion from a share in the power was the real foundation on which the present position of the Muslim League was built up."¹³

To equate the Western parliamentary system with the spurious one introduced by the British in India where conditions were entirely different, and to justify Congress refusal to form a coalition with any other party where the Congress was in a majority is quite wrong. Among other things, it may be noted that Congress Assembly parties and ministries did not function according to the principles of the parliamentary system in a bourgeois democratic country like Britain. Here the assembly parties and the ministries were responsible not to the assembly parties but to the High Command. Shankardass writes:

"Sometimes the ministers [of Bombay] found the constant supervision irksome, and they complained to the Governor, *who in most cases was their confidant* They did nevertheless accept the dictates of the High Command, for being out of favour with the High Command meant a speedy political death such as that brought upon Nariman."¹⁴

Secondly, and more importantly, separate electorates and reservation of seats for religious communities made majorities and minorities unchangeable, in the absence of a revolutionary party which was capable

of uniting the different communities. If the principle of majority rule was applied inflexibly, it would mean, as Ram Gopal put it, "on the benches of the ruling Party sat all Hindus [and a few members of the minority communities who had cast their lot with them] and on the opposition benches sat all Muslims; the peculiarity consisted in the fact that the opposition could never hope to replace the ruling Party."¹⁵ The reverse was true in a Muslim-majority province like Bengal.

Towards Dismemberment of Bengal

In Bengal the Congress had not contested a single Muslim seat in 1937. In the absence of a coalition with some other party on the basis of a programme, the Congress, which was identified as a party representing the Hindus, would always remain in the opposition and there would be a perpetual Muslim ministry dependent on European votes. This would, instead of bridging the communal divide, make it many times wider and communalism would vitiate the atmosphere. This was exactly what happened because of the policies pursued by the Congress high command, and laid the basis of the dismemberment of Bengal.

At its meeting in March 1937 the Working Committee "decided that any Congressman accepting office in any province where the Congress had failed to get the majority made himself liable to disciplinary action". In an interview to the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* on 10 July 1937, Nehru, then Congress president, said:

"The plain meaning of the Wardha resolution [of the CWC on 7 July] is that *only* the Congress parties with a majority in the provincial assemblies are entitled to form ministries from among their own members."

Meeting in August, the Working Committee heard Congress representatives from Bengal, Punjab and Sind, and warned the minority Congress parties in these provinces "against making commitments regarding the possible formation of a ministry to which the Congress is a party".¹⁶

In Bengal the Congress won 54 seats; the Tripura Krishak Samiti with 5 Muslim MLAs merged with the Congress; the total strength of the Congress increased to 60. Of the Muslim seats, 39 went to the League and 36 to the Krishak Praja Party (KPP), though the latter polled more votes than the former. Independent Muslims won 43 seats and many of them joined either the League or the KPP after the election. The strength of the League rose to 60 and that of the KPP to 59.

The KPP with a sprinkling of Hindu members was predominantly a

Muslim organization with a non-communal approach to political and social issues. It believed in the principles of liberal democracy and constitutional action, represented mainly *jotedar* interests, was widely popular among Muslim peasants, and had some influence on *Namashudra* (scheduled caste) peasants. Its election manifesto demanded, among other things, the abolition of zamindari without compensation, reduction of rent, relief to peasants from the burden of indebtedness, full autonomy for Bengal, repeal of all repressive laws, and release of all political prisoners.¹⁷ The "Aims and Objects and Programme" of the KPP included, besides other things, "immediate steps for the fixing of a minimum price of raw jute" – Bengal's main commercial crop. This item and full autonomy for Bengal were distasteful to the Calcutta-based big compradors, particularly the Marwaris, with whose agents the jute centres in Bengal were honeycombed. To them it was a very profitable pastime to depress the price of raw jute.¹⁸

The task of reviving the Muslim League in Bengal was entrusted by Jinnah in 1936 to up-country Calcutta-based Muslim compradors like the Ispahanis, the Siddiquis and the Adamjis. Jinnah wooed Fazlul Huq, the leader of the KPP, but the talks broke down on the issues like the abolition of zamindari without compensation, the KPP's right to maintain its separate identity, and its right to contest general (that is, Hindu) seats, to which Jinnah refused to agree. Fazlul Huq accused the non-Bengali Muslim businessmen of Calcutta of seeking to dominate the destiny of the Bengali Muslims.¹⁹

In a statement to the press, Fazlul Huq said that "all talks of Muslim unity and solidarity" were "worse than useless", for more than 90 percent of Bengali Muslims were cultivators on whose labour the others feasted and that there was "no difference whatever between the Hindus and Mussalmans, for their interests are welded into one another, together they stand and together, we are confident, they shall triumph".²⁰

During the election battle, the Congress lent its support to the KPP. To quote Ayesha Jalal,

"The Congress and the Krishak Praja had an unwritten agreement not to poach on each other's territory, and this worked to the electoral advantage of both."

Speaking of Fazlul Huq in a postscript to his *Autobiography*, added in 1941, Nehru stated that "even in organizing this party [KPP], he expressed his friendliness to the Congress. I remember his coming to see me, during a visit of mine to Calcutta prior to the elections, and telling me that he and his party were wholeheartedly for the Congress."²¹

Negotiations started between the Bengal Congress and the KPP for a

coalition between the two parties, the prospects of which seemed bright. Many unattached MLAs were willing to support the Congress if it formed a ministry in coalition with the KPP. According to Abul Mansur Ahmed, the talks failed because the Bengal Congress refused to agree to his proposal to give precedence to the amendment to the Tenancy Act and the passing of a Moneylenders' Act over the release of political prisoners. The real reasons were different, of which Mansur might have been unaware.

To quote Gallagher,

"for a while, members of all the factions, such as J. C. Gupta, B. C. Roy, Sarat Bose and T. C. Goswami, could hope to take office in alliance with the Muslim-Namasudra party of Fazlul Haq (Nalinaksha Sanyal to Nehru, 20 February 1937; File E5/840 of 1937, AICC Papers). But the Working Committee would not hear of it (F.N. 144, AICC Papers Nehru directed that in Bengal the Congress should not negotiate for membership of any coalition.) 'The Praja Party members headed by Maulavi Fazlul Huq begged of the Congress members to form a coalition with them.... Due to Congress decision we were unable to accede to their request'. (J. C. Gupta to Jawaharlal Nehru, 14 Aug. 1937, File P 5/868 of 1937, AICC Papers)."

Humayun Kabir, a leading member of the KPP at the time, afterwards its general secretary and, still later, in the sixties, a minister of the Indian government, regretted that

*"In Bengal Mr. Fazlul Huq pleaded and pleaded in vain for active co-operation or even tacit support. Forced into the arms of the Muslim League, he did perhaps more than anybody else in India to restore the prestige of the League and win for it support among the masses of the land."*²²

Nalini Sarkar, close to Birla, served as the link between the KPP and the Muslim League and in his house the League-KPP alliance was formed. He became the Finance Minister in the League-KPP Coalition Ministry and, though expelled from the Congress, his cordial relations with Gandhi remained unimpaired.

The ministry was formed with Fazlul Huq as the Prime Minister, but six out of eleven ministers were zamindars. The KPP's programme of abolition of zamindari and the fixation of a minimum price for raw jute, on which the lives of millions of Bengali peasants depended, had to be shelved. Big up-country Muslim compradors such as the Ispahanis and Adamjis, like their Hindu counterparts, the Birlas, came to play a key role in Bengal's politics. The ministry became dependent also on the support of the British expatriate capitalists. To quote Omkar Goswami,

‘Not only did half a dozen ministers (including Nalini Sarkar, Nazimuddin and H. S. Suhrawardy) depend on jute mill interests in varying degrees but the Government’s very existence depended on support from the European group in the Legislative Assembly, for which any price was worth paying. In fact, the degree of patronage was strong enough for Benthall to remark, ‘What a powerful position we have with the Government.... In fact, if we work things rightly I believe they would adopt any policy that we liked to press on them’.’²³

There were revolts within the KPP. Throughout 1938 there were attempts to form a coalition between the Congress, the KPP rebels and some others. Congress leaders of Bengal and rebel KPP leaders pleaded and pleaded in vain for the high command’s permission. But Gandhi and the Congress Working Committee would not be persuaded. On 18 March 1938, 20 MLAs and MLCs of the KPP met Gandhi and intimated to him ‘‘their desire to see the political situation in Bengal changed and their readiness to work in co-operation with the Congress Party in the legislature if the administration of the Province was run on purely national lines and on an economic basis’’. Gandhi refused to ‘‘be drawn into local politics’’. It was reported in the press on 5 April that the leaders of the Independent Praja Party (a breakaway group from the KPP), the KPP (another breakaway group led by the former general secretary of the united KPP, Shamsuddin Ahmed), and the Scheduled Caste Party had an interview with Subhas Bose, then Congress president. A written statement proposing a coalition was submitted to the Congress Working Committee, and Shamsuddin Ahmed and two comrades of his met the Committee on invitation. On the same day Birla and Nalini Sarkar had ‘‘another interview’’ with Gandhi. The Committee rejected the proposal.²⁴

Nirad C. Chaudhuri, who was Sarat Bose’s private secretary and who also handled much of Subhas’s correspondence, wrote that ‘‘the Congress high command, more especially Mahatma Gandhi, strongly opposed this move’’ at different times from the autumn of 1937 to break up the League-Huq alliance and to form a Congress-KPP coalition.²⁵

When Subhas made another attempt in October 1938, Gandhi at first gave his approval. But Birla, Azad and Nalini Sarkar saw him at his *ashram* and he changed his mind. Withdrawing his consent in a letter of 18 December to Subhas marked ‘‘strictly confidential’’, Gandhi wrote that ‘‘the best way of securing comparative purity of administration and continuity of a settled programme and policy would be to aim at having all the reforms that we desire carried out by the present ministry’’. He advised Subhas that the ministry’s proposed amendment to introduce separate electorates in place of joint electorate for Calcutta Corporation elections should be supported. The Calcutta municipal amendment bill was intended

to serve the interests of the Ispahanis and Siddiquis, who controlled the Calcutta District Muslim League, and of British expatriate capitalists.

Later, Nirad Chaudhuri told Leonard Gordon that "Bose felt that... G. D. Birla was interfering. Bose was said to feel that *Birla feared Hindu-Muslim unity in Bengal because this would adversely affect Marwari economic domination of Calcutta....* In Mr Chaudhuri's opinion, Gandhi acted knowingly in the Marwari interest because he was against Bose personally and against Bengali interests (other than those of his men in Bengal)." ²⁶

A copy of Gandhi's letter was sent to Birla as copies of all such letters were. Writing to Gandhi's secretary Pyarelal on 25 December, Birla said:

"Please inform Bapu that *at the request of Nalini I gave him also a copy of Bapu's letter to Subhas.* Of course, I told him to treat it as *strictly confidential* and he promised to do so. *He told me that he might have to show that copy in confidence to Lord Brabourne...* and I left the matter to his discretion." ²⁷

The handing over of a copy of Gandhi's "*strictly confidential*" letter addressed to Congress president Subhas on a very serious issue to Nalini, which Nalini "in his discretion" might show to Bengal Governor Brabourne, is quite revealing. Like many such facts, it points to the Gandhi-Birla-British raj nexus. Though Birla was the main conduit, there were many others of the type.

Interestingly, Nehru, who was the best defender of Congress ministries, criticized Subhas's move to form a coalition ministry in Bengal as "a rightist step". In reply to Nehru's charge, Subhas wrote :

"If you scrap the policy of office acceptance for the whole country, I shall welcome it.... the proposal of a Coalition Ministry arises because the active struggle for Purna Swaraj has been suspended. Resume this struggle tomorrow and all talk of a Coalition Ministry will vanish into thin air." ²⁸

Subhas held that under the circumstances a Congress-KPP coalition ministry was necessary to stop the spread of communalism in Bengal.

The Congress leaders' ban on the Bengal Congress Assembly Party's coalition with the KPP proved ominous for Bengal. It resulted in two things, both pernicious. First, it drove many of the secular-minded and progressive Muslims into the arms of communal and reactionary Muslim leaders. The KPP gradually disintegrated. Fazlul Huq became the president of the Bengal Muslim League and a member of the Working Committee of the AIML and provided the League with a mass base in Bengal. Second,

it forced the Hindus represented by the Congress to remain in permanent opposition to a Muslim alliance, which formed the government. This gave rise to the politics of confrontation between the two major communities in place of confrontation between the people and British imperialism. As Ram Gopal put it, the Huq-League alliance "was an event of outstanding importance. A Congress-Praja Party coalition would have put itself on a road to Hindu-Muslim understanding; the Praja Party's merger with the League made the Ministry almost wholly communal and gave communalism a foothold to expand." So did the KPP leader Mansur lament that Bengal's politics, if not India's, would have assumed a different character if the Congress had co-operated with the Praja Party.²⁹ It may be noted that a ban of this kind was not imposed in Sind or Assam, where the Congress Assembly Parties were in the minority.

During this time Birla was after partitioning India and dismembering Bengal and Punjab on a religious basis. On 11 January 1938, more than two years before the Muslim League demanded the partition of India on a religious basis, Birla had pleaded for it. In a letter of that date to Mahadev Desai, Gandhi's secretary, he wrote:

"I wonder why it should not be possible to have two Federations, one of Muslims and another of Hindus. The Muslim Federation may be composed of all the provinces or portions of the provinces which contain more than two-thirds Muslim population and the Indian states like Kashmir.... if anything is going to check our progress, it is the Hindu-Muslim question - not the Englishman, but our own internal quarrels."³⁰

Muslim leaders had dismissed Chowdhury Rehmat Ali's 'Pakistan' scheme, first proposed in 1933, as "chimerical". The Joint Parliamentary Committee was told by a Muslim delegation in 1934 that Pakistan was "a student's scheme which no responsible people had put forward". Several other schemes were proposed in the thirties, but most of them, like Mohammed Iqbal's in 1930, envisaged grouping of Muslim provinces in North-Western India within an Indian federation or confederation. But at the Sind Provincial League Conference, held in October 1938, Sir Abdulla Haroon, Chairman of the Reception Committee and a big comprador merchant, proposed in his speech the division of India into separate Hindu and Muslim federations and incorporated his proposal in a draft resolution. It is reported that Jinnah opposed this move and references to the division of India were dropped.³¹

In December 1939, Birla had only one solution to offer to Stafford Cripps: "*separate Hindu and Muslim nations*, with the cession of districts and appropriate population movements, followed, perhaps, by a loose federation holding the minimum powers necessary". But the League's

general secretary Liaquat Ali Khan proposed to Cripps three alternatives: partition; free sovereign states, with Hindu and Muslim federations, and a confederation; and Dominion status for each province with a federal government exercising such powers as the provinces chose to cede, subject to their right to opt out.³² More of this later.

The Sole Heir to the British Raj

As noted before, Gandhi began to insist in London in 1931 that the Congress represented all communities and all classes in India and was capable of delivering the goods, and wanted the British Government to settle the Indian problem with the Congress *alone*. The same message he sent to Lord Lothian on 20 January 1938. At a meeting of the Gandhi Seva Sangh on 25 March 1938 Gandhi said:

“There will be only one power in India with whom they [the British] can discuss matters, and that power will be the Congress.”

In *Harijan* of 6 August 1938 Gandhi wrote that “the Governors must recognize the Congress as *the one national organization that is bound some day or other to replace the British Government*”.

Gandhi stated in *Harijan* of 3 December 1938:

“It is surely in their [the Princes'] interest to cultivate friendly relations with *an organization [Congress] which bids fair in the future, not very distant, to replace the Paramount Power, let me hope, by friendly arrangement.*”

In an interview in December 1938 with H. V. Hodson, Gandhi laid down the law that “*so far as the political programme is concerned*” there could exist no other party in India and that “For religious and social activity, of course, every community can have its separate organizations”.³³

If Gandhi could, he would not allow any other political party representing communities or classes to exist. This totalitarian claim was the same as that of the fascists of Europe.

Nehru did not lag behind. In May 1936 he said: “The Congress represents *all people and all views* in the country.” He continued to speak and write in the same vein.³⁴ He claimed that there were *only* “two forces” or “two parties” – the Congress and the British raj – and that “Intermediate groups, whatever virtue they may possess, fade out or line up with one of the principal forces”.³⁵

How reasonable was the Congress leaders' claim that the Congress

represented all classes and communities? The claim was a spurious one. First, representing as they did the interests of the big compradors, landlords and princes, they were hostile to the interests of the workers and peasants. Second, the claim that they represented all communities was disproved by facts. As noted before, the Congress won only 28 seats out of 485 Muslim seats in the whole of India in the elections to the provincial assemblies in 1937. Its influence on the scheduled castes was far from what the Congress leaders claimed. B. R. Ambedkar hurriedly knocked together an Independent Labour Party in Bombay a few months before the elections and his party won 13 out of 15 seats reserved for the scheduled castes in Bombay, though its resources were nothing compared with those of the Congress. According to Ambedkar, the seats won by the Congress with a majority of scheduled caste votes were only 38 out of 151 reserved for scheduled castes in India. He said that "the results of 1937 Election conclusively disprove the Congress claim to represent the Untouchables". The Congress organization itself was overwhelmingly Hindu. In 1936, out of 143 members of the AICC only six were Muslims – 3 from the NWFP, 1 from Bihar and 1 from U.P. and the sixth member, Abul Kalam Azad, sat in the committee as a former Congress president.³⁶

It appears that, rhetoric apart, the Congress leaders did not themselves hold that the Congress represented the entire Indian people. On 25 March 1938 Gandhi said to a Gandhi Seva Sangh meeting:

"Today, we have power neither over the Princes, nor over the zamindars, neither over the Muslims nor over the Sikhs."

Kripalani said: "As for the Muslims, their hatred of Congressmen exceeds their hatred of Hindus."

On 28 March Gandhi said that the Congress

"got many Muslims enrolled as members. But they had to be coaxed into becoming members. This is a kind of flattery, or you may call it a *politically motivated policy*. We maintained friendly relations [with the Muslims] merely from a practical point of view: it was like a businessman's practical policy".

At a meeting of the Congress Working Committee Nehru observed that "the Mussalmans had absolutely no trust in him [Gandhi] and considered him their enemy".

On 31 August 1937 Birla, the great benefactor of the Congress and Congress leaders, wrote to Gandhi:

“The Congress is without doubt a party enjoying mass support, but it is essentially a Hindu Party...”³⁷

Congress and Muslims

On 7 July 1939 Nehru wrote to Rajendra Prasad:

“there is more general ill will among the Muslim masses towards the Congress than there has been at any time in the past.”

The refusal to form coalition ministries in Congress-majority provinces, in U.P. and Bombay, in particular – as noted before – marked the turning point. Besides, there were other factors during 1937-1939, which deepened Muslim suspicion and distrust and inflamed communal passion. All these factors can be traced to one source: the obsessive desire of the Congress leaders to arrogate to themselves whatever power the British *raj* doled out and to become later the sole controller of India's destiny under the British aegis. That is why the Congress leaders spurned the hand of friendship extended by Jinnah and the League. While Gandhi did so shrewdly, Nehru was more arrogant. In November 1936, while claiming that “the Congress represents the nation”, Nehru declared at a public meeting:

“The other day I saw in the papers that Mr Jinnah said that the Muslim League candidates ‘may’ co-operate with the Congress in the legislatures. I thank Mr Jinnah for the offer. But I do not want ‘mays’ and ‘buts’. I want fighters. So far as we are concerned, we rely on Congressmen *alone* – Congress Hindus, Congress Muslims or Congress Sikhs. *So far as our fight for freedom is concerned, it is going to be carried on by the Indian National Congress and the Indian National Congress alone.*”³⁸

We know the kind of fight for freedom the Congress leaders were waging. The same attitude as expressed above was displayed in Nehru's many statements and speeches. He dismissed the League as a pro-imperialist organization.

Jinnah retorted:

“Does it lie in his [Nehru's] mouth to parade so much that he stands for complete independence of India, which when it suits him becomes the substance of independence?”

In March 1937 Jinnah said:

"I welcome an understanding in matters economic and political; but we cannot surrender, submerge or submit to the dictates or ukases of the High Command of the Congress which is developing into a totalitarian and authoritarian caucus, functioning under the name of the Working Committee and aspiring to the position of a Shadow Cabinet of a future Republic."³⁹

In September 1937 Nehru declared that there could be no compromise with the League. He discouraged all attempts to arrive at an understanding on the communal issue and rejected the importunities of friends like Dewan Chaman Lal, Hansraj and others who informed him and Gandhi after meeting Jinnah that Jinnah "is in a mood not only to discuss but to come to an agreement regarding the communal issue as well as other issues of graver import". Nehru found "nothing very much to discuss" with Jinnah and dissuaded Gandhi from meeting Jinnah.⁴⁰

Nehru accused Jinnah of exploiting "the name of God and religion in an election contest" and "rousing religious and communal passions in political matters". Interestingly, Nehru, Azad and the Congress were playing the same game in Nehru's home province. They too pressed into service eminent Muslim theologians and other religious men – Maulanas and Maulavis – for the purposes of electioneering and Muslim mass contact and did their best "to exploit the religious sentiments of the ignorant masses in every conceivable manner".⁴¹ And Gandhi's charisma among the Hindus depended on his making a superb cocktail of religion and politics.

Nehru strongly denied the existence of a communal problem and described it as a "bogus question". In 1937 he talked of an economic approach to rally the Muslim masses behind the Congress. A Muslim mass contact movement was launched by the Congress on Nehru's initiative. To change their economic conditions the Hindu and Muslim masses would have to launch common struggles against feudal landlordism and foreign and native capitalists. It would mean class war which the Congress leaders abhorred and tried by all means to crush. To quote D. A. Low, "By 1938, indeed, Congress leaders with the Nehru family well in the van, were actually opposing peasant movements." As rhetoric alone failed to win the hearts of the Muslim masses, the movement petered out after some initial success. The campaign achieved the opposite of what it sought. It frightened the League to go all out to extend and consolidate its base among the Muslim masses. Gyanendra Pandey writes:

"Its one perceptible consequence in U.P. was a further closing up of the ranks of Muslim politicians and another spurt of Hindu-Muslim rioting."⁴²

Addressing the Lucknow session of the League in October 1937,

Jinnah as president lashed out at the Congress:

“A great deal of capital is made as to phrases more for the consumption of the ignorant and illiterate masses. Various phrases are used such as Purna Swaraj, self-government, complete independence, responsible government, substance of independence and dominion status. There are some who talk of complete independence. But it is no use having complete independence on your lips and the Government of India Act of 1935 in your hands. Those who talk of complete independence the most, mean the least what it means....

“The present leadership of the Congress, especially during the last ten years, has been responsible for alienating the Mussalmans of India more and more. Wherever they are in a majority and wherever it suited them, they refused to co-operate with the Muslim League and demanded unconditional surrender and signing of their pledges.”

At the Lucknow session, the League declared as its goal “establishment in India of full independence in the form of a federation of free democratic States in which the rights and interests of the Mussalmans and other minorities are adequately and effectively safeguarded”. (The League variety of “full independence” was not different from that of the Congress – self-government within the British empire or commonwealth.) Between the Lucknow session and the March 1940 session at Lahore, which adopted the ‘Pakistan resolution’, the League membership shot up from a few thousand to well over half a million.⁴³ During this time Muslim business magnates, compradors like the Ispahanis, Adamjis and Haroons, came to play a more dominating role than before in shaping its policies.

The Lucknow session set the alarm bells ringing. Gandhi immediately wrote to Jinnah “out of an anguished heart”, describing his speech at Lucknow as “a declaration of war” and regretting that he had dispensed with Gandhi’s role as a bridge between the Congress and the League. Previously, Gandhi had been deaf to Jinnah’s entreaties to him to play that role. Instead of “fundamental differences”, Nehru too discovered “a very large measure of agreement between us, not only in regard to fundamentals, but even regarding many details”. He went on emphasizing that “The Muslim League stands for independence”.⁴⁴

Both Gandhi and Nehru started corresponding with Jinnah. From the beginning Nehru was evasive in his correspondence. He claimed ignorance of the differences between the two organizations and insisted that Jinnah should make a list of them before he would meet him. Jinnah wanted a meeting to discuss and resolve them, if possible, instead of his submitting first a list of them to Nehru. At Nehru’s insistence he reminded him of the “Fourteen Points”, which Nehru considered obsolete. Throughout the

long correspondence Nehru did not shake off his high and mighty attitude, his incorrigible vanity. In mid-April 1938, Nehru informed Jinnah that he could hardly meet him in April and May and would go abroad early in June. It was a mere battle of words for Nehru – no sincere attempt to resolve momentous issues affecting the people. The correspondence had the only effect of embittering the relations further.

Gandhi and Jinnah met, but Gandhi's attitude too hardly inspired enthusiasm. In a statement to the press, dated 22 April 1938, he said:

“...I am not approaching the forthcoming interview [with Jinnah] in any representative capacity. I have personally divested myself of any such.... I go as a lifelong worker in the cause of Hindu-Muslim unity.”⁴⁵

It was transparent to Jinnah and the League that this was the usual ploy of the supreme leader of the Congress to avoid making any commitments on behalf of his organization.

By that time Jinnah's position and the League's had hardened. They claimed that the negotiations could proceed on the basis of Congress recognition of the League as “the authoritative and representative organization of the Mussalmans of India”. Subhas Bose, then Congress president, also met Jinnah in mid-May. The negotiations foundered on the rock of the League's claim. In one of his letters to Subhas, dated 2 August 1938, Jinnah argued that the League's position as the representative organization of the Muslims had been accepted in 1916 while concluding the Congress-League Pact and till 1935 when Prasad-Jinnah talks took place. As Nehru questioned “the position – in fact the very existence – of the League”, the Executive Council found it necessary “to inform the Congress of the basis on which the negotiations between the two organizations could proceed”.⁴⁶

The Congress leaders' claim to be the sole spokesman of India was countered by the League's claim to be the sole spokesman of the Muslims of India.

The Congress ministries, too, contributed their share to the growth and spread of communalism. On 9 December 1939 Dr Syed Mahmud, who had himself been a minister in Bihar, wrote to Gandhi that the Congress had “failed to properly and efficiently govern” and was “full of provincialism, caste prejudices and revivalism”. The report of a Sub-Committee appointed by the Congress Working Committee stated :

“It is evidently true that all our Congressite Hindu friends became openly communal. They completely forgot their creed and became so much unconscious that their masks dropped off and they looked quite naked to the public eyes.”⁴⁷

The Muslims came to have several specific grievances. These were highlighted by two reports, the Pirpur Report published at the end of 1938 and the Shareef Report on Bihar. Muslim grievances centred around certain issues, besides several accusations which were not substantiated. The main issues were: the policy of the Congress ministries of encouraging Hindi at the expense of Urdu; introduction of the Wardha scheme of education; the prevention of cow-slaughter; 'Bande Mataram' as the national anthem; the use of the Congress flag as the national flag; and Gandhi worship.

The question of language became a burning issue during these years. The Hindu-Urdu controversy embittered communal relations in North and Central India, which had its impact throughout India.

The Marwari businessmen who spread all over India as the commercial agents of British capital and came to control together with the British much of the inland trade of India by the beginning of the twentieth century, set their hearts on foisting Hindi as a common language and the Devanagari script as the common script on the peoples of the whole of India to establish their hegemony over them. Language was to them and to their political spokesmen an indispensable means of fulfilling their commercial and political ambitions. Gandhi wrote that he had "seen in the course of my travels" in 1917 and earlier "that cow protection and Hindi propaganda had become the exclusive concern of the Marwaris". A Hindi Sahitya Sammelan and other organizations were founded and generously funded by Marwari big businessmen to popularize Hindi in different parts of India – the Bombay and Madras Presidencies, Bengal, Assam and elsewhere. The move was supported by the Gujarati big bourgeoisie. This cause of promoting Hindi as the all-India language was taken up by Gandhi and the Congress in right earnest. It was his life-long mission to make Hindi India's national language and grow and nurture the plant of 'Indian nationalism'.⁴⁸ The trend towards centralization appeared with Gandhi's advent on India's political stage. He presided over the first 'All India One Script and One Language Conference' at Lucknow in December 1916 and served as president of the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan for many years. Throughout his life it was his constant refrain that "it is your *dharma* to learn Hindi". Gandhi insisted that the different scripts such as Tamil, Bengali, Telugu should be abolished and that there should be only one script – Devanagari. The adoption of "one script for all the languages derived from Sanskrit and the Dravidian stock", he said, "*will help to solidify Hindu India...*"⁴⁹

In 1936 the Rashtrabhasa Prachar Samiti with Rajendra Prasad as president was set up by the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan for the propagation

of Hindi as the national language. As Prasad wrote, "its policy was laid down by Gandhiji" and the funds were contributed by "our industrialist friends..."

Gandhi insisted that Congress proceedings should be "conducted *exclusively* in Hindustani".⁵⁰

Faced with Muslim opposition, Nehru, while asserting that "Hindi or Hindustani is *certainly* the national language and it *ought to be*", conceded that there might be two scripts – Devnagari and Urdu-Sindhi. Gandhi endorsed Nehru's suggestions "in a general way" but wanted Devanagari as the only script for the entire sub-continent and the abolition of all other scripts.⁵¹

The Congress leader's language policy raised apprehensions among the Muslims and added fuel to the communal flames. To the Muslims it appeared to be an attempt to impose Hindu culture upon them. Lashing out at the Congress leaders at the Lucknow League session in October 1937, Jinnah denounced the policy seeking to impose Hindi as the national language of India. One of the factors that led to the partition of India on communal lines was the Congress leaders' determined bid to make Hindi the *Rastrabhasha* of India.⁵²

This policy of elevating Hindi to the status of the national language of India and having Devanagari as the only script eliminating all other scripts (the occasional suggestion of giving the Persian [Urdu] script an equal status was only a pious pronouncement) suited the interests of the Indian big bourgeoisie who were bent upon having a centralized, unitary state to dominate the Indian sub-continent. This policy was directed not only against the Urdu-speaking Muslims but also against the different nationalities of India.

The Wardha scheme of education, formulated under Gandhi's inspiration, also aroused the resentment of the Muslims. According to the Muslim League, the text-books prepared under this scheme "did not suit the Muslims' needs". The Congress policy again was to undermine the distinctive cultures of the different nationalities and to impose a uniformity in the realm of thought and culture through the educational system. The Wardha scheme upheld "the philosophy of non-violence – non-violence as a creed, to which pro-Congress Muslims also objected". As Gandhi said, *Ramdhun*, a kind of collective prayer to Ram, occupies an important place in this scheme of education.⁵³

Humayun Kabir mildly put it that

"The use of the criminal law [by Congress ministries] for the prevention of cow slaughter was a definite mistake for this was a real restriction of the civil liberties of a community."

The Muslim League also objected to the use of the Congress flag as the national flag and the *Bande Mataram* song with its Hindu religious imagery as the national anthem. Gandhi-veneration or worship was another cause of resentment. After replacing Dr Khare as Prime Minister of the Central Provinces and Berar, Pandit Ravi Shankar Shukla issued an order on 7 September 1938 making it obligatory to use the word 'Mahatma' before Gandhi's name *in all official papers*. A Muslim correspondent complained to Gandhi:

"Your title as Mahatma is officially recognized by a Government circular, your birthday declared as a holiday, and consequently the Local Board in Amraoti has issued orders to take your image in a procession and to worship your image."

At the Congress Working Committee meeting in April 1940, Syed Mahmud said :

"Gandhiji's reforms also meant more Hindu revival than anything else. In his scheme of reforms there was no place for Muslims. The Congress was also guided by the spirit of Hindu revival."⁵⁴

Congress, Congress Ministries and the Raj

One of the significant acts of the Congress Working Committee was to prune the Independence pledge first adopted in 1930. Early in January 1938, the Committee decided to drop from the pledge that portion which described the moral and material harm done to India by British imperialism.⁵⁵

"To my knowledge" wrote K.M.Munshi, the most powerful man in Bombay's Congress ministry, "no Congress Minister ever made any effort to combat the new Act..." On the contrary, in dealing with different issues like release of political prisoners, suppressing militant struggles and in creating a friendly non-violent atmosphere, the raj was receiving unstinted help from the Congress leaders. When Linlithgow expressed his anxiety as the released Kakori prisoners were feted by the people everywhere despite Congress leaders' disapproval, Birla assured him that U.P.'s Congress Prime Minister "Pant was fully conscious of his responsibility" and that "all the big leaders of the Gandhi Seva Sangh", an ostensibly non-political organization, "were strenuously working to fight out violence". A grateful Viceroy, as Mahadev Desai informed Birla, "felt that Bapu was an *asser*".⁵⁶ As Gandhi repeated many times on different occasions, a career of close co-operation between the British imperial masters and the Congress had started.

Meeting in August 1937, the Working Committee discussed the questions of the release of political prisoners, lifting of the ban on organizations connected with the CPI, etc., and Gandhi "thought that there should be no break with the Governors on this point"; Nehru agreed with Gandhi and that "was the general opinion of the Committee".

AICC members sought to move several resolutions at the meeting of the Committee at the end of October 1937, criticizing the Congress ministries for their failure to release all political prisoners and lift the ban prohibiting persons convicted of political offences from being employed in "local bodies and municipalities", for sending the C.I.D. to shadow Congress workers and to report "the meetings organized by Congress and other anti-imperialist organizations", for using repressive laws against political workers, even those which authorized detention without trial, etc. The Madras ministry was also criticized for the arrest of the Congress socialist leader Batliwala on a charge of sedition and his subsequent imprisonment for six months. Meeting at the same time, the Congress Working Committee "was of the view that so far as it was possible discussions on these topics be avoided in the AICC. It was also the Committee's opinion that instead of allowing the AICC to exercise control over the Ministries it would be better if this control was exercised by the Working Committee."⁵⁷

Nehru wrote to Gandhi that the Congress ministries "are adapting themselves far too much to the old order and trying to justify it".

And to G.B. Pant, he wrote: "the Congress ministries are tending to become counter-revolutionary."⁵⁸ Yet, in public, he was the best defender of the Congress ministries.

To quote Munshi again,

"During the time that the Congress Ministry was in office, my relations with Sir Roger Lumley, the Governor, had become friendly, and Sardar Patel used me as a conduit pipe for conveying or receiving informal suggestions between Gandhiji and the British Government."

S.Gopal says that B.G.Kher and Munshi provided the Viceroy and the Governor "full reports... of discussions and differences within the Congress" and this "encouraged Linlithgow to promote the restiveness of the Bombay ministry against central control". Munshi, "*more royalist than the king*", as R.M. Maxwell, Home Secretary, Government of India, observed, "asked a surprised Viceroy to put the C.I.D. of Bengal in touch with his own C.I.D. to deal with communists in and around Bombay". Munshi says that the Central Intelligence Department "often supplied me with confidential information outside the routine reports" and that the Director of Central Intelligence, "whenever he came to Bombay, discussed with me the general

situation regarding the Communist movement".⁵⁹

About Rajagopalachari, Prime Minister of Madras, S. Gopal writes that he

"ordered the police to shadow Congressmen, arrested Congress socialists, continued the ban on the Independence pledge and demanded security from a socialist journal.... He invoked the Criminal Law Amendment Act, which the Congress had sharply denounced in earlier years, against anti-Hindi pickets; strong action, he told Erskine, paid in India and the British had been far too weak during the civil disobedience campaigns. He intrigued with the Governor against his own party to prevent the formation of an Andhra Province, and when he took a month's leave requested the Governor to take over much of his work as he trusted Erskine more than any of his colleagues. He wished to recommend some of his supporters for knighthoods and other titles, and was 'out-Heroding Herod as defender of the rights of the Services'... 'In fact', summed up Erskine, a die-hard Tory himself, 'he is even too much of a Tory for me...'."⁶⁰

Munshi, Rajagopalachari and Congress ministers of their type derived their strength from Gandhi. When numerous complaints were made to Gandhi against Rajagopalachari, Gandhi was eloquent in praise of him and justified his actions.

Somewhat later, in 1941, Nehru paid this tribute to Rajagopalachari:

"Rajagopalachari was terribly keen on making Provincial Autonomy a success and *making it lead to Swaraj and Independence.*"

S. Gopal writes:

"Jawaharlal's attitude... was to stand up loyally for the ministries.... In the U.P. itself he assisted Pant in dealing with labour troubles in Kanpur, controlling the students and facing the criticism of the provincial Congress committee that Pant was becoming 'a second Chhatari'. So vigorous was his support that both Gandhi and the British toyed with the hope of his taking over from Pant as chief minister."⁶¹

Gandhi himself described the kind of "self-government" under the ministers as "a mockery" and the ministers as "toy ministers", "whether they wear the Congress label, the League label or any other".

How powerless these ministers were and how humiliating were their positions may be guessed from the following. Bihar's chief secretary issued a confidential circular to commissioners of divisions with the instruction that an order not bearing the signature either of a secretary, an

under-secretary or an assistant secretary to government should not be carried out.

It is not surprising that the Viceroy lavished praises on the Congress ministers. Linlithgow, pleased beyond measure at the performance of the Congress ministries, said to K.M. Munshi on the eve of World War II:

*"You cannot get away from me, and I cannot get away from you. The circumstances daily arising in India and the world render that impossible."*⁶²

Such were the firm bonds that tied the Congress leaders to the chariot of British imperialism.

Congress Ministries, the Peasantry and the Working Class

In a note to the members of the Working Committee, dated 24 November 1937, Nehru referred to "the increasing agitation in the Indian states from Kashmir to the south", "the unusual ferment among students" and the serious "labour situation". "Yet", he wrote, "the vital problem continues to be that of the peasantry.... All these indications point to a pre-revolutionary stage of a struggle.... There are only two ways of dealing with it: the way of repression, and the way of solving some at least of the problems which affect the masses and *thus controlling and disciplining the new forces that are growing everywhere.*"⁶³ The policy of Nehru the 'socialist' and the Congress was one of "controlling and disciplining the new forces" by introducing some palliatives where they could, so that the "pre-revolutionary stage" should not lead to the revolutionary stage.

From 1934 the workers were again on the march fighting against the wage-cuts resorted to by the millowners during the depression years, against rationalization, retrenchment and so on. The solidarity and militancy of the workers were causing alarm to the raj and the native exploiters. The All India Kisan Samiti, which was formed in December 1936 and adopted the Red Flag as its flag, had a membership of 6,00,000 by May 1938 and 8,00,000 by April 1939. Its programme included abolition of the zamindari system and ownership of all lands by the tillers. Peasant struggles were sweeping some parts of the country.

At Lucknow in April 1936 the Congress announced its intention to prepare a "full all-India agrarian programme" but deferred it. Even the Faizpur Congress in December did not adopt any such programme and refused to include the abolition of feudal landlordism as one of its tasks despite the stiff fight put up by the Kisan Sabha leaders like Swami

Sahajananda.

Gandhiji's support for feudal landlordism is well-known. In the course of a discussion with Bengal Congressmen, among whom was Subhas Bose, on 13 April 1938, Gandhi said :

"The difference between your view and mine is based on the question whether the zamindari system is to be mended or ended. I say it should be mended..."

Presiding at the U.P. Political Conference on 30 December 1938, Nehru declared :

"We are not opposed to the zamindars or taluqdars. The question is not of causing harm to anybody but of giving relief to poor tenants and of raising those who are fallen. There is no question of enmity towards anyone."⁶⁴

'Socialist' Nehru proposed to provide relief to poor tenants within the framework of the zamindari and the taluqdari system. With the same object in view, and to control and discipline the new forces, Congress ministries in Bombay, U.P. and Bihar introduced some tenancy legislations, carefully avoiding any of the basic agrarian issues: the ownership of land, the abolition of the zamindari system, serfdom, debt slavery, etc.

The Bombay tenancy bill granted the right of occupancy to a certain category of tenants who had held their lands continuously for six years. But, under the bill, the landlord could terminate the tenancy if he decided to use the land for some agricultural or non-agricultural purpose. A landlord could "personally" cultivate even thousands of acres with the help of servants or hired labour. The tenancy could also be terminated if the tenant failed to pay the rent (which was considered excessive by the revenue minister) by a specified date every year irrespective of whether crops had failed that year due to drought or not. This tenancy legislation actually opened the gate to mass eviction of tenants by landlords, as agrarian legislations introduced by Congress ministries in post-1947 India did.

The U.P. Tenancy Act apparently provided greater security to the tenants and lowered rents, but the actual effects were just the opposite. As Nehru belatedly admitted,

"There are some defects in the Tenancy Act which have escaped the notice of its framers [sic!].... But today authorities and zamindars are taking advantage of those defects in the law and are heartlessly ejecting tenants out of their holdings."

Referring to the Gorakhpur district, he wrote :

“...scores of thousands of peasants ... have suddenly been reduced to a state of utter insecurity. These peasants have been tilling their lands, sometimes for generations, but their names were not recorded in the patwari's papers. They paid a rent which was mutually agreed upon, but which was not recorded. Unfortunately, the new Tenancy Bill did not say anything about such tenants.”⁶⁵

Speaking of the land reform in Bihar, Rajendra Prasad claimed that it “was a solid achievement which, perhaps, no other province could boast of”. The amendments to the Tenancy Act, introduced by the Bihar ministry, were actually based on a Congress-zamindar agreement and offered some very minor concessions to the kisans. In the Bihar Legislative Assembly the Congress Prime Minister assured the zamindars “that it was not the policy of the Congress government to cause the least harm to them, who, he said, played an important part in the economic system of the country”.

The zamindar leader in the Bihar Legislative Assembly, C.P.N. Sinha, praised Bihar's Congress Government as “very reasonable” and stated that “some concessions were secured by zamindars in Bihar which no other Government would have allowed”.

And at the landholders' conference in December 1938, the Maharaja of Darbhanga, the biggest landlord of India, “urged the landlords to strengthen the Congress government and to co-operate with those who were trying to combat revolutionary methods and class war”.⁶⁶

Not unexpectedly, the kisans' reactions were somewhat different. Condemning the tenancy legislation, the All India Kisan Conference, meeting at Gaya on 9 and 10 April 1939, adopted a resolution stating that the Congress ministry of Bihar had “entered into an agreement with the reactionary zamindars, the allies of British imperialism”, betrayed the election manifesto of the Congress and sacrificed the interests of the kisans; that it had provided “a dangerous weapon...to the zamindars in the shape of facility to distrain the crops of the Kisans”, and refused to solve the problem of the restoration of the Bakasht lands [kisan lands occupied by landlords for arrears of rent] and to relieve the peasants of the “crushing burden of debts”. While the zamindars deprived the kisans of their lands, the Congress government pursued a repressive policy to crush the resistance of the kisans, implicated in criminal cases the kisans, kisan workers and even respected leaders like Rahul Sankrityayana.⁶⁷ Sankrityayana, a renowned scholar and linguist, who taught in universities in Sri Lanka and Leningrad, was handcuffed after arrest on a charge of theft with twenty volunteers and sentenced to six months' rigorous imprisonment.

In April 1938 Fazlul Huq, the Bengal Premier, said:

"In Bihar *salami* has been retained at 8 per cent which, in this non-Congress province of Bengal, has been abolished altogether. In Bihar the right of zamindars to realize rent through certificates still obtains, but here it has been done away with. Here in Bengal we have also stopped enhancement of rent for a period of ten years but in Bihar no such relief has been given to poor tenants".

In 1938 a widespread peasant movement raged in Bihar. The Congress ministry increasingly assumed "the weapons of the raj in order to contain the Kisan Sabha agitation", while the Congress committees waged war against the Kisan Sabha. Interestingly, 'socialist' Nehru had a hearty dislike for the Red Flag.⁶⁸

How did the Congress ministries befriend the working class, which was a victim of attacks by foreign and native capitalists?

When, in 1937, G.B. Pant reported to Patel on the serious situation in Kanpur, Patel wanted that workers and their leftist leaders should be curbed effectively. The U.P. government, of which Nehru's sister Vijayalaxmi Pandit was a member, resorted to repression to deal with the workers during the strikes of 1937 and 1938, arrested Congress socialists and other labour leaders and promulgated section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code. It also issued a circular calling for stringent action including the use of section 153A of the Indian Penal Code (denounced earlier by the Congress) in communal cases as well as "*cases in which class hatred... is preached* and in particular, to the kind of class hatred that is preached by communists and results in industrial strikes and trouble between employer and employed".⁶⁹ Nehru wanted to achieve the same result by other means. In Kanpur when there were retrenchments of workers by millowners, strikes and lock-outs, Nehru exhorted the workers not "to interfere with the smooth working of the mill or cause any obstruction". He advised them to remain peaceful and non-violent, for "government is very powerful and will put down violence by violence".

The Congress ministry in Madras, David Arnold has observed, was "less than sympathetic towards industrial labour and had several times used police violence against strikers or aligned itself firmly with the industrialists and managers". Respecting the wishes of the millowners, it

"decided to completely bury the Report of the Court of Enquiry into Labour Unrest in Coimbatore Mills. The report while severely indicting the millowners and squarely holding them responsible for the prevailing crisis in industry had also recommended reasonable increases in wages for all categories of operatives."

According to Mahadevan, the leading textile magnates were closely aligned with the Congress.⁷⁰

The working class in Bombay, the main seat of big comprador capital, was causing anxiety to the Patels. Almost immediately on assumption of office, Bombay's Home Minister Munshi started preparations for 'dealing effectively' with the workers and their radical leaders.

The ministry drafted the Bombay Trade Disputes Bill which amounted almost to banning strikes, made conciliation or arbitration compulsory prior to strike notice, and imposed a fine for going on an illegal strike, three months' imprisonment for instigating workers to an illegal strike and a maximum fine of Rs 500/- for obstructing a labour officer in the discharge of his duty. While encouraging employers' unions, the bill made extremely difficult, if not impossible, the formation of independent unions of the workers.

Writing from London, Nehru said that the bill was criticized by trade unionists in England as "going back on many of the things that the labour movement had fought for during the last 50 years or more". But he discreetly decided not to give his own opinion. Later, he wrote: "*On the whole the Act seems to be a good one...*" He criticized the rule it laid down for the registration of trade unions but added: "But as the Act is law now it is obviously undesirable to tinker about with it too much."⁷¹

When the bill was rushed through the Assembly without being even referred to a Select Committee, 90,000 workers of Bombay went on a protest strike. Thorough preparations had been made by the Congress government and the workers were lathi-charged and fired upon and several workers were killed. Massive protest demonstrations took place in Calcutta, Ahmedabad, Kanpur, Madras and so on.

The *mahatma*, who always decried revolutionary violence against the imperialists and the domestic oppressors, came out in justification of the counter-revolutionary violence against the workers. He wrote:

"so long as Congressmen are in office and they cannot discover peaceful ways and means of preserving order they are bound to make use of both [the police and the army]."

In his official history of the Congress Sitaramayya has noted that "under the very Congress Ministries" there was "instance after instance of firing by the Police and the Military", and speaking of South India, added that there was no justification for the firings at Cheerala, Chittivalasa and Mandasa.⁷²

When Bombay's seamen were on strike in December 1938, the Congress government not only refused "any kind of support to the strikers, but it

even adopted harsh repressive measures against them''. The Indian capitalists, writes Claude Markovits, felt

''reassured that a Congress Raj would be as effective as the British Raj, if not more so, in dealing with the working class.... Even British business expressed its satisfaction at the course of policy followed by the Congress ministry.''

And S.D. Punekar, a Research Officer of the Ministry of Labour, Government of India, observed that ''in some respects the Congress Government proved more reactionary than even the preceding bureaucratic Government''.

In a letter dated 24 January 1939, Grigg, Finance Member of the Viceroy's Council, said that Congress policy was ''controlled in the economic sphere by the Marwari and Gujarati millionaires''.⁷³

That the Congress raj would serve the big capitalists is not surprising. He who pays the piper is said to call the tune. In June 1942 Louis Fischer, the American journalist, asked Gandhi:

''Very highly placed Britishers had told me that Congress was in the hands of big business and that Gandhi was supported by the Bombay millowners who gave him as much money as he wanted. What truth is there in these assertions?''

Gandhi answered, ''Unfortunately, they are true'', though he claimed that ''the dependence of Congress on rich sponsors'' did not pervert its policy.

Pyarelal wrote:

''Raising of huge funds for his [Gandhi's] various political and non-political (constructive) activities brought Gandhiji into intimate contact with the moneyed and capitalist class.... Gandhiji...considered such association as essentially *a sign of non-violence*.'' ⁷⁴

Congress and States People's Struggles

The native states were a vast network of ''fortresses'' of British imperialism in India, and their rulers owed their existence to British arms. Human rights were non-existent there; the people lived in feudal bondage; and the princes were mostly a most depraved and despotic lot with nothing but the British paramount power to put any restraints on them.

There was a close nexus between them and the Indian big bourgeoisie. Much of the capital invested in Indian industries came from the princes

like Gwalior, Baroda, Mysore, Bhopal and Travancore. They were among the largest investors in industries promoted by Indian big capitalists, and extended to them many other facilities.

It was not the Congress policy to liquidate these outposts of imperialism but to preserve them with some facelift as a bulwark against democratic anti-colonial revolution.

The Nehru Committee Report of 1928 assured the princes that, in the event of their agreeing to join 'British India' in a federation, the future Government of India, as envisaged in the committee's 'model constitution', would honour their treaties with the East India Company and all subsequent treaties and that there was "no desire to override cherished privileges or sentiments" of the princes.⁷⁵

We may quote again what Gandhi declared at the Round Table Conference in 1931 :

"There is a States People's Conference and it is held back under my iron rule. I have been holding them back.... I have asked them to be satisfied with their present position."

At the conference he reassured the princes:

"Even up to now the Congress has endeavoured to serve the Princes of India by refraining from any interference in their domestic and internal affairs."

The Lucknow Congress in April 1936 adopted this formally as a principle despite the demands of the rank-and-file Congressmen and of the representatives of the states people that the Congress should lead the struggles for democracy in the native states.

The demands of the states people were modest: civil liberties, end of *begar* (corvée) and similar feudal obligations, and representative government. They wanted that 'princely India' should not be politically segregated from 'British India' and expected advice and help from the Congress in their struggles.

The policy of the Congress leaders, on the other hand, was not only a policy of non-intervention in the affairs of the native states but a policy of intervention where necessary on behalf of the princes and the raj, a policy of smothering all sparks and flames of struggle against the direct rule of the princes and the indirect rule of the imperial power. The Congress leaders wanted to make the princes their allies. Replying to an accusation that he was a friend of the capitalists, Patel said that for achieving freedom the help of capitalists, landlords as well as princes should be sought.⁷⁶

Throughout India, from the south to the north, there was an unprecedented awakening among the people of the native states in the years from 1937. In different states they had been setting up their own organizations – Praja Parishads, Praja Mandals or State Congresses, and the All India States People's Conference was formed in 1936. Demanding civil liberties and representative governments the people started the civil disobedience movement in some states. Mysore led the way in 1937. The struggle spread to Travancore, Hyderabad, the states in Central India, the Eastern Agency States in Orissa, Western India, Punjab states and to Jammu and Kashmir. Peaceful meetings and demonstrations were brutally broken up and often fired upon. Tens of thousands were jailed; thousands were killed or maimed; and other atrocities were common features. In the Punjab states and Kashmir, "satyagrahis were locked up in prison in hundreds and thousands". In a small Orissa state, Ranpur, the people, victims of "unprecedented repression and abhorrent reactionary methods", and infuriated by the killing of one of them by the British Assistant Agent to the Eastern Agency States, clubbed him to death, which was followed by a "policy of frightfulness". Besides the Congress Prime Minister and other Congress leaders of Orissa, Nehru, who had no word of condemnation for the atrocities committed on the people, came out in fierce denunciation of the people and described their act as a "crime".⁷⁷

On 26 April 1938 the police fired on a peaceful meeting in the Kolar district in Mysore, killing 32 persons and wounding 60, when the people defied the order banning the hoisting of the Congress flag and prohibiting meetings. Gandhi said in a press statement:

"We can never know with absolute certainty whether the firing was justified.... It must be a matter of opinion and opinions always have a knack of varying."

That is, according to the prophet of non-violence, this firing might be justified.

In the thirties, when an Indian 'federation', as envisaged by the British, became a strong possibility, and the struggles of the people became more and more defiant, the Congress leaders, particularly Gandhi, while recognizing the right of the princes, advised them to "read the writing on the wall" and grant some civil liberties and introduce some form of representative government. They wanted the princes to associate men of the upper stratum with their rule and become less barbarous. They wanted the native states to be represented in the proposed federal legislatures partly by the nominees of the princes and partly by the representatives of the upper stratum of their subjects⁷⁸ (as actually happened after the transfer

of power in 1947.) Thus, they hoped to dominate the Indian 'Federation' under the aegis of the colonial masters.

On 19 October 1937, when the Mysore government was pursuing a policy of ruthless repression of the people, Congress president Nehru wrote to Sir Mirza Ismail, dewan of Mysore:

"...it should be possible for Congressmen and state authorities, though differing from each other, to find some basis for mutual adjustment.... I realize fully that a government has to take action against certain forms of subversive activity.... I can assure you that I have every desire to avoid anything in the nature of conflict between the Congress and the Mysore state authorities."

Next day Nehru instructed the secretary of the Karnataka P.C.C. that

"direct action should therefore be avoided.... Our general policy should be to avoid a conflict with the state authorities..."

At a public meeting in Mysore on 9 May 1938, Patel admonished the Mysoreans :

*"You must remember that they are Indian States and not foreign States. The struggle for freedom under the aegis of the Indian National Congress is freedom for 350 million people including Indian States' people and Indian princes."*⁷⁹

Mysore raised a storm within the Congress. Despite all the efforts of the leaders including Nehru, who was presiding, the AICC meeting, held in October 1937, adopted a resolution, the notice of which had been given by 80 members and which a majority of members insisted on being taken up. The resolution protested against the ruthless policy of repression launched by the Mysore state and its suppression of civil rights and liberties and appealed to the people of the Indian states as well as of 'British' India to give all support to the people of Mysore in this struggle.

In an article Gandhi openly condemned the resolution. He found it very "offensive" and said that it was *ultra vires* of the resolution of non-interference adopted at the Lucknow Congress in 1936 and that it departed from truth.

Gandhi was so angry that in a note to Patel, dated 1 November, he asked Patel to resign from the Working Committee and said that he had suggested to others to do the same, leaving Nehru "completely free to have his own cabinet". "The reasons for resigning", he stated, "are obvious. The Mysore chapter and increasing differences of opinion..."⁸⁰

Nehru's line was essentially the same as Gandhi's: his only offence was that as president he failed to avoid permitting the taking up of the Mysore resolution at the AICC meeting in the face of the insistent demands of a majority of its members though he tried hard to do so. Later, he openly confessed that he disliked the resolution.⁸¹

Both Gandhi and Nehru kept on insisting that the movement must remain always non-violent whatever the provocation. Gandhi further refined his ideas of non-violence, for the new situation demanded a 'new technique'. Among the new ideas that he developed were :

1. Non-violence 'becomes a species of violence' when, 'instead of bringing about a change of heart in the adversary, it fills him with panic'.

2. Non-violent struggle may lead to greater repression and serve 'further to arouse the brute in those in power' instead of putting 'the brute in everyone to sleep'.

3. If suspension of civil disobedience results in an *accentuation of repression* (and this is what actually happened in many states), it itself becomes 'satyagraha in its ideal form'.⁸²

So Gandhi called a halt to civil disobedience in Mysore, Travancore, Talcher and Dhenkanal in Orissa, Jaipur, Rajkot and so on. He asked the states people to give up mass satyagraha for an indefinite period, 'open a way to honourable negotiation with the authorities', lower 'the pitch of the immediate demands', not to worry about the imprisoned satyagrahis, and to ply the spinning-wheel.⁸³

In the late thirties the Congress leaders found it unwise to leave the native states to the radical elements like the socialists and communists. Nehru, Patel, Gandhi, Jamnalal Bajaj, etc., decided to enter the field to 'control and discipline' the rebellious states people directly. Nehru was president of the All India States People's Conference from 1938 to 1946, when he was succeeded by Pattabhi Sitaramayya. Barbara Ramusack suggests that Nehru decided to claim the presidency of the AISPC because 'in 1938 both he and Gandhi wanted to prevent Bose from adding this organization to his power base'.⁸⁴

One of the most dramatic episodes was Gandhi's appearance on the political stage of Rajkot, a tiny state in Kathiawar, the land of his birth, where a movement for representative government had been going on. Patel had preceded him and concluded an agreement with the ruler (the Thakore Sahib). But at the dictate of the British Resident, Gibson, the Thakore Sahib refused to honour the agreement. Gandhi considered it '*insufferable that the Congress, which is today in alliance with the British Government, should be treated as an enemy...*' He gave an ultimatum to the ruler and when it had no effect he went on a fast 'purely in answer to the voice of God', and sought 'immediate intervention of the Paramount Power'.

After exchange of messages with the Viceroy, who suggested arbitration by the Chief Justice of India's Federal Court, Maurice Gwyer, Gandhi broke his fast and went to Delhi to see Linlithgow. Maurice Gwyer's award went in favour of Patel but the Rajkot chief raised some more points. Gandhi renounced the Gwyer award and made a "sporting offer" to the Thakore Saheb to nominate his committee over the composition of which there was dispute. When the chief refused the offer, Gandhi acknowledged his defeat, recognized his "error"; for his fast, though undertaken, as he said before, "purely in answer to the voice of God", had been "tainted with *himsa*", and he appealed to the chief and his advisers "to appease the people of Rajkot".⁸⁵

Rajkot served two purposes: first, it left the prince and the Paramount Power happy and the people confused and bewildered with their movement in a shambles; second, it diverted popular attention from Tripuri where another, much greater and more important, trial of strength was taking place. We shall deal with that in the next section.

Federation, Tripuri and After

On 1 November 1937 Gandhi wrote to Patel :

"I have observed that Subhas is not at all dependable. However, there is nobody but he who can be [the next] president."⁸⁶

Why, then, did Gandhi decide to nominate Subhas as Congress president for the Haripura session of the Congress due to meet in February 1938 ?

When the Government of India Act 1935 was published, Gandhi offered presidentship of the Congress to Nehru. Nehru's term as president was extended for one more year. He served Gandhi's purpose well. When his rhetoric humoured the left and kept it on the right rails, he co-operated fully with Gandhi to guide the Congress to work the provincial part of the GOI Act – and quite loyally, to the complete satisfaction of the Linlithgows.

While working the provincial part, the Congress leaders were loud in declaring their determination to combat the federal part of the constitution. And the radical elements within and without the Congress were assured of a confrontation between the raj and the Congress on this issue. True to his commitments to the raj, conveyed through Birla, Gandhi wanted quietly to get the Congress to work the federal part and negotiations went on in 1937 and 1938. He hoped to tame Subhas by making him Congress president and use him as he had used Nehru to neutralize all opposition to his move.

It appears from the correspondence between Birla and Gandhi or Gandhi's secretary Mahadev Desai that Birla was assiduously performing his task as a broker between the Viceroy and Gandhi. Birla told Linlithgow in December 1937 that "at the proper time Bapu would" propose a "constructive" solution within the framework of the GOI Act and appealed to him to have direct talks on the issue with Gandhi and Nehru before federation was imposed.

He also said that "Gandhi had personally cancelled a proposal that Congress Ministries should resign if federation was implemented.... According to Birla, however, the Mahatma would not oppose Federation because of his objection to the States' position.... Birla then said that Federation ought to be brought in without delay... while he [Gandhi] was alive, he could make it possible to secure Federation..." Linlithgow discussed the issue with Bhulabhai Desai. "Like Birla, he wanted Federation as soon as possible..." Early in 1938 Birla saw Linlithgow again. "He thought that Congress was moving towards acceptance of Federation. Gandhi was not overworried, said Birla, by the reservation of Defence and External Affairs to the Centre, but was concentrating on the method of choosing the States' representatives." In the course of the discussion Birla "suggested that the best course might be to let the Muslims have their Federation of the North-West".⁸⁷

Lord Lothian came and became Gandhi's guest at Sevagram for two days in January 1938. Gandhi gave him a note which proposed that the states peoples should be represented through election and assured the raj that "once the right status of the Congress is fully recognized the rest becomes easy". Some "formula" suggested by Gandhi was given by Lothian to Linlithgow.

Gandhi's letter of 4 April 1938 to the Viceroy is revealing. Gandhi wrote :

"May I simply send by wire to P.S.V. [Private Secretary to the Viceroy] the day of my arrival in Delhi without giving the sender's name?... Now about secrecy, I am bound to tell some of my friends what I am doing.... I shall of course see to it that nothing goes to the Press. The fewest possible persons will be told. I assume too that you refer to secrecy before we meet. Isn't secrecy impossible after we have met?"⁸⁸

Gandhi, who preached tirelessly his sermons asking the militant anti-imperialists to abjure secrecy, for secrecy stained the white radiance of his creed of non-violence and was morally repugnant, felt no compunction to plan and work in secret collusion with British imperialism.

So the process was being repeated – the process which had changed

wrecking the Act utterly to working the provincial part of it.

Besides Birla and Bhulabhai Desai, Agatha Harrison and Carl Heath were active. Nehru informed the Working Committee from Paris on 1 August 1938 that he had been informed that Bhulabhai had indicated in London that "if some minor changes were made the federation would be accepted". (Desai denied only to add one more instance of double-speak.) In a letter of 1 September to Kripalani and a note of 6 September to the Working Committee, Nehru wrote that Gandhi himself was sending "brief and cryptic letters to Lothian and Agatha Harrison about federation, etc.", which Lothian interpreted to mean that Gandhi was "prepared to accept federation, subject to some developments". Continuing, Nehru said that Gandhi "has hinted that under certain circumstances it might be possible to work a federation" and that thus "we might avoid conflict and strengthen ourselves if certain things were done". "These by themselves", Nehru added, "are not satisfactory *but the alternative of conflict will not be worthwhile at this stage if these things are done.*" So Nehru, too, wanted to avoid conflict and accept Federation, if a few conditions were satisfied.⁸⁹

Carl Heath, who was in constant and friendly touch with Lord Lothian and the Secretary of State, suggested to Gandhi that Gandhi, Nehru, Subhas Bose and other leaders should make a joint statement on the issue of Federation. Gandhi replied that it would not be "easy for the Congress leaders to make a statement offhand. *Whatever has to happen will happen as a result of negotiation between parties. Let this be made clear that there is no real difference between Jawaharlal and me.*"

As noted before, defence, external affairs and several other subjects, besides an overwhelmingly large part of federal finance would be under the control of the Governor-General under the GOI Act. As Tomlinson writes,

"Gandhi seemed readier to accept a compromise on these matters that the Viceroy would discuss them with his Council but retain control over them himself."⁹⁰

The main objection of Gandhi and his associates was over the nomination of the states' representatives to the federal legislatures by the princes, for they were afraid that in that case they would not be able to dominate the centre. They wanted the states to be represented partly by the princes and partly by the people, as Gandhi said to Guy Wint.

On 2 January 1939, the deputy leader of the Congress party in the Central Assembly, S. Satyamurthi, appealed to the Viceroy to hold consultations with Gandhi immediately and come to a settlement. He said that the changes which would satisfy them did not require amendment of the Act but could be effected through Orders-in-Council. He was afraid

that delay might strengthen the extremist elements in the Congress.

Sometime in April or May 1939, Lord Lothian wrote to Birla:

“It looks as if the Mahatma is gradually swinging Congress round to the policy he outlined to me when I went to stay with him at Segaon.”⁹¹

Subhas refused to toe Gandhi's line and took an unequivocal and uncompromising stand against Federation. Before his return to India, the president-elect, as Agatha Harrison informed Nehru, had talks with the Secretary of State, Halifax and others and “had been very frank with them and they were under no delusion as to the situation or to the determined front against federation”. On the eve of the Haripura Congress, Subhas issued a press statement :

“My term of office as the Congress President will be devoted to resist this unwanted federal scheme with all its undemocratic and anti-national features...”⁹²

True to his words, he carried on an extensive campaign against federation. When reports appeared in the British press about behind-the-scene negotiations between Congress leaders and the raj over Federation, Subhas issued a press statement on 9 July 1938. He said that he had already contradicted such a statement which appeared in the *Manchester Guardian* and that he could hardly believe that any influential Congress leader was negotiating for a compromise on this issue “behind the back of the Congress”. He regarded “any weakness shown by the Congress or any section thereof during this fateful hour in India's history” as amounting to “treachery of the first magnitude to the cause of India's freedom”. He declared that if the federal scheme was foisted on the Congress, “it will break the Congress” and that he would relieve himself of “the trammels of office” in order to put up “open, unmitigated and unrelenting opposition to the monstrous Federal scheme”. There were many who did not relish the statement.

Again, on 15 July Subhas issued another statement in which he stated that the resolution adopted at Haripura left “no room for equivocation”. While appealing to all to “sink our differences and present a united front to the British Government”, he warned that the acceptance of the federal scheme by a majority would “inevitably cause a split” within the Congress”.⁹³

At the AICC meeting in September 1938, the amendments to the Working Committee resolution on Federation, demanding preparations for a mass movement against it, were thrown out. Besides, the Working Committee's resolution on civil liberties warning radical Congressmen

against "acts of or incitements to violence", etc., drafted by Gandhi, was passed amid protests by 'leftists' including Congress socialists and Kisan Sabhaites, who staged a walk-out. Gandhi denounced the walk-out and affirmed that the Congress "has been since 1920 like an army in action having one will, one policy, one aim and exact discipline". He asked those who challenged his policies to leave the Congress and warned: "If chaos is to be prevented, proper measures must be taken in time."

Gandhi decided that Subhas must go. In reply to two letters from Patel's daughter Maniben, he wrote on 28 October:

"What is happening regarding Subhas Babu is not out of my mind... But father (Patel) was of the view that we should wait till Jawaharlal's arrival (from Europe), so I kept silent. There is bound to be some difficulty this time in electing the president."⁹⁴

Gandhi tried to win over all those who could be won over. He invited Jayaprakash Narayan through his wife Prabhavati to "spend some days with him". "I sincerely wish", he wrote, "that we should understand each other correctly."

Gandhi offered Congress presidency to Azad and, when he refused, suggested to Nehru that he might "try again" (for the third consecutive term) and in case he was unwilling, Pattabhi would be the best choice. When a Working Committee meeting in about mid-January 1939 was over and Subhas had left, Gandhi, Patel, Nehru, Azad, Bhulabhai Desai, Rajendra Prasad and Kripalani decided to set up Pattabhi Sitaramayya as the candidate, though they knew that several provinces had already sent their nominations in favour of Subhas's re-election.⁹⁵

When Subhas decided not to withdraw from the contest, Gandhi's close associates became indignant and Patel wired to Sarat Bose that Subhas's re-election would "be harmful to [the] country's cause". Then, at the instance of Gandhi, Patel, Prasad, Kripalani, Bajaj, Bhulabhai Desai, Shankarrao Deo and Doulatram issued a joint statement as members of the Working Committee, opposing Subhas's re-election on the plea that it would violate the Congress policy of not "re-electing the same President, except under very exceptional circumstances", and commended Sitaramayya to the Congress delegates for election. Gandhi had suggested that Nehru might sign the joint statement or issue an "independent statement", and Nehru preferred to issue an "independent statement" opposing Subhas's re-election.⁹⁶ The entire Congress high command was ranged against Subhas.

A bitter controversy raged. Subhas refuted the contention that re-election was contrary to Congress principles. He challenged the claim of a group within the Congress to "dictate the selection of the Congress

President every time" and asserted that "the delegates should have a free and unfettered choice". In reply to the statements of Gandhi's associates, including Nehru, which claimed that there was no difference within the Congress on the issue of Federation, he stated that "some influential Congress leaders have been advocating conditional acceptance of the Federal scheme in private and in public". He offered to withdraw in favour of "a genuine anti-federationist" like Narendra Dev of the CSP.

Subhas won the election that took place on 29 January with 1580 votes against Sitaramayya's 1377 though the high command had pooled all its resources to defeat him. Even in the previous years, before the Haripura Congress, "the Gandhian leaders wrote to their associates in the ministries and the Provincial Congress Committees asking them to ensure that dissident Congressmen were excluded as far as possible from election as delegates to the General Session and to the AICC".⁹⁷

The issue was: which would prove stronger in the contest – the forces of radical change seeking to overthrow imperialism and its domestic props or the forces which pursued a policy of constitutionalism and collaboration with imperialism to attain the goal of self-government within the imperialist framework? By electing Subhas as President, the former had thrown a challenge to the latter. Whether rightly or wrongly, Subhas had become in their eyes a symbol of change, a symbol of anti-colonial struggle.

Shankardass observes ;

"Bose came closest to destroying the hegemony of the Gandhiites and the latter had to resort to a change of rules to gain a victory over him.... ultimately, victory over the Gandhiites was well-nigh impossible, for, in addition to a vast and controlled organization, they had enormous control over vested interests which had been further strengthened by the power and patronage that accompanied their role as incumbents."

The odds against the forces seeking change were no doubt tremendous. But these forces were also inherently weak – ideologically, politically and organizationally. Ideologically, Gandhi and Gandhism as well as Nehru and his 'socialism' still cast a spell over a large section of them. Politically, they had no correct strategy of revolution and their links with the masses – the workers and peasants, who, if roused, politically awakened and organized, could effectively challenge the mighty forces ranged against them – were weak. They themselves lacked the confidence that they could lead a revolutionary struggle for freedom despite the opposition of the Congress stalwarts. Organizationally, they were disunited; suspicion and distrust and political rivalry divided them.

After the election Gandhi announced that Sitaramayya's defeat was his defeat – the defeat of the "principles and policy" he represented. While

magnanimously conceding that Subhas was "not an enemy of his country", he challenged those who sought change to implement their "policy and programme" and gave a veiled threat of a split within the Congress.⁹⁸ Both before and after the election Nehru did more, as Subhas said, than anybody else to harm the cause he represented. Nehru and others accused Subhas of casting "aspersions" on the other members of the Working Committee about carrying on negotiations with the raj for an eventual compromise on the Federation issue. They were fully aware that negotiations had been going on. Besides, Subhas had accused not all his colleagues on the Working Committee but "some leading members of the Congress". Now they all came out with an air of injured innocence to demolish the man who opposed their policy.

Gandhi, who pursued a policy of co-operation with the British imperialists, knew that there could be no co-operation with those who wanted to reverse this policy. In his letter of 5 February 1939 he informed Subhas that his associates would refuse to serve on the new Working Committee. Twelve of them – Patel, Prasad, Azad, etc., – submitted on 22 February a joint letter of resignation from the old committee. As usual, Nehru issued a separate statement which led people to believe that he had resigned.

Gandhi decided not to attend the Tripuri session due to meet in March and so informed Nehru on 3 February. As early as 27 January Mahadev had written to Birla that Gandhi would attend Tripuri if Pattabhi won but that he might not do so in case Subhas succeeded.⁹⁹ Gandhi left for Rajkot on 25 February.

Subhas had been seriously ill for some time but he went to Tripuri where he lay in bed. His opponents thought his illness a fake one and, refusing to trust even Reception Committee doctors who reported on his illness, had him examined by a panel of three doctors – Inspector General of Civil Hospitals, C.P. and Berar, Director of Public Health, C.P. and Berar, and Civil Surgeon, Jubbulpore. They were of opinion that it was "imperative for Sjt. Bose to take complete rest, both mental and physical".¹⁰⁰

In the course of his address to the session, the chairman of the Reception Committee, Seth Govind Das, affirmed:

"Our Congress organization can be compared and is similar to the Fascist Party of Italy, the Nazi Party of Germany... Mahatma Gandhi occupies the same position among Congressmen as that held by Mussolini among Fascists, Hitler among Nazis..."

Govind Vallabh Pant moved the following resolution, drafted by Patel and propagated as approved by Gandhi, who was then in Rajkot:

“The Congress declares its firm adherence to the fundamental policies of the Congress which have governed its programme in the past twenty years under the guidance of Mahatma Gandhi...”

While expressing confidence in the work of the Working Committee that functioned in the previous year, the resolution regretted “any aspersion cast against any of its members”. It further stated :

“the Congress regards it as imperative that the Congress executive should command his [Gandhi's] implicit confidence and requests the President to nominate the Working Committee in accordance with the wishes of Gandhiji.”

Replying to the debate on the resolution, which was no doubt *ultra vires* of the Congress constitution, Pant declared that

“wherever nations had progressed, they had done so under the leadership of one man. Germany had relied on Herr Hitler. Whether they agreed with Herr Hitler's methods or not, there was no gainsaying the fact that Germany had progressed under Herr Hitler.”¹⁰¹

The CSP delegates opposed the resolution at the meeting of the Subjects Committee but, under the influence of Nehru, remained neutral at the delegates' session, and the resolution was passed.

The conflict was over another significant issue – a closely related one. Since the Munich Pact in September 1938, Subhas had been carrying on an open propaganda throughout India in order to prepare the people for an anti-colonial struggle which should synchronize with the approaching war in Europe. He held that instead of waiting passively until Federation was imposed the Congress should present the British Government with the national demand for freedom and prepare for uniform and organized mass action to paralyse the machinery of the government if the demand was not met within a definite time. At his initiative the Bengal Provincial Conference, held in February 1939, adopted a resolution to this effect. At the Tripuri Congress Subhas proposed that the Congress “should immediately send an ultimatum to the British Government demanding independence within six months and should simultaneously prepare for a national struggle”. It was opposed by the high command and thrown out. Instead, a resolution on ‘national demands’, drafted by Nehru, was moved by Jayaprakash Narayan. It rejected the federal scheme and reiterated the desire to launch a struggle against it, if it was introduced. It did not state what the Congress would do, if the British delayed its inauguration or dropped this part of the constitution and continued with the 1919 Act as

regards the centre, as they actually did with the outbreak of World War II.

Subhas was caught in an unenviable situation. While the high command's resolution directed him to nominate the Working Committee according to the wishes of Gandhi, Gandhi refused to let him know his wishes because of his "thorough disapproval" of the resolution. Subhas wanted a composite Working Committee representing the largest number of Congressmen while Gandhi was emphatic that there could be no composite cabinet but a homogeneous Committee. Subhas requested him to nominate a committee according to his wishes but Gandhi insisted that Subhas should do the same, "fully representing your policy". The choice before Subhas was either to defy the Tripuri resolution, form a Committee of his own and split the Congress or to resign. Subhas chose the latter course and resigned at the April meeting of the AICC. The tactics were superb, however unconstitutional they might be. Linlithgow "admired the way Gandhiji had succeeded soon after the Rajkot affair in ousting Mr Subhas Chandra Bose from the second term as President of the Congress and getting Dr Rajendra Prasad elected in Bose's place".¹⁰²

The force desiring change, disorganized and lacking in self-confidence, panicked and retreated when the time for a showdown with the entrenched leadership came.

After resigning, Subhas formed the Forward Bloc, a party within the Congress. He stated:

"The three-fold task of the Bloc is Left-consolidation, winning over the majority in the Congress to our viewpoint and resumption of the national struggle in the name and with the united strength of the Congress."

In his statements and speeches Nehru went on decrying the Forward Bloc as an organization of opportunists and fascists. In a rejoinder, issued on 25 July, Subhas asked him to point out the opportunism or fascism in the Forward Bloc's programme and name those in the Forward Bloc who were opportunists or fascists. He said :

"I should rather label as opportunists those who would run with the hare and hunt with the hound - those who pose as leftists and act as rightists - those who talk in one way when they are inside a room and in quite a different way when they are outside.... Are those people to be called fascists who are fighting fascism within the Congress and without or should they be dubbed as fascists who support the present autocratic 'high command' either by openly joining the present homogeneous Working Committee or by secretly joining in their deliberations and drafting their resolutions?.... The line of opportunism is always the line of least resistance."

Under Bose's leadership the Left Consolidation Committee was set up in the middle of June with the C.S.P., the Communists, the Radical League of M.N.Roy and the Forward Bloc as its units.

The AICC meeting in Bombay towards the end of June adopted two resolutions prohibiting Congress members from taking part in *satyagraha* except with the permission of the respective provincial Congress committees and forbidding provincial committees to interfere in the work of ministries. In case of difference, the committees were asked to refer it to the Working Committee. The Left Consolidation Committee called for the observance of 9 July throughout India as the day of protest and demonstration against these measures. Rajendra Prasad, elected President in April, immediately proclaimed a ban on the demonstrations. Fearing disciplinary action, the Royists dissociated themselves from the move and the C.S.P. vacillated. Subhas went ahead with the decision of the Left Consolidation Committee. In August the Working Committee debarred Subhas from remaining president of the Bengal PCC and holding any elective post for three years. The resolution was drafted by Gandhi.¹⁰³ Disciplinary action was taken by the high command against Subhas for propagating views contrary to the resolutions of the AICC though it was the practice of some leaders and other prominent Congressmen to propagate their views or act in defiance of such resolutions. Soon the Bengal PCC, which remained loyal to Subhas, was dissolved and an ad hoc provincial committee was appointed by the Working Committee.

After September 1939 the leaders of the CSP were won over by Gandhi and Nehru; the party formally withdrew from the Left Consolidation Committee in October and the Communists in December. In the meantime World War II had broken out.

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CHAPTER SIX

THE CPI AND ITS ROLE IN THE THIRTIES (TILL THE OUTBREAK OF WORLD WAR II)

The arrests of March 1929 were a staggering blow to the CPI. With the leaders in the Meerut prison the party split into a few groups in different cities, among whom there was little co-ordination.

The Bombay group, which included S.V. Deshpande, B.T. Ranadive and Mrs Nambiar formed the 'Young Workers' League' and published the *Workers Weekly*. This group which controlled some big trade unions like the Girni Kamgar Union and the G.I.P. Railwaymen's Union, issued a call, against the opposition of non-communists, for a general strike of the textile workers from about the end of April in order to fight the offensive of the employers – rationalization, wage-cuts, intensified work, retrenchment, etc. Though the workers responded to the call, the strike, which lasted several weeks, eventually failed, for the problem before the millowners during those days of almost world-wide economic crisis was not how to produce but how to sell accumulated stocks. A few other strikes called by the communists in Bombay were also unsuccessful. Gradually, the communists lost control of the powerful trade unions like the Girni Kamgar Union and the G.I.P. Railwaymen's Union to the Royists and others. After his expulsion from the Comintern towards the end of 1929, M.N. Roy sent a few emissaries to India who started work in the trade unions before his arrival in December 1930. Bombay's small communist group broke up into two quarrelling factions, one led by Deshpande and the other by Ranadive.

In Bengal the communists continued to work under the banner of the Workers and Peasants Party for some time, brought out communist literature and led strikes in jute mills and other industrial strikes in 1929, some of which ended in partial victory. They tried to assist in the defence of the Meerut prisoners and maintain contact with the Communist International. Calcutta communists also were divided into groups. In 1931 Abdul Halim, Somnath Lahiri, Ranen Sen and a few others formed the 'Calcutta Committee of the Communist Party of India'. Factionalism outside was being encouraged by the communist prisoners in the Meerut jail, who themselves were divided into factions. They expelled Dange from the party for his anti-party activities. In 1931 Ranadive formed a party of his own – the Bolshevik Party.

At the Nagpur session of the AITUC, held towards the end of 1929, the communists, supported by other militant trade unionists, pushed through the Executive some resolutions of a radical nature like the resolutions boycotting the Royal Commission on Labour (the Whitley Commission), rejecting the proposal to send delegates to the International Labour Organization (ILO), affiliating the AITUC to the League Against Imperialism and the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat, rejecting the Nehru Report, etc. The trade union leaders like N.M. Joshi, B. Shiva Rao, V.V.Giri and Dewan Chaman Lal – many of whom were pro-British and some the millowners' men – left the AITUC to form the Indian Trade Union Federation. Deshpande became the general secretary of the AITUC and Subhas Bose its president. At about the middle of 1929, N.M. Joshi told Albert Thomas of the ILO that the 'Moscow influence' on the imagination of the workers was on the rise and that absolute priority should be given to measures to fight it out.¹

At the next congress of the AITUC, there was a further split. The communists lost to the Royists and their allies and left the organization to found the Red Trade Union Congress.

The years 1930 to 1932 witnessed an upsurge of struggles – the civil disobedience movement, the peasant struggles in various provinces of India, the uprising of the Sholapur workers who established their own regime for a few days, the heroic struggles of the people of the NWFP, the Chittagong uprising followed by death-defying struggles of national revolutionaries and so on.² But the communist leaders – the Ranadives and others – engaged in squabbles among themselves, remained aloof from the struggles of the people, from the Congress-led civil disobedience movement as well as the peasant struggles.

Previously, without losing their independence, without serving as an appendage of the Congress leadership, the communists had worked within the Congress. It is the communist delegates who moved or supported at successive Congress sessions in the twenties resolutions defining the Congress goal as independence outside the imperialist framework, only to be rejected by the Congress leadership in most of the years. When the first phase of civil disobedience opened in 1930, the communists tried in places to turn the struggle into a genuine anti-imperialist one and appealed to so-called leftist leaders like Nehru to support the move.³ But they met with opposition from the Congress machinery, which, in Bombay for instance, organized anti-communist campaigns among the industrial workers.⁴ The Congress opposition to their activities, the Congress leaders' real indifference (in spite of temporary spectacular moves by them)⁵ to the arrests of communists in March 1929 and so on convinced the communists that the Congress-sponsored civil disobedience was no better than a manoeuvre for

wresting not freedom but some minor concessions from the raj for themselves. Muzaffar Ahmad, one of the Meerut accused, has written that the Congress leaders communicated their advice to them through Jawaharlal that they should plead guilty to the charge of having conspired "to deprive the King-Emperor of his sovereignty" (instead of challenging that sovereignty itself) and escape with light punishment.⁶

Attempts were made by communists in late 1930 to hold an all-India conference of all genuine anti-imperialists and build an "Anti-Imperialist League" – the "Revolutionary Anti-Imperialist United Front of the Toiling Masses of India". The appeal convening the conference correctly said:

"Behind this [a revolutionary] mask the capitalist Congress leadership is pursuing unhampered its efforts to strike a bargain with imperialism."

But what was wrong was that the communists did not participate in the struggles the peasants, the workers and the petty bourgeoisie were waging.

An important document of this period was "Draft Platform of Action of the C.P. of India", which appeared in *Imprecor* (*International Press Correspondence*), organ of the Communist International (Comintern), in December 1930.

The document pointed out :

"An agrarian revolution against British capitalism and landlordism must be the basis for the revolutionary emancipation of India."

This bourgeois democratic revolution in India, which included the overthrow of British rule, could be led not by the bourgeoisie but by the working class. To fulfil this task it was immediately necessary to build a "united, mass, underground Communist Party". According to this document, the main domestic enemies of the Indian people were the native princes, the landlords and the native bourgeoisie. It stated:

"Linked up as it is with the system of landlordism and usury, and terrified at the thought of revolutionary insurrection by the toiling masses, the capitalist class has long ago betrayed the struggle for the independence of the country and the radical solution of the agrarian problem. Its present 'opposition' represents merely manoeuvres with British imperialism, calculated to swindle the mass of the toilers and at the same time to secure the best possible terms of compromise with the British robbers. The assistance granted to British imperialism by the capitalist class and its political organization, the National Congress, takes the shape at the present time of a consistent policy of compromise with British imperialism

at the expense of the people, it takes the form of the disorganization of the revolutionary struggle against the native States, the system of landlordism and the reinforced exploitation, jointly with the imperialists, of the mass of the people, of the working class in particular."

The "Draft" upheld the right of the nationalities of India to self-determination including the right to secede. One of the tasks of the CPI would be to fight "for the complete social, economic and legal equality of women". The CPI would also organize revolutionary work among the soldiers and ex-soldiers. The "Draft" asserted that "Only the ruthless abolition of the caste system in its reformed, Gandhi-ist variety, only the agrarian revolution and the violent overthrow of British rule, will lead to the complete, social, economic, cultural and legal emancipation of the working pariah and slaves" and called upon them to join the united revolutionary front. It sharply exposed Gandhism and its role in Indian politics.

This document, which made many correct formulations, was not free from left-sectarian weaknesses characteristic of the period. Among some of its weaknesses were its failure to comprehend that the colonial bourgeoisie was divided into two sections: comprador and national; its inability to distinguish between the genuine left wing and the pseudo-left wing (represented by leaders like Nehru) of the Congress; its failure to envisage that the liberation of India, a sub-continent where social, economic and political development was very uneven, could not be achieved through what it called "a general national armed insurrection".

The "Draft Platform" became the CPI's programme in the early thirties.

In "Manifesto on the Round Table Conference" published in February 1931 and "the Karachi Congress and the Struggle against Imperialism", a pamphlet distributed at the Karachi Congress in March, the CPI unmasked the treachery of the Congress leaders and issued calls to the rank and file of the Congress to desert it to "join a revolutionary anti-imperialist united front of Indian workers and peasants".

In July 1932 an "Open Letter to the Indian Communists" from the Central Committees of the Communist Parties of China, Great Britain and Germany regretted that "the Communist Party [of India] still consists of a small number (though the number is increasing) of weak groups, often isolated from the masses, disconnected with each other..." It upbraided the Indian communists for standing "aside from the mass movement against British imperialism". "A distinction", it said, "must be made between the bourgeois Congress leadership and those sections of the workers, peasants and revolutionary elements of the town petty-bourgeoisie, who, not

understanding the treacherous character of the Indian National Congress, followed it, correctly seeing the *basis* of their slavery in the domination of British imperialism". It advised the Indian communists to form an all-India party, break their isolation, lead the 'no-rent and no-tax' movement which the peasants themselves had been waging, organize the workers and other toiling people. "Communists", it said, "must *always* take part in them [reformist trade unions] and carry on work among the workers, urging them to join the united fighting front of the proletariat."'

Again, another "Open letter to the Indian Communists from the C.C. of the C.P. of China" appeared in *Imprecor* in November 1933. Like the earlier one, this, too, was quite a long one. It advised the Indian communists that "the chief and decisive question is the formation of a militant *mass Indian Communist Party*" (emphasis in the original). It said that while the "Indian bourgeoisie, which stopped the civil disobedience campaign and continues its capitulatory policy, clears the path for the rule of British imperialism" and when "ever wider sections of the toilers are turning their eyes towards the path of the revolutionary struggle against the imperialists and feudalists", "*the rapid formation of the Communist Party is the central task of the Indian revolution*" (emphasis in the original). Like the open letter from the Central Committees of the three parties, this letter also upheld the "Draft Platform of Action" of 1930 and affirmed that "the task of Communists is *to enter and take charge of all these democratic movements* (emphasis in the original), of all movements of discontent against the existing order, whatever questions cause them to arise, and to go everywhere with Communist agitation,...constantly explaining and showing in practice that the path of the national reformists is the path of defeat and slavery". While preserving the independent class character of the Communist Party, it should strive to "create the *united front of workers, peasants and urban petty-bourgeoisie* (emphasis in the original), utilize any temporary allies, carrying [on] the struggle for leadership of the national movement for independence, land and freedom". It said that it would be "wrong to counterpose the anti-imperialist to the strike struggle" of the workers, that it would be "necessary to conduct both at the same time.... Even while organizing political strikes it is necessary, along with anti-imperialist and other political slogans, to put forward economic demands which are close and vital for all the workers, including the most backward strata of the working class. It is necessary to begin serious work in the reformist trade unions and every kind of mass reformist organization, with the aim of winning over to our side the masses who are in these organizations." Continuing, it advised the Indian Communists to "develop the movement for the non-payment of rent and taxes", to "create peasant committees and committees of struggle, supporting and extending the partisan struggle. By

carrying out these tasks, it will not be difficult for you in the future to rouse the struggle of the peasant masses to a higher level, to the level of the agrarian and anti-imperialist revolution which will sweep away the rule of the hated British imperialism along with feudalism." Emphasizing the importance of a consistent exposure of the entire policy and action of the National Congress and the national reformists, who were eagerly waiting to work the new "feudal imperialist constitution" British imperialism would impose, it pointed out: "The victory of the Indian people will be impossible unless the masses are liberated from the influence and leadership of the national-reformists, unless an independent Communist Party is formed and leads the struggle of the entire people." Before it concluded, it said: "We are entering a new period of revolutions and wars."⁸

Another very important document of this period is "The General Statement of the Eighteen Communist Accused" before the Additional Sessions Judge, Meerut.⁹ This remarkable document, after clarifying the ideological position of the accused, dwelt on the stranglehold of British imperialism over India, gave an analysis of Indian society and problems, the conditions and roles of different classes, the ways of solving the problems, formulated the tasks of the Indian communists and so on. Despite its limitations, it is a major Marxist work that has appeared in India. Its main formulations about the stage of the Indian revolution, its character and the roles of the different classes in it, the character and role of Gandhism, the tasks of the communists, etc., are in the main correct. This document rightly points out:

"Only those sections of the population, chiefly the princes and the landlord class, and *those upper sections of the bourgeoisie and professional classes whose interests are closely bound up with the imperialist machine, which profit from the imperialist connection, must support Imperialism and can be considered definitely counter-revolutionary.*"¹⁰

It emphasized that "the agrarian revolution has been and remains the axis of the national revolution".^{10a}

The extremely severe sentences passed on the Meerut prisoners by the Sessions Court were reduced on appeal by the Allahabad High Court. Like Romain Rolland's denunciation¹¹, the savage sentences had invited world-wide condemnation and as Michael Brecher writes, "The sentences were reduced later under the pressure of the British Trade Union Congress and others".¹² The process of reorganization of the CPI was helped with the release of several Meerut prisoners. In December 1933 several communists including Gangadhar Adhikari, Patkar, P.C. Joshi and some comrades of Bengal, Punjab and the Central Provinces met in Calcutta and formed the 'nucleus' of the Provisional Central Committee of the CPI. Adhikari became

the temporary secretary. The meeting also adopted a political resolution and a new constitution.

The nucleus of the Provisional Central Committee tried to build up a united Communist Party and made arrangements to hold an all-India Party Convention. This convention, a more representative meeting, was held in March 1934. At this meeting a Draft of Political Thesis which was based on "The Draft Platform of Action" was adopted.¹³

The "Thesis" regretted the mistake committed during the Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930-1, when the communists had "objectively isolated themselves from the struggle of the masses" and resolved to correct this sectarian deviation. It said that while exposing the policies of the Congress leadership, including its left wing, the communists would "use the Congress platform and systematically combat the Congress reformism and its 'Left' varieties". It criticized the slogan of 'Constituent Assembly' under the British aegis, a slogan first raised by M.N. Roy and then taken up by Nehru and the Congress, as a "reformist slogan" intended to divert the people from the anti-imperialist struggle. Referring to the Harijan movement, it stated that "The problem of the untouchables, who are for the most part landless labourers and semi-serfs, cannot be radically solved until imperialism and landlordism and all remnants of feudalism are overthrown". It gave a call for building the Anti-Imperialist League - a "United anti-imperialist front under Proletarian Leadership". The "Thesis" wanted the communist cadres to combine "legal" and underground activities.

Later, in the same year, appeared "The Manifesto of the Anti-Imperialist Conference 1934". The "Manifesto" analysed the character of the Indian bourgeoisie having links with British capital as counter-revolutionary, denounced the Congress as "an organization of the Indian bourgeoisie and working in alliance with princes, landlords and zamindars", decried the slogan of a constituent assembly and urged the necessity of building an All-India Anti-Imperialist League.¹⁴

In "Problems of the Anti-Imperialist Struggle in India", which was published in *Imprecor* in March 1935, the CPI placed before the people a "minimum programme of the united front for the anti-imperialist struggle". The programme included, among others, "Complete and unconditional independence of India from Britain", "Refusal to participate in legislative councils and the cessation of all negotiations with British imperialism" and "Organization of the struggle of the masses against imperialism and against the imperialist sham constitution". One may remember that the White Paper, outlining "the imperialist sham constitution" of 1935 which the Congress leaders were preparing to work, had already been published. The document stated that the CPI "will develop inside the Congress

organizations a wide independent mobilization of the masses for the struggle against imperialism, and will constantly put into effect the tactics of the united front when organizing any anti-imperialist action". The document decried the Congress slogan of a constituent assembly as intended "to distract the attention of the masses from the struggle against the draft of the sham constitution brought forward by imperialist Britain".¹⁵

The "Draft of the Provisional Statutes of the C.P. of India (Section of the Communist International)" appeared in *Imprecor* on 16 May 1934.¹⁶ The politics that it upheld was the politics of the "Draft Platform of Action". This Party constitution insisted that the Party must be a strictly underground organization with its "central task to develop most widely mass work to establish its leadership in the mass revolutionary movements". Its aim was one of "combining the methods of underground work with semi-underground work and open work", and the Party should work in "all the mass organizations of the toilers, including the most reactionary organizations" seeking to win over the masses and isolate the reactionaries.

On the occasion of the Congress session in Bombay 1934, the CPI addressed an appeal to "the anti-imperialist rank and file of the Congress", entitled "Independence or Surrender?". It was a sharp criticism of Gandhi and the Congress leadership. The resolution that the AICC adopted at Patna in May 1934 against "a background of ruthless imperialist horror", the appeal said, "completely demonstrates the hypocrisy and the treachery of the Congress leadership. For the Patna resolution repudiates the struggle of the masses, it repudiates the Independence struggle; it puts its faith in the very councils and the Assembly wherefrom Congressmen were forced to resign only a few years back under the rising tide of popular discontent." It correctly pointed out: "The open repudiation of mass struggle is the preliminary step towards an acceptance of the White Paper proposal." It predicted that the Congress leadership was preparing to thrust "the slave constitution on the people of India in collaboration with British imperialists, landlords, feudal princes, capitalists and communalist traitors". The CPI made an appeal to the "sincere, anti-imperialist revolutionary fighters" not "to be dragged into counter-revolutionary paths by the Congress": it urged them "to build up the new organ of struggle, the anti-imperialist united front".

By 1935 the CPI overcame many of the sectarian deviations and again emerged as the leader of the working class in many industrial centres.

At the beginning of 1933 the communists raised the slogan of unity on the trade union front and began to try to bring about co-operation between the Red Trade Union Congress and the AITUC.¹⁷ The working class struggle began to recover early in 1934. An All India Textile Workers Conference was held in January 1934, and the CPI and the followers of

M.N. Roy decided to organize jointly a country-wide strike of textile workers. A series of strikes started – in Sholapur, Ahmedabad, Kanpur, Ajmer, Calcutta, Bombay, Delhi, Nagpur, etc. By 27 April almost all Bombay mills were on strike, which lasted until some time in June. Some of the demands were purely political.¹⁸ The Bombay Trade Disputes Conciliation Act of 1934 was enacted by the government with the declared aim of preventing ‘‘Communists and extremists from entering the textile affairs of Bombay City’’. It provided for compulsory arbitration of labour disputes and served as a model to Congress governments afterwards who added more teeth to similar legislations they framed. Leading communists like Joglekar, Mirajkar and Adhikari were arrested during the strike in Bombay.

According to Intelligence reports, the RTUC had ‘‘fairly numerous’’ activities in Bengal.¹⁹ Anti-Gandhi demonstrations were organized in Calcutta in July 1934 jointly by the CPI and other groups. A ‘‘Gandhi Boycott Committee’’ which was later renamed ‘‘League against Gandhism’’ was set up in Calcutta.²⁰

In Punjab the Kirti Kisan Party (the Workers and Peasants Party) was functioning and had its influence on the peasantry.

An Intelligence Bureau publication stated:

‘‘The Party’s field of activities had been extended to cover the three main railway systems, the entire textile industry in the Bombay Presidency and a part of the jute industry in Bengal and the cotton industry in Kanpur.... only a small beginning had been made with the work among the peasantry.’’²¹

In July 1934, the CPI, the Young Workers’ League and other communist organizations, and a dozen trade unions led by the CPI were banned by the government. The Kirti Kisan Party of Punjab as well as its ally, the Nau Jawan Bharat Sabha, was declared illegal in September.

But no repression could prevent the spread of the influence of the CPI or the steady increase in its membership. At the CSP’s all-India conference in October 1934, the CPI distributed a pamphlet with an appeal to the Congress socialists and revolutionary youths. It gave an elaborate analysis criticizing the betrayal of the Indian masses by the Congress leadership. About Nehru, it said :

‘‘Socialism in words and counter-revolutionary Gandhism in deeds, revolutionary phrase-mongering in words and abject surrender to Gandhism in deeds – that sums up our great ‘Socialist’ Mr J. Nehru.’’

The CPI invited the Congress socialists and revolutionary youths to

“an anti-imperialist conference of all the revolutionary elements to draft the immediate programme of action on the basis of the united front”. It rightly denounced the slogan of a constituent assembly as “a slogan of inaction and surrender”.

The Calcutta Committee, while admiring the heroism and self-sacrifice of the “terrorist youths”, made a fervent appeal to them to give up terrorist methods as futile and to join the CPI to fulfil their cherished object. Many national revolutionary youths in prisons and concentration camps had already been reappraising their policy and were accepting Marxism. Gradually a large number of them joined the CPI and strengthened it.

After the formation of the CSP, this party and the communists started joint work on the trade union front. On the CSP’s initiative, agreement between it, the AITUC, the Red Trade Union Congress and the National Trade Union Federation was achieved for joint work on specific issues.²² The communists joined the AITUC at its annual session in Calcutta in April 1935 on the basis of an agreed programme and dissolved the Red Trade Union Congress.²³

Many communists joined the CSP on an individual basis in 1934 and, as Masani writes, “by 1937-38 the CSP had two communists as Joint Secretaries and two others in the Executive Committee”.^{23a} When the CSP decided in March 1940 to expel the communists from its organization, it lost to them its entire branches in Andhra, Tamil Nadu and Kerala and many members and units in northern India.

Writing in March 1935, the Director of the Intelligence Bureau, GOI, regretted that “we are now back in the same position as in 1929 when the [Meerut] case was instituted, with the drawback that our enemies have gained considerably in experience”.²⁴

To repeat, by 1935 the CPI had corrected many of its left-sectarian mistakes. It was trying to build up a genuine anti-imperialist united front of the toiling masses. It was the only party in India working with an anti-imperialist programme when the Congress leadership, guided by the Birlas, had not only abjured mass struggle but given commitments to the raj to work the imperialist constitution, “a charter of slavery”, and looked forward to serving as a partner of British imperialism in the oppression and exploitation of our people. The period that was opening was rich in possibilities: The CPI alone could come out as the leader of the anti-imperialist masses by shattering their illusions about the Congress leadership which was going to accept openly the role of an appendage of the British imperialist machinery in India.

But all possibilities were wasted away as the line and policies of the CPI were completely reversed under the influence of foreign mentors. “The Anti-Imperialist People’s Front in India”, a joint work of R. Palme

Dutt and Ben Bradley of the Communist Party of Great Britain, known as the "Dutt-Bradley thesis", appeared in *Imprecor* on 29 February 1936 and in the CPGB's organ, *Labour Monthly*, on 6 March. It was a line entirely worked out by the foreign mentors, who dismissed the CPI as irrelevant in formulating the CPI's own line and policies.

The "Dutt-Bradley thesis" was followed by another article "The United National Front", authored by Harry Pollitt (General Secretary of the CPGB), Palme Dutt and Ben Bradley on behalf of "the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Great Britain". The "United National Front" was carried by *Imprecor* on 7 November 1936.

While "The Anti-Imperialist People's Front" asserted that the Congress, though "not yet the united front of the Indian people in the national struggle", "can play a great part and a foremost part in the work of realizing the Anti-Imperialist People's Front", the second document instructed the CPI "to make the Indian National Congress the pivot of the United National Front". The first document stated that, despite some surrenders on the part of the leadership, the Congress stood for "irreconcilable struggle against imperialism for complete independence" and prescribed that the CPI should try to bring about some changes in the Congress constitution to make it a democratic organization and get the organizations of the workers and peasants affiliated to the Congress with the help of the CSP and other 'left' Congressmen and thus complete the process of the evolution of the Congress as the anti-imperialist people's front. When the object of the foreign mentors was to turn the CPI into an appendage of the Congress, there was no end to wishful thinking. They neither analysed the class character of the Congress leadership nor did they hesitate to recant whatever they had said earlier or to contradict whatever the Communist International and the CPI had written about the Congress. "The United National Front" lauded Nehru as the great leader of the anti-imperialist struggle and builder of the united front against imperialism. Reviewing Nehru's *Autobiography* and Subhas Bose's *The Indian Struggle 1920-1934*, Palme Dutt wrote that "Nehru's Presidential address at Lucknow in April [1936]...marked a historic turning point..." He observed:

"With regard to the future, both Nehru and Bose are convinced of the necessity for a radical change in the policy, organization and leadership of the national movement in order to realize the aim of independence."²⁵

One marvels where Palme Dutt discovered all this about Nehru!

The idea of a united anti-imperialist front was not a new one. Before 1936, the CPI had been trying to build such a front and achieved some success. In 1937 Mao Tsetung put the question:

‘‘Is the proletariat to follow the bourgeoisie, or is the bourgeoisie to follow the proletariat? This question of responsibility for leadership in the Chinese revolution is the linchpin upon which the success or failure of the revolution depends.’’²⁶

The Marxist-Leninist thesis that in the era after the Russian revolution the national liberation struggle can achieve victory only under the leadership of the proletariat was thrown overboard. Though not directly, the foreign mentors asked the CPI to abandon the task of fighting colonialism and rally behind the Congress to build a *sham* anti-imperialist front instead of a genuine one. The Congress leadership, guided by the Birlas, had capitulated to British imperialism and made commitments of abjuring mass action and serving as its tool. By rallying behind the capitulationist Congress leadership including Nehru (whose rhetorical verbiage and actual deeds were poles asunder), the CPI leadership under the influence of foreign mentors changed its orientation from a revolutionary one to an opportunist one, trailed politically behind the big collaborationist bourgeoisie and pursued essentially the same capitulationist line.

On the issue of ‘non-violence’, the ‘Dutt-Bradley thesis’ conceded that ‘‘it has been used...to shackle and hold in all effective mass activity and the development along the lines of the class struggle of the most powerful weapons against imperialism’’, but warned: ‘‘This issue should not be allowed to split the national front.’’

‘‘The United National Front’’ went still further. It affirmed that besides violence and ‘non-violent passive resistance’ a ‘third way’ existed. Whether there would be violent clashes depended on the imperialists. According to these eminent theoreticians, the Indian sub-continent might accomplish the anti-imperialist revolution pursuing the ‘third way’ of boycotts, strikes and so on and avoiding a violent revolution!

The ‘Dutt-Bradley thesis’ asserted: ‘‘The question of the elections is of cardinal importance for the anti-imperialist front’’ and enjoined the CPI to run some candidates in agreement with the Congress leadership. The participation in the elections that would be held a little later would obviously mean not a struggle against the most reactionary British-imposed constitution but acceptance of it. That is exactly what the Birlas and the Gandhis sought to do. They had abjured even sham struggles against the raj and decided to follow the path of sham parliamentarism. ‘‘The United National Front’’ document hailed the Congress election manifesto as ‘‘an inspiring document’’, though it did not touch on any of the basic anti-imperialist, democratic tasks – the confiscation of imperialist capital, the abolition of landlordism without compensation, the distribution of land among the tillers, etc.²⁷

Both the 'Dutt-Bradley thesis' and the later document insisted that the demand for convening a constituent assembly should be launched as the *central slogan*. As noted before, this slogan had been first raised by M.N. Roy, then picked up by Nehru and the Congress leadership and approved by G.D. Birla. The manifesto of the Congress Parliamentary Board drafted by Gandhi and adopted by the Board at its joint meeting with the Congress Working Committee explicitly said that the constituent assembly, as they contemplated, could 'be convened only by an agreement between the Governing Powers and the people....'²⁸ Haithcox is quite right when he says:

"The Congress leadership envisioned it [the constituent assembly] as a body to be convened under the auspices of the British government and as a means of avoiding revolutionary conflict."²⁹

Now the object of the foreign mentors was not different from that of the Congress leaders, though earlier the CPI and the Communist International had decried this slogan of the constituent assembly, replacing the demand for national freedom, as a move to derail the people's anti-imperialist struggles. For instance, a contributor had observed in *Communist International*:

"this slogan was intended to bribe the masses with its 'revolutionary' appearance. At the same time, it makes it possible to *replace* the struggle against the British imperialist project of a *fake constitution* by the decorative and fruitless preparations for the calling of a constituent assembly, which is to receive constituent rights, *no one knows how or whence* [emphasis added].

"The slogan of the constituent assembly came just at the right moment for the Congressmen [and then for the Pollitts and Palme Dutt], for the additional reason that it provided additional concealment for the capitulatory compradore entrance of the Congressmen into the legislative councils."³⁰

"The United National Front" document stated that "there must be no idea lurking in the minds of any of the participants that they have the right to exploit the United Front or that one or other of the participants must win at the expense of the other". When a united front of several classes is built, the question with which Marxists are concerned is not which group or group of persons use or exploit it in their interests but which class – that is, the politics of which class – exercises leadership over it. There can be no united front the leadership of which is non-class or above classes. If the working class fails to establish its hegemony, the bourgeoisie or the comprador big bourgeoisie will. In such an event the united front becomes pro-imperialist, not anti-imperialist. And that is what happened. When

from 1937 the Congress leadership acting in close association with big compradors like G.D. Birla openly played a counter-revolutionary role, the CPI leadership started playing a non-revolutionary, non-Marxist, opportunist role.

The Pollitts and Palme Dutts were pinning much hope on the CSP as the vanguard of the left wing within the Congress. As noted before, the CSP, the membership of which was open only to Congressmen and which was a strange assortment of Gandhians, anti-Marxists and near-Marxists, had no desire to act as an independent party of the working class. Rather, as Palme Dutt had written in an article "Congress Socialism' - A Contradiction in Terms", which appeared in *Ganashakti* (Calcutta) in September 1934, the real essence of the CSP's programme was "the subordination of the working class and peasantry to the political leadership of the bourgeoisie, represented by the National Congress".³¹ This was the programme imposed by the Pollitts and Palme Dutts on the CPI in 1936.

Over the heads of the CPI Palme Dutt and Bradley addressed an appeal to non-communists to help in setting up the united national front and this appeal entitled "An Open Letter to Indian Patriots" was published in the March 1936 issue of the CSP's organ *Congress Socialist* - almost at the same time when their thesis appeared in *Imprecor*.

The foreign mentors did not stop with theorizing about the tasks of the CPI and non-communist patriots and providing guidelines to them. Palme Dutt and Bradley met Nehru in Switzerland early in 1936 (when the CPI had not arrived at any decision) and appealed to him "to work in close collaboration with the communists". *Nehru on his part refused* "to abandon Gandhi's leadership or the method of non-violence".³²

The Seventh Congress of the Communist International met in July and August 1935, when fascism - "the open terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary, most chauvinistic and most imperialist elements of finance capital" - proved a menace to the people of the world. On the basis of Georgi Dimitrov's report to the Congress, the Comintern Congress, in order to fight back the fascist offensive, asked the Communist Parties in capitalist countries to persevere in building the unity of the working class, a united front of all workers including those who were under the influence of the Socialist Parties and willing to cease their collaboration with the bourgeoisie and to fight the bourgeoisie and fascism. The resolution also urged these communist parties to strive for "the establishment of a wide anti-fascist people's front on the basis of the proletarian united front...".³³

In respect of the colonial and semi-colonial countries, the Comintern resolution stated that "the most important task facing the communists consists in working to establish an *anti-imperialist people's front*" in order to do away with imperialist exploitation and win independence for their

countries. It advised the communists "to take an active part in the *mass anti-imperialist movements* [emphasis ours] headed by national-reformists and strive to bring about joint action with the national-revolutionary and national-reformist organizations *on the basis of a definite anti-imperialist platform* [emphasis ours]." ³⁴

The line that the British communists imposed on the CPI made a significant departure from the Comintern Congress resolution or what Dimitrov said at the Congress.³⁵ First, when the British mentors formulated the new line for the CPI, the Congress leadership had abandoned all anti-imperialist movements and accepted the role of the junior partner of imperialism in its crimes against the people. Second, they asked the CPI to make the Congress the "pivot" of the anti-imperialist front *not* "on the basis of a definite anti-imperialist programme" but on the basis of a pro-imperialist programme like participation in elections to sham legislative councils and making the demand for a constituent assembly the central slogan of struggle. In those days when the Congress leaders transformed the Congress into an electioneering organization and into an adjunct to the colonial state machinery, it was the task of the CPI to expose this collaboration, this partnership, and rid the minds of the people of the illusions about the Congress leadership. Instead, guided by foreign mentors, the CPI leadership chose to confuse the people and strengthen their illusions about the Congress leadership, especially about Nehru, Gandhi's best shield against the leftists. The CPI leaders sank into opportunism from which they hardly recovered afterwards. Since then the CPI leadership's loyalty to Nehru and his kin, instead of to Marxism-Leninism and the people, has survived almost for decades.

In a statement "For the United National Front", issued in March 1936, the Polit Bureau of the CPI welcomed the "Dutt-Bradley thesis". The party's Central Committee met in April and elected a new Polit Bureau with P.C. Joshi as general secretary.

Though the CPI leadership accepted the new line there was much antipathy among the ranks to it until the middle of 1937.³⁶

The CPI leadership prepared to participate in the elections to the provincial assemblies scheduled for early 1937. In a circular the Polit Bureau said:

"Every time demanding that the Congress candidates accept our united front platform we must support them even though they do not accept the platform."

It pledged all support to the Congress candidates in the elections.³⁷

The CPI leaders came out in December 1936 with a pamphlet entitled

“Transform the Elections into Mighty Anti-Imperialist Demonstrations”. It stated :

“Today the focal point of imperialist attack on India is the new constitution.... Transform the elections into a weapon to forge an anti-imperialist United Front.... Smash the New Constitution!”³⁸

So the CPI leaders' new battle cry was: Smash the new constitution by forging an 'anti-imperialist' united front with the Congress as the pivot. The Congress leaders also had raised the slogan of wrecking the constitution while taking part in the elections, while deciding to work it as an accomplice of imperialism.

As already noted, the working class struggle showed signs of recovery from 1934 and began to cause worry to the British raj. Peasant associations also were formed in different provinces and the All India Kisan Congress, which was renamed All India Kisan Sabha in 1938 with the Red Flag as its flag, was founded. Kisan struggles also became a feature and the communists started participating in them. During 1937 to 1939 working class and peasant organizations made significant progress and their struggles spread. We have seen that the Congress ministries which functioned in eight out of eleven provinces did not hesitate to resort to penal laws like the Criminal Law Amendment Act and to frame new laws to put down the workers and peasants fighting for their rights. Even lathi-charges and firing by the police on them were no rare events. Braving repression, CPI cadres participated in these partial struggles.

How did the CPI leaders react to the Congress policies which were openly pro-imperialist, pro-capitalist and pro-zamindar, which forged new chains for the workers and peasants in collusion with the imperialists? An article in *New Age*, organ of the CPI, stated in May 1938:

“...the Congress Ministries, inspired by the false ideology of the Gandhi Seva Sangh, were seeking to curtail the workers' right.... The recent Bombay bill threatens to extinguish the right to strike. The Madras proposals go one step further and openly deny the workers' right to resort to direct action.”³⁹

In another article, entitled “On Trade Union Policy”, in *New Age*, May 1939, B.T. Ranadive, while talking of combating “misguided legislation by some Congress Ministries” like the Bombay Trade Disputes Act, “which endanger freedom of the TU movement”, affirmed:

“The main task that faces the proletariat today is that of national unification under the banner of the Congress.... It is under these difficult

circumstances that the task of drawing the workers into the Indian National Congress has to be carried forward."

What were the difficult circumstances to which Ranadive referred? He mentioned "a certain estrangement and apathy" of the workers towards the Congress, the influence of communal leaders like those of the Muslim League and Ambedkar on "the backward section of workers" and the hostility of a section of the TU leadership to the 'national' organization.⁴⁰ It is worth noting that the CPI leaders spoke of a "false ideology" being instrumental in "curtailing the workers' right" and of "misguided legislation" but deliberately kept silent about the class whose "ideology" swayed the Congress leaders or whose guidance shaped the anti-worker legislations. The CPI leadership deliberately closed their eyes to the class war that was going on and followed a class collaborationist line.

In CPI's organ *National Front* in September 1938, P.C. Joshi wrote that the UP Kisan Committee (UPKC), a branch of the AIKS, was pledged to "work through the UP Kisan Sangh as the leading provincial organization of all kisans". As noted before, the UP Kisan Sangh had been founded under the auspices of the Congress to stem the wave of kisan struggles against the oppression of the landlords and the raj in the early thirties. Joshi wrote that "A Congress-Mazdoor united front has already been achieved". He hoped that the UP Kisan Sangh, which had become defunct, would be revived to function as the "Kisan headquarters" in the province and "Congress-Kisan unity as well will get forged".⁴¹ In another article in *National Front* of 2 April 1939 Joshi wrote:

"The major class division is between Imperialism on the one hand and the Indian people on the other, the greatest class struggle today is our national struggle, *the main organ of our struggle is the National Congress.*"⁴²

So Joshi prescribed that the Kisan movement, like that of the workers, should be an appendage of the Congress.

In an appeal "To all Anti-Imperialist Fighters", the Central Committee of the CPI lauded Nehru as the "man standing at the head of the Congress high command - who is today perhaps the best exponent of the whole leftward trend inside the Congress". It continued: "The stage is set for bursting the fetters of the reactionary leadership...." One may remember that when approached by Palme Dutt and Bradley, Nehru had told them that he would not "abandon Gandhi's leadership or the method of non-violence". Yet, as Masani writes, "the communists did their best to woo Nehru, offered him leadership of the United Leftist Forces and tried to divide him from his colleagues in the Congress Working Committee".⁴³

For all practical purposes Nehru became the unofficial leader of the 'left' wing, including the communists.⁴⁴ Soon, as we shall see, the next step of the CPI leaders would be to refurbish Gandhism and uphold it.

It was one thing to work within the Congress where a large section of the masses were, to use the Congress platform to win over the anti-imperialist ranks, while pursuing an independent political line. But it was another thing to act, as the CPI leadership practically did, as the appendage of the Congress, submit to its leadership politically and sow illusions about it among the masses, abandoning the party's revolutionary task of organizing them for an offensive against imperialism.

The CPI leadership tried to prettify the Congress leadership as best as it could. Flying in the face of facts, it observed in an article published in *The Communist*, one of their organs, that "the INC leadership as a whole and the section of the bourgeoisie which support it have, during the last few years, moved to the left".⁴⁵

On the issue of acceptance of ministerial offices by the Congress, the CPI leaders held that "Wherever the Congress would have been returned a majority they should not hesitate to accept office to carry through their major election pledge within a stipulated short period of time and actively help the development of the mass movement outside". They criticized the CSP and left nationalists for opposing office acceptance. But realizing that the 'Anti-Ministry slogan' had become "part of the platform of all left nationalist and other Anti-Imperialist elements", the CPI chose not to be isolated from them and declared that it was "unequivocally opposed to the slogan of ministry acceptance as it is being put forward by the Right Congress leadership..."⁴⁶

The CPI supported Subhas Bose in the election as President of the Tripuri session of the Congress because of his "militant plan of action to fight the Federation" and because of "the bureaucratic manipulation of certain members of the Working Committee who wanted to prevent the election of [a] leftist President". But when Gandhi and his associates took the offensive after Subhas's victory, the CPI leadership grew panicky. On behalf of the British Party, Harry Pollitt had sent the instruction on the occasion of the Tripuri session:

"The question of paramount importance in India in our view is the unity of all national forces under the leadership of the Indian National Congress."⁴⁷

The CPI leadership became terribly concerned with unity in the Congress – unity between Birla's men who were actually serving imperialism and anti-imperialists within the Congress – and insisted that the latter must submit to the former in the interest of preserving unity. They opposed the

Pant resolution in the AICC and decided to remain neutral on this resolution in the open session, but because of the revolt of the ranks, they had to oppose it. An article by A.K. Ghosh in the *National Front* stated:

“Let it be clearly understood that the slogans of the Left today must be such as can be made the slogans of the entire Congress...”⁴⁸

This could be achieved if the Left surrendered to the Gandhis, Patels and Birlas. This is what the CPI leadership did.

It became the task of the CPI leaders to “resurrect, burnish and replenish” the Gandhism of 1919-20 and to extend “the hand of co-operation” to Gandhi because, under current conditions, he served a “progressive role”. An article by S.G. Sardesai in the *National Front* warned the Leftists against continuing “their old attitude towards Gandhism and Gandhian leadership”. It said: “With the new strength at their command the time and the opportunity have come for them to weld even Gandhism with the new nationalism...”⁴⁹

When attacks on the workers and peasants were intensified by the Congress ministries and the Congress leadership deprived Congress members of the democratic right to criticize them, Subhas formed the Left Consolidation Committee. The CPI joined it and then ditched it. The degeneration of the CPI leadership had started in 1936 and the downward slide was quite rapid.

The increase in the CPI's membership and its increasing control over the growing mass organizations like the AIKS, All India Students Federation and Progressive Writers' Association were no index of the strength of the revolutionary forces, for the CPI headed by the Joshis, Ranadives and Ajay Ghoshes, was pursuing a class-collaborationist, anti-Marxist line.

References and Notes

1. Lieten, *op cit.*, 267, note 11.
2. See Vol.I of this book, 346-54; Chap. 3 above.
3. Sinha, *op cit.*, 251-2; also Lieten, *op cit.*, 166, 172-4.
4. *Ibid*, 174-5; also A.D.D. Gordon, *op cit.*, 221.
5. Muzaffar Ahmad, Introduction, *Communists Challenge Imperialism from the Dock*, pp. vii - viii.
6. *Ibid*, viii.
7. "Open Letter to the Indian Communists" from the Central Committees of the Communist Parties of China, Great Britain and Germany, Communist International, 1 July 1932, reprinted in *Radical Periodicals in the United States, 1932*, 303-14.
8. Emphasis added where not otherwise stated.
9. See *Communists Challenge Imperialism from the Dock* (with an Introduction by M. Ahmad).
10. *Ibid*, 81-2 - emphasis added.
- 10a. *Ibid*, 200.
11. Romain Rolland, "To the Meerut Prisoners, and against Colonial Terrorism", *I will Not Rest*, 281-6.
12. Brecher, *op cit.*, 136; cited in Muzaffar Ahmad, Introduction, *op cit.*, xiv.
13. Subodh Roy (ed.) *Communism in India, 1935 - 1945*, 2,5.
14. See *ibid*, 8-23.
15. See *ibid*, 29-43 - emphasis added.
16. One may note that the "Draft of the Provisional Statutes", as reproduced in *Indian Communist Party Documents 1930-1956* by the Democratic Research Service, Bombay, and the Institute of Pacific Relations, New York, in 1957, bristles with many inaccuracies and omissions.
17. Gene D. Overstreet and Marshall Windmiller, *Communism in India*, 156; Sinha, *op cit.*, 276.
18. See Subodh Roy (ed.), *Communism in India, 1925-1934*, 188-9.
19. *Ibid*, 429.
20. *Ibid*, 414-5.
21. Horace Williamson, *India and Communism*, 201.
22. M.R. Masani, *The Communist Party of India*, 54; Sinha *op cit.*, 405.
23. *Ibid*, 406, 407.
- 23a. Masani, *op cit.*, 68.
24. Williamson, *op cit.*, Preface, ix.
25. R. Palme Dutt, "Left Nationalism in India", *Labour Monthly*, Oct. 1936, 635, 637.
26. Mao Tsetung, "The Tasks of the Chinese Communist Party in the Period of Resistance to Japan", *SWM*, I, 273.
27. For the Congress election manifesto, see *The Congress Encyclopaedia*, XI, 134-40.
28. Manifesto of the Congress Parliamentary Board, 29 July 1934, drafted by Gandhi, *CWG*, LVIII, 255-6.
29. John Patrick Haithcox, *Communism and Nationalism in India*, 292.
30. G. Safarov, "The Congress Socialist Party and the New Manoeuvres of the National Congress in India", *Communist International*, 20 Nov. 1934, *op cit.*, 791.
31. *Ganashakti*, 30 Sept. 1934, reprinted in Arindam Sen and Partha Ghosh (eds.), *Communist Movement in India*, I, 661.
32. Gopal *op cit.*, 202, 203-4 - emphasis added.
33. "Fascism and the Unity of the Working Class", Resolution adopted by the Seventh Congress of the Communist International, in *Dimitrov on United Front*, esp. 124 - emphasis in the original.
34. *Ibid*, 130 - emphasis in the original except when otherwise stated.
35. See Georgi Dimitrov, "The Fascist Offensive and the Tasks of the Communist International

- in the Struggle of the Working Class against Fascism", in *ibid*, 57.
36. Sinha, *op cit.*, 426; Overstreet and Windmiller, *op cit.*, 162.
 37. "Circular no.5: On Elections", reprinted in Sen and Ghosh (eds.), *op cit.*, 613-6.
 38. Masani, *op cit.*, 64.
 39. "Indian Working Class in Action", reprinted in Sen and Ghosh (eds.), *op cit.*, 368 – emphasis added.
 40. B.T. Ranadive, "On Trade Union Policy", reprinted in *ibid*, 373-4 – emphasis added.
 41. P.C. Joshi, "The U. P. Kisan Movement", reprinted in *ibid*, 395-8.
 42. Joshi, "Kisan Movement", reprinted in *ibid*, 399-402 – emphasis added.
 43. Masani, *op cit.*, 65-6.
 44. Sinha, *op cit.*, 428.
 45. See Sen and Ghosh (eds.), *op cit.*, 631, fn.1 – emphasis added.
 46. "The Issue of Ministry Vs. Anti-Ministry", editorial in *The Communist*, see *ibid*, 620-6.
 47. *National Front*, 19 March 1939, 103; cited in Overstreet and Windmiller, *op cit.*, 170.
 48. A.K. Ghosh, "Our Stand at Tripuri", reprinted in Sen and Ghosh (eds.), *op cit.*, 642 – emphasis in the original; see also Overstreet and Windmiller, *op cit.*, 169-70.
 49. *Ibid*, 169; S.G. Sardesai, "Tasks before the Left-Wing", reprinted in Sen and Ghosh (eds.), *op cit.*, 645-7.

CHAPTER SEVEN

“SEEMINGLY IN THE OPPOSITE CAMP”

The Outbreak of World War II and the Congress

The long-awaited war came. After Germany's attack on Poland, Britain declared war on Germany on 3 September 1939. On that very day the Viceroy of India, without any reference to the Central Assembly or to the ministries in the provinces or to any Indian political organization, announced that India was at war with Germany and issued the Defence of India Ordinance curtailing civil liberties. The same day the British Parliament passed an amendment to the GOI Act 1935, empowering the Viceroy to do away with provincial 'autonomy', if he so willed.

Since 1927 the Congress leaders had been adopting resolutions and issuing statements declaring that the Congress would resist any attempt by the British to impose war on India. In the 1937 elections the Congress sought votes promising in its election manifesto that it would oppose India's participation in any imperialist war. In 1938 the Haripura Congress affirmed that India would not "permit her manpower and resources to be exploited in the interest of British imperialism". In March 1939 the Tripuri Congress recorded "its entire disapproval of British foreign policy culminating in the Munich Pact", etc., a policy of "deliberate betrayal of democracy", and resolved to keep aloof from both Imperialism and Fascism.

In April 1939, as war-clouds thickened, the British Parliament passed an amendment to the GOI Act 1935, empowering the Central government to assume all powers of provincial governments during an emergency arising from war or the threat of war. The AICC expressed its determination "to oppose all attempts to impose a war on India" and described the constitutional amendment as creating "a war dictatorship of the Central Government in India" and making "Provincial Governments helpless agents of Imperialism". On 10 August, only three weeks before the war started, the Working Committee "declared its opposition to any imperialist war" and directed the Congress members of the Central Legislative Assembly to boycott its next session as a mark of protest against the despatch of Indian troops to Egypt and Singapore. Throughout this period, Nehru's rhetoric, as usual, was strident.

And, as usual, the Congress policy was a two-faced one – one face

turned towards the people and another face turned towards the raj.

At a conference of the Prime Ministers of the Congress provinces, convened by Patel, in the last week of August 1939, a few days after the above solemn declaration of the Working Committee, "the most important decision", to quote K.M. Munshi, Secretary of the Conference, "was to the effect that in the event of war 'co-operation with the British should be whole-hearted if an understanding were arrived at between the Congress and the Government'."¹

The day after Linlithgow's announcement imposing war on India and promulgation of the Defence of India Ordinance, Gandhi rushed to Simla to respond to the Viceroy's invitation and, while imagining in the presence of the Viceroy the "*possible* destruction" of "the Houses of Parliament and the Westminster Abbey", he "broke down", became "disconsolate", was not "thinking of India's deliverance" and conveyed his "sympathies...with England and France". The apostle of non-violence told the Viceroy that personally he was for full and unquestioning co-operation with Britain in her war efforts.² Less than one year before, Gandhi had declared:

"For me, even if I stand alone, there is no participation in the war even if the Government should surrender the whole control to the Congress."³

Nehru hurried back from Chiang Kai-shek's capital Chungking and on his way back he declared at Rangoon:

"We do not approach the problem with a view to taking advantage of Britain's difficulties.... I should like India to play her full part and throw all her resources into the struggle for a new order."⁴

At the Haripura Congress Nehru had said :

"If England fights and wins, it is British imperialism that wins and the British hold on India is strengthened thereby. On no account therefore can we be parties to India's helping in such a war - even against the fascist powers."⁵

Patel, too, struck a moral tone. "There was no intention", he said, "that the Congress should harass the British Government in its present plight."⁶

The desire to line up behind British imperialism and the repudiation of past pledges were not surprising. This was not only consistent with their past policies but also in conformity with the needs of the hour.

The advent of a new world war held out a thrilling prospect before the big compradors. World War I had enabled them to grow and expand; World War II, which would invariably rain misery and death on the already impoverished people of this British colony, was greeted by the big bourgeoisie in the hope that it would shower gold on them. (And it did.) Just on the eve of the war G.D. Birla sent Gandhi for his comments the draft of a statement which he and other tycoons proposed to issue immediately after the outbreak of the war. The draft stated that "after the successful functioning of provincial autonomy during the last two years and a half", the "existing differences between India and England" were "capable of satisfactory solution and amicable settlement through friendly negotiations" and held that it was "not difficult to evolve a scheme of national defence as an integral part of the defence of the British Commonwealth".⁷

After the outbreak of the war Birla wrote to Mahadev Desai:

*"Maybe India and England may start competition with each other in manufacturing cordiality and friendship."*⁸

And Birla continued to play an active role as an intermediary, as active as before, so that no conflict marred the relations between British imperialism and the Congress and a friendly settlement was arrived at in the new situation.

Another tycoon, Lala Sir Shri Ram, insisted that "the Congress must not bargain with the British raj to squeeze out promises until the war was over".⁹

While presiding over the annual session of the FICCI in March 1940, C.S.R. Mudaliar said that "the war should be seen as an opportunity for furthering industrial expansion, and that the expanded and new industries should receive adequate protection after the war". This theme became the "main concern of the session".¹⁰ True to their character, the big bourgeoisie viewed the war between the rival imperialist powers not as an opportunity for achieving freedom from the foreign yoke but in furthering their own interests by serving British imperialism.

The Muslim League leader, Choudhury Khaliquzzaman, wrote that the League was pressed towards greater co-operation with the British by Muslim business magnates as well as by "our Muslim taluqdars and Zamindars...interested in smaller contracts.... They could hardly be expected to forgo the chance of a life-time".¹¹

The war brought the raj closer to the big businessmen. The raj depended on them for procurement and production of materials essential for war. The Eastern Group Supply Council was set up early in 1941 with

Britain, the dominions and India to plan production and procurement of war materials. Commerce expanded and industries thrived; vast profits, legitimate and illegitimate, were raked in, despite the Excess Profits Tax of 50 per cent, at the cost of the blood and sweat of the people. It was boom time for Indian business.

It may be noted that the Hindu Mahasabha, from which the Bharatiya Janata Party has descended, pledged all support to British war efforts.

There was within and outside the Congress a considerable section of political workers, usually called the 'Left Wing' – the followers of Subhas Bose, the Congress socialists, the communists, the Kisan Sabha members, etc. – who were urging that a mass anti-imperialist struggle should be launched. An anti-war demonstration in which many thousands took part was held in Madras on the day the war was imposed on India. In early September numerous meetings denouncing the imperialist war took place in different parts of India.¹² On 2 October 90,000 workers went on a one-day political strike in Bombay condemning the imperialist war – "the first anti-war strike in the world labour movement".¹³

On the other hand, the Congress ministers were more loyalists than the Britishers themselves.

"In the U.P.", writes S.Gopal, "the ministers seemed willing to give full co-operation in prosecution of the war, while in Madras the Governor had to restrain Rajagopalachari, on the outbreak of hostilities, from detaining all Germans and seizing their bank balances, 'whereupon he commented that the English seemed to want to wage war according to High Court rules'".¹⁴

In Bombay, Kher and his colleagues assured Governor Lumley of their support for Britain. "Not only that, Munshi had expressed a desire to participate more actively in the war effort" and he became Chairman of the War Committee, while a Cabinet Sub-Committee was formed with Kher, Munshi and another minister.

"In Bombay, Kher had assured the Governor for many months that *he would always keep the latter posted on developments* and even when resignation had to be implemented it would be done 'in a dignified and amicable manner'.¹⁵

Meeting from 10 to 14 September, the Working Committee adopted a long-winded resolution on the basis of Nehru's draft, inviting the raj to declare its war aims and seeking to know how these would apply to India¹⁶ – a resolution which, according to Subhas, represented "a policy of inaction".¹⁷ To these astute leaders the war aims of the Chamberlains and Churchills needed further clarification, especially after the "war dictatorship

of the Central Government” and the unilateral imposition of war on India. At this meeting Gandhi “said that there should be no obstruction *nor non-co-operation*, and that [Congress] ministers should carry on to the extent it was possible and offer *co-operation in all respects* in which they could do so conscientiously”. He wrote that Congress support should have been “unconditional in the sense that the Congress would not have asked for clarification of Britain’s war aims”.¹⁸

Subhas was invited to attend this meeting. At the meeting Subhas insisted that the Congress should launch civil disobedience to achieve freedom without delay. Naturally, there was a sharp clash between him and Nehru. Munshi wrote that Gandhi managed to secure “a promise from him [Subhas] that he would remain quiet for a certain period”.¹⁹ Gandhi was dissatisfied with the resolution. But prudence dictated the policy of the Working Committee which rejected Gandhi’s advice for overt co-operation with the raj.

In a letter to Birla, Mahadev lamented:

“Bapu’s proposition did not find favour with the W.C. Vallabhbhai and others did not, I fear, have the courage to go to the country with Bapu’s proposition.... The future is dark and gloomy and we may have to wander in wilderness now for three or more years.”²⁰

Again, he wrote to Birla :

“Heaven alone knows what is in store for us. But the principle of non-violence by which we have been swearing these 20 years seems to be under a heavy eclipse.”²¹

Birla also was disappointed and criticized the resolution as “a rambling document”. With the declaration of war he had proposed that the Working Committee should appoint Gandhi “the sole plenipotentiary” of the Congress – a proposal to which Patel agreed. Now, he wanted Gandhi to see the Viceroy again, for what was needed was “personal contact” and the Working Committee should not “talk through statements”.²² As desired by Birla, ‘Bapu’ was “doing the needful”. He sent his secretary Mahadev on an “ambassadorial mission” to Rajagopalachari in Madras “to tell him how much he can do at this juncture”.²³ Rajagopalachari had his interviews with the Viceroy.

When Gandhi saw Linlithgow again on 26 September, he gave him “an account of the Congress Working Committee discussion at Wardha” and urged him for a declaration of policy. The Viceroy told him that “*the British government would be most unwilling to define their war aims at this stage and had never committed themselves in the least degree to*

fighting for democracy”.²⁴

As V.P. Menon writes,

“The Viceroy stressed the lack of agreement between the various parties and the extreme seriousness and gravity of the communal issue” and stated that “*agreement between the communities would be a condition precedent for future constitutional advance*”.²⁵

Gandhi pleaded in vain with the Viceroy that he “should not allow the Muslim League to come in any way in connection with the terms of any declaration I [the Viceroy] might make, for *the Congress carry their claim to be the one party entitled to speak or to be consulted on behalf of India, in connection with anything affecting India as a whole, to full length*”.²⁶

Nehru was effusive in praise of Chiang Kai-shek and the U.S. ruling classes. He paid his tribute to “the supreme leader and commander of China, Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, who embodies in himself the unity of China and her determination to free herself”.²⁷ The ruling classes of the U.S.A., on whom “ultimately will fall the burden of the future, whether they will it or not”, “will no doubt play a dominating part in the reshaping of world affairs” and could establish a new world order free from imperialist wars. “We”, he said, “*naturally look to America in many ways*.”²⁸

Nehru had already forged close relations with the US ruling classes and the Chiangs. It appears from his two letters to Krishna Menon, dated 10 July and 15 August 1939, that his visit to Chungking, Chiang’s capital, was arranged by the US ruling classes in consultation with the Chiangs and the British raj. On his way from China to Europe one Edward Carter, secretary-general of the American Institute of Pacific Relations, saw Nehru and, on reaching England, had consultations with British cabinet ministers, and Nehru’s visit was arranged. On the eve of his departure for China on 20 August 1939, Nehru received a long cable from the Chinese ambassador in London, who conveyed to him not only his good wishes and greetings but also Churchill’s good wishes for success of his mission.^{28a}

Soon after the CWC meeting in September, Nehru started a campaign which, while extolling Gandhi’s leadership and the technique of non-violence – “the new technique of fight evolved by Mahatma Gandhi [which] has nonplussed the British Government, as they do not know how to combat it”²⁹ – tirelessly denounced those like Subhas, communists, Congress socialists and others who wanted a more militant line to be pursued.³⁰ And he publicly claimed that the CWC resolution of September, to which the British government attached no importance, “will shake to the foundations all imperialisms” and “uproot British imperialism”.³¹

In private Nehru, states S.Gopal, his biographer and admirer, "made clear, even if only indirectly, *his anxiety to assist personally to the full in the war effort*, and wanted the association of persons like himself...with some form of National War Council. If India and Britain waged war together as equal partners *with no formal legal changes*, but with Indian leaders being taken into confidence and associated with decisions...this in itself would have removed most of the constitutional difficulties by the time the war had been successfully concluded. *But it was hinted that Jawaharlal would not insist even on this.*"

According to Gopal, the Congress "conveyed to the Viceroy that it would be satisfied with a declaration clearly stating that India would be free to determine her own destiny after the war".³²

When Nehru and Prasad saw the Viceroy on 3 October they were bluntly told that

"There could be no extensive expansion of the Executive Council or sharing of power with political parties in the central government. All he [the Viceroy] was prepared to do was to form a group from the two houses of the central legislature with whom the Government would keep in touch on defence matters."³³

Yet pining for a gesture from the British imperialists, Nehru wrote a long letter to Linlithgow on 6 October. He regretted a "number of very undesirable speeches" made by Congressmen immediately after the outbreak of the war, and pointed out the *calming influence of the Working Committee resolution* of 14 September and "some action" taken in this regard by the Congress government of U.P. He wrote about an errant Congress M.L.A. "whose tongue runs away with him when he discusses the plight of the peasantry" and who was sobered by several warnings and advice from Nehru and other leaders. He went on to say *how much he desired "that the long conflict of India and England should be ended and that they should co-operate together....* It was a pleasure to meet you for a second time, and whenever chance offers an opportunity for this again, I shall avail myself of it."³⁴

To quote Gopal again, "Jawaharlal was desperately anxious to find a way which would enable the Congress to co-operate with the Government."³⁵

Devdas Gandhi saw the Viceroy's private secretary Laithwaite with a letter from Mahadev Desai, which was written "at Babu's instance, giving him an account of the AICC and the part that Jawaharlal had played in it". Laithwaite promised to show the letter to the Viceroy as he showed him "*all that Mahadev sends me*". Devdas assured Laithwaite that "there is really no bargaining because in a sense *you have already got the Congress support and help incoming in various ways*". While acknowledging

"the greatest possible assistance from Mr Gandhi" received by the Viceroy and assuring Devdas that "whatever happens *nothing can alter the great mutual understanding between H.E. and your father*", Laithwaite stressed the difficulties impeding a settlement – "The Mussalmans and the others" who "don't agree with the Congress".³⁶

Not only the Viceroy but Secretary of State Lord Zetland too was quite sensible of the role Gandhi was playing. Speaking in the House of Lords, Zetland spoke of Gandhi in eloquent terms and acknowledged "the help which he has most willingly given us in our endeavours to surmount them [the difficulties]".³⁷ Interestingly, the Viceroy informed Gandhi on 3 June 1940 that the Maharaja of Darbhanga, then the biggest landlord in the whole of India, had given him a bust of Gandhi done by Clare Sheridan and that Linlithgow proposed to have it exhibited first in Bombay and then "to make it over to the Government of India with the suggestion that it should ultimately find a permanent home in the national capital".³⁸ It was no small tribute to Gandhi from the King's representative in India and a prominent representative of the feudal class.

Gandhi could smell violence in the air and was determined to resist civil disobedience. As Mahadev Desai wrote to G.D.Birla, "...Bapu alone is capable of holding back the tide of the civil disobedience movement and this he is already doing and will continue to do so till the very last."³⁹ While regretting that his "views in regard to unconditional co-operation are not shared by the country", the prophet of non-violence went on declaiming that "this war may be used to end all wars".⁴⁰

After several rounds of discussion with Congress and Muslim League leaders, Linlithgow declared on 17 October 1939 that, as before, the grant of dominion status remained the ultimate goal of the British policy and that at the end of the war the raj would be prepared "to enter into consultation with representatives of the several communities, parties and interests in India and with the Indian princes" for *modifying* suitably the Government of India Act of 1935. During the war the raj proposed to set up "a *consultative* group representative of all the major political parties in British India and of the Indian Princes", over which the Viceroy would preside.⁴¹ To the embarrassment of the Congress leaders, the raj refused to make the slightest concession to them. Moreover, it did not want to displease the Muslims, between whom and the Congress the gulf had grown wider particularly since the ministry-making in 1937 by the Congress.

Meeting on 22 and 23 October, the Congress Working Committee asked Congress ministries in the provinces to resign. At the same time it warned "Congressmen against any hasty action in the shape of civil disobedience, political strikes and the like".

Through messages to the foreign press and other statements, Gandhi

assured the concerned people that "*the Congress must not embarrass*" the rulers in the prosecution of the war and that he was "in no hurry to precipitate civil disobedience".⁴²

Why did the Working Committee ask the Congress ministers to lay down their precious burden and go into the wilderness, which they were extremely reluctant to do?

"Lord Linlithgow's private letters to Lord Zetland", writes B.B. Misra, "show that when the Congress decided to call out its Ministries, it did so 'only for the time being' under the impression that the exigencies of the war would compel the British Government to accept its terms of settlement. In fact, the Congress detested 'the thought of leaving office' for any considerable period and was 'anxious to resume power as soon as it can be made possible for it to do so'."⁴³ G.D.Birla could not "conceive that all that has been done during the last two years will now be undone suddenly". He continued to maintain contacts with the Viceroy, members of his family, and other high British officials to smooth matters.⁴⁴ According to Sitaramayya, "Some of the ministers themselves playfully and jocularly stated that they were all taking a three-month holiday. But every joke has a core of truth to be sure."⁴⁵

During an interview with the Viceroy on 12 January 1940, Munshi reported to him about an anti-imperialist undercurrent among ordinary Congressmen and expressed his fear that Gandhi might not be able to keep them on leash for a long time. Defending their resignation as ministers, he said:

"We could not have continued long in office and helped you in the war unless we had obtained a share in the Centre which could justify our being there.... For instance, Subhas would have made our task very difficult.... if we had been in power he would have got himself arrested only in order to make our position difficult. Now things are better from every point of view and things should be done early.... You hold Gandhiji in great respect and Gandhiji, I am sure, holds you equally in great respect and if you both cannot settle the matter, nationalism will naturally go into wilderness."⁴⁶

The Congress ministries had to be withdrawn for two main reasons. First, if they remained in office, the anti-imperialist mask of the Congress leadership would fall off. The ministers would have to serve *openly* as imperialism's agents and use the Defence of India Act and ordinances to suppress anti-imperialist struggles and perform every other dirty job when the tide of anti-imperialist feeling was rising. Moreover, as Munshi said, "The prestige of the Congress Working Committee was at a low ebb since the Tripuri Congress in March 1939."⁴⁷ Second, this decision, "nothing

more than a passive action'', was ''intended to soften the attitude of left-wing circles, without involving anti-imperialist activity''.⁴⁸ While this manoeuvre saved the Congress from internal disruption, it helped the raj to prosecute its war efforts unhindered by a political party holding offices in provinces, which, for its very existence, had to face both ways.

As Sitaramayya wrote, the Congress was faced with the dilemma that on the one hand, it could not initiate any satyagraha for fear that it might result in ''red ruin and anarchy''; on the other hand, ''to keep quiet to allow the ministries to function would be...to wipe out the Congress as a political party at the end of the war''. Both satyagraha and withdrawal of ministries were evils. ''The choice then'', said Sitaramayya, ''lay between the worse and the better of two evils''.⁴⁹

Appreciating the Working Committee's decision, Sir Stafford Cripps commented: ''it was wise on the part of Mr Gandhi not to have hurried things and to have kept the door open.'' After ''fairly lengthy interviews with Gandhi, Jawaharlal and the Sardar'', Cripps ''took with him back to London a long detailed memorandum prepared by Gandhi''.⁵⁰ Sitaramayya does not disclose the contents of the memorandum nor does *The Complete Works of Mahatma Gandhi*.

Gandhi, Jinnah and Prasad met the Viceroy again on 1 November ''to try to work out an arrangement in the provincial field as a prelude to co-operation at the centre''. On 2 November Jinnah had a meeting with Gandhi and Prasad, but Gandhi and Prasad refused to discuss anything on the plea that the communal issue was not related to the political crisis and that the British government must first clarify its war-aims.⁵¹ ''Co-operation at the centre'' with the colonial masters, so longed for by the Congress leaders, eluded them as they refused to agree to co-operation with the League in the provinces.

Appreciating the Viceroy's 'sincerity', Gandhi urged ''fellow workers not to lose patience''.⁵² Indeed, as Sitaramayya stated, ''*The British Government was not the problem to Gandhi. There were two internal foes or problems*'': they were the Muslim League and impatient Congressmen.⁵³

To counter the League's main demands, especially the demand for a share of power in the provinces, the Congress leaders presented the panacea of a constituent assembly for all political and communal ills. They would be content if the British government declared that, after the war, it would summon a constituent assembly with members representing separate communal electorates, if desired, and implement its decisions, whether in favour of independence, dominion status ''or less than independence or a modified form of it''.⁵⁴

The League decided to observe 22 December as the 'Deliverance Day' to mark the occasion of the resignation of the Congress ministries.

At the meeting of the Congress Working Committee on 15 to 19 March 1940, Gandhi gave his picture of the proposed constituent assembly: "In the transition period we will lay down no conditions for the British Government. *The army will remain and so will their administrative machinery.* There will be an agreement with the British Government before and after the Constituent Assembly.... I may not even press for the withdrawal of the army if a minority wants it [in a 'free' India].... Mutual goodwill is necessary for the Constituent Assembly to come into being and function efficiently. Without this the British Government may very well use the Princes and the Muslims as counter-weight against us."⁵⁵ It is worth noting that G.D. Birla appreciated the usefulness of the constituent assembly as "the most effective machinery for settlement of the communal question".⁵⁶

Subhas Bose observed: "The latest stunt which has been devised to stave off a struggle and which may in time prove to be the greatest fraud perpetrated on the Indian people by their own leaders, is the proposal of a Constituent Assembly under the aegis of an Imperialist Government." He added that "a Constituent Assembly, if it is not a misnomer, can come into existence only after the seizure of power.... Only a Provisional National Government [which takes over power after the liquidation of imperialist rule] can summon a Constituent Assembly for framing a detailed Constitution for India".⁵⁷

Nehru's confidential note on Congress policy written on 20 January 1940 is quite significant. In it he recognized the difficulties of British imperialism in making any "precise announcement of war or peace aims" but felt the need for "a general and *somewhat vague* declaration", for without a settlement there would be conflict on a big scale. "*Even if the British authority is weakened or eliminated, the internal forces of disruption may gain the upper hand and lead to chaos and anarchy. We want to avoid that.*" Nehru preferred "British authority" to "the internal forces of disruption", "the rabble", and sought a non-violent peaceful settlement with imperialism. He also thought that "the real difficulty will be the *communal one*". He was afraid that the Muslim League would demand coalition or composite ministries to which he was "entirely opposed".⁵⁸

On the one hand, at the time when he was writing to V.K. Krishna Menon that "no immediate conflict seems to be likely", Nehru used his best declamatory style to exhort people: "The hour of trial is drawing near"; "Be prepared for all eventualities" and so on.⁵⁹ On the other hand, he went on deprecating not only anti-war meetings and processions, speeches and writings, but even the shouting of slogans: "Anything, even shouting of slogans, which attempts to create a sense of violence is to be deprecated"; "The shouting of such slogans as *samraj ka nash* [death to the empire] will not set the country free. The question before us is not how we destroy but

how we can construct.”⁶⁰ It was a balancing trick he was performing – a performance in which he excelled others. To quote B.B. Misra, “as circumstances developed, we notice that in terms of power politics it was Nehru who won. Surprisingly enough, ‘riding two horses’ produced greater political turnover than sheer decorum and uprightness of conduct.” B.N. Pandey has observed that Nehru “attained great speed by riding two horses and even greater heights by standing on two stools. And to his own surprise he never fell. Such delicate balancing came to him naturally, but during this period [1936-42] he performed with greater agility and a greater sense of purpose...”⁶¹ It is the situation that demanded of him this “greater agility”. “Speaking for the U.P.”, he wrote to Krishna Menon on 8 November 1939, “I can tell you that it is becoming increasingly difficult to hold our organization in check.”⁶²

The raj refused to declare, as desired by the Congress leaders, that it would convene a so-called constituent assembly after the war. The League too was opposed to the idea: it felt that such an assembly would be dominated by the Congress leadership even if there were separate electorates. After the resignation of the Congress ministries, which the raj accepted as a good riddance, Linlithgow, as V.P. Menon states, discountenanced “any move on the part of the Congress to return to office except on his own terms” and “insisted on a mutual settlement by the Congress and the League of their differences in the provincial field as a *sine qua non* for the expansion of his Executive Council...”⁶³ While the raj’s policy was one of ‘nothing doing’ except on its own terms, the Congress leadership enjoined people to devote themselves to the ‘constructive programme’. Gandhi was sure that “if Congressmen solidly support me, we would not require another struggle” to reach the goal.⁶⁴ Besides relying on the ‘constructive programme’, Nehru pinned his hopes on the U.S.A.

According to an Intelligence Branch report, Gandhi expressed concern at that section of Congressmen who indulged in anti-war speeches.⁶⁵ As secretary of the Congress, Kripalani issued a circular to all provincial Congress committees warning them of the possibility of a fast by Gandhi if his instructions were not sincerely carried out.⁶⁶

Interminable negotiations continued between the Viceroy on the one hand and Congress and League leaders on the other. They served the purpose of the raj well. They created an atmosphere in which many believed that something would turn up and were lulled into passivity. But the people were not entirely passive. There were numerous anti-war demonstrations and meetings and strikes by the workers in all centres of industry in defence of their interests. As early as November 1939, an Intelligence Bureau document stated: “Left-wing pressure, whether in the Labour and peasant movements or in the Congress itself, continues to

gather force.”⁶⁷ While British imperialism refused to take Congress resolutions and speeches of leaders like Nehru at their face value and held, to Nehru’s regret, “that Congress is not serious and does not mean business and is only out to bargain here and there”,⁶⁸ it armed itself with arbitrary powers and tried systematically to stifle the ‘left’, however divided it was.

From the time the war started the Defence of India Act was ruthlessly applied in Bengal. In addition to the Government of India’s ordinances, the Bengal governor promulgated certain ordinances which put a ban on public meetings and rendered open political activity impossible. Repression was going on in all provinces but it was most severe in Bengal and Punjab. When Gandhi was preaching the virtues of not embarrassing the raj and reposing faith in the sincerity of the Viceroy and the Secretary of State, thousands of political workers and working class leaders were arrested – detained without trial, interned or convicted – and the press was being gagged. The Congress leadership was playing a complementary role. It was isolating militant political workers and waiting to get them decimated. It had already taken disciplinary action against Subhas and disaffiliated the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee. It was vehemently decrying all anti-imperialist actions as disruptive. Speaking on 16 August 1940, Nehru admonished his audience: “This is not the time for organizing meetings and processions and shouting slogans such as *inqilab zindabad* [Long live Revolution!]. This is the time for work, hard work – 24 hours’ work, for the country.”⁶⁹ The programme of work placed before the people by the Congress leadership was what they called the ‘constructive programme’, mainly spinning. The purpose was to emasculate the militant spirit of the people. As Nehru said, “It is with great difficulty that we have been able to restrain our advanced elements.”⁷⁰

The Congress leadership found itself between the restive masses and the raj which was prepared to expand the Viceroy’s Executive Council and include about two Congress leaders and a Muslim Leaguer in it who would work under the Government of India Act of 1935 provided there was prior Congress-League agreement in the provincial field – something which the Congress was not willing to discuss.

As one more manoeuvre, the Working Committee drew up a resolution for adoption by the Ramgarh session of the Congress due to meet in March 1940. While announcing the Congress goal as complete independence outside the orbit of imperialism, it declared that the withdrawal of Congress ministries would be followed by a resort to civil disobedience to achieve freedom. This resolution, intended to steal the thunder of the ‘left’, contained the all-important clause – an escape route – “as soon as the Congress organization is considered fit enough for the purpose, or in case circumstances so shape themselves as to precipitate a crisis”.⁷¹

Almost immediately after the Working Committee meeting was over, Gandhi declared: "I cannot, will not start mass civil disobedience so long as I am not convinced that there is enough discipline and enough non-violence in Congress ranks.... Let it be clearly understood that I cannot be hustled into precipitating the struggle."⁷²

On 8 March 1940, before the Ramgarh Congress, G.D. Birla wrote to Gandhi's secretary: "You know *I hate civil disobedience*. In the name of non-violence it has encouraged violence." He added that "if this psychology continues, any Government, even our own, would become an impossibility.... *Hence my dread at anything that will lead us towards a mass movement.... Hence my horror at any talk of civil disobedience.*" Birla, who claimed to be a "Gandhiman"⁷³ added: "*The truth perhaps is that none believes in non-violence.*"⁷⁴ Again, on 14 March, he wrote to Mahadev Desai that "in my opinion we are going the wrong way and as the position is very critical, he [Gandhi] should reconsider the position in the light of the views held by some of us". Birla was afraid that "Anti-British feeling is fast gaining ground which must in the end result in violence". Next day he again complained in his letter to Desai:

"We have pitched our demands so high that we have made it impossible for Englishmen to come to an honourable settlement. That is where I complain. There are others even in the Working Committee who feel like myself.... Bapu said to me many times that I should continue to influence him because seemingly I might not succeed but unconsciously he might get influenced."⁷⁵

On his way to Ramgarh, Gandhi, proving Birla's misgiving unfounded, sent Carl Heath, Chairman of the India Conciliation Group in England, a message in which he stated the actual Congress position "*shorn of all camouflage*". He wrote that the Congress wanted the British government to declare that "not later than the termination of the war" it would convene a constituent assembly of representatives to determine "the mode of the Government of India including Princes' India if possible and without if they won't agree". In the meantime the Viceroy's Council should be constituted with a majority of elected representatives from the Central Assembly and it would be responsible "*as far as possible*" to the Assembly without the official bloc. If these demands were unacceptable, Gandhi was willing to modify them and "try to give you satisfaction". Responsible Congressmen had a "keen desire to explore every means of conciliation".⁷⁶

The Ramgarh Congress with Abul Kalam Azad as president passed the resolution recommended to it by the Working Committee. Gandhi was given the sole responsibility of launching and leading a struggle at a

moment of his choice.

According to Intelligence documents, the seemingly anti-imperialist resolution was adopted because of the "leftist pressure [which] was on the increase and it was no longer possible to ignore the accusation that Congress was out for a compromise and shirking direct action".⁷⁷ While assuring the Right that there was no risk of confrontation with the raj, Ramgarh sought to disarm the 'Left', sections of which like the CSP were led to believe that the Congress leadership would give the call for struggle.

To remove all misgivings of the raj and big bourgeois patrons, Gandhi made it abundantly clear at the meetings of the Working Committee and the Subjects Committee and at the open session of the Congress that the time was not propitious for launching civil disobedience. At the Subjects Committee meeting he was emphatic that

"I do not see at the present moment conditions propitious for an immediate launching of the campaign.... Well, then, I want to repeat what I have said times without number that, if you will be soldiers in my army, understand that there is no room for democracy in that organization...as there is none in our various organizations, A.I.S.A., A.I.V.I.A. and so on. In any army, the General's word is law, and his conditions cannot be relaxed.... Compromise is part and parcel of my nature. I will go to the Viceroy fifty times, if I feel like it.... The basis of my fight is love for the opponent."

Addressing the open session, he said:

"I feel you are not prepared.... Your General finds that you are not ready, that you are not real soldiers.... I know that with such as you I can only have defeat.... I have never acknowledged defeat throughout all these years in any of my struggles [sic!].... *Do not, therefore, concentrate on showing the misdeed of the Government, for we have to convert and befriend those who run it.*"⁷⁸

Nehru was complementing Gandhi's role. He stated at the open session of the Congress:

"Misguided enthusiasm of a few people to go head-on for any objective has often caused disruption in fighting forces. Such enthusiasts are counter-revolutionaries and rebels."⁷⁹

Among the targets of Nehru's attack were Subhas Bose and his associates like Sahajanand Saraswati who held a spectacular Anti-Compromise Conference at Ramgarh simultaneously with the Congress session. The Conference was convened by the Forward Bloc and the Kisan Sabha. With

the outbreak of the war Subhas started a campaign for active opposition to war efforts. In the course of his presidential address to the conference, he strongly criticized the inconsistencies between Congress resolutions and statements and statements by Gandhi and other leaders and gave a call for an uncompromising fight against imperialism. The Conference decided immediately to launch a struggle against India's forced participation in the war and for independence. Subhas wanted the Gandhian leadership to lead the national struggle for freedom but gave up hopes of it and held that it should be launched even without it or in spite of it. The CSP was of the view that no national struggle could be started without the Gandhian leadership and was critical of any attack on it. The CPI shared the view that the national struggle could be launched only by the Gandhian leadership but held that their task was to build pressure from below to force the hands of the leadership. And soon after the outbreak of the war M.N.Roy's group described the war as an anti-fascist war and rallied behind the British raj.

As noted before, in Bengal and Punjab, where the Forward Bloc was better organized than elsewhere, severe repression had started since the beginning of the war. Gradually, other provinces also became victims of repression.

The movement that was launched after the Anti-Compromise Conference had not only to face ruthless repression by the raj but also to contend against the Congress leadership, the CSP and the CPI, and failed to create any considerable impact. Subhas was arrested early in July 1940.

At the Working Committee meeting in April Gandhi pointed out why no struggle could be launched. There was, he complained, neither honesty nor discipline nor faith in the 'constructive programme' among Congressmen. He was also afraid that a struggle might lead to a communal clash because of the attitude of the Muslim League and the Khaksars. Rajendra Prasad and some others believed that "civil disobedience would mean civil war". Rajagopalachari held that there was "no atmosphere for a fight" and wanted the Congress to "retrace its steps" if "it had gone too fast". Nehru did not want to precipitate any action, but as there was "goading" by the government he was in favour of struggle. Several others like Patel and Abul Kalam Azad felt "something must be done" to avoid "demoralization in Congress ranks". The C.S.P. leader, Achyut Patwardhan, "thought that if the fight did not begin the Congress would lose its hold *even* on the Hindus". Asaf Ali said that "The majority of the Muslims were with the League" and wanted to wait for "a more favourable opportunity to start a movement of C.D.". While Gandhi and several others were opposed to any kind of action, a few others including Nehru wanted some action for fear that the Congress would otherwise lose its credibility.⁸⁰ Sham anti-imperialism had reached a blind alley.

Pakistan Resolution and Congress Reaction

In the meantime the communal problem was getting worse and worse. In a letter of 16 October 1939 to the Secretary of State for India, Linlithgow confessed that he "had not possibly fully realized till now how greatly the gap between Hindu and Muslim has widened since April 1937, or the extent to which experiences...since then have undermined altogether belief in the possibility of common and united action...."⁸¹ Reginald Coupland held that the chief reason for the deterioration in the political situation by 1940 was the Congress's "purpose to take over the heritage of the British Raj".⁸² Far from trying to bridge the gap that was widening between the two major communities of India, the Congress leaders did not deviate from their objective of becoming the sole heir to the British raj. Any suggestion, advice or approach from prominent Congressmen or Muslim leaders for bringing about an understanding was spurned by them.

In March 1940, soon after the Ramgarh Congress, the annual session of the Muslim League was held at Lahore. In his presidential address Jinnah claimed that "the Muslims are a nation...and they must have their homelands, their territory and their State". On 24 March the League adopted a resolution which demanded that "the areas in which the Muslims are numerically in a majority as in the north-western and eastern zones of India should be grouped to constitute 'Independent States', in which the constituent units shall be autonomous and sovereign".⁸³ This resolution came to be known as the Pakistan resolution.

As noted earlier, only a few years before, Muslim leaders had dismissed Rehmat Ali's Pakistan scheme as "chimerical" and at the Sind League Conference in October 1938 the demand for the division of India was dropped at Jinnah's insistence. Only two months before the League Conference at Lahore, Jinnah had been in favour of a constitution which recognized that there were "in India two nations who both must share the governance of their common motherland".⁸⁴

It seems that when the political representatives of the big Muslim compradors, who had sought for a long time provincial autonomy in an undivided India (for reasons discussed in Chapter Two), lost hope of obtaining it, they raised the demand for India's partition on communal lines.

It also appears that the demand was at first intended as a bargaining counter.⁸⁵ According to Penderel Moon, a high-ranking I.C.S. officer, then serving in Punjab, Jinnah told one or two persons in Lahore privately that the Lahore resolution was a "tactical move", designed to force concessions from the unwilling hands of the Congress leadership.⁸⁶ Until his death in December 1942, Sir Sikander Hyat Khan, the Punjab premier, who lent

powerful support to the League's resolution at Lahore, insisted that "the Lahore resolution was only a bargaining point for the League".⁸⁷

It seems that the League raised the banner of pan-Indian Muslim 'nationalism' to confront the Congress banner of pan-Indian 'nationalism'. Both 'nationalisms' were equally spurious, designed to serve the interests respectively of the Muslim and the Hindu big bourgeoisie and to trample underfoot the different nationalities.

Sikander Hyat Khan was opposed both to the idea of "an all-powerful centre" which would enable "a communal oligarchy" to "undermine or altogether nullify the autonomy and freedom of the provinces" as well as to the division of India on communal lines. He insisted on the preservation of the integrity of Punjab.⁸⁸ So did Fazlul Huq, the mover of the Lahore resolution, insist to the end on the preservation of the integrity of Bengal. He too did not believe in the 'two-nation theory'. (More of it later.) It is doubtful whether Jinnah himself believed in the 'two nation theory'. Replying to a representative of the *News Chronicle* (London) at the end of February 1944, Jinnah said:

"Does any man with the smallest glimmer of commonsense believe that so great a country with the *twenty different nations* and its twenty languages can ever be bound up and consolidated into one compact and enduring empire?"⁸⁹

In 1947 Jinnah told Mountbatten that Bengal as well as Punjab "had national characteristics in common: common history, common ways of life..."⁹⁰

Nehru called "the Pakistan scheme" "a foolish scheme which will not even last twenty-four hours"⁹¹ and gave a call to the Congress to fight out this "mad scheme". But almost immediately after the Lahore resolution was adopted, Gandhi wrote:

"The Muslims must have the same right of self-determination that the rest of India has. We are at present a joint family. Any member may claim a division."⁹²

It is worth noting that Gandhi recognized the right of self-determination, including the right of separation, of a religious community which lived intermingled with other religious communities throughout India but not that of the different Indian nationalities like the Tamils, Telugus, Bengalis and Punjabis. While acknowledging the right of self-determination of the Muslims, Gandhi rejected 'the two nation theory'. One may remember that it is Gandhi who described the Hindus and the Muslims as "two races" in the twenties.⁹³

Again at the Working Committee meeting in April 1940, Gandhi "was not prepared to say that the League did not represent the Muslim mind. If the Muslims want separation, he will not oppose."⁹⁴

In April 1940 an English friend wrote to Gandhi that *the Muslims seemed likely to agree to "something a good deal less than 'Pakistan'"*. He was afraid, "the longer the time that elapses without any compromise solution being reached, the stronger and more insistent will be the cry for 'Pakistan', so that in the end civil war or partition will be the only alternatives". Others also felt that if "the vision of united India is to become a reality", the Congress should allay the "apprehensions" that it "has raised in the minds of many Muslims".⁹⁵

Birla, who had been pressing Gandhi since at least January 1938 for partition of India on communal lines, wrote to Thakurdas in December 1940: "I argued with him [Gandhi] that we could not object to separation in case Muslims really wanted it."⁹⁶ Thakurdas had a discussion with the League's general secretary, Liaquat Ali Khan and wrote to Birla that he had "gathered from my talk...that *it was not a question so much of pressing Pakistan...as to ensuring that the Mohammedans will get freedom from what the Muslims call 'jabarjasti' ['jabardasti'] of the Hindus ...the position is mendable provided the Congress is prepared to bend*".⁹⁷

When on 2 January 1941, Thakurdas saw Jinnah, Jinnah "said that if talks were started without reservation, he felt sure that a suitable solution of this impasse, of which the British Government appear to him even to be taking advantage, will be found". He wanted that negotiations should be held between Gandhi (or some other leader) and himself as representatives respectively of the Hindus and the Muslims.⁹⁸ Perhaps this condition would have been relaxed if Gandhi offered some suitable formula which he was so good at devising in inconvenient situations.

But the Congress leaders refused to bend. They would not have any discussion on the issue. Gandhi's stand on the 'Pakistan' question differed from time to time. He would often assert that any solution reached under the threat of Pakistan would be an unjust solution and "worse than no solution" and was "entirely for waiting till the menace is gone".⁹⁹

Any talk of reaching an understanding with the League upset Nehru. On 4 September 1941 he noted in his prison diary:

"Iftikhar¹⁰⁰ - disillusioned Iftikhar - seeing no light except in a compromise with the Muslim League - which of course enrages me and I shout at him till I am hoarse. Of course Iftikhar and his close colleagues have been thinking along these lines for the last three years or so, and all my previous shouting has had no effect whatever on them, except to quieten them for a while in my presence."¹⁰¹

So the door to negotiations with the League (however keen the Congress leaders might be on negotiations with the imperial masters) for something less than Pakistan, was shut by them. While they preferred to wait "till the menace is gone", it continued to grow and assume threatening proportions. Though Linlithgow had wired to London towards the end of May 1940 that to counter the "preposterous claim" of the Congress, Jinnah had "put forward just as extreme a claim", he soon felt that the Pakistan demand was sinking into the minds of "rank and file Moslems".¹⁰² Within a short time the demand for separate Muslim states captured the imagination of the Muslim masses.

No doubt, the Congress leaders wanted an undivided India. But if the alternatives were a compromise with the Muslim leaders which would give the latter a share of power in a united India and a divided India minus Muslim-majority areas but with a strong centre controlled by them, they preferred the latter. So compromise with the League was ruled out.

In 1941 communal riots broke out in Ahmedabad, Bombay, Dhaka and Bihar. Gandhi asked those who wanted to organize violent resistance, like K.M. Munshi, Bhulabhai Desai and Bhulabhai's son Dhirubhai, who was then president of the Bombay PCC, to withdraw from the Congress and organize like-minded persons. He "made it absolutely clear that violent resistance becomes the duty of those who have no faith in non-violence".¹⁰³ (This principle, of course, did not hold good when British imperialism was to be resisted.) He assured Munshi, who wanted to organize Hindus to offer violent resistance against Muslims, that their personal relations would remain as warm as before.¹⁰⁴ In a letter to Gandhi Munshi wrote: "Fanatic Muslims consider you to be the source of all evil and me only a little serpent."¹⁰⁵

Individual Civil Disobedience

Swift, dramatic developments took place on the European war-front from the latter part of April 1940. In quick succession Nazi hordes overran Norway, Denmark, Holland, Belgium and Luxembourg. In June, after a brief war, France surrendered; and Italy declared war on the allies.

From the time of Holland's surrender, "Hitler's stocks", as Mahadev Desai informed Birla, "are steadily rising in his [Gandhi's] eyes". Gandhi, to quote Birla, "unfortunately took it for granted that Britain had lost the war".¹⁰⁶ Gandhi praised Hitler's "*sadhana*", "his single-minded devotion to his purpose that should be the object of our admiration and emulation", his "unclouded and unerring" intellect.¹⁰⁷ Through his letter to Linlithgow and his appeal "To Every Briton", he advised the British to uphold

non-violence and surrender when things appeared so black and to invite Hitler and Mussolini to take possession of even "your beautiful island". He volunteered "to go to Germany or anywhere" on a peace mission, if the British cabinet needed his help.¹⁰⁸

The mahatma's attitude towards British imperialism was changing with the change in the tide of the war. His policy of unconditional co-operation with it yielded at this stage to one of passive waiting "till the heat of the battle", as he said, "in the heart of the allied countries subsides and the future is clearer than it is".¹⁰⁹

Some of Gandhi's close associates like Prasad hurried to declare their support for Britain through press statements. Gandhi chided Prasad and said: "It is no small thing that we are not resorting to civil disobedience. Take good rest."¹¹⁰ Nehru thought it "very ungenerous" for them to take advantage of Britain's distress.

The serious reverses of the Allies awakened hopes in the hearts of the Congress leaders that the raj would relent and make concessions. After five days of deliberation in June the Working Committee affirmed that while the Congress would "adhere strictly to the principle of non-violence in their struggle for independence", it could not follow the same principle "in regard to external aggression and internal disorder". The committee left Gandhi "free to pursue his great ideal" and relieved him of his responsibility of leading the Congress. Meeting early in July, the committee adopted a resolution assuring the raj that the Congress would "throw in its full weight in the efforts for the effective organization of the Defence of the country", if the raj made a declaration committing itself to India's complete independence afterwards and, as an immediate step, formed a provisional national government.

According to S. Gopal, "the majority in the committee did not insist on a declaration about independence by the British but offered to assist in defence if a fully national government were established."¹¹¹ "A fully national government" was a reconstituted Executive Council of the Viceroy with leaders of political parties and functioning under the Government of India Act 1935.

Gandhi believed that if the Congress would wait and "develop sufficient strength", the raj would transfer power to it without the Congress coming "to an agreement with all parties". He felt that "we can get both our independence and national government", that the raj would transfer power to the Congress *alone*, "if the government are assured that the Congress will participate fully in the war effort".¹¹² It was the opinion of the Working Committee, including Nehru, that British imperialism was crumbling.¹¹³

But all hopes were blasted by the Viceroy's statement of 8 August,

known as the 'August Offer'. The Viceroy was prepared to reconstitute his Council with some representative Indians and to set up a War Advisory Council with "representatives of the Indian states, and of other interests". The raj agreed to set up at the end of the war "a body representative of the principal elements in India's national life in order to devise the framework of the new constitution". Referring to "the position of minorities in relation to any future constitutional scheme", the statement pointed out that the British government "could not contemplate the transfer of their present responsibilities...to any system of Government whose authority is directly denied by large and powerful elements in India's national life". The raj looked forward to "the attainment by India of that free and equal partnership in the British Commonwealth".¹¹⁴

The 'August Offer' practically granted the power of veto to the Muslim League in respect of future constitutional advance.

So the Congress Working Committee and the AICC rejected the 'August Offer', regretted that the raj had raised the issue of minorities as "an insuperable barrier to India's progress", declared the earlier resolution as having lapsed and again saddled Gandhi with the responsibility of leading the Congress. At the same time the AICC warned Congressmen against "doing anything with a view to embarrass" the British.¹¹⁵

It was a very uncomfortable situation for the Congress. The raj refused to buy its co-operation. On the other hand, the policy of not embarrassing the raj on one plea or another was tarnishing the anti-imperialist image of the leadership when thousands of political workers and leaders of other parties, trade unions and the Kisan Sabha were sent to prison. Some action, even a pretence of it, became necessary for the very survival of the Congress leadership. Gandhi wrote to the Viceroy on 29 August: "If things go on as they are and if the Congress remains supine, the Congress will die a slow death."¹¹⁶ He told the AICC meeting held in mid-September "that the position today is such that if we do nothing, our very existence will be imperilled.... Under the circumstances if we do not make our opposition known we shall cease to exist." He explained that the object of the movement he planned was not to embarrass the government's war efforts but to obtain the right of free speech. He pointed out that it would not be a mass movement.¹¹⁷

Gandhi had interviews with the Viceroy at the end of September but Linlithgow failed "to appreciate the Congress position" and refused to grant "freedom of speech" despite Gandhi's assurances that it would do no harm to the war efforts.¹¹⁸

In a press statement of 5 October, Gandhi declared that the "immediate issue" was not a declaration by Britain about India's independence, nor her willingness to convene a constituent assembly at the end of the war,

nor reconstitution of the Viceroy's Council, but "the right of existence, i.e., the right of self-expression which, broadly put, means free speech".¹¹⁹

It was an individual civil disobedience movement that Gandhi planned. Sole author of the plan, he remained in sole control of the movement, designed as a mere symbolic protest which would serve as a safety-valve for the pent-up resentment of the people without embarrassing in the least British imperialism. Gandhi took every precaution to steer the movement in a way that would fulfil this two-fold task. It was he who would select the individuals who would disobey only *one* official injunction – that which banned preaching against participation in the war. The *satyagrahi* was enjoined not to speak at public meetings; he was to give due notice to the authorities before he offered *satyagraha* and there would be no demonstrations or *hartals*. It was not the object to prevent "war-minded" Indians from contributing to war-efforts and joining the war or to surround ammunition factories or military barracks.¹²⁰

The first *satyagrahi* was Vinoba Bhave, an *ashram* inmate, who offered *satyagraha*, that is, spoke against participation in the war on 17 October and went to prison four days after. Nehru was the next choice. But he was arrested early in November before he could offer *satyagraha*.

On 30 October Gandhi in a letter to the Viceroy further clarified that he had not claimed "unrestricted access to the public through the ordinary channels of publicity" like newspapers. He assured Linlithgow that he "was taking extraordinary precautions to ensure non-violence", and that "to that end I was restricting the movement to the fewest possible typical individuals". He added :

"I had hoped that you would be satisfied with such aid as the Princes, moneyed men and professional warlike classes could give you.... I ask you to believe me when I tell you that, in every single step I have taken, I have thought of you and your people as your and their true friend."¹²¹

According to the Secretary of State, the movement was part of the "pressure upon the British Government to go back upon the Declaration of [August] 1940", which "was regarded by Congress as a direct challenge to its whole position, a direct denial of its claim to speak for India".¹²²

In November Mahadev Desai left for New Delhi with Gandhi's "blessings" to meet four persons: Puckle, the Director General of Intelligence; Tottenham, the Additional Home Secretary in charge of the C.I.D. portfolio; Reginald Maxwell, the Home Member; and Laithwaite, the Viceroy's private secretary. At a press conference on 10 November in Delhi, Mahadev repeatedly stressed that it was "a libel", "a gross and ungrateful libel to say that we are hindering the war effort". He cited

instances to show that instead of hindering, Gandhi helped the war effort.¹²³ When Mahadev met Puckle and Tottenham, he told them that Gandhi restricted the freedom of speech he claimed "by declining to address his appeals to the army or munition workers". Puckle confessed: "What puzzles and perplexes me is that *one who has been an asset to us for 16 months should have ceased to be that asset.*" Gandhi's secretary pointed out that *such a thing was "psychologically impossible", that it was wrong to think that Gandhi has ceased to be that asset.* When Mahadev met Tottenham again, the latter admitted that *Gandhi had been "most helpful"*. Maxwell asked him: "Why will you prevent those who want to pay or those who want to join as recruits?" Desai answered: "We don't..." and gave instances of people whom Gandhi did not want to dissuade from paying to the War Fund and from joining as recruits. He believed that there was "agreement on the principle of 'live and let live'" and told Maxwell that it should not be impossible to prepare "a formula agreeable" to both the raj and the Congress. When Mahadev met Laithwaite, the latter said to him: "I told Mr Birla that though we were technically at 'war', our relations were as friendly as they used to be." Mahadev repeated what he had told Puckle about Gandhi being an asset to the raj. He explained that it was not Gandhi's object to hamper war efforts in any way and disturb the allegiance of people who wanted to help. He pointed out how *the restricted liberty of speech Gandhi claimed would ultimately serve the interests of the raj.* He said to Laithwaite: "Rather than that [imprisoning *satyagrahis*], give us the liberty, [then] there is no agitation, no prisoners." Mahadev's arguments were based on what he said: "you live and let live." Laithwaite asked him, "...if you think your propaganda does not have any effect on the war effort why pursue it?" Mahadev replied: "*For our own existence. On the one hand there is little effect concretely on the war effort and on the other hand if we do not exercise the right, we smother ourselves.*" He told them all to remember that the advantage arising out of Gandhi's great influence for restraint far surpassed any disadvantages caused by his policy.¹²⁴

Gandhi "was altogether satisfied" that Mahadev "had represented him well as his ambassador!"¹²⁵

In a letter of 2 December, Gandhi assured the Home Member, Maxwell: "My desire is to cause the least embarrassment to the Government consistently with the prosecution of my mission." He added that "*duty has enjoined upon me a seemingly opposite course.* I take comfort in the fact that *though seeming to be in the opposite camp, I work for the same end as is declared by the British Government...*"¹²⁶ In reply, the Home Member wrote: "*I am glad to know that you are only seemingly in the opposite camp and that your end is the same as ours.*"¹²⁷

While staying with Gandhi at Sevagram in December 1940, Birla noted:

“Whenever *satyagraha* was in the field, communism disappeared for the time being only to reappear after its suppression.... I wondered what would be the position just now if Gandhiji had not started *satyagraha*? Would extremists in the Congress and Communists combine to create greater trouble? Was *satyagraha* not a blessing in disguise? Was Gandhiji, by starting restricted *satyagraha*, saving Government from greater embarrassment and at the same time registering his protest?.... I know from the past experience that Gandhiji’s move is always full of more than one implication?”¹²⁸

During this time Birla played his usual role of bringing the Congress leadership closer to the raj.¹²⁹ He was assiduously making contacts with the Viceroy, other high officials and prominent Britishers to bring about a settlement.¹³⁰ Towards the end of 1940, Birla had talks with Bombay’s governor Roger Lumley on his proposal for expansion of the Viceroy’s Council “by taking in men who were neither Congressmen nor Leaguemen but who would command respect” as a solution for ending the impasse. On 18 and 19 December Birla discussed this proposal with Gandhi, who blessed it provided the men were of a representative character. Birla suggested the names of eight “really good men” – Sir Purshotamdas Thakurdas, Nalini Sarkar, Sir Mirza Ismail, Sir Sultan Ahmed, M.S. Aney, etc., and Gandhi approved them. With the expansion of the Viceroy’s Council there would be an end to the individual civil disobedience movement. When Devdas Gandhi asked if the Congress would tolerate the war effort, the prophet of non-violence said: “Yes, they will. Even today they do.... Why should we grudge war-minded people associating with war?” Birla conveyed the substance of his talk with Gandhi to Linlithgow and asked Thakurdas to pass it on to Lumley, which Thakurdas did.¹³¹ In July 1941, the Viceroy’s Council was expanded with five new Indian members, among whom were three whose names had been suggested by Birla and approved by Gandhi – Nalini Sarkar, M.S. Aney and Sultan Ahmed.

The individual civil disobedience movement gradually petered out. Many like Bhulabhai Desai, a Working Committee member, resented being asked to go to prison and many of those who had gone in were most loath to go for the second time.¹³² The movement remained suspended under Gandhi’s instruction from 24 December 1940 to 4 January 1941 in order not to mar the enjoyment of the Christmas holiday by British officials. About 23,000 satyagrahis were put in prison for brief periods in the course

of one year. It was formally withdrawn in December 1941. In the meantime, in September 1941, Rajagopalachari, Bhulabhai Desai and Satyamurthi started a campaign for a return to the 'parliamentary programme'.

Subhas Bose's Escape to Germany

Subhas was arrested on 2 July 1940 under the Defence of India Act and did not expect release until the end of the war. The idea gripped him that it would be better to escape to a foreign country and work for India's freedom from outside than to languish in prison. He began a hunger strike on 29 November as a protest against his imprisonment and was released from prison on 5 December and interned in his own house. Members of the Kirti Kisan Party, which had links with the CPI, were contacted, some of them were sent to Afghanistan and two to the Soviet Union. A member of the Forward Bloc Working Committee, Mian Akbar Shah of the NWFP came to Calcutta and went back to make necessary arrangements. On 17 January 1941, soon after midnight, Subhas, immaculately dressed as a Pathan, left home eluding watchers. At Peshawar Bhagat Ram Talwar, a member of the Kirti Kisan Party, took charge of him. Reaching Kabul on 28 January, they made contacts with Soviet Embassy officials and waited, but received no encouragement. On 2 February Subhas contacted German officials who promised to communicate with Berlin. It was on 18 March that he left Kabul on an Italian passport for Berlin via Moscow. He had many anxious moments in Kabul, then infested with spies of different countries.

In the late thirties Subhas had hoped that the imperialist war that was approaching would provide an opportunity for India to liberate herself from the British yoke. But the policies of the Congress leadership shattered his hopes. It was perhaps in late 1939 that the idea dawned on him that he might try to escape to a foreign country and work for India's freedom and raise an army to liberate India. He believed that the enemy's enemy was his friend (whatever the ideological complexion), whose help he felt no scruple to accept with a view to freeing his motherland from foreign rule. He also believed that without foreign assistance the country's liberation could not be achieved, for the Indian army was still loyal to the British raj. During 1938-40 Subhas tried to make contacts with Germany, Japan and the Soviet Union.¹³³ Immediately the war started, he contacted the CPI to help him to send a message to Moscow. S.S. Batliwala, a member of the CPI Central Committee for some years, stated that he represented the CPI in the meetings with Subhas in October 1939. Subhas said to him: "I trust Soviet Russia as one State which will not be interested in colonizing

India. So I would be ready to welcome military help from Soviet Russia to secure our freedom from the claws of the British imperialists." Instructed by Subhas and with help from the CPI, which gave him necessary contacts in London, Amiya Nath Bose, Subhas's nephew, who had just returned from England after his studies there, carried his uncle's message to a Soviet representative in London.¹³⁴

In 1934, when Subhas wrote *The Indian Struggle*, he wanted "a synthesis between Communism and Fascism".¹³⁵ At an interview with Palme Dutt in January 1938, Subhas said:

"My political ideas have developed further since I wrote my book [*The Indian Struggle*] three years ago.... What I really meant was that we in India wanted our national freedom, and having won it, we wanted to move in the direction of Socialism.... When I was writing the book, Fascism had not started on its imperialist expedition and it appeared to me merely an aggressive form of nationalism.... I have always understood and am quite satisfied that Communism, as it has been expressed in the writings of Marx and Lenin and in the official statements of policy of the Communist International, gives full support to the struggle for national independence and recognizes this as an integral part of its world outlook."¹³⁶

Subhas extolled the achievements of the Soviet Union and as late as 1941 acclaimed the Soviet Union as "the greatest revolutionary force in the world". He was not happy when Germany invaded the Soviet Union and, though he had tied his fate with the Axis Powers, he was critical of the Nazi invasion.¹³⁷ He despised Nazi racism and brutality but he did not express anywhere "any sympathy for the millions of victims of Nazi aggression and brutality. He was, Nambiar said, 'a one-idea man', and that idea was Indian freedom".¹³⁸

Subhas was essentially a bourgeois nationalist who, unlike Gandhi, Nehru, Patel, Prasad, etc., was uncompromising in his opposition to British imperialism. Since at least the Calcutta Congress in 1928, he was consistent in his open opposition to Gandhi's policies. His book *The Indian Struggle 1920-1934*, critical of Gandhi and Gandhism, which first appeared in London in January 1935, was banned in India immediately after its publication.

It appears from Subhas's writings that there was an authoritarian streak in his outlook. He believed that it was the political elite who could lead the basic masses to freedom and then to Socialism and that it would be necessary to curb the democratic rights of the people for some years after their liberation.

By escaping to Germany when other doors were barred against him,

Subhas objectively joined the most reactionary forces on earth whatever might have been his subjective wishes and however much he might have tried to assert his independence. The plunge that he took in January 1941 landed him from the frying pan into the fire.

But the stories of the free Indian Government and the Indian National Army he organized in South-East Asia brought about at the end of the war a rapid politicization of the masses, even of the British Indian armed forces, and were an important factor which convinced the British imperialists of the necessity of changing their direct rule for an indirect one.

References and Notes

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4. SWN, X, 119.
5. *Ibid.*, VIII, 752.
6. *Bombay Chronicle*, 6 Nov. 1939, quoted in Gitasree Bandyopadhyay, *Constraints in Bengal Politics*, 333.
7. Birla, *Bapu*, III, 332 – emphasis added.
8. *Ibid.*, IV, 22 – emphasis added.
9. Shri Ram to Amritlal Ojha, May 1940, PT Papers, File 239, Part I: cited in Rajat Kanta Ray, *op cit.*, 322.
10. Venkatasubbiah, *op cit.*, 43-4.
11. Choudhury Khaliquzzaman, *Pathway to Pakistan*, 243.
12. Balabushevich and Dyakov, *op cit.*, 370.
13. Palme Dutt, *India Today*, 449-50.
14. See Gopal, *op cit.*, 250.
15. Shankardas, *The First Congress Raj*, 247,248 – emphasis added.
16. See SWN, X, 122-38 for the resolution and two earlier drafts.
17. *Ibid.*, 183 fn.3.
18. Birla *Bapu*, III, 338 – emphasis added; CWG LXX, 311: also 175.
19. Munshi, *op cit.*, 59.
20. Birla, *Bapu*, III, 342-3.
21. *Ibid.*, 344.
22. *Ibid.*, 341,338,339.
23. *Ibid.*, 344-5.
24. Gopal, *op cit.*, 254 – emphasis added.
25. Menon, *op cit.*, 63-4 – emphasis added.
26. See Misra, *op cit.*, 355 – emphasis added.
27. SWN, X, 85.
28. *Ibid.*, 274,288 – emphasis added.
- 28a. *Ibid.* 73-4; XIII, 714.
29. *Ibid.*, X, 161.
30. *Ibid.*, 18-9,159,229,244-6,247,366, *passim*.
31. *Ibid.*, 183 fn.3,180,181.
32. Gopal, *op cit.*, 254 – emphasis added.
33. *Ibid.*
34. SWN, X, 170-3 – emphasis added.
35. Gopal, *op cit.*, 255-6.
36. Birla, *Bapu*, 347-8 – emphasis added.
37. Tendulkar, *op cit.*, V, 227-8.
38. CWG, LXXII, 147, fn.3.
39. Birla, *Bapu*, IV, 21; see also CWG, LXX, 292,316,328,389; *ibid.* LXXI, 11,51,117,306, *passim*.
40. *Ibid.*, LXX, 189-90,204.
41. Menon, *op cit.*, 66-7 – emphasis added.
42. CWG, LXX, 290, 316, 328 – emphasis added.
43. Misra, *op cit.*, 355.
44. Birla, *Bapu*, III, 352,349,350,353-5,356-7,358-9.
45. Sitaramayya, *op cit.*, II, 145.
46. Munshi, *op cit.*, 390; CWG, LXXI, 437.

47. Munshi, *op cit.*, 59.
48. Misra, *op cit.*, 359.
49. Sitaramayya, *op cit.*, II, 130.
50. Misra, *op cit.*, 359-60; Sitaramayya, *op cit.*, II, 157.
51. Menon, *op cit.*, 68-9.
52. CWG, LXX, 337.
53. Sitaramayya, *op cit.*, II, 145 – emphasis added.
54. CWG, LXX, 364; LXXI, 316; SWN, X, 280,287,294.
55. CWG, LXXI, 337-8.
56. Birla, *Bapu*, IV, 4.
57. Bose, *Crossroads*, 232.
58. SWN, X, 303-7.
59. *Ibid*, 226,210,223,229.
60. *Ibid*, 229,315; also, 170-2,451,479, *passim*.
61. B.N. Pandey, *Nehru*, 188; Misra, *op cit.*, 489; also Bose, *The Indian Struggle*, 334; Dietmar Rothermund, *The Phases of Indian Nationalism and Other Essays*, (Bombay, 1970), 67,138.
62. SWN, X, 230.
63. Menon, *op cit.*, 69.
64. CWG, LXXI, 191-2.
65. GOI, Home, Poll, File, 3/33 of 1940; cited in Gitasree Bandopadhyay, *op cit.*, 337.
66. AICC Papers, File P-5 of 1940, Part-I; cited in *ibid*.
67. See Subodh Roy (ed.), *op cit.*, 1935-1945, 97.
68. SWN, X, 477; also 175, fn. 4, 189, 230, 311, *passim*.
69. *Ibid*, XI, 121.
70. *Ibid*, X, 379.
71. *The Congress Encyclopaedia*, XII, 367,368.
72. CWG, LXXI, 305-6.
73. Birla, *Bapu*, IV, 189 – emphasis added.
74. *Ibid*, 30-1 – emphasis added.
75. *Ibid*, 32-3, 33-4.
76. CWG, LXXI, 331 – emphasis added; also 342,343.
77. See Subodh Roy (ed.), *op cit.*, 1935-1945, 160,164,168.
78. CWG, 338,353,349-53,357-60 – emphasis added.
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80. Proceedings of the CWC meeting, Wardha, 16-19 April 1940, AICC Papers, File G-32/1940; CWG, LXXII, 4-7.
81. Quoted in Moore, *Endgames of Empire*, 73.
82. Cited in W.H. Morris-Jones, "If It Be Real, What Does It Mean?": Some British Perceptions of the Indian National Congress", in Sisson and Wolpert (eds.), *op cit.*, 109-10.
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86. Penderel Moon, *Divide and Quit*, 21.
87. Stanley Wolpert, *Jinnah of Pakistan*, 185; also Abul Hayat, *op cit.*, 106.
88. See Moon, *op cit.*, 20, 21; for Sikander's long speech at the Punjab Legislative Assembly, 11 March 1941, insisting on maintaining Punjab's integrity, see Menon, *op cit.*, 442-58.
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90. TOP, X, 159.
91. SWN, XI, 215; also 17.
92. CWG, LXXI, 388.

93. *Ibid*, XVIII, 289-90; XXIII, 201.
94. *Ibid*, LXXII, 6.
95. *Ibid*, 26 and 21 fn.1 – emphasis added.
96. Birla to Thakurdas, 18 Dec. 1940, PT Papers, File 177.
97. Thakurdas to Birla, 19 Dec. 1940, *ibid* – emphasis added.
98. Thakurdas's note on his talk with Jimmah, 2.1.41 (the document is wrongly dated 2.1.40), *ibid*.
99. CWG, LXXII, 26,27.
100. Iftikharuddin Ahmed, president of the Punjab PCC, was a respected person with left leanings.
101. SWN, XI, 692.
102. Linlithgow to Zetland, 25 May 1940; Linlithgow to Amery, 30 June 1940; both cited in Moore, *Endgames of Empire*, 84,85.
103. CWG, LXXIV, 92-3; also 112-4,133-4.
104. *Ibid*, 403-6; Munshi, *op cit.*, 75-6, 411-5; also 77.
105. *Ibid*, 420.
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107. CWG, LXXII, 70,100,193.
108. *Ibid*, 100-1,230.
109. *Ibid*, 104.
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111. Gopal, *op cit.*, 265.
112. CWG, LXXII, 168-9,246.
113. Sitaramayya, *op cit.*, II, 192; SWN, XI, 68.
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116. *Ibid*, LXXII, 426.
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123. CWG, LXXIII, 161; Birla, *Bapu*, IV, 121-9.
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131. Birla to Thakurdas, 4 Jan. 1941 and Thakurdas to Bombay governor 11 Jan., PT Papers. File 177; Birla, *Bapu*, IV, 185-7; also 177-8.
132. *Ibid*, 264-6.
133. Leonard A. Gordon, *Brothers Against the Raj*, 416,426.
134. *Ibid*, 416; Amiya Nath Bose, "Socialist View", *Statesman*, 30 June and 1 July 1992.
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CHAPTER EIGHT

'QUIT INDIA': BEFORE AND AFTER

The New Phase of the War and Congress

The war entered a new phase when Germany broke the Non-Aggression Pact with the Soviet Union and launched a blitzkrieg against it on 22 June 1941. With the vast resources of most of Europe at their command and with an efficient military machine, the Nazis hoped to bring the Soviet Union to its knees within a few weeks. Initially, the march of Nazi troops and tanks into the Soviet territory did not meet with much resistance. Then began resistance which the Nazis had not bargained for.

Soon the Soviet Union and Britain concluded a treaty of alliance. In August 1941 the U.S.A. and Britain issued the 'Atlantic Charter' as the statement of their war policy, declaring:

"They respect the right of all peoples to choose the form of Government under which they will live; and they wish to see sovereign rights and self-government restored to those who have been forcibly deprived of them."

But Britain's Prime Minister Churchill announced in the House of Commons in September that the 'Atlantic Charter' did not apply to India, Burma and other British colonies.

On 7 December Japan attacked Pearl Harbour, an important U.S. naval base in the Pacific and destroyed the U.S. fleet there. She declared war on Britain and the USA. With the entry of the USA into the war, an alliance was formed between the Soviet Union, Britain and the USA. The Japanese swept through South-East Asia knocking down U.S., British and Dutch defences of their colonies with almost effortless ease.

The members of the Congress Working Committee, which met at Bardoli from 23 to 30 December 1941, differed on the question of non-violence. Nehru, Azad and Rajagopalachari wanted to discard non-violence and participate in war efforts if the British would be persuaded by the grim war situation to make some concessions and buy their support. But Patel, Prasad and some others insisted on no participation, refusing to compromise with their creed of non-violence, which had been of a more accommodating type in July 1940 and before. Gandhi, who had offered, and insisted on,

unconditional co-operation with the raj in its war efforts at the initial phase of the war, refused to abandon non-violence, "the faith of a lifetime".¹ A resolution offering conditional support to the war was adopted by the Working Committee. At his request Gandhi was relieved of the responsibility of guiding the Congress.²

Meeting at Wardha in mid-January 1942, the AICC adopted the resolution with some minor additions. While declaring at the meeting that he "won't exchange *ahimsa* even for independence", Gandhi supported the resolution and asked other 'believers' in non-violence to support it. Interestingly, he criticized China for defending herself with arms. At this meeting he announced:

"...Jawaharlal will be my successor. He says whatever is uppermost in his mind, but he always does what I want."³

Chiang Kai-shek and Madame Chiang came to India in February 1942 to bring the government and the Congress closer. Chiang met the Viceroy as well as the Congress leaders. Nehru escorted the Chiangs, Madame Chiang in particular, to different places, and arranged an interview between Chiang and Gandhi. The Chiangs were among those who served later as links between Nehru and the Congress on the one hand and the U.S. authorities, including Roosevelt, on the other.⁴ On being asked by the press whether he had discussed the Indian problem with Chiang, Nehru with his usual modesty replied: "Certainly, we discussed India. *After all I am India.*" He thought of himself "as a symbol of India" – "like the national flag".⁵

With the rapid advance of the Japanese in South-East Asia, U.S. President Roosevelt was afraid that India was as good as lost. He continued to put pressure on Churchill without offending much the susceptibilities of the British imperialists to grant dominion status to India.⁶ The U.S. imperialists had been seeking an open door to the British colonies, especially India, and found in the war an opportunity to force Britain to relax her hold on India.

On 30 September 1939, soon after the outbreak of the war, Joseph Kennedy, then U.S. ambassador to Britain, wrote to Roosevelt:

"War regardless of the outcome, will merely hasten the process [of Britain's decline as a world power].... the leadership of the English-speaking world will, willy-nilly, be ours."⁷

In December 1940, when Nehru was extolling the USA as the champion of democracy and freedom, Virgil Jordan, the president of the National

Industrial Conference Board of the USA, said in the course of his address to the Investment Bankers' Association:

"At best, England will become [after the war] a junior partner in a new Anglo-Saxon imperialism, in which the economic resources and the military and naval strength of the United States will be the centre of gravity. Southward is our hemisphere and westward in the Pacific the path of empire takes its way, and in modern terms of economic power as well as political prestige, the sceptre passes to the United States."⁸

Nehru was convinced like Gandhi that the end of the British empire was quite near. It became the burden of his many speeches that the British empire was disappearing, that India would soon become free and that "mostly Russia and China...are keeping up the British structure in Europe and Asia".⁹ He was sure that "countless eyes from all over the world look up to it [the USA] for leadership in the paths of peace and freedom", that "The next hundred years...are going to be the century of America" – "America on whom rests a vast burden of responsibility, and towards whom so many millions look for right leadership at this crisis in world history".¹⁰

Nehru was highly critical of the 'People's War' slogan of the CPI, which came to hold at the end of 1941 that after the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union the imperialist war had changed into a People's War. Inaugurating the 19th session of the AITUC at Kanpur in February 1942, he denounced the communists, blamed the workers and peasants of the world for "arming themselves with guns and producing aeroplanes" and "destroying each other's countries", and held China and Russia responsible for keeping British imperialism alive. He exhorted the people to "organize themselves in accordance with the *orders* of the Congress and snatch freedom from this British Government..."¹¹

The Cripps Mission

Churchill yielded to US pressure as well as to that of his Labourite colleagues like Clement Attlee, who criticized "the *crude* imperialism of the Viceroy" as "fatally short-sighted and suicidal", believed that "To mark time is to lose India" and suggested that "some person of high standing" should be sent out "with wide powers to negotiate a settlement with India".¹² On 9 March, the day after Rangoon had fallen to the Japanese, the British cabinet decided to send Stafford Cripps, then an influential member of the cabinet, to India to negotiate a settlement with Indian leaders. The Tory members of the cabinet agreed more as a gesture

to the USA than out of any genuine desire for a settlement. Cripps was to negotiate within the framework of a Draft Declaration of the cabinet: it was subject to amendments after discussion with Indian leaders provided the cabinet approved of them. As Secretary of State Amery wired to Linlithgow, he was far from sure "whether Cripps succeeds in squaring the circle or not". He expected adverse Congress reaction as "the nest contains the Pakistan cuckoo's egg".¹³

Arriving in India on 22 March, Cripps had discussions with the Viceroy and preliminary talks with Indian leaders of different political persuasions and then announced at a press conference the cabinet's draft declaration. It provided for an elected constituent assembly after the war was over, which could opt for dominionhood or independence. It gave the provinces which were not prepared to accept the constitution framed by the constituent assembly the right to opt out of the Indian Union. It invited "the immediate and effective participation of the leaders of the principal sections of the Indian people in the counsels of the country, of the Commonwealth and of the United Nations". While this was worded vaguely, the draft made it clear that defence would remain the responsibility of the British government.¹⁴

Even before Cripps came and the proposals were known, Gandhi had decided to reject them. Mahadev Desai had written to Birla on 14 March:

"Let Cripps come, if he likes. What does he hope to get from Bapu? He should get busy placating Jawaharlal and Rajaji."¹⁵

When Cripps met Gandhi on 27 March, the latter "expressed the very definite view that Congress would not accept the document".¹⁶ Gandhi wrote to Nehru who was in favour of acceptance of the British proposals: "I am clearly of the view that we cannot accept this 'offer'."¹⁷

Gandhi was then more than convinced that the collapse of the British empire was imminent. When Rangoon fell, "the shadow of a heavy and far-reaching military defeat" lay over India, as Churchill himself said.¹⁸ Even earlier, on 21 February, in a broadcast to the country, the deputy chief of General Staff in India, General Molesworth, had warned that the Japanese warships which were on the prowl in the Indian Ocean, might increase their activities, and that Japanese raids and landings on Indian coasts were feared. The Andaman Islands were occupied by the Japanese on 23 March. At such a moment the Gandhis did not think it prudent that India should "make herself", to quote Sitaramayya, "a trailer to a sinking steamship or hitch her wagon to a falling star".¹⁹ They preferred, as we shall see, to hitch their wagon to the 'rising sun' of Asia. Cripps wired to Churchill on 4 April that the "Gandhi wing of the Congress" regarded "Great

Britain as defeated and unimportant so far as the future of India is concerned".²⁰ Dismissing the Cripps proposals as "a post-dated cheque on a crashing bank",²¹ Gandhi refused to wait in Delhi until the end of the negotiations and left for Sevagram on 4 April. But before leaving Delhi, Gandhi again warned Nehru that the Cripps offer could not be accepted.²²

The Gandhi-Patel wing of the Congress would not compromise itself in the eyes of the Japanese whose victory seemed to them imminent. "Indeed", writes R. J. Moore, "Cripps imagined Gandhi to be 'actually desirous to bring about a state of chaos while he sits at Wardha eating vegetables'".²³

Nehru, too, as Gandhi said, "is convinced that the British empire is finished".²⁴ But Nehru believed in the ultimate defeat of the Axis Powers and in the emergence of the USA as the dominant power which would shape the future of the world. As noted before, it was the Americans who, in consultation with the British government, arranged his visit to Chiang Kai-shek in 1939. He was all praise for the US ruling class, "the ally of the rotten Kuomintang generals" and various other reactionaries. The US ruling class also was depending on him. In February 1942, Roosevelt sent Nehru "a friendly message through Edgar Snow", requesting Nehru to write to him telling him what Nehru "wants me to do for India". Snow was told to send Nehru's reply "through our diplomatic pouch".²⁵

Throughout the war the US ruling class was putting irresistible pressure on the British to loosen their hold on the empire. After the fall of France the Americans agreed to give the British some military hardware in exchange for long-term leases to set up US naval and air bases in various British possessions in the Western hemisphere.²⁶ Early in 1942 the Americans demanded and ensured the dismantling of the system of imperial preference as a *quid pro quo* for their lend-lease aid (Article 7 of the Lend-Lease Agreement), rejecting Churchill's pleas.²⁷ They insisted on an 'open door' for U.S. capital and goods into India and other British colonies and on exploiting their natural resources. The theoreticians of US imperialism were openly proclaiming its aim of building up a world-wide informal empire. In the beginning of 1941, Henry Morton Luce, the publisher of *Life*, *Time* and other journals, declared in an article entitled "The American Century" in *Life* that the USA should take over world leadership on the basis of its vast power.²⁸

Perhaps Nehru echoed Henry Luce when he described the next hundred years as "the century of America" in an article "India's Day of Reckoning", which was published in the March 1942 issue of *Fortune* (Chicago).²⁹

In December 1941, Roosevelt told Churchill that he favoured termination of India's colonial status, to which Churchill reacted strongly. But Roosevelt continued to raise this issue through his personal envoy

Harriman as well as through correspondence.³⁰

The ultimate objective of the US ruling class was to drive out the old imperialist powers like Britain, France and the Netherlands from their colonies and semi-colonies and turn them into parts of their own informal empire. But, during the war, their primary aim was "to uphold the Allied coalition" in order to ensure defeat of the Axis Powers. Only victory in the war would pave the way to the USA's cherished goal – world domination. As Eugene V. Rostow, U.S. Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, said later:

"in many ways the whole postwar history has been a process of American movement to take over possessions...of security which Britain, France, the Netherlands and Belgium had previously held."³¹

Within the basic framework of this policy and without disrupting the wartime alliance, the USA exerted pressure on her ally to relax Britain's imperialist grip on India.

Col. Louis Johnson, who afterwards became US Defence Secretary, was appointed the US President's Personal Representative in India and came during Cripps' talks with Indian leaders. He tried to mediate when the negotiations seemed to have failed. The Congress Working Committee adopted a resolution on 2 April, rejecting the Cripps proposals, though it was not released to the press until 11 April when the talks finally broke down.³²

The differences actually centred around two issues – the character of the reconstituted Executive Council of the Viceroy and control over Defence. The Working Committee wanted the Council to work like a *de facto* cabinet with the Viceroy as the constitutional head and sought to have an *effective* control over Defence. But on these issues the British government refused to make any concessions.

On 4 April Johnson wired to Roosevelt and appealed to him for personal intervention with Churchill to prevent a breakdown.³³ Nehru met Johnson on 6 April, when Nehru told him that the Congress would not break on the issue of the right of a province not to accede to the Indian Union. "*Nehru had then gone on to speak of hitching India's wagon to America's star and not Britain's.*" Johnson assured him that the USA, which "would have the leading place at the peace table" after the war, would do its best to enable India to attain "her ambitions", provided India "had wholeheartedly backed the war effort". "But", he warned, "the matter would be far otherwise if she did not." Nehru said that the talks with Cripps would fail "if they were not satisfied" on the issue of Defence. But he promised "to assist the war effort even if the 'Cripps proposals'

did not go through." Nehru confessed to Johnson that "he would lose his followers, if he compromised with the British on the Defence issue".³⁴

Meeting Cripps on 7 April, Nehru admitted that his "main difficulty" was "fear lest if he accepts office, Gandhi will turn the mass of Congressmen against him".³⁵

A new formula on the issue of Defence was devised by Cripps and Johnson to narrow the differences and handed over to the Congress leaders. The Viceroy and the Commander-in-Chief Wavell were not consulted. This was too much for Linlithgow who, while appreciating the pressure exerted by Roosevelt's representative on the Congress Working Committee in favour of accepting the offer, very much resented his intervention on the Defence issue.³⁶

Though Cripps was very hopeful that the scheme, "largely owing to very efficient and wholehearted help of Col. Johnson", might succeed,³⁷ it was torpedoed by Churchill, and the concessions made on the Defence issue, the crux of the problem,³⁸ were withdrawn. With the failure of the negotiations Churchill, Amery, Linlithgow and Co. as well as Gandhi and his closest associates were happy. Though Churchill and Amery believed that the effect in the USA was "wholly beneficial", Roosevelt, who made a last-minute effort to get Cripps' departure from India postponed, held the British solely responsible for the deadlock.³⁹

Congress – A Divided House

In a letter to Roosevelt on 12 April, Nehru regretted the failure "for the present" of the negotiations and blamed the British government for not permitting the Congress to rouse the people to fight for "the larger causes of freedom and democracy". Yet he assured the President that "still we shall do our utmost not to submit to Japanese or any other aggression and invasion".⁴⁰

At an interview to a *News Chronicle* representative, soon after Cripps' departure, Nehru "tried to represent that though Congress has rejected the Cripps offer, India was willing to help the British". He also promised to make a broadcast from the All India Radio obviously in support of the war efforts and was only dissuaded by Azad from making it.⁴¹ Earlier, on 6 April, Johnson had received the impression from his talks that Nehru would help war efforts "even if the 'Cripps proposals' did not go through".⁴² And on 11 April, after the negotiations had fallen through, Johnson reported to the State Department: "I shall have his complete help; *he is our hope here. I trust him.*"⁴³

When the AICC met at Allahabad at the end of April, Shiva Rao,

correspondent of *Hindu* and *Manchester Guardian*, who had close contact with Congress leaders, carried Johnson's message to Nehru, inviting him to pay a short visit to Washington and discuss the Indian problem with Roosevelt. The US mission in Delhi would make all arrangements for his flight to Washington and back. Nehru declined the invitation for fear of strong objection from his Congress colleagues.⁴⁴ Before Johnson left India in mid-May, Nehru assured him in a confidential communication that no hindrance would be placed in the way of the Allied forces in India, "no embarrassment of any kind", and production, instead of being interfered with, would be encouraged.⁴⁵ After Johnson's departure Nehru maintained cordial relations with the Americans through the American mission in New Delhi.

The invitation to visit the USA for personal contact with Roosevelt came from another American, Claire Boothe Luce, wife of Henry Luce. A member of the U.S. Congress from 1943 to 1947 and, later, an ambassador to Italy, Claire Boothe in her letter of 4 June to Nehru wrote that "the mysterious impact of great personalities" like Roosevelt and Nehru might strike the sparks that would light India on the road to freedom, for "Washington and the White House are deciding the destinies of the nations".⁴⁶

Claire Boothe had come to India, and together with General Brereton, met Nehru⁴⁷ before she flew to visit the Chinese front on 2 April with General Stilwell.

Claire Boothe sent a letter, dated 25 August, to Nehru who, then in prison, received it much later. Her messenger was Wendell Willkie, the Republican candidate who lost in the presidential election in 1940 to Roosevelt. Willkie flew round the world in a US military bomber as the President's envoy in 1942-3. The rumour that he might visit India gave the British the jitters and through diplomatic pressure it was prevented.⁴⁸ In her letter Claire Boothe greeted Nehru as "the greatest and truest friend that the cause of Democracy and the cause of the United Nations has in all of Asia". She wrote: "The delivery of this letter in India by Mr Wendell Willkie means the thing of greatest importance to us, the United Nations, and to you, the Indian people". What message Willkie would convey to Nehru in a "face to face" talk between the two is not known, but before concluding, she wrote: "The hope that this letter carries is so much greater than any words can express that I feel foolish, inept, trying to put it into any words."⁴⁹ In India, the hopes of the US imperialists were pinned on Nehru.

For some time before and after Cripps' departure from India, Nehru went on emphasizing that nothing should be done to embarrass the British war efforts or those of the Americans who would be coming. He wanted

"production to go on full speed ahead" and the Indian people "to resist the Japanese to the uttermost", even by resorting to guerrilla war. He told the press that he did not agree with Gandhi on the question of scorched earth policy.⁵⁰

Though Nehru resolved to fight Hitler and Japan, he was not wholly without admiration for Hitler. While expressing his dislike for Hitler's "hideous gospel", he said on 21 February:

"...this can be said to his [Hitler's] credit that he represents something against the defunct order.... *Hitler*, in the way he dealt with unemployment, which England and America failed to solve, *represented some elements of a progressive order.*"⁵¹

On 15 April Gandhi sent a message warning him. "I see no good", he wrote, "in entering into a guerrilla warfare when the American and Chinese forces enter India."⁵²

It is worth noting that the Working Committee's resolution rejecting the Cripps proposals agreed in principle to the partition of India. Though the committee stood for the unity of India, the resolution stated:

"Nevertheless the Committee cannot think in terms of compelling the people in any territorial unit to remain in an Indian Union against their declared and established will."

As Sitaramayya observed,

"this passage concedes the division of India into more than one political State and gives the go-by to the unity and integrity of India".⁵³

During the negotiations with Cripps, the Congress leaders did not "rule out the Pakistan idea".⁵⁴ In his confidential note to Louis Johnson, dated 11 May 1942, Nehru stated:

"While we are entirely opposed to the break-up of India and will try to prevent it, we recognize that in the last resort we cannot compel a territorial unit to remain in the Union against its declared and established will."⁵⁵

It may be noted that in reply to Birla's letter of 14 July 1942, arguing in favour of the partition of India on religious lines, Mahadev, Gandhi's devoted secretary, wrote on 16 July:

"Now about your letter.... Bapu has given it careful attention.... *The*

question is not of Pakistan or separation as such, but of the real content of these conception [sic!]."^{55a}

Gandhi appeared to have had hardly any objection to the partition of India on religious lines: his concern was about the "content", that is, areas that might be claimed for inclusion within Pakistan.

The view that the Congress leaders felt obliged to accept partition in the interests of communal peace and freedom early in 1947 – only after communal holocausts had started and after the functioning of the Interim Government in 1946-1947 had revealed to them the impossibility of working with the Muslim League – a view propagated by Congress leaders like Rajendra Prasad, and others like Sumit Sarkar, is far from correct. The facts are: the Congress leaders exerted as much pressure on the British raj as possible to make a deal with them *alone* and hand over to them an undivided India (of course, within the imperial framework), but as 'freedom' would be the product of negotiations between three parties – the raj, the Congress and the League – they were afraid from the time the League raised the demand for separation that "*in the last resort*" they would have to agree to the partition of India on a religious basis. More of it later.

The situation on the war-front grew from bad to worse. Early in April, Colombo, the capital of Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) and Trincomalee, the headquarters of the British fleet, as well as Visakhapatnam and Kakinada in Andhra were bombed by the Japanese. The sea approaches to the Indian coast were commanded by the Japanese fleet. On the basis of a report of a spy about a projected invasion by the Japanese, Madras city was hastily evacuated. In a broadcast on 21 April, the Commander-in-Chief of the British Indian Army warned that "the Japanese may raid India. They may even seek to occupy a portion temporarily..." The British prepared a plan of adopting the scorched earth policy and blowing up even the Tata Iron and Steel Works at Jamshedpur, withdrawing from Assam and Bengal and building a new defence line across Bihar. As D.D. Kosambi wrote, the Japanese "had only to attack immediately in force for the whole of the so-called defence system to crumble..."⁵⁶

The people's anti-British hatred became intense. The government forced people to evacuate their homes on one or two days' notice in many villages in some coastal areas of Bengal. Boats and cycles, the only or main means of communication and transport in many areas, were taken away from the people and their normal lives were disrupted.

When with the Japanese attack, the British fled from Malaya, the Indians there were left to fend for themselves. So with the Japanese occupation of Burma, the Indians there were forced to rely solely on themselves. Streams of refugees – hundreds of thousands of them – started

on their long trek through inhospitable places into India, and were denied any protection or help by the British. On the contrary, invidious distinction was made between British and Indian evacuees. Separate routes were fixed for the whites and the browns; the former were provided with food, shelter and means of transport while the latter were denied them. Thousands of Indians perished on the 'black road' for want of food and drink and due to diseases. On reaching India, the Indians were discriminated against as usual. Tales of horror to which they had been subjected spread throughout India and added to the people's hatred of the British raj.

Two factors caused resentment among the big bourgeois against the British. Those who had stakes in Malaya and Burma could hardly reconcile themselves to the losses. As the Governor of the Central Provinces, Twynham, wrote to Linlithgow, "the losses incurred in Malaya and Burma have stricken the Baniyas and Marwaris to the soul".⁵⁷ Second, the scorched earth policy that the government threatened to pursue in the event of Japanese penetration into India was a nightmare to the tycoons. They could hardly stomach the prospect of seeing their industries going up in flames. Edgar Snow, who met many of them at the time, wrote:

"Indian industrialists and capitalists were among the most suspicious and worried groups. Would not 'scorched earth' ruin their factories?"⁵⁸

Thakurdas strongly criticized the policy at the annual session of the FICCI on 8 March 1942, and the FICCI communicated its opposition to the Viceroy. On 27 March G.L. Mehta, FICCI president, issued a press statement criticizing such a policy.⁵⁹ Birla wanted Gandhi to write on 'scorched earth': Mahadev assured him that Gandhi, who was "opposed to a scorched earth policy", would do so.⁶⁰ In an article Gandhi condemned the "Russian technique of scorched earth" and opposed its introduction in India.⁶¹ But for some time he deferred "final judgement" so far as the forcible eviction of people from their homes, seizure of boats, etc., were concerned.⁶²

The big compradors had hailed the war and desired it to last long, but such a war as would scorch their factories and reduce them to ashes was not to their taste. The illusion about the invincibility of British arms lay shattered before their eyes. A section of them waited to welcome the Japanese. Walchand Hirachand told Edgar Snow that "As for choice between the British and Japanese, frankly he preferred to take his chance with the latter".⁶³

The Congress leadership was a divided house. Gandhi resented Nehru's call for co-operation with British war efforts and advocacy of guerrilla struggle against the Japanese in case of invasion. While warning Nehru,

he advised Patel to resign from the Working Committee. He himself decided not to attend the next meeting of the Working Committee and the AICC at Allahabad on 27 April and subsequent days.⁶⁴

Rajagopalachari was full of resentment at the rejection of the Cripps proposals and shared his feelings with the Madras governor, A. Hope. He told the governor that he would break with the Congress to form a new party, if the Working Committee would not reconsider their decision at its next meeting.⁶⁵ On his initiative the Madras Congress Legislature Party adopted two resolutions for consideration of the AICC: one, deeply regretting the failure to establish a 'national government' in order to organize effective resistance against an invasion by a foreign aggressor and asking the AICC to accept the League demand for partition of India and not 'to sacrifice the chances of the formation of a national government for the doubtful advantage of maintaining a controversy over the unity of India'; the other, proposing the restoration of the ministry in Madras.⁶⁶

Azad had faith in the ultimate victory of the Allies but, unlike Nehru and Rajagopalachari, was for *conditional* co-operation with the British. He was opposed to extending co-operation to the British while they refused to concede any of their demands; he was also opposed to the launching of any anti-British struggle. And he did not agree to the League's demand for partition.

Patel, Prasad, Kripalani, etc., followed Gandhi unhesitatingly.

Gandhi decided to wait no longer. Two factors mainly shaped his decision: one, his conviction that Britain's defeat was imminent; the other, the British cabinet's scheme of allowing option to provinces to secede from the Indian Union. As he told the American journalist and author Louis Fischer, hardly had Cripps gone, the idea of asking the British to withdraw from India immediately "seized hold upon me".⁶⁷ The loss of Burma and the retreat of the British army into Egypt, the latest in the unbroken series of military disasters faced by the Allies, coincided with the Cripps visit and the moment of Gandhi's inspiration.

"I have waited long, and I can wait no longer", he asserted.⁶⁸ The apostle of non-violence affirmed: "We have to take risk of violence to shake off the great calamity of slavery." He would launch a non-violent movement but if violence broke out in spite of him, then it was God's wish. They would "have to take the risk of anarchy if God wills it". He hoped that "pure ahimsa will arise out of such anarchy".⁶⁹

In the article "Foreign Soldiers in India", Gandhi looked upon "the introduction of foreign soldiers as a positive danger thoroughly to be deplored and distrusted". American aid would amount "in the end to American influence, if not American rule added to British". Second, he asked the British to leave India to her fate *before being forced to do so*

as they were forced to leave Singapore. If they did as he desired, "non-violent India would not lose anything. *Probably the Japanese would leave India alone.*" Third, "the Nazi power had risen as a nemesis to punish Britain for her sins of exploitation and enslavement of the Asiatic and African races". Fourth, with the withdrawal of the British, "The fiction of majority and minority will vanish like the mist before the morning sun of liberty. *Truth to tell there will be neither majority nor minority in the absence of the paralysing British arms.*"⁷⁰

Gandhi sent a draft resolution to be placed at the meetings of the Working Committee and the AICC due to meet at Allahabad on 27 and 29 April respectively.

The draft said :

First, "Britain is incapable of defending India."

Second, "Japan's quarrel is not with India" and "If India were freed her first step would probably be to negotiate with Japan". And "if the British withdrew from India, India would be able to defend herself in the event of Japanese or any aggressor attacking India."

Third, "the British should withdraw from India."

Fourth, on the withdrawal of the British from India the question of majority and minority, "which is a creation of the British Government,...would disappear".

Fifth, the draft resolution assured "the Japanese government and people that India bears no enmity either towards Japan or towards any other nation". It asked people "to offer complete non-violent non-co-operation to the Japanese forces" as well as to the British in the event of Japanese invasion and refusal of the British to withdraw.

Sixth, the draft opposed the scorched earth policy so far as it sought to destroy what belonged to or was of use to the masses.

Lastly, the resolution opposed the introduction of foreign soldiers and sought their removal from India.⁷¹

In a note in *Harijan* Gandhi wrote that it was the British presence which was "the incentive for the Japanese attack". If the incentive were taken away, the Japanese were not likely to attack India. Gandhi repeatedly stressed that when his movement would be launched "only against the British", the Japanese could "expect us to sign a neutrality pact with them". *With the withdrawal of the British it would be possible "to come to terms with Japan"*.⁷²

Criticizing Gandhi's draft resolution, which was supported by Patel, Prasad, Kripalani, etc., Nehru said at the Working Committee meeting:

"If Babu's approach is accepted we become passive partners of the Axis Powers.... the whole thought and background of the draft is one of

favouring Japan.... It is Gandhi's feeling that Japan and Germany will win."

Rajagopalachari said :

"Japan will fill the vacuum created by the British withdrawal.... Do not run into the arms of Japan, which is what the resolution comes to."

Sardar Patel warned Nehru and the others who differed:

"We have ever since the outbreak of war tried to pull together. But it may not be possible on this occasion. Gandhiji has taken a definite stand.... I am not in favour of making any approach to Jinnah.... I have placed myself in the hands of Gandhiji. I feel that he is instinctively right, the lead he gives us in all critical situations."

The CSP leaders, Narendra Deb and Achyut Patwardhan, who were among the invitees, supported the draft resolution as amended by Rajendra Prasad.⁷³

Ultimately, at the request of president Azad, a fresh resolution drafted by Nehru was adopted. The resolution deplored the introduction of foreign troops into India and resented the prospect of India turning into a field of battle between foreign armies. But it refrained from demanding the withdrawal of allied troops from India. In the event of fresh aggression taking place, it advised the Indian people "to offer complete non-violent non-co-operation to the invading forces" and claimed that the success of the "policy of non-co-operation and non-violent resistance to the invader" "would largely depend on the working of the constructive programme".⁷⁴

Besides the above resolution, the AICC adopted another resolution opposing the partition of India and rejected Rajagopalachari's resolution. Speaking on Rajagopalachari's resolution, Nehru declared that he could "have no compromise" with the League and wanted "*the British Government to assist me in opposing the idea of Pakistan*".⁷⁵

Replying to his critics in *Harijan* of 17 May, Gandhi wrote: "Why do you say that the Japanese have no right to invade your country although it is in foreigners' hands?.... Second, if the Japanese have enmity against your master, they have every right to attack what your master possesses.... The proper course for you is to ask the wrongful possessor to vacate your country."⁷⁶ He addressed an open letter "To Every Briton" asking him to join him in his "appeal to the British *at this very hour* to retire from every Asiatic and African possession and at least from India".⁷⁷

Gandhi's demand for the *immediate* withdrawal of the Allied forces from India and *immediate* transfer of power to Indian hands (or to "God or, in modern parlance, anarchy") grew more and more insistent. He declared that though such anarchy might "lead to internecine warfare for a time or to unrestricted dacoities", yet it was preferable to the "ordered anarchy" then prevailing.⁷⁸

At the same time Gandhi developed another theme linked to the above. He went on declaring that "until British power is withdrawn from India can there be any real unity [between the two major communities]", that "real heart-unity, genuine unity, is almost an impossibility unless and until British power is withdrawn".⁷⁹ In the twenties, he professed that the achievement of Hindu-Muslim unity was a condition precedent to attainment of 'independence' and was one of the three major planks of his 'constructive programme'. But in the thirties this plank fell off and gradually 'independence' became a condition precedent to Hindu-Muslim unity.

The Secretary of State's memorandum, dated 28 January 1942, noted the Congress Party's "*ingrained conviction that it is the natural heir to the British Government in India, and entitled to take over control both of legislative and executive power...*"⁸⁰

Gandhi now considered "the vivisection of India to be a sin" and held that only "when the British power is entirely withdrawn and the Japanese menace has abated", then "it will be time to talk of Pakistan and other 'stan's and to come to an amicable settlement or fight". He ruled out negotiations with the League before those conditions were fulfilled.⁸¹

On 15 May Gandhi had a meeting with prominent Congressmen of Bombay, including Patel, Bhulabhai Desai, B.G. Kher and Morarji Desai. The points he made at the meeting were:

First, if the British would not heed his advice to leave India, *he would force them to leave* – by non-co-operation or civil disobedience or by both. This time not individual satyagraha but all-out mass satyagraha would be started to force them to withdraw.

Second, he did not think Japan would invade India and it would be possible "to come to terms with Japan" after the British withdrawal. The British were no better than the Japanese: the British would not willingly part with power. If the Japanese did invade India Congressmen would resist them non-violently. He expected the Japanese to sign a neutrality pact with them. *The Congress would 'launch our movement only against the British'*.

Third, Rajagopalachari conceded Pakistan but Gandhi could hardly swallow the splitting of India. Jinnah had not explained what was Pakistan. Hindu-Muslim unity was impossible of achievement because of the British. He insisted that the British should "leave India to anarchy". If they refused to withdraw leaving India to anarchy, the Congressmen would have

to create anarchy by launching satyagraha, "take charge of the anarchy and fashion it into Hindustan".

Fourth, it seemed Gandhi, Azad, Nehru and Rajagopalachari spoke in four different voices. But Gandhi was sure that Nehru and Azad would follow him so far as action was concerned. There would actually be two voices – his and Rajagopalachari's and Congressmen would have to choose between them.

Fifth, Gandhi would take two months more to launch the fight against the British. Though he himself would not indulge in violence, *his advice to all those "to whom non-violence is not a belief but a weapon" was: "you needn't desist from helping Japan. Nay, to be true to yourselves, you should help it by every means, by even violent means, if possible"*.

Sixth, when India was free, she would remain neutral.

Before concluding, he decried the communists and ridiculed their theory of 'People's War'. He said that Congress could hardly depend upon Britain and America, "whose hands are stained with blood".⁸²

For the first time Gandhi expressed his determination to launch an all-out struggle against the British that would lead to anarchy, out of which he hoped to fashion a Hindustan.

Early in June Gandhi had long talks with Nehru and Azad. Nehru was "full of China and America. He has made to them all kinds of promises", as Mahadev Desai informed Birla.⁸³ After talks with Nehru, Gandhi changed his earlier stand: he protested no more against the introduction of Allied troops nor did he demand their withdrawal from India. Gandhi no doubt realized the importance of the concession to Nehru as a bid for the support of the USA, China and Russia, chiefly the USA. But he wanted "independence now" and a treaty between the fully independent government and the Allies, which would prescribe conditions under which the Allies were to conduct their military operations in India. "The terms on which the Allied Powers may operate will be purely for the Government of the free State to determine."⁸⁴ He wrote to Chiang Kai-shek and Roosevelt and conveyed his views to them.⁸⁵

Nehru too altered his previous stand. He talked no more of co-operation with the British in the war efforts or of guerrilla struggle against the Japanese; instead, he directed his attacks against the British and criticized their denial of freedom to India.⁸⁶

While at Wardha, Nehru wrote a confidential note on his talks with Gandhi. It appears that what impressed Nehru was Gandhi's contention that "the total withdrawal of the British power from India has become essential from every point of view and there is no solution of any of India's major problems (such as *the communal problem*) till such withdrawal". Even if there was no agreement between the major political parties after India's

independence was accepted, the British must "announce their intention to hand over political power" despite "risks of chaos and anarchy". In the likely event of the British not agreeing to Indian independence "some kind of direct action movement" should be launched until independence was achieved and "there should be as few restrictions as possible on the people who wish to join it".⁸⁷

What, according to Gandhi, would replace the retiring British raj, in case the raj agreed to retire? He preached that with the political withdrawal of the British, the contending Indian leaders would reach an agreement and form a national government. If they did not, they would fight and there would be chaos and anarchy for some time, after which peace would prevail. When Louis Fischer suggested to him that Pakistan might be only a bargaining counter with Jinnah, Gandhi replied:

"As I have told you before, he will only give it up when the British are gone and when there is nobody with whom to bargain."⁸⁸

Both Gandhi and Nehru expected that with the withdrawal of British power – "the third party" – from India, the communal problem would be neatly buried. *One of the major aims of the "direct action movement" seems to have been to lay the spectre of Pakistan and realize the Congress leaders' cherished aspiration to become the sole controlling authority in India after the British raj.* Whether their brave declarations about the widest possible anti-British struggle to be launched were intended to be really acted upon or were mostly threats to frighten the British raj to concede what they wanted is a question which will be discussed later.

While Gandhi conceded that, after concluding a treaty with free India, which "instead of being sullen becomes an ally",⁸⁹ the Allied forces might remain in India to resist Japan, he also said that it would be his aim to convert India to non-violence and negotiate with Japan.⁹⁰ As Edgar Snow wrote, "Gandhi had all along fought behind the scenes against any commitment to wage war on Japan."⁹¹

On 24 June Gandhi informed Birla that he had "almost finalized the strategy for the struggle" and was "waiting for the Working Committee meeting". Next day Mahadev wrote to Birla that the Viceroy had told Louis Fischer that "Gandhi has been very good to me all these years" and that he regretted he would "have to put him under control", if his activities affected the war effort. Mahadev also informed Birla that Patel had a meeting with Nalini Sarkar, a member of the Viceroy's Council, who told Patel that, at a meeting of the Council, the Commander-in-Chief had said, "Gandhi should be given as long a rope as possible" and that the rest had agreed.⁹²

The Working Committee met at Wardha from 6 to 14 July "in a tense atmosphere in which conflict prevailed in an unusual measure", to quote Sitaramayya.⁹³ Gandhi asked Nehru to resign from the Committee and Azad from the presidency of the Congress. Gandhi said to Nehru: "If you won't join, I'll do it without you."⁹⁴ Ultimately, Gandhi withdrew the demand for resignation; and, afraid of being dubbed as ones who were selling their country to the imperialists, Nehru and Azad thought it prudent to climb onto Gandhi's bandwagon. But, according to Gary R. Hess, who has based his observation on many documents, "While not openly disagreeing with Gandhi, Nehru worked behind the scenes during June and July in an attempt to forestall Gandhi's campaign".⁹⁵ At Gandhi's promptings, Rajagopalachari resigned from the Congress on 15 July. The Committee adopted a 'Quit India' resolution and referred it to the AICC, which would meet on 7 August in Bombay for final decision. The Committee's resolution demanded immediate transfer of political power to a "provisional government representative of all important sections of the people of India", while it agreed to "the stationing of the armed forces of the Allies in India should they so desire". The resolution stated that if the demand was not met the Congress would "be reluctantly compelled" to launch a widespread non-violent struggle under Gandhi's leadership.

Mahadev Desai informed Birla:

"The W.C. was this time our eye-opener. With the exception of the Khan Sahib [Abdul Ghaffar Khan] the Muslims have no heart in the Congress programme - or rather Bapu's programme. Jawaharlal is too deeply committed to China and America to take up anything energetic immediately. My fear is that the real situation is even worse.... The fact is that he [Gandhi] is determined to throw his last throw this time."⁹⁶

In a letter of 18 July, Rajagopalachari and some of his Madras colleagues criticized the Working Committee's resolution on several grounds, chiefly that it would only "facilitate Japanese invasion and occupation".⁹⁷

What Was Gandhi's Real Plan?

Now there was an added fire in the statements and speeches of Gandhi, Patel and Prasad. In an interview to the press on 14 July, Gandhi declared that "This is open rebellion of a non-violent character" and stressed "that there is no room left for negotiations in the proposal for withdrawal". He told the press that he would not court imprisonment. "The struggle does not involve courting imprisonment. It is too soft a thing." If "dragged into

jail", he could fast. It was his intention "to make the thing as short and swift as possible". He said that "free India will make common cause with the Allies". But he was not sure whether free India would "take part in militarism or choose to go the non-violent way". But "if I can turn India to non-violence", he added, "I will certainly do so". He told foreign correspondents that he would "take every precaution" and "handle the movement gently", but he "would not hesitate to go the extremest limit" if he found that "no impression is produced on the British Government or the Allied Powers". He declared that it would be his "*biggest movement*". Asked whether there was any more room for negotiation, he said: "So far as we are concerned, we have closed our hearts." But he added that it was "open to America, to Britain, to China and even to Russia to plead for India which is pining for freedom".⁹⁸

Patel's speeches, too, were breathing fire. At different public meetings in Gujarat and Bombay, he declaimed that it was *Gandhi's last struggle and it would be "short and swift"*.⁹⁹

Now they were not squeamish about violence. Gandhi came to regard the cutting of telegraph and telephone wires and removing rails or fish-plates as non-violent if the *motives* were not to injure *innocent people*.¹⁰⁰ Congress president Azad impressed on prominent Congressmen from different parts of the country that, if the Government put behind bars the Congress leaders, "*the people would be free to adopt any method, violent or non-violent, to oppose the violence of the Government in every possible way*".¹⁰¹ At a press conference at Ahmedabad on 28 July, Patel said:

"All the struggles launched by the Congress so far, were of a restricted character. This time the movement would be unrestricted.... Civil war and anarchy may occur during the struggle but the movement will not be stopped for it."

This became the refrain of the speeches and statements of the Congress leaders.¹⁰² *Formally wedded to non-violence, the leaders did not rule out violence.*

The AICC met in Bombay on 7 and 8 August and adopted a resolution demanding that Britain should immediately quit India. Like the Working Committee's resolution of July, this resolution also appealed to Britain and the USA to respond sympathetically. Gandhi was invested with the responsibility of leading the struggle.

Claiming that the Congress represented "the whole of India" including the Indian states and that he was "a greater friend of the British now than I ever was", Gandhi declared at the AICC meeting on 7 August that he was "about to launch the biggest fight of my life". On 8 August, he

claimed to be a true friend of the Muslims, described the Pakistan idea as "a call to war" and asked the Muslims to shake off distrust of the Congress, as such distrust would lead to "a perpetual war between the Hindus and the Mussalmans". While giving the audience the *mantra* 'Do or Die', he asked them to keep jails out of their consideration and at the same time not to do anything secretly. He did not explain how they could avoid jails while abjuring secrecy. Regretting that he was misunderstood and maligned in the foreign press, he conveyed his appeal through the foreign pressmen assembled there to the United Nations to act justly towards India and win India "as a free ally". While asserting that "freedom has to come not tomorrow but today", he warned the people that he would first write to the Viceroy and give the signal for the fight at the right moment.¹⁰³

In his usual style Nehru declared:

"The movement contemplated is not merely for achieving national ends but for achieving world freedom."¹⁰⁴

The question is: Did Gandhi and his associates really seek a confrontation with the British imperialists to achieve independence? Or, was Gandhi's 'Quit India' a threat which, the Gandhis hoped, would suffice to frighten the British imperialists and the United Nations on the eve of the anticipated Japanese invasion to come to a settlement with them? Did they expect that, if the mere threat of an "open rebellion" – "the biggest fight" – did not work, the threat plus "a short and swift struggle" of a week or less, as Patel promised,¹⁰⁵ synchronized with a Japanese attack, would accomplish the purpose?¹⁰⁶

If the Congress leaders were really serious about a struggle, it is difficult to explain why no concrete programme of action was placed before the people who were asked to 'do or die'. As Nehru wrote, "*There was no direction, no programme.*" "So neither he [Gandhi] nor the Congress Working Committee", to quote Nehru again, "issued any kind of directions, public or private, except that people should be prepared for all developments, and should in any event adhere to the policy of peaceful and non-violent action."¹⁰⁷ They also made "no arrangements for the functioning of the Congress after they had been removed from the scene". S. Gopal adds: "It was almost as if the Working Committee wished to escape to prison and to avoid decision at what Jawaharlal described as the 'zero hour of the world'."¹⁰⁸

Did Gandhi and his associates expect that the unorganized, disunited and unarmed masses without any concrete programme of action and without any central leadership to guide them would be able to win in a struggle

with the armed forces of the Allied powers and liberate themselves? The Muslims were mostly hostile. Jinnah issued a statement that the Congress Working Committee's resolution of 14 July was intended to blackmail the British and coerce them to fulfil the Congress objective of establishing a "Hindu raj", "thereby throwing the Muslims and other minorities and interests at the mercy of the Congress raj".¹⁰⁹ The CPI, which had some hold on the working class in Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, Kanpur, etc., had declared that the imperialist war had changed into a world-wide anti-fascist war and that it was the task of the Indian people to support the Allies and not to countenance any struggle that would weaken the defence against Japan. Even the Congress leadership itself was disunited. Rajagopalachari had resigned from the Congress on this issue and he and his Madras colleagues opposed the struggle; Nehru, Azad, Asaf Ali, etc., had reluctantly joined Gandhi's bandwagon; and there were others like Bhulabhai Desai and K.M. Munshi of Bombay and Bidhan Roy and Kiran Shankar Roy of Bengal (who had been put at the helm of the provincial Congress by Gandhi and Patel), who found discretion to be the better part of valour, preferred to keep themselves aloof from the struggle and waited for better days to return to the Congress with the blessings of Gandhi, Patel, etc., to enjoy the plums of office.

Commenting on the Congress leaders' refusal to place any programme of action before the Congress and the people, D.D. Kosambi has said that though they knew that arrest was imminent and though most of them "had prepared for the event by setting their family affairs and personal finances in excellent order", not one of them "ever thought of a plan of action for the Congress as a whole". Kosambi has observed that on a *class* basis this refusal to draw up a plan of action "was quite brilliant, no matter how futile it may have seemed on a national revolutionary scale.... If the British won the war it was quite clear that the Congress had not favoured Japan: if on the other hand the Japanese succeeded in conquering India (and they had only to attack immediately in force for the whole of the so-called defence system to crumble) they could certainly not accuse the Congress of having helped the British."¹¹⁰

No doubt, Gandhi himself knew, as Edgar Snow has said, that it was "the biggest gamble of his life".¹¹¹ The calculations might go awry if the British remained obdurate, if the United Nations, chiefly the USA, did not force the British to see reason and if the Japanese were not obliging enough to strike at the right moment. The Congress banked on several factors favourable to them, chief of which was Britain's vulnerable position. Second, as S. Gopal writes, "in contrast to the public postures, in private the Congress leaders still hoped for intervention by Roosevelt". According to Snow, Col. Johnson had given Nehru and Azad "strong reason to

suppose Roosevelt might put pressure on Churchill to re-open negotiations. They believed that the threat of rebellion might even yet bring that result."¹¹² At a press conference in New Delhi on 27 July, Azad stated:

"I regard the Working Committee's resolution as an appeal to the United Nations to intervene on behalf of India.... The matter is no longer one between India and England but between India and the United Nations, as the latter want to make India their operational base."

Referring to Azad's statement Linlithgow wrote to Amery that his suspicion that "what the Mahatma was after was to work on the nerves of people at home and in the U.S. in the hope that he might get pressure brought to bear by the United Nations or the like" appeared to have been correct.¹¹³ Not only the Working Committee's resolution of July but the AICC resolution of August and various press statements and speeches of the leaders expressed the hope that the USA would ultimately intervene in their favour.¹¹⁴

Third, at that time it was not too much to expect the Japanese to force open the eastern gate of India after the monsoon, which the British themselves anticipated. According to an official report, Gandhi was convinced that the Japanese would attack India when the monsoon would be over.¹¹⁵ And Gandhi, Patel, Nehru and others believed that Japanese advance into Indian territory would spell the swift collapse of British administration in India.¹¹⁶ On 16 July Nehru gave J.L. Berry, the head of the U.S. Mission in New Delhi, his impression that though there was very little chance of the British accepting their demand at that moment, they were likely to agree to it after Japanese infiltration into India.¹¹⁷

If the threat failed, the Congress leaders hoped that "a short and swift struggle"¹¹⁸ – sporadic struggles of the restive people, fuelled by the arrests of the leaders and Gandhi's threat of self-immolation¹¹⁹ – would succeed. Though it was essentially a gamble and involved risks, yet if the gamble paid off, the gains would be enormous. No doubt they were playing for high stakes. But the stakes were the lives of the common people while the gains would be their own.

What were the gains that the leaders hoped to achieve?

First, if the British agreed to a compromise with them at this hour of grave peril, the Congress leaders would have a substantial control over defence – their minimum demand during the negotiations with Cripps. This would enable them to negotiate and "come to terms with Japan" – a longing Gandhi expressed almost till his arrest in the early hours of 9 August.¹²⁰ They would then become the sole controllers of India's destiny – under the aegis of Japanese imperialism.

Second, Gandhi and Nehru stressed this point times without number: "Truth to tell there will be neither majority nor minority in the absence of the paralysing British arms." Even the demand of the Muslim leaders for the autonomy of the provinces within a weak all-India federation (let alone the democratic demand of the different nationalities inhabiting the sub-continent for the right of self-determination) would be swept under the carpet. As noted before, Gandhi ruled out any negotiations with the League prior to the achievement of 'freedom'. So did Nehru.¹²¹ Both Gandhi and Nehru looked upon the demand for 'Quit India' and Britain's compliance with it as an indirect or flank attack on the communal problem and hoped it would succeed. In dealing with matters like Hindu-Muslim understanding, Nehru wrote to R.M. Chetsingh, "as often in war itself, an indirect or flank attack is more successful than a direct or frontal attack."¹²² It was then their tactic that they must first capture power taking advantage of the favourable situation and then deal with the Muslims.

Third, the transition of India from a British colony to a neo-colony of Japan, which had already brought under its heel Korea, large parts of China, and the whole of South-East Asia, would be smooth. India would not turn into a theatre of war; there would be no occasion for adopting any 'scorched earth' policy which would cause the factories of the big bourgeois to go up in flames. In one of his 'Most Secret and Personal' letters, dated 2 November 1942, to provincial Governors, Linlithgow suspected that this might have been one of the main objects of the Congress leaders for raising the 'Quit India' slogan.¹²³

But one can never accuse Gandhi of being a reckless gambler. Though he had been declaring that it was an "open rebellion", that there was "no room left for negotiations", "no question of last chance", he did not throw caution to the four winds. Instead, on 15 July, the day after the Working Committee adopted a 'Quit India' resolution at his instance, he sent his disciple Mira Behn (daughter of a former British Admiral) to see the Viceroy, the Commander-in-Chief and General Harley.¹²⁴ The Viceroy refused to see Mira Behn since, as his private secretary Laithwaite told her, Gandhi was talking of an open rebellion. Gandhi's emissary assured Laithwaite that Gandhi "would do all he could to guide the movement on non-violent lines". She hinted that Gandhi would invite his death, that is, fast unto death, if he was not "left free to guide it". But she was given clearly to understand that there would be no change in the British Government's attitude and the Congress claim would not be entertained.¹²⁵

On receiving Mira Behn's report, Gandhi's secretary Desai issued a most significant statement. It said "that there appeared to be some misunderstanding about Gandhi's intentions" and that "it was not correct to say that Gandhiji had decided to launch an open non-violent rebellion

against the British".¹²⁶

Immediately after Mira Behn had seen Laithwaite, G.D. Birla, often an unofficial emissary of Gandhi, wrote to the Viceroy stressing the need for "personal contact" and saw Laithwaite.¹²⁷ In his letter of 4 August to Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, Gandhi assured him that he was "doing all I can to avert the crisis, if by milder measures I can possibly reach the same result".¹²⁸ Gandhi told the Associated Press on 6 August that there would be "an interval between the passing of the Congress resolution and the starting of the struggle". "A letter will certainly go to the Viceroy, not as an ultimatum but as an earnest pleading for avoidance of a conflict. If there is a favourable response, then my letter can be the basis for negotiation."¹²⁹ It is hard to reconcile this craving for negotiations with his earlier pronouncements that there was no scope for negotiations, that there could be no compromise on the issue of immediate political withdrawal of the British. He had categorically said that "it must be irrevocable and complete political withdrawal".¹³⁰ On 8 August also, after urging "the whole of India to launch upon a non-violent struggle on the widest scale" and giving them the *mantra* 'Do or Die', he warned them against precipitate action and asked them to wait until he had written to the Viceroy. During these months he had been threatening to take the plunge but stepped back from the brink.

The leaders were fully aware that arrests would immediately follow the passage of the 'Quit India' resolution in Bombay.¹³¹ There was no dearth of warnings from reliable sources. On 28 July Azad wrote to Gandhi that the Government would take immediate action after the AICC meeting. But Gandhi told Azad that "*a way out would be found*" and believed that "the Government would take no drastic action".¹³² Gandhi told some CSP leaders who had come to warn him on the evening of 7 August that Linlithgow would not be so foolish as to arrest him. He expected to remain busy for at least one month in negotiating with the Viceroy.¹³³ At four in the morning of 9 August, before the police came, he told Mahadev: "After my last night's speech, they will *never* arrest me."¹³⁴ Till the last moment Gandhi felt confident that the raj would be too afraid to "take any precipitate action" when the Japanese stood at the door.

Gandhi decided to ignore all warnings and to do nothing except making brave statements, until perhaps the end of the monsoon to see whether the Japanese would really come and then to make up his mind whether to take the final leap or to retreat along the escape route that the negotiations with the Viceroy, which he proposed, would open up.

It appears that Linlithgow had anticipated Gandhi's plan. On 11 July when the Working Committee was drafting its resolution, the Viceroy wrote to the Secretary of State that

*"the old man will play for time and (as so often happened in the past) produce a threatening resolution drafted so as to attract as much attention as possible here, at home and in the United States but also worded so carefully as to leave ample opportunity for Congress to get out without too much loss of face if things look like going badly for it later on."*¹³⁵

On the same day Linlithgow wrote to Punjab Governor Glancy that he found it "difficult to believe that they will take an out-and-out campaign against us". He thought "it much more likely that *Gandhi will continue to frame resolutions designed to make our blood curdle and to keep public nerves on the stretch, but to avoid any major battle, and to have ready as many avenues of escape as he can, if he finds his new nostrum is not going as it should*".¹³⁶

Though Gandhi preferred to play for time, the Viceroy and his Council refused to wait. As early as 16 July, after the Working Committee's meeting at Wardha, the Council decided unanimously to deal "swiftly and sternly with Congress if they force the issue". With its "unanimous support"¹³⁷ on 8 August "to immediate action", Gandhi, almost all members of the Working Committee and other prominent Congressmen were put under arrest in the early hours of 9 August. Among the members of the Viceroy's Council were friends and former Congressmen – M.S. Aney, once an acting Congress president and Nalini Sarkar, who flitted in and out of the Congress and enjoyed the never-failing trust of Gandhi and Birla.

Immediately after arrest, Gandhi became a sadder and wiser man. That morning Azad found him "looking very depressed". Azad observed: "I have never seen him looking so dejected.... Now that his calculations had proved wrong, he was uncertain as to what he should do."¹³⁸

But, as a B.B.C. official who spent some months in India during the 'Quit India' movement said: "The arrest of the leaders had the usual effect of enshrining them once again as national heroes..."

The 'Quit India' Struggle

The 'Quit India' struggle was described by Linlithgow in a cable to Prime Minister Winston Churchill as "by far the most serious rebellion since that of 1857, the gravity and extent of which we have so far concealed from the world for reasons of military security".¹³⁹ It was a rebellion of the people, mainly a peasant revolt, in which the leaders had no role to play for some time except that they had popularized a slogan – 'Quit India'

– coined by an American journalist. After some time they played a negative role; they did whatever they could to liquidate it.

When the Congress leaders took refuge in the Aga Khan Palace or prisons and other prominent Congressmen were arrested and the Congress organization was banned, students went on strike, people observed *hartals*, held meetings and demonstrations and took out processions defying government orders almost all over India. They tried to hoist Congress flags atop government buildings and there were clashes everywhere between the demonstrators and the police. There was a spate of arrests throughout India, and lathi-charges and shootings by the police causing many deaths and severe injuries of the people were common occurrences. Strict censorship of news was enforced and ruthless suppression of all signs of militancy on the part of the people was the official line from the beginning.

The most common forms of struggle that developed were attacks on centres of British power like police stations and treasuries and on means of transport and communications like railway stations and post offices and cutting of telegraph and telephone wires – all intended to paralyse the government. There were pitched battles in many places between the armed police and the army on the one hand and the people equipped with primitive weapons on the other. The railways most affected were East Indian, Bengal and North-Western, and Madras and Southern Mahratta. There was hardly any no-rent or no-revenue movement. The leadership was provided mainly by persons thrown up by the struggles and mostly unknown before. Students played an important role in many areas. Forward Bloc, CSP activists and Kisan Sabha workers in some places played a prominent role.

The AICC members, Congress Socialists, Gandhians and others, who had escaped arrest, formed a central organizing body and tried to function in the name of Congress. It drew up a programme of action which endorsed violent attacks on symbols of government authority, sabotage and capture of power. It tried to circulate its programme and its appeals and circulars from time to time, but its links with the different areas of struggle were tenuous or non-existent.¹⁴⁰ When, early in 1943, Gandhi condemned violence and sabotage activities, there was a split in this body. Sucheta Kripalani and other Gandhians withdrew from it.

Of the many battles that took place in urban areas, Patna's reached a great intensity. When a big procession of students on 11 August was fired upon by the police and seven students were killed and many wounded, there was a revolt of the people. Next day there was no trace of British rule in Bihar's capital. Urban proletarians replaced students as leaders of the revolt. As Rahul Sankrityayana said, "The power of the people of Patna had destroyed the established government", but they knew not what to build in its place and how to defend that. As there was no revolutionary

party to lead them and as army units were rushed into the city, the heroic revolt came to an end.¹⁴¹ Many students left the city for rural areas.

At Chimur, a small town in the Central Provinces, a veritable reign of terror was imposed by the government when angry demonstrators, who had been lathi-charged and brutally fired upon, retaliated. The military which took over the town perpetrated unbelievable crimes.¹⁴² At the initial stage large demonstrations were fired upon and many atrocities were committed by the minions of law and order in many cities and towns – Bombay, Pune, Ahmedabad, Calcutta, Balurghat (in north Bengal) and so on. In Ballia town (in eastern U.P.) 'order' was restored when the army marched in.

The working class under the influence of the CPI in cities like Bombay, Calcutta, Madras and Kanpur hardly participated in the struggle. Wherever industrial strikes took place, whether in Ahmedabad, Jamshedpur or some other place, these were engineered by factory-owners themselves. More of this later.

The struggle became intense in a number of rural areas. In an area comprising twenty-five villages in the Balasore district of Orissa, the people revolted: they braved police firing to wipe out the authority of the government for some time. In the Jeypore estate (now Koraput in Orissa) and Talcher, also in Orissa, firings and even machine-gunning from the air were resorted to to put down the revolts.¹⁴³ In the Madras Presidency several police stations were destroyed or damaged and many government buildings came under attack. Troops were employed between August and October to suppress the revolt. Rajagopalachari, the former Congress Prime Minister of Madras, and several associates of his condemned it as "hooliganism".¹⁴⁴ In some districts of Gujarat *hartals*, demonstrations and clashes with the police took place on 9 August and subsequent days. In Surat, Broach and East Khandesh guerrilla-type attacks on government property, means of communications and loyalists were a feature. In Broach, Surat and Navsari the entire peasantry supported the movement but in districts like Kheda and Mehsana (Baroda) the poor peasants belonging to the lower castes were hostile. A parallel government led by the Congress socialists functioned for some months in Ahmedabad, drawing its support from the Hindu middle classes of the city. In this city, retail, wholesale and share markets were closed by the *mahajans* or unions of businessmen. The movement received its support chiefly from the middle classes and the upper strata of the peasantry. An important organizer in Gujarat was B.K. Mazmudar, who had been secretary to the big industrialist Kasturbhai Lalbhai, with whom he maintained contact during his underground life. Hindu-Muslim relations were strained and in February 1943 there was a serious clash between the two communities in Ahmedabad.¹⁴⁵

In the NWFP, demonstrations in protest against government repression were held. There was firing by the police and large numbers of people courted arrest. Nothing more remarkable happened.

In almost the whole of North and Central Bihar and six districts of Eastern U.P., a contiguous region about the size of England and Wales, the struggle assumed the character of a peasant insurrection. In most villages of this large area the British raj collapsed. "For two weeks or more", writes H.V. Hodson, then Reforms Commissioner of the Government of India, "the writ of the Government did not run in most of Bihar and some districts of the United Provinces."¹⁴⁶ The British raj could be set up again in this region after about a fortnight by "nearly a full army corps, supported by aircraft and armour". As Max Harcourt observes, "the forestalling arrests of provincial Congress leaders [and all-India leaders] far from dampening down the movement actually abetted the process whereby it developed into an insurrection".¹⁴⁷ To crush this peasant rebellion more than 57 army battalions were employed and machine-gunning from the air was resorted to. By May 1943, "105 battalions were given the task of keeping India quiet..."¹⁴⁸

The struggle in Bihar and U.P. was directed against the raj but not against the zamindars, not even against the biggest of them – the Darbhanga raj.¹⁴⁹ Sporadic guerrilla warfare started in North Bihar after the open revolt was put down by fire and sword. Guerrilla bands were organized mostly by CSP leaders but these leaders were thoroughly incompetent and guerrilla war fizzled out.

Medinipur (Midnapur) in South-West Bengal with its long tradition of militant anti-imperialist struggles of the peasants and of the national revolutionaries was one of the few places in India where the fire of revolt burnt the longest and where the people suffered the cruellest oppression by the government as well as the ravages of Nature.

With the threatened invasion of India by the Japanese the government declared the coastal areas as emergency areas and removed the different means of transport – boats, cycles, motor vehicles – causing much hardship to the people. Another problem was that of food. The government started procurement of rice and paddy for the Allied forces as well as for export elsewhere. Even before the 'Quit India' call, the people of Medinipur (especially of the Tamluk and Kanthi sub-divisions) launched struggles against the government's 'denial policy', procurement and removal of rice and paddy from the district. On 8 September the police killed three villagers when they fired on unarmed people trying to prevent export of rice.

The Congress committees in Kanthi and Tamluk were reorganized, ridding themselves of those who strictly adhered to non-violence, and set up War Councils with Forward Bloc and other Congress representatives.

Training camps for volunteers whose number swelled to several thousands, were set up in Tamluk sub-division and a *Mukti Bahini* (Libération Army) and a *Bhagini Sena* (Army of Sisters) were organized. Important roads were dug up at places, culverts were blown off, telegraph and telephone lines were cut off for miles and poles uprooted on the night of 28 September by thousands of villagers according to plan in the Tamluk sub-division, but the enemy had no knowledge of all this. Next day began mass attacks on police stations for the capture of the entire area. While leading a large contingent of thousands for the capture of the Tamluk sub-divisional headquarters and police station, Matangini Hazra, a brave lady of 73, fell along with nine others to the bullets of the enemy.¹⁵⁰ Several police stations in Tamluk and Kanthi were captured after considerable losses. British and Indian troops were rushed in. They were assisted by aeroplanes ready to drop bombs on the people.¹⁵¹ But undeterred by shootings and other savageries committed by these, the people fought on. As the District Magistrate of Medinipur reported in mid-October, the combined civil and military offensive could not dampen the morale of the people and was only partly effective.

It was a real people's war in the Tamluk and Kanthi sub-divisions and some contiguous areas in the *sadar* sub-division. Except most Muslims and a few communists, the entire people including Krishak Samiti activists supported the struggle. Parallel administrations were set up. An official publication stated:

"In Midnapur in Bengal, the operation of the rebels indicated considerable care and planning, an effective warning system had been devised, elementary tactical principles were observed, for instance, encirclement and flanking movements, clearly on pre-arranged signals. The forces of disorder were accompanied by doctors and nursing orderlies to attend to casualties and the intelligence system was efficient."¹⁵²

Upcountry Muslim officers were brought in to administer the district. The army and the police set new records in savagery: it was a tale of mass arrests, killing, destruction of homes, raping, even gang-raping, of women; as well as of heroic resistance.

A fierce cyclone swept over Kanthi and Tamluk sub-divisions on the night of 16-17 October leaving a trail of devastation. In the wake of the cyclone a huge tidal wave rushed several miles inland and when it receded, entire villages with men, their homes and cattle were washed away into the sea. Tens of thousands perished; there was neither food nor drinking water for the survivors; and epidemics followed.

The news of the terrible happenings was censored and not allowed to

reach the outside world. No relief to the survivors was provided as a policy – to punish the people. As news filtered through, non-official relief organizations tried to offer whatever help they could. But even they were prevented from doing so for some weeks until the pressure of public opinion was too much for the alien government. And when the people suffered from the ravages of the cyclone, the raids by the combined forces of the army and the police continued.¹⁵³ There was a set-back in Kanthi after December 1942.

The *Tamralipta Jatiya Sarkar* (National Government of Tamluk) was set up on 17 December to resist the marauders including dacoits, arrange for relief and rehabilitation of cyclone-affected people, preserve law and order and administer justice. *Biplabi*, a journal they had been bringing out, became the organ of the *Jatiya Sarkar*. *Vidyut Bahini*, the national militia, had been formed earlier.

The *Jatiya Sarkar* decided to eliminate local informers after careful and systematic investigation. It had to fight the alien government as well as local landlords, rich landowners and unscrupulous merchants whom they had to force to unearth their hoarded stocks of food and whose profiteering at the cost of the lives of people they had to curb. The requisitioned stocks were distributed among the people and the consumption per capita was rationed. Their actions came to be openly condemned by 'votaries of non-violence'. To quote Hitesranjan Sanyal,

"As a matter of fact, the Quit India Movement of Tamluk and Kanthi had outgrown the Congress and for that matter all other political parties. The veterans of the past *satyagrahas* had submitted to the newly emerging forces which represented the mood and aspirations of the common people."¹⁵⁴

The *Jatiya Sarkar* functioned successfully until the end of August 1944. On 14 August 1944, Richard Casey, Governor of Bengal, reported to the Viceroy that the government's position in Tamluk was "still difficult", that there had been further "deterioration" and the situation was "clearly intolerable".¹⁵⁵

But the rebellion that the forces of the alien raj could not defeat, was killed by Gandhi's injunctions about non-violence and his denunciations of secrecy and "sabotage activities". He personally toured the area and at the end of August 1944, the leaders of the struggle decided to call it off from 1 September, disband the *Jatiya Sarkar* and the militia and suspend the publication of *Biplabi*.

In the Rampurhat sub-division of the Birbhum district in Bengal also, the people rose up in a death-defying struggle in 1942, which led to the collapse of the British administration for some time.

A long-drawn guerrilla struggle heroically resisted the forces of British imperialism in Satara in Western Maharashtra. Guerrilla bands were formed and became active in several districts – Satara, East Khandesh, Pune, Kolaba, Broach, Belgaum and Surat. It was in Satara which comprised present-day Satara and a major part of present-day Sangli district, the guerrilla struggle continued the longest. In Satara *Prati Sarkar*, a parallel government, was set up. The struggle was anti-imperialist as well as anti-feudal and anti-caste. The leader thrown up in this struggle was Nana Patil, who had been an activist in social reform movements and in the civil disobedience movement of 1932. They had hardly any links with the Congress or with any other parties like the CSP or the CPI.

The movement started with disrupting communication lines by cutting telegraph wires, burning government buildings, stealing rifles from the armed police and mass marches to capture centres of British power. After mass confrontations which led to the deaths of several people and arrests of about two thousand persons by the end of 1942, the people gradually took to guerrilla warfare. Attacks were launched against enemy agents and informers and 'police' and 'revenue' departments were set up before the end of 1942. The *Prati Sarkar* was formally inaugurated in June 1943. By this time *nyayadan mandals* had begun to function and became real people's courts. Besides the central core of underground activists, there were elected committees of villagers and bands of volunteers – the Rashtra Seva Dal, the Tufan Dal, etc.

They formed some link with the underground CSP leaders in Bombay but they acted independently. One of the three groups into which the activists divided themselves waged struggle in the eastern part of Satara as well as of Khandesh; another group in the western part and Sholapur; and the third group in Pune district. At Gandhi's call for surrender, about sixty activists were permitted to surrender in 1944. But the large majority ignored Gandhi's injunctions as well as the later instruction of the Working Committee to lay down arms. The activities of the rebels, which harmed the interests of the Brahman landlords and usurers and of the Marwari merchants, were denounced by the Congress Working Committee member, Shankar Rao Deo, as criminal. The guerrilla struggle and the *Prati Sarkar* survived all the offensives of the British raj as well as the admonitions of Congress leaders until the beginning of 1946 when the Congress and other parties waged the election battle all over India. "It was the elections", observes Gail Omvedt, "which effectively ended the *prati sarkar*, not British military force".¹⁵⁶

The Quit India revolt, mainly a peasant rebellion in widely scattered places, revealed the revolutionary potentialities of the Indian people. It showed that the main force of an anti-imperialist, democratic revolution

in a country like India is the peasantry. What ensured its defeat was the lack of a revolutionary theory and a well-knit organization.

The Role of the Big Bourgeoisie

After the fall of Rangoon and the Japanese occupation of the whole of Burma (now Myanmar), when the Japanese invasion of India seemed imminent, the Indian big bourgeoisie, like the Congress leadership, was a divided house. A section including Walchand Hirachand, the Gagalbhais, Lalbhais and Sarabhais, sure of the victory of the Axis powers, preferred a change of masters and waited to welcome the Japanese.¹⁵⁷ Another section, to which belonged Thakurdas, Cowasji Jehangir and many other millowners, did not lose faith in ultimate British victory and remained loyalists. About mid-May, Bombay governor Lumley informed Linlithgow that Thakurdas had come out "openly with the assertion that India's hope lay with the success of the British and that full support must be given to the war".¹⁵⁸ It seems there was a third section including the Birlas and Tatas, who, while not enthusiastic about precipitating any conflict with the raj and serving British imperial interests to the best of their ability, enriching themselves in the process, contributed liberally to the Congress funds and offered secret help. G.D. Birla's letter of 14 July 1942 to Mahadev Desai, when the Working Committee adopted the 'Quit India' resolution, was far from enthusiastic or optimistic as regards "Bapu's movement". Rather, it painted the darker aspects of the political situation in India, which were not conducive to the success of the struggle. A memorandum submitted in late July or early August to the Viceroy, which was sponsored by Thakurdas and signed, among others, by J.R.D. Tata and Birla, said that as businessmen their interest lay "in peace, harmony, goodwill and order throughout the country". It further stated: "We have always believed in creating a firm and solid foundation for building up a permanent friendship between England and India, and throughout our public career most of us have endeavoured to work for this object."¹⁵⁹ At this crossroads of history the question before the Indian big bourgeois and their political frontmen was not one of achieving freedom from imperialist domination but of choosing between rival imperialist masters.

When the August rebellion started, the Ahmedabad millowners kept their mills shut for three months at the instance of Kasturbhai Lalbhai. Immediately after the 'Quit India' resolution was passed in Bombay, Kasturbhai, who had promised Rs 10 lac (a very huge amount in those days) to Gandhi's movement, discussed plans with Khandubhai Desai of the Ahmedabad Labour Union. They hit upon the plan of sending away

the workers of the Ahmedabad mills to their villages so that the government would not be able to hold anybody responsible for the stoppage of work. Kasturbhai had also discussions with Ambalal Sarabhai, another big tycoon. After about three months of "strike", when the millowners realized that their calculations had proved wrong, Kasturbhai received Khandubhai's consent and the so-called strike was over.¹⁶⁰ In Bombay, as Snow said, a few

"millowners themselves, led by Patel's friends such as Mafatlal Gagalbhai...staged lockouts. Foremen and managers simply told the workers to go home and promised to see that they got their wages. But when owners saw that the revolt had failed they quickly reopened the factories."¹⁶¹

The entire Tata Iron and Steel Works remained closed for about a fortnight in August-September. Edgar Snow wrote that though the TISCO workers had no serious grievances, "just before Gandhi was arrested the owners inexplicably distributed a three months' 'Bonus' to all employees, who then promptly went on protest strike, led by their foremen!" Bhuyan states that Ardeshir Dalal, a director, and Jehangir Ghandy, the general manager, were in favour of the "strike".¹⁶²

Linlithgow gave "a very broad hint" to Homi Mody, then a member of the Viceroy's Council and a senior director of the Tatas before and after serving on the council, that if the Tatas "continued to play the fool" the government might "have to send our orders in other directions".

The threat had immediate effect and normal work was resumed in TISCO without delay.¹⁶³

Some writers have failed to realize that these industrialists were playing for high stakes. They ignored short term profits and lent secret support to a "short and swift struggle" against the rule of British capital but not against the rule of all foreign capital. What the Tatas, Lalbhais, Sarabhais, Gagalbhais and their ilk lost due to temporary stoppage of work was more than made up by the undreamt-of profits they harvested afterwards in conditions of scarcity.

A note prepared by the Government of India's Intelligence Bureau, entitled "Congress and 'Big Business'", dated 28 February 1944, contains reports from chiefs of intelligence and police of various parts of India that the Congress was receiving financial help from Indian big business. It also says:

"In November 1942, two Gujarati merchants told a secret agent that the motives which led the millowners of Ahmedabad to close their mills

were more economic than political, as the Congress leaders, particularly Vallabhbhai Patel, had impressed upon them that a Japanese invasion was a certainty and that in that event their accumulated profits in the shape of money would have no value; the millowners calculated that the losses incurred by closing their mills could be made up by the rise in prices, which would follow the decrease in production."

The Intelligence Bureau note further states that when Herbert Matthews, a *New York Times* correspondent, visited Ahmedabad in March 1943,

"the local millionaires deplored what had been happening in the country and pointed out that their object in life being to make money, like most Indian businessmen, they were keeping one foot in the Congress camp, which they expected to see running the country, and another in the British camp, which is running it now and gives them fat orders."

According to this note, "in the course of the statements made to the police after his arrest, Jaya Prakash Narayan said: '...in fact I hate their [the Birlas'] dual policy. On one side they claim to be nationalists while on the other they have all the military contracts'."¹⁶⁴

When the calculations of this section of the big bourgeoisie went wrong, they tried quickly to re-establish the old relations with the raj. Interestingly, perhaps to expiate their 'sin' of 1942, the Ahmedabad millowners celebrated the victory of the British and their Allies by offering a "Victory Bonus" to workers in 1945.¹⁶⁵ The Indian big bourgeoisie was then eager not only to serve British capital as before but to hitch its fortune to the more resplendent star of US monopoly capital.

"Save the Post-War Years"

Rajagopalachari's article "Save the Post-War Years", which appeared in the autumn of 1943, is quite significant. It is a plea for "constructive thought" and for rejection of "a soul-killing negative attitude". He criticized the other Congress leaders for losing the opportunity presented by the Cripps offer and betraying "a lamentable lack of foresight". He held that the Cripps proposals were "the only practical plan for reconciliation of all the forces that are in play in India". As the end of the war was in sight, he pleaded for the revival of the long-term aspect of the Cripps plan and for its acceptance by the Congress, even if such acceptance was considered a surrender. "If we do nothing now", he warned, "we shall be losing precious time in the immediate post-war period when every other country

will be reorganizing its industry for self-preservation." Interestingly, he criticized the Congress for launching movements in 1919 and 1930 and for its refusal to co-operate with the British government "in the making of the Constitution".¹⁶⁶

This was the voice not of Rajagopalachari alone, who was intimate with Birla, but the voice of the entire Indian big bourgeoisie. That India should "save the immediate post-war period from futile controversy" and utilize the "precious time" for "constructive effort in a new world" was what this class, flush with war-profits, yearned after.

This eagerness to co-operate with Britain and the USA is reflected in the FICCI's communications with the Government of India. On 11 February 1943, Sir Muthia Chettiar, president of the FICCI and a leading industrialist and banker, wrote to the Viceroy's private secretary that Gandhi had "unequivocally condemned violence" and was eager to end the political impasse. He appealed to the Viceroy for a reversal of the government's policy in order to "bridge the widening gulf between Britain and India" and release Gandhi, then on fast, "in the interest of amicable Indo-British relationship". A communication from the FICCI to the Government of India, Department of Supply, dated 6 May 1943, said that as India would soon become "a virtually important base of operations", the "country should be industrially equipped" and "her capacity to contribute to the war is increased substantially through the establishment of such war industries".¹⁶⁷

It may be noted that the annual session of the FICCI in 1943, over which G.L. Mehta presided, was attended by, among others, Rajagopalachari, several members of the Viceroy's Executive Council and a number of high officials of the government, who warmly congratulated the president for his address.¹⁶⁸

During the war the British raj and the Indian big bourgeoisie were bound with close ties of collaboration. An Eastern Group Supply Council with Britain, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and India was set up early in 1941 and the Indian big bourgeoisie was depended upon for supply of some commodities essential for the prosecution of the war. The FICCI viewed this as an opportunity for building up some basic industries with British patronage.¹⁶⁹

The big bourgeois served on different official committees during the war. For instance, Birla was a member of the Reconstruction Committee, Trade and Industry; Thakurdas, of the Reconstruction Committee, Resettlement and Re-employment; Shri Ram, of the Reconstruction Committee, Disposals, Contracts and Government Purchases; and so on.

When Birla saw Wavell on 6 March 1944, *he affirmed that "he believed in co-operation, [and] agreed [with the Viceroy] that political*

leaders had missed a great opportunity during the war''. He was anxious that the post-war years should not be wasted. He "favoured industrial visit to [the] UK" by a delegation of Indian industrialists and "would be prepared to go himself". He also "recommended [the] appointment of a Member [of the Viceroy's Council] for Reconstruction".¹⁷⁰

Now it became the cry of the Indian big bourgeoisie: "Save the Post-War Years". A *Brief Memorandum Outlining a Plan for Economic Development for India*, popularly known as the Bombay Plan, authored by the big tycoons, Thakurdas, J.R.D. Tata, Birla, etc. came out in January 1944 and a second part of it later in the year. Sitting in prison, Nehru hailed it as "one of the most cheering and promising signs of the times in India recently" and resented Prof. K.T. Shah's criticism of it.¹⁷¹ To quote Profs. P.A. Wadia and K.T. Merchant,

"The future for investment which the authors of the Plan envisage is evidently a holy alliance between foreign capitalists and themselves on a profit-making basis, of which we have had such bitter experience in the past and in the present."¹⁷²

What Rajagopalachari said soon became the voice of the entire Congress leadership as well. The process of close integration between the Indian big bourgeoisie and the foreign, mainly British, capitalists at this stage formed the prelude to the intimate co-operation between the Congress leaders and the British imperialists to solve the constitutional problem and put down all anti-imperialist struggles. No wonder that Rajagopalachari became a member of the Interim Government formed by the Congress in early September 1946 – a valued comrade of Nehru, who had regarded him two years before as "a more dangerous person in all India" than all others.¹⁷³

Rebuilding Bridges

All the sound and fury of the days before 9 August 1942 turned overnight into a whimper. On 14 August, within less than a week of his interment at the Aga Khan Palace, Gandhi complained to the Viceroy with an air of injured innocence that Linlithgow had acted hastily. Gandhi would "have dealt with every difficulty" if the Viceroy had given the opportunity. While assuring him that he remained "the same friend you have known me", he appealed to him as "a sincere friend of the British people" for a reconsideration of the government's policy. Writing on 23 September to the Home Department, Government of India, Gandhi decried the revolt of the people as a "calamity", "deplorable destruction". Claiming

that "the Congress policy still remains unequivocally [sic!] non-violent", he affirmed:

"The wholesale arrest of the Congress leaders seems to have made the people wild with rage to the point of losing self-control."¹⁷⁴

As noted before, the Congress leaders including Gandhi were not squeamish about violence before their incarceration. Not only Gandhi but the entire Working Committee disowned the struggle. In the letter Azad addressed on 13 February 1943 to the Viceroy – a letter drafted by Nehru and sent on behalf of the Working Committee – they disclaimed all responsibility for the rebellion and referred the Viceroy to Gandhi's speeches on 8 August at the AICC meeting, urging observance of non-violence, and to the non-violent tradition of the Congress. It stated that "Responsible Congressmen tried to divert this feeling [of bitterness towards the raj in the people's minds] into peaceful channels" and blamed the arrest of the leaders for what followed.¹⁷⁵

Nehru wrote: "...for the first time since the great revolt of 1857, vast numbers of people again rose to challenge by force (but a force without arms!¹⁷⁶) the fabric of British rule in India. *It was a foolish and inopportune challenge...*" It was "*the impromptu frenzy of the mob*" that defied the organized and armed forces of the raj. The verdict of the Congress leaders on the Quit India struggle is recorded in the official history of the Congress. Sitaramayya wrote that with the arrest of "responsible men or women to guide popular activities", the people "grew insensate and were maddened with fury" and committed various "excesses"; and that "*the turbulent elements of society partly bent on adventure but mainly provoked by the leonine violence of Government to acts of counter-violence, were providing a menace to public security*".¹⁷⁷

Who or what was responsible for the outbreak of the rebellion? That was the question over which there was a voluminous correspondence between Gandhi and the government, besides numerous statements. While Gandhi and other Congress leaders insisted that the responsibility lay with the government, for arrests of the leaders had "goaded the people to the point of madness", the government blamed the Congress leaders for their call to 'open rebellion' and prominent Congressmen's role in it. In a curt letter of 14 October 1943, Tottenham, the Additional Home Secretary, referring to Gandhi's long reply to the official publication *Congress Responsibility for the Disturbances, 1942-43*, wrote that the government "do not deny...your habit of reinterpreting your own statements to suit the purposes of the moment..."¹⁷⁸

When Gandhi was repeatedly professing his friendship for the King's

deputy in India, on whom his 'change of heart' theory refused to work as on other British rulers, Churchill declared:

"We mean to hold our own. I have not become the King's First Minister in order to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire."¹⁷⁹

Indeed, notwithstanding the facade of a long-drawn wordy warfare over the issue about the immediate cause of the rebellion, what Gandhi was actually proposing was an abject surrender consistent with pre-1942 relations with the raj. He wanted to be convinced by the Viceroy "of my error or errors". "If I have not ceased to be your friend, why did you not, before taking drastic action, send for me, tell me of your suspicions and make yourself sure of your facts?" he asked the Viceroy.¹⁸⁰ Nehru noted in his prison diary: *"All the brave words he said last year were empty verbiage or so they have subsequently proved."*¹⁸¹

Soon there was a change in the tide of the war. For forty-eight days from 23 August 1942, the Battle of Stalingrad, "an unprecedentedly bitter battle, unparalleled in the history of mankind", raged until on 9 October the German line of encirclement of the industrial district of the city was breached by the Soviet defenders. It was the first major victory of the Soviet Union and the Allies, which was hailed by Mao Tsetung immediately after as "not only the turning point of the Soviet-German war, or even of the present anti-fascist world war" but as "the turning point in the history of all mankind". Hitler's strategy had failed. Hitler, who had hurled an army of over 1,500,000 backed by the bulk of his tank and air forces to press through Stalingrad and the Caucasus to effect a junction with the Japanese in India, was "on the threshold of a final defeat", as Mao Tsetung wrote confidently on 12 October 1942.¹⁸²

When the German-Japanese strategy to effect a junction of forces in India was defeated on the Stalingrad front and Gandhi's expectations were belied, when his appeals to Linlithgow elicited far from friendly responses, and his escape route by disclaiming all responsibility for the 'Quit India' movement was firmly closed by Linlithgow, he could do nothing else but discharge what Nehru called "almost his last weapon"¹⁸³ – the decision to go on fast. He communicated to the Viceroy his decision to fast from 9 February to 2 March "solely for the service of God and in His presence". He felt hurt when Linlithgow called his proposed fast "a form of political blackmail". The government offered to release him during the period of the fast but Gandhi informed the government that, if released, he would not fast – a proposal to which the government did not agree but provided him with additional facilities of interview and added staff to nurse him and so on.

Nehru was afraid that if the fast led to Gandhi's death the Gandhian era would come to an end and *"The last chance of any settlement or compromise will go, on any basis"*. The possibility of Gandhi's survival, on the other hand, would be an *"anti-climax"*, according to him. *He disliked "the prospects either way"*.¹⁸⁴ Gandhi, however, survived the fast.

William Phillips, a former U.S. Under-Secretary of State and Roosevelt's friend, was appointed the U.S. President's Personal Representative in India in December 1942. Roosevelt keenly wanted to bring about a solution of the Indian deadlock and Phillips was charged with this mission. Before the end of January 1943 Phillips, who had been seeing prominent Indians, gave Linlithgow the impression that the Indian dispute could be settled *"by the immediate formation of a provisional government. Devdas Gandhi...seems to have told him that the Mahatma would be very ready to make liberal concessions in the event of such a government..."*¹⁸⁵

Linlithgow, Amery and Churchill took strong exception to any US interference in their own imperial interests – a domestic question.¹⁸⁶

Horace Alexander saw Gandhi during the fast and informed the Bombay governor that *Gandhi seemed "so genuinely anxious to find means of restoring goodwill"*. Gandhi would *"only welcome release...if the Government is assured that he, as a free man, will be an asset, not a liability"*. Rajagopalachari also met Gandhi on 26 February and saw *"some light"* and *"caught some hope from Mahatma Gandhi's bedside"*.¹⁸⁷

A 'leaders' conference' attended by, among others, Rajagopalachari, Bhulabhai Desai, K.M. Munshi, Sapru, Jayakar, Birla, Thakurdas, Tata, Walchand Hirachand, Kasturbhai Lalbhai and several more tycoons, was held in Bombay. The conference adopted a resolution, which, while regretting *"the deplorable events of the last few months"* and seeking *"a reconsideration of their policy both by the Government and the Congress"*, stated:

"The recent talks which some of us have had with Gandhiji lead us to believe that a move for reconciliation at the present juncture will bear fruit."

The resolution gave assurances that *"there would be no danger to the successful prosecution of the war"*, if Gandhi was set at liberty.

The efforts of the 'leaders' conference' to obtain the release of Gandhi and restore *"internal harmony and reconciliation"* bore no fruit. The British raj did not feel as yet the need for a reconciliation.

When the fast had ended, interesting questions, quite tactful ones, were put to Gandhi, perhaps by Birla, to elicit the right answers that would help the process of bridge-building and disrupt the 'Quit India' struggle. To the

question "Do you then disapprove of these acts of sabotage and violence?", the answer was: "I definitely disapprove of them.... *I would suggest that they [the militant Congressmen and others] should surrender themselves to the police.*" In answer to another question, Gandhi categorically stated that "*if the national government is formed and takes power on the basis of giving military help to the Allied nations, I obviously cannot obstruct and will not obstruct*".¹⁸⁸

Feeling that the Congress policy had reached a dead end and seeking to extricate himself from it, Gandhi now decided to woo the Muslim League, too. He agreed with Rajagopalachari to a formula for the partition of India on religious lines. Rajagopalachari had conversations with Jinnah and felt optimistic for, as Sitaramayya observes, Rajagopalachari "had the assent of Gandhi in his pocket to a formula which he had produced before him on the eve of the termination of the fast".¹⁸⁹

Gandhi also wrote to Jinnah addressing him as 'Qaid-e-Azam' and seeking a meeting with him.

Rajagopalachari's formula envisaged that the League would endorse "the Indian demand for independence" and co-operate "with the Congress in the formation of a Provisional National Government for the transition period". At the end of the war a commission would be set up "for demarcating contiguous districts in the north-west and east of India wherein the Muslim population is in absolute majority" and a plebiscite of all the inhabitants of such areas would be held to "decide the issue of separation from Hindustan". If the majority was in favour of the formation of a separate sovereign state, "such a decision shall be given effect to, without prejudice to the right of the districts on the border to choose to join either state". And "In the event of separation, a mutual agreement shall be entered for safeguarding defence, commerce and communications and other essential purposes. Any transfer of population shall only be on an absolutely voluntary basis." It was stipulated that the above terms of settlement would be "binding only in case of transfer by Britain of full power and responsibility for the governance of India".¹⁹⁰

Jinnah did not agree to Rajagopalachari's scheme, which was blessed by Gandhi.

While in the Ahmednagar Fort prison, Nehru, like Asaf Ali, could only "see just blackness ahead", Patel, Kripalani and their group seemed to "have been hit in their great faith in Bapu's instinct for right action at the right time". They could "visualize an end of the so-called Gandhian era in Indian politics" and Nehru felt that "this prospect leads to unhappiness, for the future is uncertain and dark".¹⁹¹ Almost all the Working Committee members were lodged in this prison; they appeared to be a demoralized lot. Discussion of politics was generally avoided and personal relations

were hardly amiable.

Released from internment on 6 May 1944, Gandhi tirelessly ploughed his furrow – that of restoring the old relations with the raj. He went on not merely disowning all responsibility for the 'Quit India' movement but condemning secrecy (as "a sin and symptom of violence"), sabotage (as "a form of violence") and underground activities of the rebels and asking them to surrender while in the same breath he offered the raj full co-operation in prosecuting the most violent war in history.

During his interview to Stuart Gelder of the *News Chronicle* (London) in July 1944, Gandhi said that he sought an interview with the Viceroy "with a view to help and not to hinder the Allied war effort". He told Gelder that he had "no intention of offering civil disobedience today. I cannot take the country back to 1942." "Today", as Gelder reported, "he would be satisfied with a national government in full control of civil administration.... Such government would be composed of persons chosen by the elected members of the Central Assembly [of whom the majority belonged to the Congress]." Gandhi said: "So far as military operations are concerned, the Viceroy and the Commander-in-Chief will have full control." He wanted "To plead with the Viceroy", but in order to do so he wanted to "know the Working Committee's mind".¹⁹²

Before and after the interview with Gelder, Gandhi sought an interview with the Viceroy. Despite what Nehru described as his "grovelling before the Viceroy",¹⁹³ he was refused any interview on the ground that he had not withdrawn the 'Quit India' resolution. Nor was permission given to him to see the Working Committee members. The British imperialists wanted him to appear before them in sack cloth and ashes, as Gandhi himself felt.¹⁹⁴

Interestingly, whether Gandhi was legally empowered to withdraw the August resolution, whether the authority vested in him by the AICC in August 1942 had lapsed with his arrest or not – this legal question worried him much. He asked lawyer friends for their legal opinion and was assured by a panel of three eminent lawyer friends that his authority had legally lapsed. And he went on knocking at the Viceregal door.

Gandhi also felt the need for forming an alliance with Jinnah. On 17 July he wrote to Jinnah seeking an interview and appealing to him not to refuse it. Gandhi was invited by Jinnah to meet him in Bombay in September.

In an unpublished statement sent to Gandhi for his approval, K.M. Munshi wrote:

"The two-nation theory has been accepted and brought into operation by Gandhiji. Whatever the verbal jugglery, the Hindu and Muslim nations are now going to meet in the persons of their most prominent representatives, a consummation which Mr Jinnah devoutly wished."¹⁹⁵

During the negotiations with Jinnah in September, Gandhi proposed to "recommend to the Congress and the country the acceptance of the claim for separation" on the following basis. A commission should demarcate areas in Punjab, Bengal and Assam where Muslims were in absolute majority and, if a plebiscite in the Muslim-majority areas was in favour of separation, these areas including Sind, the NWFP and Baluchistan should form a sovereign independent state after India was free. A treaty of separation should provide for the administration of certain subjects like Foreign Affairs, Defence, Internal Communications, and for safeguarding the rights of minorities in the two states. Later, he explained that he did not envisage a common centre but "a board composed of representatives of the two States regulating matters of common concern and enforcing the treaty obligations". He told the press that "where there is an obvious Muslim majority they should be allowed to constitute a separate State by themselves and that has been fully conceded in the Rajaji formula or my formula.... The right is conceded without the slightest reservation."¹⁹⁶

According to Gandhi, when "independence for India as it stands" was achieved "by joint effort", "demarcation, plebiscite and partition if the people voted for partition" would be the responsibility of the provisional government. When asked by Jinnah to clarify his conception of the all-powerful provisional government, "the basis or the lines on which such a Government is to be set up or constituted", Gandhi refused to be pinned down to anything. Pressed by Jinnah, Gandhi said: "The provisional interim government will be responsible to the elected members of the present Assembly or a newly-elected one."¹⁹⁷ That is, it would be predominantly a Congress government. Criticizing Rajagopalachari's scheme, Ambedkar asked who was to enforce the agreement "if the Provisional Government failed to give effect to the Congress part of the agreement".¹⁹⁸ Jinnah called this "putting the cart before the horse". He wanted a full political settlement and then withdrawal of British power by "joint effort". Jinnah claimed that his Pakistan comprised six provinces – Sind, Baluchistan, the NWFP, Punjab, Bengal and Assam, "subject to territorial adjustment that may be agreed upon" – and that in the Muslim-majority zones the Muslims alone would enjoy the right of self-determination (he was opposed to any plebiscite in which all inhabitants of those zones would take part). Gandhi's formula, like Rajagopalachari's, was rejected by Jinnah.

Though the negotiations failed they had a far-reaching impact on Indian politics. Gandhi agreed in principle to the partition of India on religious lines and recognized the right of self-determination of a religious community living intermingled throughout India with other religious communities and as a part of the different nationalities of India. Upholding the right of these nationalities to self-determination could have removed

the anxieties of the Muslim masses regarding a Hindu-majority, unitary Indian state, helped unite the masses of the different communities within various nationalities, reassured secular-minded Muslim leaders and marginalized communal Muslim leaders. Instead, Gandhi played the communal game and marginalized the role of many secular-minded Muslim leaders like, for instance, Fazlul Huq and Congress Muslims like Ashrafuddin Choudhuri in Bengal. As B.B. Misra observes, "Gandhi's attempt to use the C.R. formula not only failed politically, but also aggravated communal tension."¹⁹⁹

"To one man [ie, Gandhi], however", Sumit Sarkar writes, "the idea of a high-level bargain by which the Congress would attain quick power in the major part of the country at the cost of a partition on religious lines still [even in early 1947] seemed unimaginably shocking and unacceptable."^{199a} Perhaps any comment is superfluous except that, though one does not quarrel with Sarkar's idealization of his hero, truth should not be sacrificed in the process.

Gandhi, like Rajagopalachari, proposed the dismemberment of Bengal and Punjab as part of the process of dividing India on a religious basis and the destruction of the integrity of the Bengali and Punjabi nationalities. In August 1944, on the eve of the Gandhi-Jinnah talks, the Bengal Congress sent a delegation to meet Gandhi. The delegation led by K.S. Roy, leader of the Bengal Assembly Congress Party, which discussed with Gandhi the Rajagopalachari formula, told him that its application to Bengal on district-wise basis would result in cutting up the province into two areas and that the people of Bengal were opposed to its dismemberment "as Bengal situated as at present is culturally and linguistically one single homogeneous unit". The delegation said that Bengal accepted the principle of self-determination but that it should be applied on the linguistic and cultural basis. K.S. Roy said to Gandhi: "If the worst comes to the worst, we in Bengal will all go in to Pakistan, but for goodness sake do not partition Bengal. Do not vivisect it." Gandhi gave his promise to the delegation as well as to a delegation of students that "he would not do anything without consulting Bengal".²⁰⁰ But he broke his pledge soon after when he placed his proposals before Jinnah.

As Ayesha Jalal writes,

"What the Bengali Muslims were really after was freedom from central control and Government House in Calcutta saw clear hints of a specifically provincial Bengali nationalism capable of being deployed against Jinnah's centralist pretensions."²⁰¹

P.C. Joshi wrote that "on the eve of the Gandhi-Jinnah meeting, the

Bengal Provincial Muslim League passed a resolution in favour of a United Bengal which would exercise its sovereign will and decide whether to join Pakistan or Hindustan or to join neither, and instead remain completely independent", that "the Provincial League sent its resolution to the Congress leader, Kiran Shankar Roy, to discuss it among themselves", and that they told Jinnah "that the Bengalis would be able to decide their own fate".²⁰²

Another process, a more powerful and sinister one, was at work. When the Bengal Congress delegation was meeting Gandhi in August 1944, K.M. Munshi wrote to Gandhi: "We cannot reconcile ourselves till the Punjab and Bengal are not partitioned." And at about the same time G.D. Birla wrote to Gandhi's secretary:

"I have heard many Bengalees saying that they would not mind even going to Pakistan if Bengal was kept intact.... If Bengal is kept as it is, then it is not a Pakistan but separation of Bengal from the rest of India. It will be troublesome for Hindus and Muslims both."²⁰³

Instead of being troublesome to the Hindus and Muslims of Bengal, it would have averted an endless series of appalling tragedies, if Bengal remained intact and free to determine its future. But, no doubt, it would have been injurious to the interest of big Hindu as well as Muslim compradors – the Birlas and the Ispahanis.

Sitting in Ahmednagar Fort prison, Nehru felt upset at Gandhi's "grovelling before the Viceroy and Jinnah". He noted in his prison diary on 5 August:

"This may be the satyagraha technique. If so, I fear I do not fit in at all.... Tall talk and then excuses and explanations and humility. What I may do outside after our release, I do not know. But I feel that I must break with this woolly thinking and undignified action – which really means breaking with Gandhi."²⁰⁴

As usual, this was one of Nehru's fleeting moods. *He did "fit in"* – quite well – with Gandhi's politics: his own interests would not allow him to break with Gandhi.

Though Gandhi pined for reconciliation with the raj and showed enough humility, he had to wait for the reconciliation until mid-1945, when the war in Europe was over and the defeat of Japan was a matter of weeks.

References and Notes

1. CWG, LXXV, 188-9.
2. *Ibid*, LXXIII, 1 fn.1; LXXV, 189-92, 450-2.
3. *Ibid*, 219-29.
4. TOP, I, 375, 448, 937-8; II, 529-32, 802-3; Nehru, *A Bunch*, 466-8, 484-5.
5. SWN, XII, 467 – emphasis added; XIV, 163; Nehru, *Inside America*, 191.
6. TOP, I, 415; Gopal, *op cit.*, 276.
7. Quoted in M.S. Venkataramani and B.K. Shrivastava, *Quit India: The American Response to the 1942 Struggle*, New Delhi, 1979, 16.
8. Quoted in *Monthly Review* (New York), Nov. 1966, 9.
9. SWN, XII, 104-5, 114, 124, 131.
10. *Ibid*, XI, 24, 141-2; XII, 131, 169, 176-7.
11. *Ibid*, 123-7 – emphasis added.
12. TOP, I, 110-2, 395, 404 – emphasis added.
13. *Ibid*, 396-7.
14. For the final form of the draft, see Azad, *op cit.*, 228-9.
15. Birla, *Bapu*, IV, 291.
16. See Cripps' report of the interview, TOP, I, 498-500; see also Moore, *Churchill, Cripps, and India*, 87.
17. Azad, *op cit.*, 56; CWG, LXXV, 440.
18. Quoted in Menon, *op cit.*, 114.
19. Sitaramayya, *op cit.*, II, 283.
20. TOP, I, 636.
21. Tendulkar, *op cit.*, VI, 89; Edgar Snow, *People on Our Side*, 27; TOP, III, pp. XII, 321; Sudhir Ghosh, *Gandhi's Emissary*, 80.
22. Gopal, *op cit.*, 279.
23. R.J. Moore, *Churchill, Cripps, and India*, 92-3. Moore quotes from R.G. Coupland's Diary "India: 1941-1942".
24. CWG, LXXV, 246.
25. See Gopal, *op cit.*, 290.
26. Roosevelt and Churchill, *Their Secret Wartime Correspondence*, ed. by F.L. Loewenheim, H.D. Langley and M. Jones, 81.
27. See *Ibid*, 174 note 2, 174-6, 178 note 2; see also Amery's letter to Linlithgow, 5 Jan. 1942, TOP, I, 7-8.
28. Cited in R. Palme Dutt, *The Crisis of Britain and the British Empire*, London, 1957 edn., 128.
29. SWN, XII, 169.
30. Roosevelt and Churchill, *op cit.*, 183-4 and note 1; Moore, *Churchill, Cripps, and India*, 105; *passim*.
31. *The Economist* (London), 27 Jan. 1968; cited in Harry Magdoff, *The Age of Imperialism*, 43.
32. For the resolution, see Azad, *op cit.*, 61-3.
33. Moore, *Churchill, Cripps, and India*, 105-6.
34. Johnson's account of the interview, TOP, I, 665-6; SWN, XII, 194-5 – emphasis added.
35. R.G. Coupland's Diary, 7 Apr. 1942; cited in Moore, *Churchill, Cripps, and India*, 107.
36. TOP, I, 691.
37. *Ibid*, 697.
38. CWG, LXXVII, 428.
39. TOP, I, 739, 756-7, 759-60.
40. Nehru, *A Bunch*, 469-70.
41. Azad, *op cit.*, 64-5.

42. TOP, I, 666.
43. Gopal, *op cit.*, 288 – emphasis added.
44. B. Shiva Rao, "India, 1935-47" in Philips and Wainwright (eds.), *op cit.*, 440-1; see also TOP, II, 136, 141, 144.
45. SWN, XII, 305-6.
46. Nehru, *A Bunch*, 479-80.
47. Claire Boothe Luce to Nehru, 1 Apr. 1942, JN Papers, Vol.43.
48. TOP, II, 475, 652, 701, 815-6.
49. Nehru, *A Bunch*, 487-8.
50. SWN, XII, 208, 213, 222-3, 226, 235, 260, 305, 329.
51. *Ibid.*, 134 – emphasis added.
52. Nehru, *A Bunch*, 470-1.
53. Sitaramayya, *op cit.*, II, 634-5.
54. TOP, I, 528; also Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, 468; Rajendra Prasad, *India Divided*, 152.
55. SWN, XII, 309.
- 55a. Birla, *Bapu*, III, 316, 319.
56. D.D. Kosambi, *Exasperating Essays*, 17.
57. TOP, II, 117-8.
58. Edgar Snow, *People on Our Side*, 34.
59. PT Papers, File 279 (Parts I and II); see also Thakurdas to Birla, 12 Mar. 1942, *ibid.*
60. Birla, *Bapu*, IV, 290, 291.
61. CWG, LXXV, 409-10; also 444 and LXXVI, 12-3.
62. *Ibid.*, 71-2, 99.
63. Snow, *op cit.*, 56.
64. CWG, LXXVI, 31, and fn.1, 36, 40, 51-2, 53.
65. TOP, I, 802.
66. Azad, *op cit.*, 67-8; Tendulkar, *op cit.*, VI, 96.
67. CWG, LXXVI, 449.
68. *Ibid.*, 209; also 159, 442.
69. *Ibid.*, 160.
70. *Ibid.*, 49-50 – emphasis added.
71. *Ibid.*, 63-5 – emphasis added.
72. *Ibid.*, 67, 107, 110, 372, 373.
73. GOI, *Congress Responsibility for the Disturbances 1942-43*, 42-5; SWN, XII, 286-93.
74. *Ibid.*, 277-85; CWG, 424-5.
75. SWN, XII, 294-5 – emphasis added.
76. CWG, LXXVI, 95.
77. *Ibid.*, 98-100 – emphasis added.
78. *Ibid.*, 105, 106, 114.
79. *Ibid.* 112, 120, 139-40, 167, 433, 452, *passim*.
80. TOP, I, 82 – emphasis added.
81. CWG, LXXVI, 120, 143, 167.
82. TOP, II, 128-32; CWG, LXXVI, 106-11 – emphasis added. While reproducing the report of the meeting, the editors of CWG note that they cannot "vouch for its authenticity". According to the editors of TOP, this report of the meeting was enclosed with a letter, dated 17 May 1942, from Sharaf Athar Ali, a communist of Bombay, to CPI general secretary P.C. Joshi. Athar Ali was present at the meeting. His report was intercepted by Intelligence officials.
Wickenden Report states that Athar Ali's report is corroborated by D.N. Wandrekar's, letter, dated 6 June 1942, to Dr A.G. Tendulkar, detenu in the Nasik Road Central Prison; see *Wickenden Report*, 23, 158, 225-6.

83. Birla, *Bapu*, IV, 308.
84. *Ibid*, 308; CWG, LXXVI, 195,208,215,253,431,449, *passim*.
85. *Ibid*, 223-6,264-5.
86. SWN, XII, 358-9,368.
87. *Ibid*, 359-62 – emphasis added.
88. CWG, LXXVI, 450.
89. *Ibid*, 195,196,444.
90. *Ibid*, 254,297,372-3.
91. Snow, *op cit.*, 30; also 49.
92. CWG, LXXVI, 246; Birla, *Bapu*, IV, 307-8,313.
93. Sitaramayya, *op cit.*, II, 337.
94. CWG, LXXVI, 293-4; Azad, *op cit.*, 76; Gopal, *op cit.*, 292.
95. Gary R. Hess, *America Encounters India, 1941-1947*, Baltimore, Maryland, 1971, 65; also Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, 483-4 ; Brecher, *op cit.*, 285,286.
96. Birla, *Bapu*, IV, 318,320.
97. CWG, LXXVI, 454-5.
98. *Ibid*, 294-7,298-9,303,379 -- emphasis added.
99. Shankardass, *Vallabhabhai Patel*, 244; see also Prasad, *Autobiography*, 532.
100. *Ibid*, 535-6 – emphasis added.
101. Azad, *op cit.*, 81 – emphasis added.
102. *Wickenden Report*, 249; SWN, XII, 362; CWG, LXXVI, 237.
103. *Ibid*, 384-401.
104. SWN, XII, 457.
105. CWG, LXXVI, 380.
106. Linlithgow to Amery, 26 Jan. 1943, TOP, III, 544 and 553, fn.1 and 2.
107. Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, 487,498 – emphasis added; see also Azad, *op cit.*, 74.
108. Gopal, *op cit.*, 300; see also SWN, XIII, 3-4 and fn.14.
109. CWG, LXXVI, 368, fn.2.
110. Kosambi, *op cit.*, 16-7.
111. Snow, *op cit.*, 50.
112. *Ibid*, 47-8.
113. TOP, II, 486,487, fn.3.
114. See, for instance, Gandhi's press statement of 5 August 1942, CWG, LXXVI, 372; Gandhi fervently hoped that "Britain will shed that taint [of imperialism], and that *her great ally America will make her do so*" (emphasis added); also Azad, *op cit.*, 84; *Wickenden Report*, 368-9.
115. See Arun Chandra Bhuyan, *The Quit India Movement*, 42-3, fn.22.
116. Nehru to J.L. Berry, 23 June 1942, SWN, XII, 374-5; *Wickenden Report*, 80,219.
117. SWN, XII, 406.
118. "This time we have to finish the entire work in three or four days", said Gandhi to Vinoba Bhave and others on 26 July; CWG, LXXVI, 334; also 295, 380; SWN, XII, 406, 423; *passim*.
119. Gandhi told the Working Committee and his disciples as well as informed the Viceroy that *he would fast unto death*, if he was put behind bars. Rajendra Prasad and others warned the people of this possibility. See CWG, 317-9; 333-5; TOP, II, 408; *Wickenden Report*, 241,251,262-3,313.
120. CWG, LXXVI, 63,107,110,372,373; TOP, II, 980-1.
121. SWN, XII, 359,360,407,408,509 and fn.4,510,511 and fn.2, 512,515-7. See also 522.
122. *Ibid*, 509.
123. TOP, III, 190.
124. *Ibid*, II, 407-8; Mahadev Desai to Amrit Kaur, 15 July 1942, *Wickenden Report*, 236.
125. TOP, II, 407-8.

126. Azad, *op cit.*, 81 – emphasis added.
127. TOP, II, 432.
128. CWG, LXXVI, 370.
129. *Ibid*, 375.
130. *Ibid*, 449.
131. Gopal, *op cit.*, 300; Prasad, *Autobiography*, 537-8.
132. Azad, *op cit.*, 82-3, 85 – emphasis added.
133. *Wickenden Report*, 262-3.
134. Tendulkar, *op cit.*, VI, 216 – emphasis added.
135. TOP, II, 368-9 – emphasis added.
136. *Ibid*, 367-8 – emphasis added.
137. *Ibid*, 397-8, 433, 620.
138. Azad, *op cit.*, 85.
139. TOP, II, 853.
140. *Wickenden Report*, 123, 137-8; also Bhuyan, *op cit.*, 91.
141. Gyanendra Pandey, "The Revolt of August 1942 in Eastern UP and Bihar", in Gyanendra Pandey (ed.), *The Indian Nation in 1942*.
142. *Wickenden Report*, 186, fn.128; also Bhuyan, *op cit.*, 101.
143. *Wickenden Report*, 187-8; Biswamoy Pati, "Storm over Malkangiri: A Note on Laxman Naiko's Revolt", in G. Pandey (ed.), *op cit.*, 193-202; Bhuyan, *op cit.*, 79.
144. See David Arnold, "Quit India in Madras: Hiatus or Climacteric", in G. Pandey (ed.), *op cit.*
145. See David Hardiman, "The Quit India Movement in Gujarat", in G. Pandey (ed.), *op cit.*
146. H.V. Hodson, *The Great Divide*, 106.
147. Max Harcourt, "Kisan Populism and Revolution in Rural India", in D.A. Low (ed.), *Congress and the Raj*, 342.
148. J.H. Voight, "Co-operation or Confrontation? War and Congress Politics, 1939-42", in *ibid*, 368, note 115.
149. Stephen Henningham, "Quit India in Bihar and the Eastern United Provinces", in Ranajit Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies*, II, 130, 159-62.
150. *Freedom Struggle in Tamluk, I: Sarbadhinayak*, 26-8.
151. *Ibid*, 31.
152. GOI, *Some Facts about Disturbances in India 1942-43*; quoted in *Freedom Struggle in Tamluk*, I, 32.
153. *Freedom Struggle in Tamluk*, I, 32-6.
154. Hitesranjan Sanyal, "The Quit India Movement in Medinipur District", in G. Pandey (ed.), *op cit.*, 68.
155. Cited in *ibid*, 56.
156. Gail Omvedt, "The Satara Prati Sarkar", in G. Pandey (ed.), *op cit.* The quote is on page 254. See also Bhuyan, *op cit.*, 125-6.
157. Shankardass, *Vallabhbhai Patel*, 245; Unpublished biographical notes of Kasturbhai Lalbhai, quoted in Dwijendra Tripathi, "Congress and the Indian Industrialists (1885-1947)", (mimeo), 52; TOP, IV, 768-71; Snow, *op cit.*, 51, 54, 56.
158. TOP, II, 84, 85, 405, 805; Frank Moraes, *Sir Purshotamdas Thakurdas*, 213.
159. Birla to Desai, *Bapu*, IV, 316-7; Moraes, *op cit.*, 219-20.
160. Shankardass, *Vallabhbhai Patel*, 245; Unpublished biographical notes of Kasturbhai

- Lalbai, quoted in Dwijendra Tripathi, *op cit.*, 52.
161. Snow, *op cit.*, 54.
162. *Ibid*; TOP, II, 776,777,829; Bhuyan, *op cit.*, 83-4.
163. TOP, II, 869,886.
164. *Ibid*, IV, 765-71.
165. *Eastern Economist*, 21 Sept. 1945, 433.
166. C. Rajagopalachari, "Save the Post-War Years", *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, Puja Number, 1943.
167. FICCI, *Correspondence and Relevant Documents relating to Important Questions Dealt with by the Federation during the Year 1943-44*, New Delhi, 1944, 110, 245-6; see also Shri Ram's letter to Thakurdas, 29 Nov. 1943, PT Papers, File 169, Part I.
168. G.L. Mehta, "An Unforgettable Year", in FICCI, *Silver Jubilee Souvenir 1927-51*, New Delhi, 1952, 212.
169. Venkatasubbiah, *op cit.*, 47.
170. TOP, IV, 779.
171. SWN, XIII, 353.
172. P.A. Wadia and K.T. Merchant, *The Bombay Plan*, 29; see also Suniti Kumar Ghosh, *The Indian Big Bourgeoisie*, 229-38.
173. SWN, XIII, 457.
174. CWG, LXXVI, 406-8, 414 – emphasis added. See also LXXVII, 56.
175. SWN, XIII, 59.
176. Among those primarily responsible for reducing the people to this state were Gandhi and Nehru.
177. Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, 498,499,501; Sitaramayya, *op cit.*, II, 373,380 – emphasis added.
178. CWG, LXXVII, 454.
179. Churchill's address at the Lord Mayor's annual banquet on 10 Nov. 1942.
180. CWG, LXXVII, 50-51, 52-3.
181. SWN XIII, 185 – emphasis added.
182. Mao Tsetung, "The Turning Point in World War II", Oct. 12, 1942, SWM, III, 103-7.
183. SWN, XIII, 92.
184. *Ibid*, 68 – emphasis added.
185. TOP, III, 552.
186. *Ibid*, 555,566,569,688-90, *passim*.
187. *Ibid*, 734; CWG, LXXVII, 449-50 – emphasis added; SWN, XIII, 81 and fn. 127; see also record of the interview between Gandhi and Syed Abdullah Brelvi, CWG, LXXVII, 65-6.
188. TOP, III, 800-1808 and note, 857-8; Birla, *In the Shadow*, 261-31; CWG, LXXVII, 71-3 – emphasis added.
189. Sitaramayya, *op cit.*, II, 506 and fn.
190. *Ibid*, 633; CWG, LXXVI, 456. See also Sitaramayya, *op cit.*, II, 631-2.
191. SWN, XIII, 101, 142.
192. CWG, LXXVII, 347-51.
193. SWN, XIII, 457.
194. See his letters to Horace Alexander, 12 July 1944, and Agatha Harrison, 13 July. CWG, LXXVII, 372; also Gandhi's statement to the press, 12 July and letter to Wavell, 15 July.

ibid., 369,385-6.

195. Munshi, *op cit.*, 436.

196. CWG, LXXVIII, 126-7,140,268.

197. *Ibid.*, 92,99,101-3,104,403-4,405-6.

198. B.R. Amedkar, *Pakistan or Partition of India*, 409-10.

199. Misra, *op cit.*, 515-6.

199a. Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India 1885-1947*, 437.

200. IAR, 1944, II, 180-1; Roy's press statement, *ibid.*, 181; CWG, LXXVIII, 85,89; Pyarelal, *op cit.*, I, 89.

210. Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman*, 124; see also in fn. 170 and *TCP*, V, 29,30,309-10.

202. P.C. Joshi, *For the Final Bid for Power!*, Bombay, 10-11 (this pamphlet appeared towards the end of 1948 or early in 1946).

203. CWG, LXXVIII, 400 – emphasis added; Birla, *Rapu*, IV, 333.

204. SWN, XIII, 487.

CHAPTER NINE

PARTITION AND DOMINION STATUS

"A New Chapter of Confidence and Goodwill"

As the end of the war came near, the British imperialists as well as the Indian leaders and big bourgeois felt afraid of a post-war upheaval and thought of devising means to combat the menace.

In September 1943, Viceroy-designate Wavell and most members of the Indo-Burma Committee of the British War Cabinet were keen on a negotiated settlement with the Indian leaders, for *"our main aim must be to keep India within the Commonwealth"*. Their move fell through because of Churchill's opposition. Apprehending a likely "flare-up" in India after the war Wavell complained at a governors' meeting that the British government did not understand the Indian problem as it had failed to understand the Egyptian problem before World War I. To forestall mass struggles after the war he tried to convince Churchill of the immediate need for opening negotiations with Indian leaders and wrote to him on 24 October 1944:

*"If we can secure India as a friendly partner in the British Commonwealth our predominant influence in these countries [Burma, Malaya, etc.] will, I think, be assured: with a lost and hostile India, we are likely to be reduced in the East to the position of commercial bagmen."*¹

As noted before, Gandhi and the Congress leaders who were outside prison were also hungry for co-operation. The Congress leaders' appraisal of the post-war situation was not different from that of Wavell. Early in January 1945, Bhulabhai Desai, leader of the Congress party in the Central Assembly, pleaded with Wavell that "the continuation of the present situation was more likely than not to lead to an upheaval".² Afraid of their own people and aware that the interests of the classes they represented were tied to British imperial interests, they sought immediate understanding with the raj to face the likely post-war upsurge of struggles of the people, who had been dragged down to the lowest depths of want and misery.

In mid-November 1944, with Gandhi's blessings, Bhulabhai Desai

entered into an agreement with Liaquat Ali Khan, known as the Desai-Liaquat Pact, and approached the Viceroy for the formation of an interim government on the basis of Congress-League parity, which would "function within the framework of the existing Government of India Act". If formed, it would get the withdrawal of Section 93 from the former Congress provinces, where governments would be constituted on the lines of a coalition – a League proposal which had been rejected by the Gandhis and Nehrus in 1937 and subsequent years. Wavell informed the Secretary of State that "Desai's proposals fit in with those I submitted months ago..."³ When Jinnah rejected the agreement and it was criticized by other Congress leaders, Gandhi denied giving his support to it. M.C. Setalvad, a judge of the Bombay High Court, wrote that "Bhulabhai Desai entered into the Pact with the full knowledge, concurrence and encouragement of Gandhi..."⁴

During Desai's negotiations with Wavell, Birla saw the Viceroy's private secretary and as Wavell wired to Amery, Birla "was probably sent by Gandhi" and "Birla obviously thought that Coalition Government at [the] centre under present constitution [was] by no means impossible. He said he was satisfied that *Dominion status should be the aim and not repeat not complete independence*. He thought *Gandhi was now of the same opinion*..."⁵

A Congress ministry was formed in the NWFP in March 1945, before the Congress Working Committee members were released, and with Congress support a new ministry with the Leaguer, Mohammad Saadulla, as Premier was formed in Assam in the same month.

At the end of the war in Europe, Wavell released the members of the Working Committee and convened a conference at Simla in June-July 1945. As V.P. Menon wrote, the Congress came in for co-operation without any conditions.⁶ The Congress leaders were anxious to join the Viceroy's Council "on the basis that they would whole-heartedly co-operate in supporting and carrying through the war against Japan to its victorious conclusion". (The Congress leaders', including Gandhi's, faith in the creed of non-violence was remarkably flexible.) Nehru felt overjoyed: "We feel", he said, "we must succeed at Simla....I am very hopeful."⁷

Wavell asked the Congress and the League to suggest names of members of the reconstituted Council. The panel submitted by the Congress included the name of Shyamaprasad Mukherjee, Hindu Mahasabha president. The Simla Conference foundered on the rock of the League's claim to nominate all the Muslim members of the Council. But so far as the British imperialists were concerned, it did not fail. It cast the Congress leaders in the role of accomplices who would work shoulder to shoulder with the raj to put out the flames of anti-imperialist struggle.

After the Simla conference was over, Wavell

“assured them [Gandhi and Azad] that even if a final constitutional settlement failed to materialize, he would see to it that an interim Government is formed at the centre out of the elements prepared to co-operate”.

He wanted the Congress leaders to “see to it that a peaceful atmosphere is preserved in the country”.

The Congress president wrote to him:

“the contacts established between the Congress and the Government had largely allayed past bitterness, and marked the beginning of a new chapter of confidence and goodwill.”

Nehru said : “In spite of our sincere efforts, we have not succeeded but there is no ground for despondency and despair.” He hoped : “I do not know how things will shape themselves. The Viceroy may take some further step, as he hinted...”⁸

The Congress leaders felt a surge of “confidence and goodwill” for the raj while the wounds inflicted by it on the people were still fresh.

The British Labour Party won the general elections in July and this was hailed by Birla’s *Hindustan Times*, the unofficial Congress organ, as “the downfall of India’s oppressors”. On assuming office the Labour Party announced elections to central and provincial legislative assemblies in India. Summing up the views of the provincial governors at their conference early in August, Wavell said: “We should endeavour to retain the initiative and to divert political energy into legitimate channels.” Election seemed the first step.⁹

Close co-operation between the raj and Indian big bourgeois and Congress leaders had already started. Sir Ardeshir Dalal, one of the Tata directors and an author of the Bombay Plan, so much lauded by Nehru, had been appointed a member of the Viceroy’s Executive Council in charge of planning and development early in June 1944. In mid-May 1945 the government arranged the visit of a delegation of Indian industrialists led by Birla and J.R.D. Tata to Britain and the USA for exploring chances of collaboration with the British and US monopoly capital. The raj regularly invited discussions with Congress leaders on constitutional questions, the future administrative set-up, “a scheme of army reorganization” and other matters like education, industry and planning. For instance, Nehru was being consulted on constitutional issues and army reorganization; Rajkumari Amrit Kaur and Zakir Hussain, intimately associated with the Congress leaders, went to England “on some education committee of which Sargent was chairman”. “Except in politics”, wrote Guy Wint, “British-Indian rapprochement is making very helpful progress.”¹⁰

Beset with sharp contradictions, the British imperialists sought to forge a new kind of relationship with India, under which their economic, political and strategic interests would remain secure. Their only hope lay in adjusting their relations with the classes – the classes that were dependent on them for their growth and development – and in giving them the reins of administration while exercising control from behind. As R.J. Moore observes,

“Labour favoured an early withdrawal not only because the party was pledged to it, but because it would best serve Britain’s own interests. The co-operation of Congress...seemed necessary to the preservation of the now uncertain internal order and the security of the Indian Ocean area.... The best security for commercial and financial interests lay in an orderly transfer and the continuation of the collaborative arrangements that had prospered before and during the war (when leading magnates were associated with government).”¹¹

British imperialism emerged victorious out of World War II but far weaker economically, politically and militarily than US imperialism and the erstwhile Soviet Union. Much of its industry was shattered and its capital investments in Canada and the USA were taken over by the latter. For its post-war reconstruction it was dependent on US aid and loan-capital.

On the other hand, World War II was the ‘Best of Wars’ for US monopoly capital. In his *The Struggle for the World*, published in 1947, James Burnham wrote of “an American Empire which will be, if not literally worldwide in formal boundaries, capable of exercising decisive world control. Nothing less than this can be the positive or offensive phase of a national United States policy.” He added: “There is already an American empire, greatly expanded during these past years.”¹² An article and map based on Burnham’s book were carried by *Life*, Henry Luce’s journal.

The contradiction between British and US imperialism became acute in the post-war years. Under the Anglo-US Financial Agreement of December 1945 the USA extended a loan to Britain to assist in her post-war reconstruction on condition that Britain would end by mid-1947 the “Empire dollar pool” and eventually the system of Imperial preferences. The US demand for liquidation of Britain’s direct rule in India became insistent.¹³ The USA was “making sheep’s eyes” not only at vital British oil reserves in the Middle East, as Churchill insinuated, but also at India, “the jewel in the crown of the British Empire”. The enlightened section of the British imperialists – the Labourites – realized that the post-war situation would not permit them to maintain the old imperial structure of

domination. With the change in the situation, relations with the colonies had to be restructured, if the British strategic and economic interests were to be defended against the mounting offensives not only of the people of India but of the USA as well as the growing world-wide forces of national liberation and socialism.

Like the spectre of the USA's 'Manifest Destiny', the spectre of Communism also was haunting the raj, as it haunted all other imperialists and reactionaries. The emergence of the Soviet Union with its power and glory greatly enhanced, the collapse of different reactionary regimes in Eastern Europe, the heroic advance of the People's Liberation Army and expansion of Red bases in China, and the armed national liberation struggles in Indo-China and Indonesia were contributing to the revolutionary ferment in India and accelerating the change in her political climate. India was loud with protests against the despatch of Indian troops by the raj to defeat the national liberation wars in Indo-China and Indonesia and restore them to the old colonial masters – the French and the Dutch respectively. At the San Francisco Conference in 1945, Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov declared:

"We have at this conference an Indian delegation, but India is not an independent state. We all know that the time will come when the voice of independent India will be heard too."

Like the imperialists, Indian reactionaries too were worried. In a note enclosed with his letter of 20 August 1945 to the Secretary of State, Shiva Rao warned:

"the influence of the communist element in India, particularly in the Trade Unions, has been growing since 1941. Russia has expressed active interest in her independence (through Molotov at San Francisco) and in that of all colonial areas."¹⁴

As Gary Hess writes,

"The spectre of communist influence, seemingly certain to increase as long as the British held onto power, added another compelling reason for the United States to encourage a quick and orderly withdrawal."

At the cabinet meeting on 4 April 1945, Churchill "spoke of the difficult and unfriendly attitude of Russia since the Yalta conference; of the mighty military power of the USA; and hence the need for Empire unity".¹⁵

Another contradiction which beset British imperialism was with its

own people. With the end of the war the British youth became sick of it and felt no inclination to serve in distant lands and shed their blood for the profit and power of their capitalists. Those who had joined the armed forces demanded speedy demobilization and mutinied in some places to realize their demand. The British rulers were often heard to bewail the shortage of manpower to preserve the empire.

But of all the contradictions with which British imperialism was faced in the immediate post-war years, its contradiction with the Indian people was, no doubt, the principal one. In the winter months of 1945-6, India, as Penderel Moon said, was on the 'Edge of a Volcano'.

Elections

In the meantime, to refurbish their own image, which had been tarnished by the repudiation of all responsibility for the 'Quit India' movement, Gandhi's condemnation of underground activities and his instruction to underground workers to surrender,¹⁶ Nehru, Patel and some others, especially Nehru, did some sabre-rattling during the election campaign. They claimed full credit for the August rebellion; predicted the end of British rule within a short time; denied the possibility of a compromise with the League; and demanded investigations into the atrocities committed by the minions of law and order during the struggle and their punishment. The Secretary of State for India, Lord Pethick-Lawrence, dismissed these as part of electioneering. Birla hastened to assure Pethick-Lawrence and Stafford Cripps that there "is no political leader including Jawaharlal who wants to see any crisis or violence" and that "everyone is anxious for settlement". He explained that "*even leaders are often led*".¹⁷

The Congress election manifesto was drafted to sound as progressive as possible. For the first time the Congress promised in the election manifesto for the provincial assembly elections to abolish zamindari but assured the zamindars that they would be compensated. It stated that the future constitution should be a federal one with autonomy for its constituent units. The election campaign was fought by the Congress on the issue of Indian unity and by the Muslim League on the issue of Pakistan and its sole right to represent the Muslims.

In the elections to the Central Assembly the Congress won an overwhelming majority of general (that is Hindu) seats: all Hindu Mahasabha candidates were routed. Patel had wanted uncontested election of Hindu Mahasabha president Shyamaprasad Mukherji,¹⁸ but the Bengal Congress, then dominated by Sarat Bose, put up a candidate against him. Shyamaprasad, for whom the Congress high command had developed

affection, could not escape defeat and save his deposit. The Muslim League won all the Muslim seats in the Central Assembly, obtaining 90 per cent of the votes cast.

In the provincial assembly elections, which took place early in 1946, the successes of the Congress and the League were almost equally spectacular. All Hindu Mahasabha candidates were defeated, except Shyamaprasad who won from a pocket constituency. When the Muslim League wave was sweeping through India and Bengal, Fazlul Huq was returned to the Bengal Assembly with five companions of his, defeating the League.

The Congress formed ministries in eight provinces and the League in Bengal and Sind. The leader of the Muslim League Assembly Party in Bengal had proposed the formation of a coalition ministry with the Congress but the Congress high command was opposed to it. Thanks to the Congress high command, Muslim League ministries had functioned in Bengal from 1937 to 1946 with a break for a little over a year. As Abul Hashim, then general secretary of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League said,

“They kept out accredited Hindu leaders from the governments. There were two or three Hindu ministers but they did not represent their community.... We were fully conscious of its inevitable reaction, which ultimately led to the partition of Bengal in August 1947. We decided [in early 1946] to constitute a coalition ministry with the Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha. *The Congress high command did not agree.* They apprehended that if there was a coalition between the Muslim League and the Congress in Bengal, the All India Muslim League would demand similar coalitions in other provinces of India.”

It was the Congress leaders' obsessive desire to have a monopoly of power at the Centre and in the Hindu-majority provinces that stood in the way of a settlement with the League – a settlement which would have averted the 'Great Calcutta killing' of mid-August 1946 and later more appalling holocausts, the partition of India and the dismemberment of Bengal and Punjab.

Even after the riots in Calcutta, Noakhali and Bihar in 1946 – in early November that year – Muslim League leaders of Bengal met Gandhi at the residence of Suhrawardy, Bengal's prime minister, in Calcutta with the proposal for a coalition government in Bengal. But “Mr Gandhi said that he preferred a one-party government to a coalition government.”^{18a} Gandhi left for Noakhali on an ostensible mission of restoring communal peace there after blasting all hopes of bringing about communal harmony even at that late hour.

In the Punjab, though the Muslim League party was the biggest single

party in the assembly, the Congress formed a coalition with the Akali Party, a party of Sikh communalists, and the Unionist Party, a party dominated by pro-imperialist big landlords of Punjab. This unprincipled alliance was one more instance among countless ones which exposed the hollowness of the Congress leaders' claim that it was their anti-imperialist and anti-feudal crusading zeal that had not allowed them to form coalition with the League in 1937 and after. The Unionist Khizar Hayat Khan, leader of a small minority party, headed the Punjab ministry with the support of the Congress. Before the elections, the Congress had poured funds to get Muslim candidates under different banners elected, but all Congress-supported Muslim candidates in different provinces were defeated.¹⁹

The Post-War Upsurge and the Congress Leadership

The post-war upheaval, apprehended by the raj and Congress leaders, began almost immediately after the end of the war. On 21 to 23 November 1945, Calcutta witnessed the first outburst of the pent-up fury of the people. The immediate cause of it was the firing on a procession of students along an important thoroughfare of the city – Dharamtala Street, now Lenin Sarani – demanding the release of INA prisoners. The British had brought back to India captured officers and soldiers of the Indian National Army (INA), which Subhas Bose had organized in Malaya and Singapore. The colonial rulers staged the trials of three officers of the Army – Shah Nawaz Khan, P.K. Sahgal and G.S. Dhillon. (We shall soon return to this subject). The procession of the students in Calcutta was stopped and fired upon. A student and another young man became martyrs and many were wounded. That set Calcutta ablaze. All communal considerations were forgotten; the united people, undaunted by armoured cars and other military paraphernalia, fought with whatever they could lay their hands on. Hundreds of thousands of workers went on strike; trains were stopped; barricades were set up and street battles took place – people fighting with primitive weapons against the heavily-armed forces of the raj. Police and military vehicles were burnt down – about 150 of them. According to official estimates, 33 persons including an American were killed and 200 civilians, many policemen, British and American soldiers were wounded.²⁰

When the news spread, the whole of Bengal was surcharged with bitter anti-imperialist feeling. Anti-imperialist processions, meetings and other demonstrations were held all over Bengal.

Describing the mood of the people, Governor Casey wrote:

“Both in North and South Calcutta a feature of the disturbances...was

that the crowds when fired on largely stood their ground or at most only receded a little, to return again to the attack."

There was a revolutionary solidarity among the people. On 27 November, Wavell informed the Secretary of State :

"Casey was impressed by the very strong anti-British feeling behind the whole demonstration [in Calcutta and Howrah] and considers the whole situation still very explosive and dangerous."²¹

Gandhi immediately came to Calcutta and had a series of interviews with Casey. Gandhi assured the governor that "our future long term relations would be good"; that he did not want any "public enquiry...into recent disturbances"; that he would do his utmost in bringing about a peaceful solution of India's constitutional problem; that "he was trying to reduce temperature"; that he was lulling the people into the belief that "India was going to get her freedom out all right" and asking them to "work on that assumption and on no other". Gandhi also met Wavell who too had rushed to Calcutta and assured him that "he was trying to get the tone [of the Congress leaders' electioneering speeches] lowered".²²

Gandhi's emissary, Sudhir Ghosh, also saw Casey and said to him that the Congress believed that *there could be no agreed solution to the Indian problem and wanted the British to hand over control to the Congress*.²³

Nehru, Patel and Azad also had their shares of interview with Casey. The Working Committee, meeting in Calcutta early in December, adopted a resolution, drafted by Gandhi, which affirmed

"for the guidance of all concerned that the policy of non-violence adopted in 1920 by the Congress continued unabated and that such non-violence does not include burning of public property, cutting of the telegraph wires, derailing the trains and intimidation".

While eulogising the patriotism, sacrifice, etc., of the INA men in another resolution, the Working Committee disapproved of the methods they had adopted.

The lesson of the November upsurge went home to the British imperialists. They immediately changed their policy regarding the trials of INA officers and soldiers. Instead of court-martialling at least 200 to 300 of them and executing 40 to 50 prisoners, as previously planned, they decided to try a few of them, not on the charge of "waging war against the King", but on the charge of "brutality and murder".²⁴ The sentences of imprisonment already passed on Shah Nawaz and others were remitted.

Wavell and Auchinleck, the Commander-in-Chief, noted with

satisfaction that the election speeches and propaganda of the Congress leaders had "become more sober", that Gandhi had issued instructions for the preservation of non-violence and that Birla had "told the *Hindustan Times* to lower its tone".²⁵

Even before the November upheaval in Calcutta, Nehru had been emphasizing "the necessity of maintaining a peaceful atmosphere in the country while this [the INA] trial lasts". Before and after the upheaval, Nehru went on telling the people that "The British are packing up", that *the task of winning independence "has been almost accomplished because in the present day world the British empire has ceased to exist"*. In his speeches and statements he decried "sporadic violence" and expatiated on "the folly of disorder and violence". He advised students not "to take suddenly the reins of the nation in their own hands" (as they had done in November) but to "leave political leadership to those...qualified to lead". *They were asked to forget British rule and think how "to build up the future India", etc.* A superb actor on India's political stage, *he did his "utmost to avoid conflict and restrain the hotheads", as he pledged himself to do in his letter of 3 December 1945 to Cripps.*²⁶ Wavell noted that "Indian business magnates...are anxious for a solution without conflict and disorder".²⁷

Ignoring the Congress leaders' sermons, Calcutta erupted again from 11 to 13 February 1946. The occasion was a protest demonstration by students against the sentence of rigorous imprisonment for 7 years passed on Abdul Rashid of the INA. The city was paralysed by a general strike; jute mills in Calcutta's suburbs remained closed for two days; suburban train services stopped; people fought bitter street battles with the armed police and the army units riding armoured cars. A marked feature, like that in November, was strong solidarity among Hindus and Muslims who together directed their attacks against Europeans. The flare-up reached greater heights than that in November. According to official statistics, 84 persons became martyrs and 300 injured. As in November, the anti-imperialist wave in Calcutta and the suburbs sent ripples throughout Bengal. The Congress leaders like Azad, Nehru and Patel admonished the people and asked them to go back to their homes and leave it to them to bring freedom and prosperity to the people. Bands of Congress, League and Communist volunteers jointly moved about and helped in restoring order.

Waves of anti-imperialist struggle rose one after another in different parts of India and lashed at the regime of the imperialists. What was lacking was a revolutionary party to co-ordinate, develop and lead them. The most spectacular and most significant among them was the uprising in Bombay which began on 18 February 1946. The ratings of the Royal Indian Navy rose in revolt first in Bombay and then in Karachi, Calcutta

and Madras. The rebel sailors who had various grievances – bad food, racial discrimination, insults meted out by British officers, and so on – were also inspired by the deeds of Subhas and the example of the INA. In its report the RIN Enquiry Commission observed:

“Politics and political influence had a very great effect in unsettling men’s loyalty and in preparing the ground for the mutiny and in the prolongation and spread of the mutiny after it had started. The glorification of the INA had undoubtedly a most unsettling effect on the morale of the men of the services.”²⁸

By 22 February 1946 the rebel sailors were in control of about 22 vessels in Bombay, including the flagship of the British Vice-Admiral. A total of 78 ships of the Royal Indian Navy, 20 shore establishments and 20,000 ratings were involved in the struggle. Over a thousand men in the Royal Indian Air Force camps in Bombay came out on a sympathy strike. When ordered, Indian soldiers refused to fire on the R.I.N. ratings in Bombay as well as in Karachi. And Bombay’s workers and youth, irrespective of the community to which they belonged, stood by the heroic men of the navy, carried food to them, erected barricades and fought pitched battles with armed policemen and several British battalions equipped with tanks and armoured cars. On 22 February, Bombay observed a general strike in the teeth of bitter opposition from big Congress and Muslim League leaders – Sardar Patel, Jinnah, Chundrigar, S.K. Patil and others. Patel had issued statements asking the people not to go on strike and advising the ratings to surrender to the authorities, while assuring them that they would see to it that there was no victimization. Azad, too, issued a similar statement. *The president of the Bombay Congress, S.K. Patil, had secret confabulations with Bombay governor John Colville, and the Congress and League placed “volunteers” at the service of the raj “to assist the police” to fight the people.*²⁹

Ignoring the Patels and Patils and Chundrigars, the entire working class of Bombay came out at the call of the Naval Central Strike Committee, which was supported by the CPI, and for two days there were pitched battles on the city’s streets, in which, according to official estimates, there were about 1500 casualties, including more than 200 dead. A British officer described how “armed patrols in full battle order moved about the streets in lorries, firing at random into crowded streets and moved on before anyone could even pick up a stone”.³⁰ What is significant is that the wall that had been sedulously erected by the raj to separate the armed services from the people crumbled down.

The brave men of the navy refused to be cowed by any threat – not even the threat of Admiral Godfrey (who had flown in bombers) to sink

the navy. They appealed to political parties to lead them and promised to place the navy at their disposal. No party, not even the CPI, came forward to give them leadership. On the other hand, besides the Congress leaders, Jinnah also asked them to surrender.

Ultimately, on 23 February, the Strike Committee surrendered, stating that they were surrendering not to the British but to the Congress and the League. Their last message to the people said: "For the first time the blood of the men in the services and the people flowed together in a common cause."³¹ After the surrender, the Congress leaders like Patel and Azad promptly forgot, as usual, the promise to see that "no disciplinary action" was taken against the navymen. Many of them – two thousand or more – were arrested and kept in detention camps; about five hundred were sentenced to prison terms to serve as common criminals.³² The navymen were not reinstated, neither by the British nor by the Congress leaders in the post-colonial period.

At a mass meeting held in Bombay on 26 February, Patel as well as Nehru condemned "the mass violence in Bombay", that is, the actions of the navymen and workers who had dared to raise the banner of anti-imperialist revolt. Addressing the press next day, Nehru thundered :

"The R.I.N. Central Strike Committee had no business to issue such an appeal [to the city of Bombay to observe a sympathy strike]. *I will not tolerate this kind of thing.*"³³

Theirs was a totalitarian claim to the leadership of the people, an infringement of which was intolerable.

Gandhi condemned the rebels for their "thoughtless orgy of violence" in very strong language. To him the "combination between Hindus and Muslims and others for the purpose of violent action is unholy..." He "would rather perish in the flames" than see India delivered over to "the rabble". No doubt, it was "unholy" for the Hindus and Muslims to unite and rise against colonial rule and he went on denouncing those who disbelieved in British professions that they would grant freedom to India. Though violent revolt of a united people was a 'sin', Gandhi looked forward to communal holocausts, to "internecine warfare" between the Hindus and the Muslims, in which a few lakhs would be killed as the only solution to India's problems. He would expect "from Congress in the event of civil war...that they fight decently and take one tooth for one tooth..."³⁴

And Nehru decried revolutionary violence, which, according to him, had been effective in the 18th century but was quite futile after the new inventions of war.³⁵

Besides the navy, Indian air force units also mutinied in some places,

though on a minor scale. And workers were on the march everywhere despite the opposition of Congress and League leaders. The number of workers who went on strike in 1946 was 1,961,984 and in 1947, 1,840,784. There was an unprecedented upsurge of anti-imperialist struggle, in which workers, peasants, students, other youths, and employees, even sections of the Indian army, air force and police and lower rungs of the bureaucracy took part, and armed confrontations were frequent. In his diary Wavell noted under the date 19 February 1946 what he was offered as one day's fare:

"A day of alarms but not excursions. I saw Porter,³⁶ all for capitulation to the INA; Bewoor³⁷ about a postal strike; Carr³⁸ about RIAF mutiny; Griffin³⁹ and Conran-Smith⁴⁰ about a railway strike; and finally the C-in-C, most gloomy of all about the RIN mutiny at Bombay and the INA trials; What a cheerful day – prospect or reality of three mutinies and two strikes!"⁴¹

The fire of anti-imperialist struggle was not confined to cities and towns; it spread to some remote rural areas. In Telangana in the Hyderabad state – Telangana now a part of Andhra Pradesh – started a peasant struggle, which soon developed into a liberation struggle. There emerged a peasant army and liberated areas. All these struggles showed that the Congress and Muslim League leaders were on the same side of the barricade as the raj.

In his letter to King George VI, dated 22 March 1946, the Viceroy, referring to the revolts in India, wrote : "It is a sorry tale of misfortune and of folly. Perhaps the best way to look at it is that India is in the birth-pangs of a new order."⁴²

Birla's *Eastern Economist* was satisfied with the role of the Congress leaders:

"In fact whenever they spoke, it was to denounce rebellion, mutiny, indiscipline. It was Sardar Patel's intervention that brought RIN mutiny to an end. Gandhiji's statement on the same brought out for the first time in recent history a chorus of unstinted praise from every section of the British press. Maulana Azad denounced unequivocally the recurring disturbances at Calcutta....In fact the fear was and is that if the Government failed to accomplish a negotiated transfer of power, even the Congress would not be able to check the deluge that would follow. India would cease to be a politically stable area and this would knock out the international foundations of the British Empire."⁴³

The Birla organ's fear of a likely deluge of mass struggles sweeping away all Congress resistance and its solicitude for the international

foundations of the British empire are worth noting.

Despite the shootings and other repressive measures, the communal tension that was steadily being built up, and all other efforts of the Congress and League fire-fighters, flames of struggle – especially industrial strikes which often turned political – continued to leap up in different parts of India.

Towards the end of March 1946, Turnbull, Secretary to the Cabinet Mission that came to India in that month, wrote :

“The only hope is that the big boys of Congress and League are said to be much alarmed lest their followers break loose and of Russia.”⁴⁴

Thanks to “the big boys of Congress and League” and to the policies of the non-Marxist, non-revolutionary CPI leadership, what emerged was a mockery of a new order.

The INA and Congress Leaders

As captured INA soldiers were brought home by the British, who prepared for their court-martials on the charge of waging war against the King-Emperor, tales of Subhas having founded the INA in South-East Asia and a free Indian government in Singapore, of having planted the flag of Indian freedom, though under the Japanese auspices, on the Andamans, and of the INA having fought its way into North-East India and having unfurled the flag of Indian independence in Kohima, thrilled the people and captured their imagination. Subhas’s call “On to Delhi” found an echo in the hearts of the people and the greeting “Jai Hind” (Victory to India) he introduced resounded throughout India. As Palme Dutt wrote, the example of the INA and “the subsequent trials of the INA leaders kindled to white heat the flame of militant patriotism and the conception of the armed conquest of power in place of the old non-violent struggles”.⁴⁵ The INA, though defeated, shook the loyalty of the Indian armed forces to the government and brought about a transformation in the outlook of a large section of them.

Another feature which appealed to all Indians was its truly united, non-communal character.

As we have seen, the INA issue acted like a catalyst in changing an apparently quiescent India into a revolutionary India, with one condition for a successful revolution absent – a party with a revolutionary line.

To exploit the INA issue, the Congress leaders immediately began “making great play in support of the INA, demanding their unconditional

release and sometimes lauding them as heroes'', as Wavell said.⁴⁶ They formed an INA Defence Committee with leading legal and political personalities and with Asaf Ali as convener. For dramatic effect Nehru himself donned the barrister's robe.

But their private stand was quite different. On 18 October 1945 Asaf Ali had quite a long interview with one Captain Hari Badhwar, a report of which was sent to New Delhi and to the Secretary of State. Asaf Ali said that it was the "inflamed feeling" among the people on the INA issue that "forced Congress to take the line it did", that "if Congress was in power it would have no hesitation in removing all INA men from the Services and even in putting some of them on trial..." Asaf Ali added "that if Government now postponed trial Congress would be prepared to put leaders on trial when in power. When asked if Congress leaders would announce this officially, he said that they could not do so though there was no objection to H.E. the C-in-C being informed."

Some Congressmen including Dr Khan Sahib, the Congress premier of the NWFP, said to the governor of the province, G. Cunningham:

*"If only they [the INA leaders] had been shot in Rangoon or Singapore, everyone would be pleased."*⁴⁷

When the Congress assumed office in Bombay, the ministry banned ex-INA men even from the police. So did the UP ministry at the instance of Nehru.⁴⁸

Though the Congress leaders would not recruit ex-INA men in the police or the army, they, as we shall see, besides retaining British governors and others, offered better emoluments to British soldiers to induce them to serve in the army of 'free' India.

When Nehru visited Malaya in March 1946 with all help extended to him by the Indian government and was offered by Lord Mountbatten, the head of the British Military Administration in Malaya, every facility including the use of cars, an aeroplane, the assistance of the Chief of Staff of the Malay Command and another officer whenever required, he cancelled at Mountbatten's request a public function at which he was to place a wreath on the memorial of dead INA men. He was impressed by the activities of the INA, which gave even the poorest Indians in Malaya a sense of pride and discipline.⁴⁹

Fearing that INA trials would create public excitement, that is, rouse intense anti-imperialist feeling, Nehru advised Commander-in-Chief Auchinleck to drop all trials. Giving him "a glimpse into my own mind", he confided that his earlier attitude had been influenced partly by his "apprehension" about "the inevitable consequences in India" of the

court-martial. He stated:

“Within a few weeks the story of the INA had percolated to the remotest villages in India.... The widespread popular enthusiasm was surprising enough, but even more surprising was a similar reaction of a very large number of regular Indian army officers and men.”

Nehru gently reminded Auchinleck of this aspect of the question though he agreed with him that “it is a dangerous and risky business to break the discipline of an army”, even that of a colonial power.

During a “longish talk about the INA” with Wavell on 13 May 1946, *Nehru said that “they had gone too far in their glorification of the INA, and the tendency was now swinging the other way”*.⁵⁰

Until at least the end of 1946 (early in September 1946, Nehru had formed the Interim Government at the centre), 35,000 INA officers and men were still in prison. Because “of the universal expression of public opinion throughout the country”, a resolution recommending the immediate release of all INA prisoners and other political prisoners was discussed in the Central Assembly and would have been unanimously passed. But the Nehrus got it postponed “because of the Commander-in-Chief’s wishes”. The resolution was moved again on 18 February 1947. Nehru wanted to respect the wishes of the C-in-C, who was opposed to release, but he was afraid that the result of ignoring the demand of the people was “bound to lead to public agitation and possible trouble” and to agitate the minds of the Indian army officers and men. In a note prepared for the cabinet, he made “it clear that *there is no question before us of reinstatement of the INA personnel in the defence services*”. Though the entire country demanded the release of the INA prisoners, though the elected members, whether Hindus, Muslims or others, wanted their release, they continued to languish in detention camps because of the objection of the British Commander-in-Chief. Before another resolution would be moved in the Assembly in April 1947, Nehru sought Viceroy Mountbatten’s instructions.⁵¹

The INA issue, like ‘Quit India’, was used by the Congress leaders as a trump card during the elections of 1945-6.⁵²

Another issue on which the Congress leaders were eloquent during the elections was the demand for inquiry into atrocities on the people committed by the minions of law and order during the ‘Quit India’ movement. Nehru thundered:

“There is much talk about war criminals. The time is not far off when we shall prepare our list of anti-national criminals, those who mercilessly crushed the spirit of our patriots, who opened fire on them.... We shall never forget them.”

At the Meerut session of the Congress in November 1946, Nehru declared that "those who were responsible for the atrocities committed on the people must not escape punishment."

But the reality was different from the rhetoric tuned to the mood of the people. When the Congress leaders assumed office, they, far from trying the "anti-national criminals", depended on them for the same reasons as the British had done, and promoted many of them to higher posts. True to their character, Patel took strong exception to an exhibition showing pictures of police atrocities committed in 1942, held in Banaras, on the ground that it was likely to affect the morale of the police force and agitate the public mind against the services.⁵³

Pakistan Concept, the Big Bourgeoisie and Congress leaders

As noted before, the resolution, known as the 'Pakistan' resolution, adopted by the Muslim League in March 1940, demanded the formation of independent and sovereign *states* in the north-west and the north-east of India where the Muslims were in a majority. The resolution was left *deliberately* vague. Addressing the Muslim League Working Committee meeting held between 24 and 26 April 1943, Jinnah advised its members to "discourage anything that will create dissensions in the Muslim camp. For instance, discussions or determination of fundamental rights for citizens in Pakistan, or production of a cut and dried scheme for Pakistan must create controversies and differences of opinion and should, therefore, be avoided for the present."^{53a} If the concept of Pakistan was made clear, the Muslims, at least of Bengal and Sind, would not have responded as enthusiastically as they did to the call for founding Pakistan. Many Muslim leaders like Fazlul Huq, who moved the 'Pakistan' resolution in Lahore, and Abul Hashim, general secretary of the Bengal Provincial League from 1943, believed that the resolution envisaged the formation of a number of independent Muslim-majority states and hoped that Bengal would be one such state. But after the League had swept the polls in 1945-6 elections, a newly-elected League legislators' convention was held in New Delhi from 7 to 10 April 1946 and the resolution was interpreted to mean the creation not of independent and sovereign states but a single unitary state comprising Punjab, Sind, the NWFP and Baluchistan in the north-west and Bengal and Assam in the east. A resolution to that effect was adopted amidst protests from Abul Hashim and others. In the years between 1940 and 1946, the Muslim League came under the dominant influence of the big Muslim compradors like the Ispahani brothers, Dawood, Haroon and the like – the Muslim counterparts of the Birlas, Tatas, Sarabhais, etc.

They demanded a unitary state with a strong centre, where they could thrive by using the state machinery, untrammelled by competition with the more powerful Marwari, Gujarati and Parsi business magnates.⁵⁴

Pakistan was the demand of the big Muslim compradors, backed by big Muslim landlords and the upper stratum of the Muslim professional classes, and not of the Muslim masses, though the demand for separation caught the imagination of the Muslims within a few brief years because of the refusal of the Congress to dispel their suspicion of the great Hindu majority, rather because of the Congress leaders' pursuit of a monopoly of whatever power the British would concede, and because of the League's cry of 'Islam in danger'. It was their own 'emancipation' that the Muslim business magnates were seeking -- not the emancipation of the Muslim masses, about forty million (or 45 per cent) of whom would have to remain outside the promised land, if it emerged. The fate of the Muslim 'hewers of wood and drawers of water' was no different from that of their Hindu counterparts. The British raj, too, which at first encouraged the idea of Pakistan,⁵⁵ could hardly be accused of having any desire to liberate the Muslim masses. By raising the slogan of 'Islam in danger' and indulging in rhetoric about the emancipation of the Muslim masses from Hindu domination, the League leaders could rally the Muslim masses behind their demand in semi-feudal conditions when religious obscurantism prevailed and when there existed no revolutionary party, just as the Congress and Akali leaders could sway their co-religionists. After the emergence of Pakistan, the Pakistan state machinery has minted big Muslim industrialists whom Gustav Papanek calls 'robber barons' out of those who were mainly merchants in undivided India⁵⁶, while the lot of the Muslim masses has hardly improved.

On 24 October 1945, Wavell wrote to Pethick-Lawrence:

"The whole question of Central control over industry in India is bound up with the political problem, and quite apart from the natural desire of all Provinces to have a fairly free hand in developing their own industries, the Muslims in the Pakistan Provinces believe that their industrial development may be strangled by a Hindu centre."⁵⁷

When asked by Bengal governor Casey "if the Muslim League was still absolutely intent on Pakistan and nothing else", M.A.H. Ispahani, the head of a big firm based in Calcutta and member of the League Working Committee, said that he

"regarded the problem as an economic one -- in that it was essential for the Muslims to get opportunities for self-advancement, administratively and otherwise.... He said that the present leaders of the Congress were

bantias – small-minded merchants with whom it was impossible to get along – they're all take and no give.... He said that it was impossible for the Muslims to achieve economic emancipation in the hands of the Hindus."

It is obvious whose "self-advancement" and "economic emancipation" Ispahani was talking about. In August 1946, the League's general secretary Liaquat Ali told Sir A. Waugh, the member of the Viceroy's Council for Industries and Supplies, that "so long as Marwaris and other Hindu capitalists had a money stranglehold anywhere in India, Muslims could never improve their lot".⁵⁸

As Ispahani said, "Business and industry were overwhelmingly the monopoly of the Hindu bania and the British merchant and industrialist." In his article he presented a somewhat detailed account of the comparative weakness of the Muslim businessmen.⁵⁹

As noted before, Jinnah entrusted Ispahani and Abdur Rahman Siddiqi, both non-Bengali businessmen of Calcutta, with the task of organizing the League in Bengal. In Bengal, Ispahani was the most trusted man of Jinnah as G.D.Birla was of Gandhi. The Muslim business magnates financed the League, helped Jinnah to convert *Dawn*, a League weekly, into a daily and themselves brought out pro-League dailies like *Morning News* and *The Star of India*. Some of them served on the League's Working Committee and Council. Jinnah encouraged them to build new industrial enterprises and set up the Federation of Muslim Chambers of Commerce and Industry in 1944.⁶⁰ The League had set up its own Planning Committee in 1943.

As we have seen, Birla had been putting pressure on Gandhi at least since January 1938 to agree to partition of India on a religious basis and consequent dismemberment of Bengal and Punjab. Later, in a self-congratulatory vein, he wrote:

"I somehow or other not only believed in the inevitability of Partition but always considered this as a good way out of our difficulties."⁶¹

As the Birlas aspired to self-government within the empire through negotiations and as there were three parties to a settlement, they thought it prudent to agree to an India minus certain parts to expedite the settlement. By 1945 the Tatas also seemed to have been anxious for an early settlement of the constitutional problem on the basis of an agreement on the Pakistan issue. In 1945 Homi Mody and John Matthai, both senior directors of the Tatas, served as members of a three-member sub-committee of the Sapru Committee appointed by the Non-Party Leaders' Conference, and submitted a memorandum declaring the proposed Pakistan state as viable. Besides,

in a note of dissent appended to the Sapru Committee's report, they expressed the view that if the Muslims wanted separation, it should not be deplored.⁶²

A myth has been spread that Gandhi was opposed to partition to the very end and that Nehru, Patel and other leaders reluctantly agreed to it after the holocausts of late 1946 and after the experience of the Interim Government in late 1946 and early 1947 had convinced them of the impossibility of working with the Muslim League.⁶³ We have already seen that such views are in blatant contradiction with facts. Gandhi, as noted before, agreed in principle to partition immediately after the demand had been raised; he blessed the Rajagopalachari formula in early 1943 and had meetings with Jinnah in September 1944 recognizing the principle of partition on a religious basis. In reply to Birla's letter arguing in favour of partition, Gandhi's secretary, Mahadev wrote on 16 July 1942 :

"Now about your letter.... Bapu has given it careful attention.... The question is not of Pakistan or separation as such, but of the real content of these conception [sic]."⁶⁴

Gandhi appears to have had hardly any objection to the partition of India on a religious basis: his concern was about the "content", that is, areas which might be claimed for inclusion in Pakistan.

But on this issue of Pakistan Gandhi was not consistent. He sometimes considered it a "sin" and vowed bitter opposition to it. It seems that his attitude to Pakistan varied according to the political situation in the country.

We have also seen that the Congress Working Committee virtually accepted partition in a resolution rejecting the Cripps proposals in 1942 and did not rule out Pakistan during their negotiations with Cripps.^{64a} To cut a long story short, we may refer to Nehru's letter to Cripps, dated 27 January 1946, in which he affirmed that the British Government "cannot force Pakistan on India, in the form demanded by Jinnah, for that certainly will lead to civil war.... Thus the crux of the Pakistan issue is this: A Pakistan consisting of only part of Punjab and part of Bengal, or no separation at all."⁶⁵ This became the burden of the speeches and statements of the Congress leaders. Till almost the end, they, especially Gandhi, put maximum pressure on the raj to recognize them as its sole heir in an undivided India. But if their claim was not conceded, Bengal and Punjab, like real estate with human chattels, must be divided between the rival claimants. The wishes of the people of Bengal (then more than sixty million – about seventy million if Bengali-speaking people in the contiguous districts of Bihar and Assam were counted) and of the people of Punjab (about thirty million) were worth no consideration. For the Congress leaders the question of referendum on this issue did not arise. More of it later.

The Cabinet Mission and Its Plan

To forge a new kind of relationship with India under which their economic, political and strategic interests would remain secure, the British imperialists felt the efficacy of negotiations with Indian leaders. Election had been the first step, negotiations were another. These were intended to sow illusions among the people and lull them into passivity. These would also encourage communalism to gather strength and disrupt the anti-imperialist solidarity of the people.

The Congress leaders also were keen on a quick negotiated settlement to stave off anti-imperialist struggle. Nehru emphasized again and again that any delay on the part of the British to arrive at a compromise with the Congress would be disastrous for both imperialism and India. In his letter of 27 January 1946 to Cripps, he wrote: "Elections have somewhat held people in check but as soon as these are over, events of their own motion, will march swiftly.... What happened in Calcutta two months ago and what is happening in Bombay now are significant signs of the fires below the surface. A single spark lights them." He said that any delay on the part of the British to take the initiative "might well lead to disastrous consequences". He pleaded that if the raj opened "a way out to independence in the near future with recognition of it and an approach to it now...then it may be possible to control the situation in India and proceed peacefully and co-operatively". He assured Cripps that the gulf between India and imperial Britain, which "has never been so wide", could perhaps "be bridged even now with a great effort" and that he worked "to that end".⁶⁶

To check the deluge of revolutionary struggles, a veritable deluge of "interesting negotiations about the future" was released. A British parliamentary delegation toured India in January 1946. Almost close on its heels came the Cabinet Mission, which had as its members Secretary of State Pethick-Lawrence, Cripps and A.V. Alexander. Before it arrived in late March, "India, in the opinion of many", as P.J. Griffiths, the leader of the European group in the Central Assembly, said, "was on the verge of revolution.... The Cabinet Mission has at least postponed, if not eliminated, the danger."⁶⁷ When the Mission met the Viceroy's Executive Council, Edward Benthall said on behalf of it that

*"the Council was unanimous that a change of Government at the Centre was imperative.... It [the Council's lack of confidence] is due to the uncertainty of Indian troops and police to whom they must look for defence and support in the future."*⁶⁸

The British imperialists regarded India as "the essential linchpin in the structure of the Commonwealth". When the Indian troops and police became unreliable, their aim was to transfer power to "friendly hands" – political representatives of the classes which had a symbiotic relationship with British capital and which could be trusted to preserve and further their interests – and to enmesh the new state or states in a net of Commonwealth ties.⁶⁹ The British Chiefs of Staff and the G.H.Q. (General Headquarters), India, held that "from the military point of view, it was as nearly vital as anything can be to ensure that India remains within the Commonwealth". The (India) Chiefs of Staff Committee repeatedly emphasized that

"From the military point of view, and on the grounds of our future strategy and the security of the British Commonwealth, our aim must be to retain India constitutionally within the British Commonwealth of Nations, and to direct all our endeavour towards persuading her to this end."⁷⁰

A paper, prepared under Wavell's instructions "on the effect which the transfer of power in India would have on the Strategy, Economics, and Prestige of Great Britain and the British Commonwealth", pointed out that *the transfer of power "to a stable and friendly Government" would "bring advantage and not loss" to Britain from all those considerations, if a defensive alliance was formed.* The Chiefs of Staff Committee held that no formal defensive alliance was necessary, if India remained within the Commonwealth.⁷¹

Though the British had encouraged the idea of Pakistan previously as a counterpoise to Congress claims, they were in favour of a united India and no partition of its defence forces from about 1943 or 1944. As Ayesha Jalal observes, "Congress imperatives were coming neatly to dovetail with London's priorities since a strong unitary government was the best way of assuring British economic and strategic interests in South Asia."⁷²

Wavell told the Central Assembly in February 1944 that the "geographical unity" of India was central to its post-war constitution and argued with Jinnah that the unity of India ought to be maintained at least for security and economic reasons. Auchinleck stated:

"If we desire to maintain our powers freely by sea and air in the Indian Ocean area, which I consider essential to the continued existence of the British Commonwealth, we can do so only by keeping in being *a United India* which will be a willing member of that Commonwealth, ready to share in its defence to the limit of her resources."⁷³

The paper on the results to the British Commonwealth of the transfer

of power in India, to which we have already referred, also said that "Great Britain should not lose, but, on the contrary, may gain in prestige and even in power, by handing over to Indians, provided that...Power can be transferred in an orderly manner to a friendly and *united India*..."

Even on 18 March 1947, when the Cabinet Mission plan envisaging a united India had foundered on the question of the grouping of provinces, Prime Minister Attlee emphasized in his directive to Viceroy-designate Lord Mountbatten that it was "*the definite objective of His Majesty's Government to obtain a unitary Government for British India and the Indian States, if possible within the British Commonwealth.... In the first place you will impress upon the Indian leaders the great importance of avoiding any breach in the continuity of the Indian Army and of maintaining the organization of defence on an all India basis. Secondly you will point out the need for continued collaboration in the security of the Indian Ocean area...*"⁷⁴

The Cabinet Mission spent more than three months in India negotiating with Indian leaders for an agreed solution of the constitutional problem, but no solution could be arrived at. If there were only two parties – British imperialism and the Congress – there would have been little difficulty or delay in reaching a compromise. But there was a third party – the Muslim League; and the real conflict was between the Congress and the League and not between either of these parties and British imperialism.

Gandhi told the cabinet delegation on 3 April that he stood by the Rajagopalachari formula on the basis of which India could be partitioned and Jinnah could have Pakistan. Earlier, in March, he told Abell, the Viceroy's private secretary, that he was prepared to accept partition.⁷⁵

In a statement issued on 15 April, Congress president Azad pointed out that the Congress wanted future India to be a federation composed of fully autonomous units with residuary powers vested in them. According to the Congress scheme, there would be two lists of federal subjects, one compulsory and the other optional. Jinnah told the delegation and Wavell that the principle of Pakistan should be accepted. He was prepared to settle for a Pakistan comprising five provinces – Punjab, Sind, the NWFP, Baluchistan and Bengal. Common arrangements could be made for defence, foreign policy and communications through treaties and agreements between the two states after their formation.⁷⁶

The vicious 'war of succession' that raged was fought not over the issue of Pakistan but over the 'content' of Pakistan. As Wavell put it,

"The real issue between Congress and the League is not *repeat not* that of self-determination for Muslim-majority provinces, but whether, and if so how, Bengal and Punjab should in the last resort be partitioned."⁷⁷

Early in May the cabinet delegation convened a conference at Simla to thrash out an agreement. They suggested a three-tier constitutional structure – a common Union centre to administer the minimum subjects of defence, foreign affairs and communications; two sub-federations or groups, one predominantly Hindu, comprising provinces which would be willing to concede optional subjects to the centre, and the other comprising Muslim provinces and areas which would concede only compulsory subjects; and autonomous provinces enjoying residuary powers vested in them.

The Congress leaders insisted on a ‘strong and organic Federal Union’ and on a constituent assembly having ‘perfect freedom to draw up its constitutions with certain reservations to protect the rights of minorities’. They claimed that ‘the Federal Union must have power to raise revenues in its own right’; that currency and customs as well as other subjects like planning must be included in the Union subjects; and that the Union must have powers to ‘take remedial action in cases of breakdown of the constitution and in grave public emergencies’. They were after a strong centre though Nehru had been telling the public that ‘the common subjects...would be very minimum in number such as defence and foreign affairs’.⁷⁸

Jinnah agreed to a United India provided the Congress accepted the sub-federation or groups. The League also proposed that ‘Each Province will have the power to opt out of the Group after the constitution for the group has been framed’.⁷⁹

The Congress leaders refused to accept sub-federations. To Gandhi, the proposed three-tier solution was ‘worse than Pakistan’. He affirmed that the British ‘must adopt entirely the Congress point of view if we thought it just, or Jinnah’s point of view if we thought it juster; but there was no half-way house. *Gandhi seemed quite unmoved at the prospect of civil war...*’⁸⁰

When Wavell saw Patel on 8 May, Patel was ‘uncompromisingly hostile to any settlement except on the basis of complete Hindu supremacy; and said that they were bound to have it out with the Muslims sooner or later, and that it was better to have a conflict now and get it over’.

As the Secretary of State said, *the ‘vital points...actually boiled down to the basic question whether there should be a strong centre or a weak centre with two sub-federations...*’⁸¹

After the failure of the Simla Conference, the delegation and Wavell produced their own plan, known as the Cabinet Mission Plan, on 16 May. It argued against the Muslim League demand for a separate sovereign Pakistan and pointed out that ‘a radical partition of the Punjab and Bengal, as this would do, would be contrary to the wishes and interests of a very large proportion of the inhabitants of these Provinces’. It said:

“Bengal and the Punjab each has its own common language and a long history and tradition.” Besides, the partition of Punjab would be harmful to the interests of the Sikhs who were spread over the whole of the province. The scheme the delegation recommended for India comprising both ‘British India’ and the native states was a three-tier one – a Union centre dealing with foreign affairs, defence and communications and with powers to raise the necessary finances and equipped with an Executive and a Legislature; three groups of provinces (or sub-federations) with their own executives and legislatures – one including all Hindu-majority provinces, another comprising Punjab, Sind, the NWFP and Baluchistan and the third one consisting of Bengal and Assam; and the provinces vested with all other subjects and with residuary powers. British paramountcy over the native states would lapse and there should be negotiations between them and the rest of India for their inclusion in the Indian Union.

The three groups of provinces would frame constitutions for the provinces included in them and decide whether to have group constitutions. A province would be free to opt out of a particular group after the first general election under the new constitution.

The constituent assembly to draw up the constitution for India would be formed not through election on the basis of adult suffrage but by single, transferable votes of the members of the existing provincial legislatures (formed under the Government of India Act 1935), Muslim members and non-Muslim members voting separately. Each province would be allotted seats in the constituent assembly “proportional to their population, roughly in the ratio of one to a million”. On the demand of the legislature of a province, the constitutions of the Union and of the Groups would be reconsidered “after an initial period of 10 years and at 10-yearly intervals thereafter”.

The delegation’s statement said that the Viceroy was taking the initiative to form an interim government all members of which, except the Viceroy, would be Indians enjoying the support of the major political parties.

The statement concluded with the hope that “the new Independent India may choose to be a member of the British Commonwealth”.⁸²

In the meantime the Congress leaders mounted pressure for the immediate formation of an Interim Government responsible to the elected members of the Central Assembly, that is, ultimately to the Congress high command. As early as 1 March 1946, Gandhi’s emissary, Sudhir Ghosh, conveyed to Major Woodrow Wyatt the opinion of Gandhi and Rajendra Prasad that

“the only possible solution was for the British Government to hand over power to the majority in India and to rely on it to find a way of

coming to terms with the Muslims and other minorities. *This would have to be done by the use of force, or in other words, the combined might of the British and Indian majority, as represented by Congress, would be able to keep the joint forces of the Muslim League and the Communists in order.*'⁸³

Gandhi spoke repeatedly in a similar vein. He expressed the view that *"there may well have to be a blood bath in India before her problems are solved"*.⁸⁴

The Congress leaders opposed the grouping of provinces on the plea that this feature deprived the provinces of their autonomy and was detrimental to the interests of the Sikhs. They insisted that the proposed constituent assembly should be "a sovereign body" which would have powers to change the recommendations and procedure suggested by the Cabinet Mission and "decide as it chooses in regard to any matter before it and can give effect to its decision". They urged withdrawal of the British troops the moment the interim government was formed and insisted on disallowing European members of provincial assemblies to vote in the elections to the constituent assembly or offer themselves as candidates.⁸⁵ This was the first time after the Communal Award had been announced in 1932 that they came out in sharp denunciation of the fantastic over-representation of the Europeans in the Bengal and Assam assemblies.

The delegation clarified that the grouping of provinces was "an essential feature of the scheme, which can only be modified by agreement between the two parties"; that the scheme could be changed by the constituent assembly only if a majority of members of each of the two parties agreed to do so; and that "independence [and the withdrawal of British troops] must follow and not precede the coming into operation of the new Constitution".⁸⁶

The Congress Working Committee's resolution of 24 May asserted that "India must necessarily have a strong central authority", interpreted the Cabinet Mission statement to mean that it was not compulsory but optional for provinces to form groups, and insisted that the "Provisional National Government" must function in the interim period with full independence and as a cabinet responsible to the Central Legislature". "In the absence of a full picture", the Congress Working Committee reserved its final opinion on the Mission's scheme.

The Council of the All India Muslim League, while resenting the Mission's arguments for rejection of a sovereign Pakistan, considered the compulsory grouping of six provinces in Section B and C "as the basis and foundation of Pakistan", accepted the Cabinet Mission scheme and authorized its president to negotiate on the interim government issue and take appropriate decisions.⁸⁷

At a meeting of the Cabinet Mission and Wavell with Nehru and Azad, Nehru was categorical that *the Congress was resolved "to work for a strong Centre and to break the Group system"* and that "they would succeed". He affirmed that "They did not think that Mr Jinnah had any real place in the country".⁸⁸ The attitude reflected in the statement was an invitation to civil war and partition of India on religious lines, for Jinnah was then, thanks mainly to Congress policies, the unquestioned leader of the overwhelming majority of the Muslims.

Meeting on 25 June the Congress Working Committee adopted a resolution claiming to accept the Cabinet Mission plan but putting its own interpretation on it. While rejecting the grouping system, which, according to the Mission and Wavell, was "an essential feature of the scheme", "the whole crux of the plan",⁸⁹ the Committee played the provincial autonomy and Sikh cards with a vengeance. Ironically, it was their refusal to agree to provincial autonomy within an India with a weak centre, that had raised the spectre of Pakistan, and it was their long-term policy to concentrate all powers at the centre denying provincial autonomy and suppressing the aspirations of the different nationalities. To woo the Sikhs when the 'war of succession' was bitter and when they needed them most,⁹⁰ Nehru said:

"I want not only provincial autonomy, but if necessary, within the provinces, smaller semi-autonomous areas. Take the Sikhs for instance. If they desire to function as a separate unit, I should like them to have a semi-autonomous area within the province, so that they may have a sense of freedom."⁹¹

In reply to a query from Mountbatten about the importance of the Sikhs and Assam to the Congress V.P. Menon wrote to the Viceroy's private secretary Abell:

"The support of the Sikhs is a matter of paramount importance to the Congress.... Apart from other considerations, if the Congress loses the support of the Sikh community, Hindus in the Punjab will by themselves not be able to stand up to the Muslims, much less to a possible combination of Sikhs and Muslims."^{91a}

It is worth noting that while Nehru played the communal card at this stage by making a separate appeal on the basis of *religion* to the Sikhs, the same Nehru later bitterly opposed even the formation of a Punjabi-speaking state within the Indian Union.

While professing to accept the Mission's scheme with reservations, the Congress leaders torpedoed it. Succeeding Azad as Congress president, Nehru declared at the AICC meeting on 7 July that "it is not a question

of our accepting any plan... We are not bound by a single thing except that we have decided for the moment to go to the constituent assembly." He affirmed that the centre's powers would not be confined to foreign affairs, defence and communications but would extend to all subjects linked with these. He told the press on 10 July that *after elections to the constituent assembly, the Congress would be "entirely and absolutely free to determine" what they did there*. While repeating that the centre would have very wide powers in the economic sphere, he asserted that the centre would have "over-all power to intervene" in the affairs of provinces or states "in grave crisis, such as a breakdown of the administration, or an economic breakdown or a famine".⁹²

Thus the last chance for India not being dismembered by communal considerations vanished. Nehru was not so naive as to be unable to anticipate what would follow these declarations.

The Congress leaders talked of a sovereign constituent assembly but the proposed constituent assembly would emerge not after seizure of power by the Congress but through a compromise agreement between three parties and would be convened by the raj. The plan would fall through if its very basis was rejected. These declarations were actually an invitation to civil war. The fact is, the Congress leaders preferred a divided India with a strong centre to an undivided India with a weak centre. More of it later.

Nehru's declarations proposed to do away with much of the provincial autonomy by which the Congress had begun to swear in order to oppose the grouping system. As Ayesha Jalal writes, the Muslim politicians were afraid that their "freedom of action in their provincial domains" was intended to be restricted and "For the League's business supporters this meant the supremacy of the Tatas, the Birlas and the Dalmias in the competitive wilds of an independent India".⁹³ Meeting on 29 July, the Council of the AIML withdrew its acceptance of the Mission's 16 May statement. To achieve its goal of Pakistan, it resolved to launch direct action.

Before the League decided on direct action, Jinnah had made a last minute attempt to avoid it and reach a peaceful settlement. In a "strictly private, personal and confidential" letter of 6 July to Attlee, Jinnah complained that the Congress was out to wreck the Cabinet Mission plan, though claiming to have accepted it. He warned that, if the British government surrendered to the Congress, "Its consequence, I need not say, will be most disastrous and a peaceful settlement will then become impossible". Attlee's reply of 23 July to Jinnah's letter was evasive. In a leading editorial on 17 July, the League's mouthpiece *Dawn* wrote that if the British government "restate that there shall be no departure from the fundamental basis of that [the Mission's] Statement, Moslems would still

be willing to play their part honourably and peacefully, provided that such a restatement by the British Government is logically followed up by action in respect of setting up an Interim Government also".⁹⁴

The seemingly endless negotiations and the brave declarations of the leaders were having an insidious effect on the people, much to the satisfaction of the raj and the Indian reactionaries. *"Amidst these 'summit talks'", wrote Michael Brecher, "the poison of communalism penetrated deeper into the body politic of India."*⁹⁵

Calcutta, the port-city, which was a bone of contention between the big Marwari compradors and their up-country Muslim counterparts, became not surprisingly the first scene of a communal flare-up. The Calcutta City Muslim League was controlled by the Ispahanis and the Siddiqis. They had been preaching *jihad* against the Hindus for some days.⁹⁶ 16 August had been declared the 'Direct Action Day' by the League. The communal riots which began on 16 August raged for some days in the city and resulted in the most barbarous killing of 5,000 persons and injuries to many more and rendered homeless about one hundred thousand. Bengal's Premier Suhrawardy helped initially to stoke the communal fire, and British military officers did precious little to stop the carnage at the first stage for fear that people might turn anti-British.⁹⁷

Later, on 24 January 1947, when communal holocausts had spread, the director of the Intelligence Bureau, Government of India, noted for the benefit of the policy-makers:

*"The game so far has been well played, in that (a) both Congress and the League have been brought into the Central Government; (b) the Indian problem has been thereby thrust into its appropriate plane of communalism;...Grave communal disorder must not disturb us into action which would reproduce anti-British agitation."*⁹⁸

The 'Great Calcutta Killing' and the prospect of more to follow had no sobering effect on the leaders. As Wavell wrote, "It is appalling with what irresponsibility and lightness many of them seem to regard prospects of renewed disturbances or civil war." On 27 August Nazimuddin, a member of the League Working Committee, told Wavell "that an unequivocal statement by Congress that Provinces could not opt out of the Group except as laid down in [the] Statement of May 16th might cause League to reconsider [the] Bombay resolution [of 29 July]" or if Wavell or HMG "stated plainly" their "intention not to permit Congress to put any other interpretations on grouping except that meant by Mission".⁹⁹

When Wavell proposed to Gandhi and Nehru that the Congress should make a categorical statement "that the Provinces must remain in the sections, as intended by the Mission, until after the first elections under

the new Constitution'', *''Gandhi said that if a blood-bath was necessary, it would come about in spite of non-violence''. He spoke in the same vein many times during this period. With all his faith in non-violence Gandhi seemed prepared for and repeatedly spoke of blood bath'', a savage communal war, the killing of ''a few lakhs'', ''grievous loss of life...on an unprecedented scale''.¹⁰⁰*

Interim Government

During the negotiations Wavell suggested the formation of an interim government composed of 5 members from the Congress, 5 from the League and 2 from the minorities other than the Muslims. The Congress opposed parity between it and the League and demanded its right to nominate a Muslim member and that such a government should be responsible to the elected members of the Central Assembly and should be treated as a dominion cabinet with the Viceroy as the constitutional head. The Congress leaders insisted on the immediate formation of an interim government dominated by the Congress. *Gandhi* demanded a *''homogeneous National Government''* and was opposed to the formation of *''a coalition Government between two incompatibles''*. On 13 June he wrote to Cripps: *''You will have to choose between the two -- the Muslim League and the Congress, both your creations.''* On the same day he sent a similar message to Wavell.¹⁰¹

Wavell believed that the Congress leaders strongly insisted on the immediate formation of an interim government, for *''their object was to get power at the centre.... They could at any time torpedo the constitution-making body by raising some crucial communal issue if they so desired. If they could delay constitution-making until they had got British troops out of the country and had control of the police and the army, they would then be in a position to deal with the Muslims and the Sikhs in their own way and in their own time.''*¹⁰²

After negotiations for weeks, which produced no agreement, the Viceroy in consultation with members of the Cabinet Mission issued on 16 June a statement that he proposed to form a coalition government composed of 14 persons, whose names he announced. Six of them, including one member of the scheduled castes, were from the Congress, five from the Muslim League and three others were a Sikh, a Parsi and an Indian Christian. There was no Muslim in the list other than Leaguers. The statement pointed out: *''The above composition of the Interim Government is in no way to be taken as a precedent for the solution of any other communal question.''*

The statement also announced that if the two major parties or either of them refused to join the coalition government as proposed, the Viceroy would proceed with the formation of the interim government "which will be as representative as possible of those willing to accept the Statement of 16 May", that is, the long-term Cabinet Mission plan.¹⁰³

Penderel Moon writes :

"If it had not been for [Gandhi's] last minute intervention, the Congress would have accepted the Mission's proposal for an Interim Government, and with a Congress-League Coalition Government installed in office at the beginning of July, the communal outbreaks of the next few months would never have occurred."¹⁰⁴

On 25 June the Congress Working Committee rejected the interim government proposals of 16 June. But it accepted with its own interpretation the long-term proposals of 16 May against the advice of Gandhi. He admitted defeat and withdrew from the Working Committee meeting.¹⁰⁵

The Muslim League accepted the interim government proposals and, as the 16 June statement enjoined, should have been invited by the Viceroy to form the government. But it was not. The British government relied mainly on the Congress to defuse the revolutionary situation which was increasingly being difficult for them, when even the army was not reliable. They were afraid that in the event of the League forming the government "the Left Wing element in Congress" would regard such a situation "as the signal for starting disturbances". They feared that "it was possible that the Left Wing would get control of Congress" after the AICC meeting in the late summer. Nehru gave them a similar warning.¹⁰⁶

So, though Jinnah accused the British of bad faith, the question of the formation of the interim government was shelved for the time being.

The situation in India was growing more and more alarming for the British raj. The waves of struggle continued to rise despite communal tension.

At the end of July the India and Burma Committee of the British cabinet concluded that if "some positive action" was not taken "without delay", "the initiative might pass from His Majesty's Government. The postal strike and the threatened railway strike were symptoms of a serious situation which might rapidly deteriorate."

Wavell agreed and wired to Pethick-Lawrence on 31 July :

"League resolution will certainly increase communal tension in the towns which is already bad. *Widespread labour trouble exists also and general situation is most unsatisfactory.* The most urgent need is for a

Central Government with popular support. *If Congress will take responsibility they will realize that firm control of unruly elements is necessary and they may put down the Communists and try to curb their own left wing.*"

Wavell added that he disliked "intensely the idea of having an interim Government dominated by one party but I feel that I must try to get the Congress in as soon as possible".¹⁰⁷

On 29 July, at the call of the CPI, there had been a very successful general strike in Calcutta and neighbouring areas in sympathy with the all-India postal strike. Revolts were taking place elsewhere too. From U.P., Governor Wylie reported: "This strike business, for instance, is most unsettling.... With all this strike fever about, it would be too much to expect that the police would remain totally unaffected..."

On 9 August the Director of the Intelligence Bureau, Government of India, warned:

"the labour situation is becoming increasingly dangerous....I am satisfied that a responsible government, if one can be achieved, will deal more decisively with Labour than is at present possible."¹⁰⁸

The Congress leaders too were no less worried and anxious to play their part. In August, the Congress Working Committee passed a resolution condemning the growing lack of discipline and disregard of obligations on the part of workers.¹⁰⁹

On 5 August Wavell reported to Pethick-Lawrence that, according to an unimpeachable source,

"Patel...was convinced that the Congress must enter the Government to prevent chaos spreading in the country as the result of labour unrest."

Next day Wavell again wired to the Secretary of State:

"I think it is quite likely that Congress [if it joins the Government at the Centre] would decide to take steps fairly soon against the communists as otherwise the labour situation will get even worse."¹¹⁰

So Nehru, then Congress President, was invited to form an interim government in the expectation that the Congress leaders would serve as imperialism's shield and protect it from the wrath of the people. The British cabinet, meeting on 1 August, decided that "if the Muslim League were unwilling to come in [on Congress terms], it would be necessary to proceed with the formation of an Interim Government with Congress only".¹¹¹

So a Congress government was installed in office on 2 September with Nehru as vice-president.

The expectations of the raj were more than fulfilled. On 9 October 1946 Nehru informed Lord Wavell that "A short while ago the [U.P. Congress] Government issued an ordinance of the kind we have been issuing here to tide over the period from 1st October..." The U.P. ordinance "provided for the maintenance of public order and essential services through preventive detention, imposition of collective fines, and the control of meetings and processions".¹¹²

On 21 January 1947 Wavell informed Pethick-Lawrence that searches, still then incomplete, had been conducted, that "the Madras [Congress] Government appear to have taken action against communists and are contemplating a conspiracy case against leading members of the party.... The Bombay [Congress] Government have also written strongly for Central action or a Central directive against the party and indicating that they propose, in the absence of either of these, themselves to take strong action for detention of Communist agitators who constitute a great threat to public tranquillity in that Province."

In this holy war against democratic struggles of the people, the Congress leaders would brook no interference even from British Parliament. Wavell's message added that *Home Member Patel deprecated the idea of any discussion in British Parliament of the action taken against Communists "as it can only impede the efforts of Congress to deal with the revolutionary element in the country"*.¹¹³

The country-wide search of the offices of the CPI, the Kisan Sabha, the Students Federation, the Friends of the Soviet Union, etc., was carried out "under the direction of the Government of India", of which Patel was Home Member. But in reply to Palme Dutt's cable Nehru unhesitatingly wired back: "The police raids on the Communists took place without the authority or knowledge of the Ministers." A similar reply he sent to Harry Pollitt.¹¹⁴

Such were the ways of the Congress leaders.

Even Wavell was amused. Communicating to Pethick-Lawrence on 29 January 1947 that "the Congress Government in Bombay had decided that the only way to deal with the Communists was to resort to detention without trial", Wavell had a dig at the Labour Party minister: "it may come as a shock to you if they should resort to such 'imperialistic' methods."

On 27 February 1947 the Bombay Governor reported to Wavell that Bombay's Congress ministry

"are determined to handle the communist and other extreme Left Wing elements firmly, and are bringing forward this session a new Public

Safety Measures Bill which re-enacts all our Ordinances in full”.

The Bombay Governor also wrote on 2 April 1947 to Viceroy Mountbatten that the Congress ministers of Bombay felt that *“their real opponents are the Congress Socialists and the Communists”*¹¹⁵ – *not the British imperialists.*

At its twenty-second session held in Calcutta from 13 to 19 February 1947, the All-India Trade Union Congress expressed its concern at the “indiscriminate firing by the police on workers” and stated in a resolution:

“Firing was resorted to in Coimbatore, Golden Rock, Kolar Gold Fields, Ratlam, Amalner and Kanpur [which all belonged to Congress-ruled provinces], resulting in the death of more than 50 persons including women and children and injury to more than 400.”

After referring to “the suppression of civil liberties”, ban on labour meetings, arrests and internment of trade union workers, destruction of union properties and so on, the resolution added:

“In Madras alone, hundreds of labour workers are in jail, and in some places, Section 107 of the Criminal Procedure Code has been applied demanding security of good behaviour from labour leaders.”

The AITUC also protested against

“the recent amendments to the Bombay District Police Act and the enactment of ordinance in the provinces of Punjab, Madras, Bengal, United Provinces and the Central Provinces under which persons can be arrested, externed or detained without trial”.

It also condemned the governments of Madras, Bombay and the Central Provinces for detaining trade unionists in jail without trial and for externing some of them.¹¹⁶

It was an all-out war against the restive people that the Congress leaders launched before and after their assumption of office at the Centre. Besides repression, there were other means the Congress leaders employed to put down all struggles including industrial strikes. As noted before, whenever the people rose up against the raj, for instance in February 1946, the Congress leaders condemned them unequivocally and helped the raj actively to suppress them. Nehru even condemned the “pulling down of the Union Jack” during the revolt of the naval ratings.¹¹⁷ Industrial strikes were anathema to them. As usual, Gandhi went on decrying them. He was afraid that “A great many things seem to be slipping out of the hands

of the Congress". If the Congress did not take the necessary steps, "the battle which we are on the point of winning will be lost". He asked all strikers to accept arbitration or adjudication and abide by the advice of the Congress. Both he and Nehru condemned the all-India strike by extremely low-paid postal workers and employees as "against the interests of the common people".¹¹⁸

Another means they adopted was to break up the solidarity of the workers, which withstood even the impact of communal holocausts, which their politics inevitably led to. On 12 August 1946 the Congress Working Committee adopted a resolution drafted by Nehru to organize the Hindustan Mazdoor Sevak Sangh on an all-India basis.¹¹⁹ The Sangh had been functioning at Ahmedabad on Gandhian lines, that is, as a stooge organization of Ahmedabad's textile magnates. When militant working class struggles threatened the interests of the British imperialists and the Indian big bourgeoisie, the Congress leaders took upon themselves the mission of splitting the working class.

They had not exhausted all their weapons against the Communist Party and the people, for they were afraid that the communists, though weak, might take advantage of the situation.¹²⁰

At its meeting in Calcutta on 7 December 1945 the Congress Working Committee took disciplinary action against the communist members of the AICC and asked all subordinate committees to purge the Congress of all communists. As part of their fierce onslaught against the people, the Congress leaders launched a vicious political campaign against the communists in order to isolate them from the people. When they themselves were fully colluding with the raj to put down all struggles of the people, they accused the communists of having co-operated with the government during the war after Nazi Germany's attack on the Soviet Union. As B.B. Misra writes, the Congress leaders divested the communist pro-war policy of its ideological content and used "the old 'people's war' slogan as an instrument of anti-communist propaganda to gain a political lead at a period when their interests and the interests of the British were becoming noticeably identifiable".¹²¹ Gandhi pledged co-operation with British war efforts in 1944 and 1945. If the communists had acted treacherously, no less treacherous were the acts of Rajagopalachari, but Rajagopalachari became once again a member of the Congress Working Committee in 1946 and succeeded Mountbatten as the Governor-General of India in 1948. And Shyamaprasad Mukherji, president of the All India Hindu Mahasabha, had become a favourite of theirs at least since 1945 and was elected a member of the Constituent Assembly in 1946 as a nominee of the Congress, though the Hindu Mahasabha offered all support to the British from the beginning of the war. Rather, it had always been openly on the side of

British imperialism. Perhaps that strengthened the claim of Shyamaprasad. At the conference in London on 4 December 1946, Nehru said:

*"There was a great urge among the masses of India for political progress. The Congress leaders had tried, with some success, to restrain that urge and keep it behind the Government."*¹²²

Instead of allowing the Congress "to monopolize power under the protection of the British regime", Wavell wanted a coalition. Ultimately Jinnah yielded to Wavell's persuasions and, to prevent the Congress from consolidating its power at the Centre, League nominees joined the Interim Government on 26 October 1946 without getting anything they had demanded. They got neither parity with the Congress nor the monopoly of Muslim representation. One of the five nominees of the League was Jogendranath Mandal, a scheduled caste member. Jinnah himself did not join the government. From the beginning there was conflict with the Congress, first over the issue of portfolios. The Congress refused to part with any of the three portfolios – Home, Defence and External Affairs. Then Nehru wanted to lead the flock of fourteen members of the government, claiming virtually to act as prime minister – a role disputed by the League. The fight was most bitter over the question of the League's acceptance of the Cabinet Mission's 16 May Statement, which the League had withdrawn on 29 July. The Congress was keen that the League should join the Constituent Assembly where the Congress was dominant. The elections to the Assembly were over by the end of July. The Congress won all the general seats except nine while the Muslim League all Muslim seats except five. At first the Sikhs did not participate in the election, but later they did. The Assembly met for the first time in December 1946. The League refused to accept the 16 May Statement and argued that if the Congress could join the interim government without accepting it unconditionally, it too had every right to remain in the government.

Then there was the conflict over certain provisions of the budget which Liaquat Ali Khan as Finance member prepared in February 1947. While abolishing salt tax and providing some concessions, the draft budget proposed to impose a special income tax of 25 per cent on business profits exceeding Rs 100,000 per annum. This enraged Nehru, Patel and their colleagues; this would hurt the interests of the big bourgeois patrons of the Congress. Naturally, there were violent clashes at the meetings of the Council.

The bitter 'war of succession' infected the body politic of India with the communal virus, and communal riots spread to different parts of India. Calcutta was followed by Noakhali, Bihar, U.P. and Bombay.

When thousands of ordinary people were being killed, homes were

being plundered, and hundreds of thousands fled their homes the leaders showed no desire to come to a reasonable agreement. Rather, their words and deeds inflamed communal passions.

Gandhi, who had been pushed to the background by Nehru and Patel, went on an ostensible peace mission to Noakhali. At his prayer meetings in the riot-torn villages of Noakhali, Gandhi was repeatedly asked: "can there be any hope of establishing Hindu-Muslim unity here in spite of the Congress-League differences which are at the root of all the troubles everywhere?" Evading such straight questions as "when things are all going wrong at the Centre, what can common people do to restore unity?", he blamed the ordinary people, who were being used as pawns in the power game, for the communal troubles. He was faced with the same question at his prayer-meeting at Sodepur near Calcutta in May 1947: "When everything at the top goes wrong, can the goodness of the people at the bottom assert itself against its mischievous influence?"¹²³

When the conflict between the Congress and the League leaders became increasingly sharp, the raj invited to London their representatives and a Sikh representative for a conference in early December. Nehru who represented the Congress refused to accept grouping as an essential feature of the long-term plan of the Cabinet Mission. Jinnah was prepared to accept the plan provided the Congress accepted compulsory grouping.

After the failure of the talks, the British Government issued a statement on 6 December, in which it stated that compulsory grouping and arriving at decisions of the sections by a majority vote were "an essential part of the scheme of May 16". It appealed to the Congress "to accept the view of the Cabinet Mission in order that the way may be opened for the Muslim League to reconsider their attitude". It said in conclusion :

"Should a constitution come to be framed by a Constituent Assembly in which a large section of the Indian population had not been represented, His Majesty's Government could not of course contemplate...forcing such a constitution upon any unwilling parts of the country."¹²⁴

On 13 December 1946, Jinnah said that "the Muslim League's condition for entering the Constituent Assembly was the unequivocal acceptance by the Congress of the British Government's interpretation of the grouping clauses".

But the Congress leaders refused to accept the interpretation of the British Government on the plea that compulsory grouping was in conflict with the basic principle of provincial autonomy and that it "affected injuriously two provinces especially, namely, Assam and the North-West Frontier Province, as well as the Sikhs in the Punjab".¹²⁵

Gandhi advised the Assam Congressmen and the Sikhs not to go into

the Sections and to rebel against the Congress, if necessary.¹²⁶

Congress resolutions and statements and Gandhi's advice were intended to bury the Cabinet Mission plan, the last hope of averting partition of India on religious lines.

A memo by the secretary to the Cabinet Mission found it "difficult to see what advantage they (Congress) expect to get from insisting on this interpretation [which rejected grouping], because the interests of Assam and the North-West Frontier are really safeguarded by the provision that they can opt out later".

The Secretary to the Cabinet Mission and several others completely misunderstood the Congress leaders' object. The interests of Assam and the NWFP were of the least concern to the Congress leaders nor were those of the Sikhs. Soon after as we shall see, they had no hesitation to throw the Congressmen of the NWFP to the wolves, as Abdul Ghaffar Khan accused them of doing: by opposing later the provincial option to stay out of both Hindustan and Pakistan, they deprived the NWFP of the right to be an independent Pathanistan and forced it to be a part of Pakistan. And, as we have seen and shall see more of it, the Congress leaders were the sworn enemies of the principle of provincial autonomy though they might use this card to destroy the Cabinet Mission Plan.

At his meeting with the Cabinet delegation and Wavell on 24 May 1946, Bengal Governor Burrows said that *the Muslim League ministers of Bengal were not very keen Pakistanis and that both Hindus and Muslims had felt relieved on the publication of the Cabinet Mission Plan that Bengal would not be partitioned*. He added that one of the Muslim seats in the Constituent Assembly was likely to go to a non-Leaguer of Fazlul Huq's party who might align himself with the Congress. If the Europeans did not vote, the Congress might muster 35 supporters in a body of 70 in the Bengal-Assam group.¹²⁷ And yielding to the pressure of the Congress, the Europeans decided not to vote. Could anybody in his senses believe that the Muslim League could impose a constitution on Assam which would not allow it to opt out of the group after the first elections?

The Congress leaders' real objection was not to the denial of provincial autonomy to Assam or the NWFP. What they really objected to was the emergence of groups or sub-federations, which would render the centre weak. *Their policy was basically opposed to the essence of the Cabinet Mission scheme – decentralization of powers and a weak centre*. As they had chosen the royal road of negotiations to attain the goal of self-government, they were prepared to settle for an India minus certain parts in the north-west and the east. But they were not willing to make any compromise on the issue of a strong centre – a strong centre which would not be restricted to the exercise of merely three subjects. That is why on

the pleas of upholding the sacred principle of provincial autonomy and Sikh interests, they torpedoed the Cabinet Mission plan. But they, especially Gandhi, manoeuvred as long as possible to have a monopoly of power in an undivided India within the British empire or commonwealth.

The Congress leaders demanded the dismissal of the League members from the interim government and threatened to resign if the demand was not complied with. The League refused to resign on the ground that the Congress too had not accepted the Cabinet Mission's scheme without qualification. The withdrawal of either the Congress or the League from the Government was likely to lead to a widespread communal conflagration. On the other hand, despite communal holocausts, the united struggles of the workers and peasants in different parts of India forged ahead.

On 20 February 1947 Attlee announced in British parliament their "definite intention" to transfer "power to responsible Indian hands" by June 1948. He stated that if a constitution was not "worked out by a fully representative [constituent] Assembly" by June 1948, the British government "will have to consider to whom the powers of the central Government in British India should be handed over, on the due date, whether as a whole to some form of central Government for British India, or in some areas to the existing provincial Governments" or in some other way. As regards the Indian states, the British government did not "intend to hand over their powers and obligations under paramountcy to any Government of British India". Attlee assured British commercial and industrial interests in India that they "can look forward to a fair field for their enterprise under the new conditions".¹²⁸ The British raj was afraid that the communal monster they had raised might cause irreparable damage to their plan of a "friendly and stable India". They were also afraid of the spectre of Communism. When Attlee asked Lord Mountbatten to become the Viceroy of India, he told him that if power was not transferred quickly, they might find themselves "handing India over not simply to civil war, but to political movements of a definitely totalitarian character".¹²⁹ Wavell was replaced by Mountbatten, for the former, as Attlee told the King, lacked "the finesse to negotiate the next step when we must keep the two Indian parties friendly to us all the time".¹³⁰

The fixing of the date of transfer of power had been opposed by some governors like Jenkins of Punjab and Burrows of Bengal as well as by Wavell. They feared that the announcement of a target date "would precipitate a crisis and disorders", that it would intensify the war of succession.¹³¹

While the announcement was welcomed by the Congress leaders, the fears of Wavell and the governors proved true. There was a scramble for power, particularly in Punjab and the NWFP, and for dismemberment of

Bengal. The Punjab Congress-Unionist-Akali coalition became the first casualty. To consolidate its power the League stepped up its campaign and Sir Khizr, heading the coalition, resigned. For some time the Muslims, the Sikhs and the Hindus had been building up private armies and a big communal upheaval was anticipated. From about early March several districts of Punjab became scenes of communal carnage. In the NWFP the Congress ministry survived the Muslim League bid to oust it but its hold on the people had grown considerably weaker¹³²; and the announcement threw the province into a turmoil. "In Bengal", as Wavell informed Pethick-Lawrence on 22 February, "the Hindu Mahasabha immediately called for the partition of the province. Nehru echoed this view suggesting that once the League and Congress fell out irretrievably (now an imminent prospect), Bengal and the Punjab would have to be partitioned."^{132a}

Meeting from 6 to 8 March 1947, the Congress Working Committee urged division of Punjab into a predominantly Muslim part and a predominantly non-Muslim part. Congress president Kripalani declared that "the principle might be applied to Bengal also". Even earlier, on 21 February, the day after Attlee's announcement, Nehru spoke to Wavell "of the possible partition of the Punjab and Bengal..." Enclosing the Working Committee's resolution in a letter to Wavell on 9 March, Nehru stated that "*The principle would, of course, apply to Bengal also*". In the case of the League's refusal to join them in the constituent assembly "*the division of Bengal and Punjab becomes inevitable*", Nehru wrote.¹³³ This momentous decision to vivisect Bengal and Punjab, the homes of about 90 to 100 million people, was made on behalf of the Congress not even by the AICC but by Nehru and a few colleagues of his. The Nehrus never felt that in the provinces they were out to dismember there should be plebiscites to ascertain the views of the people concerned. According to the Nehrus, these national regions should be cut up and shared out with their human chattels between the rival claimants to the British legacy without even the formality of consulting their own men in the two provinces.

Curiously, in the above letter of 9 March to Wavell, *Nehru suggested the partition of Bengal and Punjab even if India was not partitioned.* Birla's *Hindustan Times* had raised the same demand which was echoed by Shyamaprasad Mukherjee of the Hindu Mahasabha at a public meeting in New Delhi on 22 April and in his letter to Mountbatten on 2 May. Nehru too in his letter to Mountbatten repeated the same demand on 1 May.¹³⁴ What were the economic and political reasons behind this demand? Politically, they wanted to cripple Bengal, which had always rebelled against the Congress high command, despite the fact that there were several factions loyal to the high command. A divided Bengal would be a crippled Bengal. Economically, they sought to have a tight control over

West Bengal, which was then the main seat of Marwari comprador capital.

Immediately after Attlee's announcement, the Hindu Mahasabha led by Shyamaprasad, which had been totally rejected in the 1945-6 elections, started an agitation in Bengal for the partition of the province. The Bengal Congress leaders loyal to Patel and Nehru lent their support to it. At the same time a movement to prevent her partition, preserve her integrity and build an undivided Bengal state, which would be free to decide her relations with the rest of India, was launched. The leaders of this movement were Sarat Chandra Bose, who had resigned from the Congress Working Committee; Abul Hashim, general secretary, Bengal Provincial Muslim League; H.S. Suhrawardy, Bengal Premier; and K.S. Ray, leader of the Assembly Congress Party.

Earlier, the Congress leaders on the advice of K. M. Munshi were trying "to circumvent the autonomy of the Sections" and assume control of them by abusing the rule-making powers of the Constituent Assembly.¹³⁵

Mountbatten Plan

After assuming office on 23 March 1947 as Viceroy, Mountbatten soon realized that the Cabinet Mission scheme could not be revived as the difference between the Congress and the League over the grouping system could not be reconciled. The Viceroy and his British staff drafted a plan which gave to the representatives of the provinces (the NWFP after a fresh election) and the Muslim-majority and non-Muslim majority areas of Punjab and Bengal the right to decide whether they would join the existing constituent assembly or group together in one or more constituent assemblies or stand out independently and act as their own constituent assembly. Among the main features of the plan were: Compulsory grouping was avoided to meet the objections of the Congress to this feature of the Cabinet Mission Plan; the right of the provinces to decide their own fate was recognized; Bengal and Punjab would be free to decide whether they would remain undivided with their integrity intact and free to decide their relations with the rest of India.

The plan also envisaged that "the constituent assemblies, if more than one, should also create machinery for joint consultation among themselves on matters of common concern, particularly Defence, and for the negotiation of agreements in respect of these matters". The native states after the lapse of British paramountcy would be "free to arrange by negotiation with those parts of British India to which power will be demitted whatever measure of association they consider to be in the best interests of their people".¹³⁶

This plan was shown to Nehru and Jinnah. Nehru approved of it except for his objection to fresh election in the NWFP and over the procedure concerning representation of Baluchistan, while Jinnah objected to the possibility of partition of Punjab and Bengal. On 1 May Lord Ismay, Mountbatten's chief of staff, took this plan to the British cabinet.¹³⁷

But the Congress Working Committee, which met early in May for several days with Gandhi attending, took a completely different stand. In an interview to the Associated Press of America, Patel proposed two alternatives. All power should be transferred to the Central Government "as it now stands", which should function as a dominion government with "the Viceroy standing out". "If there were conflicts in the Cabinet on any question, the majority would rule." The other alternative was that power should be transferred to the two constituent assemblies – the existing one and the other composed of Muslim League members already elected. Patel affirmed: "...Congress would like to have a strong centre. Apart from external troubles, it was absolutely essential that there should be a strong army, and for defence a strong central government".

When at Simla on 10 May Mountbatten showed the plan with minor amendments made by the British cabinet to Nehru, who was his guest, Nehru was completely upset and rejected it outright on the plea that it would lead to the balkanization of India. Drawing Mountbatten's attention to Patel's interview, he said that it was "a clear expression of the Congress viewpoint". "The present draft", claimed Mountbatten at a meeting attended by Nehru on 11 May, "did not differ in essentials from that [approved by Nehru on 30 April]."¹³⁸

To obtain a monopoly of power (of course, under the British umbrella), the Congress leaders opposed the plan that the provinces should initially be successor states and that the central authority or authorities should emerge on the voluntary coming together of the provinces – their voluntary agreement to part with some powers in favour of some central authority – the essence of genuine federalism. Every province (or national region like Andhra, Tamil Nadu, Bengal, Maharashtra etc.) was big enough to constitute an independent state – many of them far bigger and more populous than most of the states of Western or Central Europe. Instead of accepting the federal principle to which they often paid lip-service, they killed the provincial choice and insisted on the partition of India on artificial, religious lines: the national regions or parts of them were coerced to join either Hindustan or Pakistan.

Nehru's violent reaction persuaded Mountbatten to ask V.P. Menon, the Reforms Commissioner, to draft another plan, which he did consulting Patel on the phone. The outline of this plan had been drawn up either late in December 1946 or early in January 1947, when Menon had had a long

discussion with Patel. *Patel had agreed with Menon that if partition and dominion status were accepted, there would be many advantages. Such an agreement would guarantee a peaceful transfer of power, earn Britain's friendship and goodwill, ensure continuity in respect of civil and military administration and "enable the Congress to have at one and the same time a strong central Government, able to withstand the centrifugal tendencies all too apparent at the moment..."* In Patel's presence Menon had dictated the outline of this plan and sent it to the Secretary of State.¹³⁹

Nehru was pleased to see the new plan which would provide for "a strong central government" for combating "centrifugal tendencies" (that is, the demands of the different nationalities to decide their own fate).

Communicating to the British cabinet on 8 May the desire of Nehru and Patel "for a form of early Dominion Status (*but under a more suitable name*)", Mountbatten observed: *"This is the greatest opportunity ever offered to the Empire."* Nehru told the Viceroy and his staff on 10 May that he was "most anxious...to have the closest relations with the British Commonwealth.... *He did not intend to talk about 'Dominion Status' openly because of the many suspicions. He wanted to prepare the ground.*"¹⁴⁰

Jinnah and the League were equally anxious that Pakistan should be allowed to join the British Commonwealth. On 26 April Jinnah told Mountbatten that *"it was not a question of asking to be admitted, it was a question of not being kicked out"*.¹⁴¹

On 23 May Attlee wired to the Dominion Prime Ministers that the Congress leaders

"said that though, in order to secure assent of their party, they would have publicly to stress the fact that it is inherent in Dominion Status, that Dominion can secede from the Commonwealth..., in their view Hindustan would not ultimately leave the Commonwealth, once Dominion Status had been accepted."

He expected the whole of India, "divided into two or possibly three independent states", to remain in the Commonwealth and hoped that

"[the] example set by India would be likely to influence Burma, and probably later other parts of the Empire to remain in the Commonwealth."

*"I must emphasize the need for extreme secrecy on this matter because if it became known that Congress leaders had privately encouraged this idea, the possibility of their being able to bring their party round to it would be serious[ly] jeopardized."*¹⁴²

While sending the new plan to London on 13 May, Mountbatten wrote to the Secretary of State:

"The issues...are limited to joining existing Constituent Assembly or joining together in a new Constituent Assembly. I have omitted choice to Provinces of standing out independently."

But the India and Burma Committee of the British cabinet was in favour of giving the provinces, particularly to Bengal, "the option of remaining independent of either Hindustan or Pakistan, if they so desired". Earlier, on 4 March 1947, a memorandum by the Secretary of State for India took note of the possibility of transfer of power to "three authorities": Pakistan, Hindustan (including Assam) and Bengal. In a memorandum, dated 17 May 1947, *Earl Listowel, then Secretary of State, noted that "there are strong practical arguments for giving the third option of remaining united and framing its own constitution certainly to Bengal and probably also to the Punjab". He was "in favour of giving the third option to all the areas which have a right of choice"*.¹⁴³

But on 27 May Nehru gave an interview to *News Chronicle*, in which he bitterly opposed the proposal to keep Bengal undivided and outside Hindustan and Pakistan. In the meantime an agreement had been reached between Bengali leaders – Sarat Bose, H.S. Suhrawardy, Abul Hashim, K.S. Roy and others – that Bengal should be a "free state" and would decide its relations with the rest of India. It had also been agreed to form immediately a coalition ministry, to adopt a modified form of joint electorate and to constitute a body to prepare a constitution for Bengal. On behalf of the Muslim League Jinnah and Liaquat Ali welcomed the formation of undivided Bengal as a separate state outside Hindustan and Pakistan.¹⁴⁴

As Mountbatten told the Viceroy's staff meeting on 31 May on his return from London after consultation with the British cabinet, the British government "had declared themselves willing to agree to an independent Bengal – in fact willing to agree to any solution for Bengal with which the leaders of the principal parties agreed". *Though the British government and the Muslim League were willing, the move to preserve the integrity of Bengal was frustrated by the Congress leaders*¹⁴⁵ and Bengal was dismembered resulting in endless tragedies for her people. My personal experience agrees with what V.P. Menon wrote:

"In fact, it was when the West Pakistan officials had established themselves in East Bengal that the exodus of Hindus began in earnest. It has always been my belief that the East Bengal Muslims, if left to themselves, would have been content to live with their Hindu brethren as one family..."^{145a}

There is no doubt that Nehru-Patel-Birla loyalists in Bengal would have been trounced if a plebiscite was held, though a section of the Hindu

petty bourgeoisie and upper stratum, mainly in West Bengal, was swayed by the communal propaganda. Sarat Bose was right when he wrote to Gandhi that if a referendum was taken, even the Hindus would have voted by a large majority against the dismemberment of Bengal. Bose's move to prevent it had the support of a section of Congressmen, the Forward Bloc and the CPI. Jogendranath Mandal, an influential leader of the scheduled castes, opposed the partition of Bengal and demanded a referendum on the issue. On 28 May 1947, the Working Committee of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League left it to Jinnah "to negotiate and settle the future constitution on behalf of the Muslims of India as a whole" and affirmed that "the Muslims of Bengal shall stand by his decision".^{145b} Jinnah, as we have seen, was in favour of an undivided Bengal outside Hindustan and Pakistan.

It may be noted that in a by-election to the West Bengal Legislative Assembly in 1949, when the West Bengal ministry was packed with Nehru's and Patel's men including Bidhan Roy and Nalini Sarkar, Sarat Bose defeated the Congress candidate by a more than three to one margin, despite the determination of Nehru and Patel to defeat him. Bose easily won in the teeth of the opposition of these men though he himself was away in Europe during the election campaign. Earlier, at the end of 1945, he had won the election to the Central Legislative Assembly with 7,290 votes against 88 votes polled by his Hindu Mahasabha rival.

But Bengal's fate was decided by big Hindu compradors and their front men. It was the Communist Party that could foil the conspiracy of the reactionaries by organizing and mobilizing the masses, but it was too weak for such a role.

The two parts of Bengal, interdependent and forming together an integrated country for centuries were both reduced to misery and wretchedness, and Bengal was crippled as a result of the partition. The full story of how she was dismembered and in whose interests is yet to be written. The new plan, known as the Mountbatten Plan, dividing India on religious lines and awarding dominion status to two new states – the Indian Union and Pakistan – was adopted formally on 3 June 1947 by the three parties. On 5 June B.M. Birla, G.D. Birla's brother, replying to Patel, congratulated him, for "things have turned out according to your desire.... *I am very happy that the Bengal partition question has also been settled by you*". He suggested that "we should consider Hindustan as a Hindu State with Hinduism as the State religion" and that Shyamaprasad (who was not even a Congress member) should be made the leader of the West Bengal Congress Assembly Party, that is, chief minister of the new province of West Bengal to be formed.¹⁴⁶

Michael Brecher, Nehru's American biographer and admirer, writes

that the consensus among the people, including Nehru, whom he saw, was that "a united India was within the realm of possibility as late as 1946". He adds that "one must assume" that the partition of India "was a voluntary choice of Nehru, Patel and their colleagues". It seems that "a united India was within the realm of possibility" as late as April 1947. On 14 April Birla's *Hindustan Times* reported that Jinnah was willing not to press his "demand for a division of India's armed forces and her financial resources in order to create Pakistan", "if the Congress would reiterate its acceptance of the Cabinet Mission's proposals and of the British Government's statement of 6 December". It appears from Nehru's letter of 15 April to Mountbatten that this report in the *Hindustan Times* was correct.

Explaining the reasons why he made this voluntary choice, Nehru told Brecher that "a federal India with far too much power in the federating units" would be "a very weak India". According to him, "A larger India [i.e., an undivided India] would have constant troubles, constant disintegrating pulls."¹⁴⁷

Though the Congress leaders professed too much their adherence to the principle of provincial autonomy, they trampled it underfoot when the test came. On 14 July 1947, while presenting a report of the Order of Business Committee at the fourth session of the Indian Constituent Assembly, K.M. Munshi, one of the main architects of the Indian Constitution, said that they were free to have a federation of their own choice, with as strong a centre as they could make it and that there would now be no Provinces with residuary powers. Earlier, moving the resolution on 14 June at the AICC meeting for the acceptance of the 3 June plan, Govind Ballabh Pant argued that it "would assure an Indian Union with a strong Centre" and that it "was better than the Cabinet Mission plan with its groupings and sections and its weak Centre".¹⁴⁸

When the choice was between a united, federal India with autonomy for the federating units and an India minus certain parts but with a strong, unitary government, the Congress leaders opted for the latter. A strong centre was the need of the Indian big bourgeoisie aspiring to dominate the Indian Union and the Indian Ocean region under the umbrella of the Anglo-American powers. *It was this ambition to domineer over and exploit smaller and weaker nations which made partition inevitable.* Before we discuss this point, we shall refer to a few other things.

It has been noted that Gandhi had been prepared to agree to partition till early 1946. But he struck an increasingly militant note after the Cabinet Mission came. He spoke many times of his preparedness to face a blood-bath. Even on 1 April 1947 he said to Mountbatten: "The blood-bath must be faced and accepted."

Yet on 3 April, during his interview with Mountbatten, Gandhi "agreed that if the Muslim League were completely intransigent, partition might have to come..." Even though on 1 May the Congress Working Committee resolved in favour of partition with the benefit of his "presence and advice" (to quote Nehru), he went on making militant speeches welcoming chaos, an armed conflict, "the worst kind of violence", etc. Toward the end of May Gandhi's speeches at public prayer meetings, expressing his determination to resist partition, became particularly violent. On 30 May he asserted: "We must make it clear that even if we all have to die or the whole country is reduced to ashes, Pakistan will not be conceded under duress." On 31 May he stated:

"I said yesterday that we would not let Pakistan be formed by threat of force even if the whole of India were burnt down..."¹⁴⁹

When Gandhi was making these fiery speeches, which were being flashed throughout India by the daily press, parts of India were literally burning. Communal fires were then ravaging extensive areas in Punjab and communal frenzy had been raised to a fever pitch by the vested interests.

Curiously, when the mahatma was hurling threats *in public*, he was conveying *in private* an impression to Acting Viceroy John Colville, who "had recently seen Gandhi", that Gandhi had no "intention to sabotage the present plan" – the plan envisaging the emergence of Pakistan.

V.P. Menon, who had become Patel's man, informed the Viceroy's staff meeting on 31 May that "it was Sardar Patel's opinion that not too much account should be taken of the recent utterances of Mr Gandhi in favour of a united India". On 3 June when "Jinnah and Liaquat Ali insinuated that Gandhi was inciting the people to do as they liked", Patel assured them and the Viceroy that "Gandhi would abide loyally by any decision taken".¹⁵⁰

So it was Gandhi who spoke in favour of partition on communal lines at the meeting of the Congress Working Committee on 3 June (within three days of his last "even-if-the-whole-of-India-were-burnt-down" speech) and used his influence to persuade the AICC on 14 June to accept it.¹⁵¹

Congress and Native States

We have seen that it was the policy of the Congress leaders, as the Nehru Committee report of 1928 said categorically, to protect the interests of the princes, the puppets of British imperialism, and to serve as a bulwark against democratic revolution in the feudal princely states. On the eve of

the transfer of power, when there was the danger of a big mass upheaval in the states and when in some states like Kashmir, Hyderabad and Travancore, the people raised the banner of revolt, the Congress leaders were anxious to promote friendly co-operation between the autocratic state administrations and the states people's organizations.

In April 1946 Nehru, then president of the All India States People's Conference, wrote:

"The desire of the States People's Conference to proceed in a manner friendly to the Princes, as far as possible, is evidenced by a statement that in States absorbed to a larger unit¹⁵² suitable provisions should be made for the present rulers and their personal dignity and position safeguarded."

He assured the rulers that they, "whether big or small, can not only be sharers in that heritage [of the greatness and progress of India as a great power] but can play a notable part in the India that is going to take shape. *Their position can in reality be greater and more honourable if they have the capacity and the will for it than their present position.*"

Speaking at the general council of the AISPC in June 1946, Nehru affirmed:

*"our approach to the Princes must be a friendly one....Our objective is responsible government in the States under the aegis of the ruler as a constitutional head."*¹⁵³

It is usually held that Nehru's dash for Kashmir in the midst of negotiations with the Cabinet Mission in May was impelled by his passionate desire to fight the repression let loose by the Kashmir state government and to stand by Sheikh Abdullah (vice-president of the AISPC) and other National Conference leaders and workers who were thrown into jail. What really perturbed Nehru was the demand of the Kashmir National Conference that the Maharaja must 'Quit Kashmir'. It had sent a memorandum to the Cabinet Mission, which raised the question of the Amritsar treaty and demanded "that this treaty be abrogated and Kashmir be ruled by the people of the State".¹⁵⁴ By the Amritsar treaty of March 1846, the British sold Kashmir and Hazara along with the people to Gulab Singh, a sardar of the Lahore Darbar, on payment of several lakhs of rupees. In 1946 the National Conference launched a mass campaign under the slogan 'Quit Kashmir'. At the call of Nehru, Sheikh Abdullah left for Delhi and the movement was suspended. On the way Abdullah was arrested and a reign of terror was unleashed. The whole of the Kashmir valley was brought under military administration. Many were shot and killed, and more were

put behind bars. All sorts of humiliation were inflicted on the people. While criticizing the state's repressive measures, *Nehru* in a press statement affirmed that it was "the policy of the All India States People's Conference to demand full responsible government in all the States under the aegis of the ruler" and regretted "*that the issue of the ruler continuing or not was raised in Kashmir at this stage*". Before he left for Kashmir, he tried to assure the Maharaja that the purpose of his visit was to bring about a peaceful settlement and appealed to him to release Abdullah. The Kashmir authorities banned his entry into the Kashmir territory. He entered it but returned to Delhi at the instruction of the Working Committee. Gandhi, Patel and Azad appealed to the Maharaja to lift the ban on Nehru and it was removed. After assuring the Maharaja and others about his peaceful intentions, Nehru went to Kashmir with the consent of the Viceroy and Gandhi. The net result of his visit was that Abdullah signed a statement in court, jointly drafted by Nehru and Asaf Ali, retracting the earlier demand for the abolition of the monarchy. Abdullah was not released; atrocities on the people continued; the civil disobedience movement was withdrawn; and it was decided to participate in the proposed elections when "almost every one of their workers was in prison".¹⁵⁵ So a happy settlement was achieved through Nehru's efforts.

After the 3 June 1947 plan was accepted, the interim government set up a States Department with Patel in charge and V.P. Menon as secretary to negotiate relations with the native states. With the transfer of power British paramountcy over the states would cease and all treaties and agreements between the British and the states would lapse. It was decided by the Congress leaders that the princes would be invited to accede to the Indian Union under three subjects only – Defence, Foreign Affairs and Communications. On assuming charge of the department Patel said:

"The States have already accepted the basic principle that for Defence, Foreign Affairs and Communications they would come into the Indian Union. We ask no more of them than accession on these three subjects, in which the common interests of the country are involved. *In other matters we would scrupulously respect their autonomous existence.... I should like to make it clear that it is not the desire of Congress to interfere in any manner whatever with the domestic affairs of the States.*"¹⁵⁶

Earlier, on behalf of the State Committee of the Constituent Assembly, Nehru negotiated an agreement with the States Negotiating Committee of the Chamber of Princes that "not less than 50 per cent of the total representatives of States [in the constituent assembly] shall be elected by the elected members of legislatures [which were hardly representative of the people] or, where such legislatures do not exist, by other electoral

colleges'' and upto 50 per cent of the representation would be nominees of the princes. The agreement was arrived at without any consultation with the organizations of the states people. When at the AISPC conference in the third week of April, Nehru sponsored a resolution for endorsing the agreement, Ghulam Mohammad Khan of Kashmir moved an amendment, suggesting that the people of the states should be asked to send their representatives directly to the constituent assembly. The amendment was withdrawn at Nehru's intervention. Other amendments seeking to scrap the fifty-fifty agreement were either ruled out of order or defeated.¹⁵⁷

The princes were treated quite generously after the states' integration into the Indian Union. As Nehru said at the San Francisco Press Club in 1949, "a large majority of them had been given generous privy purses and...some of them had been absorbed in the public service [as ministers, ambassadors, governors, etc.]",¹⁵⁸ besides continuing to enjoy several other benefits.

Partition and Demarcation of Boundaries

After interminable negotiations for about one year and a half, which ended with the acceptance of the Mountbatten Plan on 3 June, it took less than two months and a half to partition India – to demarcate the boundaries of the new states, to divide the administrative machinery of the central government and those of Punjab and Bengal, as well as the assets and liabilities, the defence forces, and so on! A little earlier, "Auchinleck had expressed the view that it would take from 5 to 10 years satisfactorily to divide the Indian Army." Mountbatten had pointed out to Nehru "that it took two years to separate Burma (now Myanmar)" from India in the mid-thirties,¹⁵⁹ though there were natural boundaries between these two countries. It was not so in Punjab and Bengal (and the Bengali-speaking Sylhet district in Assam), where Hindus and Muslims (and Sikhs), belonging to the same nationalities lived intermingled in "thickly populated and long-settled areas, each of which formed an integrated economy and system of communication".

Mountbatten told Nehru that he "was less interested that India should be handed over on lines which might ultimately prove correct than that mechanism should be set up to avoid bloodshed after the departure of the British". As we shall see, he was least interested in either of the two: rather, knowingly and with the full consent of the Congress and League leaders he did what made the communal carnage many times more terrible than what was likely.

There was no plebiscite in Bengal and Punjab, giving the people the

option, among other options, to choose whether they wanted to have their provinces undivided and outside Hindustan and Pakistan. On 17 May Jinnah wired to Mountbatten in London demanding plebiscite in Bengal and Punjab and reiterated the same demand on Mountbatten's return from London on 30 May. Earlier, on 4 May, Bengal governor Burrows had intimated to Mountbatten that "A plebiscite however could be held if delay involved is not a bar".¹⁶⁰ It was possible to hold a plebiscite, at least in Bengal, before June 1948 – the date by which the British government had decided to withdraw. Not only were the views of the people not ascertained but even the members of the legislatures of Bengal and Punjab, as noted before, were not allowed the option to vote in favour of preserving the integrity of their provinces outside Hindustan and Pakistan, under the pressure exerted by the Congress leaders.

With incredible callousness and irresponsibility the date was advanced flippantly on 3 June by Mountbatten to 15 August – by more than ten months – leaving less than two months and a half for implementing the partition plan, which included the holding of referendums in the NWFP and Sylhet. This abrupt decision of Mountbatten, which was welcomed by the Congress and League leaders, played havoc with the lives of millions. It may be noted that on 13 May, 1947, when the date by which the British proposed to withdraw was June 1948, Mountbatten held

"that the time factor precludes me from fully implementing the partition plan. For instance, the material for deciding the issues concerned with the assets and liabilities between the Centre and the Provinces and the Provinces inter se, may not be easily available. It is also possible that the Boundary Commission may not be ready with their recommendations."¹⁶¹

What might not be possible by June 1948 was sought to be achieved by 15 August 1947!

The cynical indifference to the lives of tens of millions was shared by the Nehrus and Jinnahs. They too were in a hurry. To attain powers of administration within the quickest possible time and out of fear of the submerged masses the Nehrus were not bothered by their old, incessant rhetoric that the constituent assembly should be elected on the basis of adult suffrage when such an assembly was proposed by the Cabinet Mission. Nehru spoke of convening another constituent assembly after the transfer of power¹⁶² – another piece of conscious deception. *In about mid-June 1947 Nehru urged Mountbatten that the work of the Boundary Commissions, yet to be formed, should be rushed through and the "fairly lengthy process involving the ascertainment of the wishes of the people concerned in any particular area affected" should be postponed to a date later than their*

installation in power, as if the Congress and League leaders would be reasonable and willing to adjust the boundaries after they were fixed or to settle any other differences in the interest of the people. This was another ploy to divide Bengal and Punjab as quickly as possible regardless of the people's interests.

It was decided to set up two Boundary Commissions, one to divide Bengal as well as the Sylhet district of Assam and the other to divide Punjab. Each Boundary Commission was to consist of a Chairman and four members, two nominated by the Congress and two by the League. On the recommendation of the Secretary of State, Sir Cyril Radcliffe, a British lawyer, was appointed on 27 June the chairman of both the Boundary Commissions. In actual practice it was a one-man commission which was given the task of dividing Punjab, Bengal and Sylhet. All decisions were his alone. The Indian Independence Act passed by British Parliament which conferred 'independence' on India, pointed out that the expression 'award' used in the Act, in relation to the Boundary Commissions, meant "the decisions of the chairman of that commission..."

Radcliffe arrived in India on 8 July. He met the Indian leaders – Nehru, Patel, Jinnah and Liaquat Ali Khan. Radcliffe pointed out to them that *the job entrusted to him "would take even the most careful arbitrators years to decide" and asked if the "importance of having an award by August 15th, taking into account its inevitable imperfections outweighed all other considerations. Each said that it did"*. The "inevitable imperfections", which would be a source of permanent sorrow and suffering to millions, were of no concern to the leaders – Congress or League. Among many glaring "imperfections", one was the award by Radcliffe of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, a non-Muslim area, to East Pakistan whose inhabitants, tribal Chakmas, hounded out of their homes, have been forced to live as refugees in hostile surroundings elsewhere.

Radcliffe undertook the work not before 12 July. He, as Mosley said, never saw the land he was dividing and "was not even given the right map to do it with".¹⁶³ Besides the appalling heat of summer in north India, he had to contend with the differing opinions of the other members of the commissions, masses of evidence, arguments, memoranda and petitions. This colossal work he accomplished in about a month – a super-human feat. But the Indian leaders had promised to abide by his decisions, however harmful they might be to the common people.

On 11 July the Punjab governor Jenkins sent a note saying that the Punjab Boundary Commission had

"given the Punjab Government an enormous questionnaire the replies to which cannot at the earliest be ready before about 20th July. Thereafter,

if the information collected is to be studied and transferred to special maps and if the parties are to be heard at any length (they have engaged very eminent counsel), it is difficult to see how the Commission can report by 15th August."

The farce of this demarcation of boundaries can be appreciated if one remembers that Radcliffe was to report not only for Punjab but also for Bengal and Sylhet.

On 16 July Jenkins made a special request for

"as much advance intimation not only of the date of the award but also of its contents as can be given. Whatever the date and whatever government will be in power when the award is announced, it will be necessary to take precautions, especially in those districts which are likely to be affected, particularly those in the central Punjab."¹⁶⁴

The situation in Punjab was an extremely grim one. As early as 16 August 1945 the then Punjab Governor Glancy had reported to Wavell that "the consensus of opinion is that, if Pakistan becomes an imminent reality, we shall be heading straight for bloodshed on a wide scale".

Warnings from Punjab came thick and fast. For instance, Governor Jenkins reported on 2 May 1946 that private armies of the different communities were being organized; on 9 May he told Wavell that "the Punjab was in inflammable state"; and noted on 31 August that "We have the material for a vast communal upheaval". In July 1947 he frantically tried to impress upon New Delhi the importance of an early award so that the administrative machinery might have time to use its resources to minimize bloodshed. On 20 July, when he met Mountbatten, he told Mountbatten that

"Even a few hours warning would be better than none, as the nature of the Award would affect the distribution of the police and troops."¹⁶⁵

On 22 July Mountbatten wrote to Radcliffe that the members of the Punjab Partition Committee had

"emphasized that the risk of disorder would be greatly increased if the award had to be announced at the very last moment before the 15th August.... We should all be grateful for every extra day earlier that you could manage to get the award announced. I wonder if there is any chance of getting it out by the 10th?"

Next day, replying to Mountbatten, Radcliffe assured him that "he could promise the 12th but he would do the earlier date if he possibly could".

It appears from the letter of 8 August from Abell, the private secretary to the Viceroy, to Abbott, private secretary to the Punjab governor, enclosing "a map showing roughly the boundary which Sir Cyril Radcliffe proposes to demarcate in his award" and a note describing it, that Mountbatten had secured advance information regarding Punjab by 8 August. And on the same day Abell wrote in a note that Radcliffe had, "in fact, already dictated his award".¹⁶⁶

It appears that *the Punjab award was ready on 9 August.*

Now Mountbatten staged a *volte face*. He, like the others, knew that each day's delay in announcing the award increased the risk of violent disorders leading to massacres. He was reminded also by men on the spot of the explosive situation. On 11 August Maj.-Gen. D.C. Hawthorn stated:

"The refugee problem mainly from Eastern Punjab to Western Punjab is becoming increasingly difficult and more and more of the population is on the move..."

On 13 August Jenkins reported to Mountbatten :

"The Hindus are thoroughly terrified and the Muslim movement from the East is balanced by a similar movement of Hindus from the West...."

On the same day General Messervy and General Rees sent a telephone message to Mountbatten's office, which stated that in East Punjab gangs were operating and men getting killed and that the Amritsar countryside was "bereft of police". Seventy per cent of policemen in Amritsar were Muslims and they had been ordered to hand in arms. The telephone message added: "Postponement of Boundary Commission's Award causing uncertainty." And on 15 August, in a note on the Punjab Border Force area, C-in-C Auchinleck referred to his visit to Lahore on the previous day and observed:

"The delay in announcing the award of the Boundary Commission is having a most disturbing and harmful effect."¹⁶⁷

Yet Mountbatten sat on the Boundary Commission Awards and resorted to dishonest tricks and lying to withhold announcement of them until the transfer of power was over – until 17 August – which was responsible for terrible carnage in Punjab.

At the all-White staff meeting (from which V.P. Menon was excluded) on 9 August, it was stated that by that evening Radcliffe would be ready to announce the Punjab award. Mountbatten did not think it "desirable

to publish it straight away" for "*the earlier it was published, the more the British would have to bear the responsibility for the disturbances which would undoubtedly result*". (But from 15 August the responsibility would be transferred to the Indians.) *The Viceroy insisted that not only the terms of the award but also the fact that the award would be ready that day should be kept a secret.*

Hodson writes that Mountbatten had a private meeting with Radcliffe about 9 August and "asked whether Sir Cyril could hold his reports until after 15 August". An entry in W.H.J. Christie's diary for 9 August states:

"Staff Meeting today concerned with Boundary Commission timing of announcement and precautions – George [G.Abell] tells me H.E. [the Viceroy] is in a tired flap, and is having to be strenuously dissuaded from asking Radcliffe to alter his award."

According to Campbell-Johnson, Mountbatten said at the meeting that "if he could exercise some discretion in the matter he would much prefer to postpone its appearance until after the Independence Day celebrations..."

In his personal report, dated 16 August, to the king and important ministers, Mountbatten was not being truthful when he wrote that he knew on 12 August that the Radcliffe "awards would be ready by noon the following day, just too late for me to see before leaving for Karachi". He himself admitted in the same report as well as in his letter to Listowel, dated 14 August, that the Bengal award had been sent in on 12 August.¹⁶⁸

There is hardly any doubt that the Punjab award had been ready on 9 August and Mountbatten knew of its contents. But he made arrangements with Radcliffe so that both the Punjab and Bengal awards were dated 12 August.

Though Mountbatten knew quite well the consequences of the delay in announcing the awards, especially, the Punjab award, he put off announcing them until 17 August, for, as he wrote in his personal report dated 16 August, "*the later we postponed publication, the less would be the inevitable odium react upon the British*". In his address to the Indian Constituent Assembly on 15 August Mountbatten boasted that he had set up a machinery on 3 June which carried out "one of the greatest administrative operations in history – the partition of a sub-continent of 400 million inhabitants and the transfer of power to two independent governments in less than two and a half months".¹⁶⁹ For this mad rush in partitioning India and installing two governments in the two new states, the Congress leaders were ecstatic in praise of Mountbatten.

But what was the price that the Indian people paid for this achievement? It took a toll of countless lives in Punjab alone. In Punjab, as Penderel Moon writes,

“Between August 1947 and March 1948 about four and a half million Hindus and Sikhs migrated from West Pakistan to India and about six million Muslims moved in the reverse direction.”¹⁷⁰

The massacre was so widespread and the misery of the refugees was so agonising because there was no central authority after 14 August. And the administrations in the partitioned provinces were then at the initial stage of building up. **“In East Punjab”, writes Menon, “the administration...had virtually broken down.”** The Boundary Force that was set up on 1 August under Major General Rees for putting down disorders in Punjab, as Moon writes, suffered from **“total inadequacy...in point of numbers. The force also consisted of mechanized infantry units which would hardly be able to operate in the rural areas during the monsoon.”**

Since 1947, Bengal has seen waves of migration from time to time. In 1971 alone, about ten million people came over from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) to West Bengal but most of them returned after the defeat of the Pakistani forces. The wretchedness of the whole affair is indescribable. There have been massacres at places in the two Bengals at different times, though not on the Punjab scale.

The achievements of Mountbatten and the Indian leaders have till now inflicted on the people three wars and the prospect of more to come. That **“partition of India would be a most serious potential source of war”** was a view held by Mountbatten himself.¹⁷¹

The Indian leaders added fuel to the fire directly, not merely by their policies. In a long memorandum attached to his letter of 4 August to Mountbatten, Jenkins wrote that the critics who deplored the communal riots in Punjab – Congress, League and Sikh leaders – **“themselves are in part responsible for this situation and have given no help to the authorities”**.¹⁷²

While the work of separation proceeded fast, nothing was done to set up joint machineries to deal with common problems like defence, communications and the like. Cripps, who was interested in such arrangement, sent W.H. Morris-Jones to India. During the negotiations with the Cabinet Mission, Jinnah had proposed confederal arrangements. But when Morris-Jones came to Delhi, Mountbatten was hardly interested and Nehru even less. Some sort of confederal arrangement, which might avert many tragedies, was farthest from Nehru's mind.¹⁷³

The 'Great Power' Syndrome

It has been noted that the partition of India was the voluntary choice of the Congress leaders, that they preferred a divided India with a strong centre to an undivided India with a weak centre.

The Marwari, Gujarati and Parsi big bourgeois wanted a strong centre, for only a strong centre could enable them to realize their ambitions. They wished to prevent by using the state machinery the emergence of competitors from different national regions and aspired to become a zonal power in the Indian Ocean region.

The end of the war saw in Asia the defeat of Japan, the decline in the power and prestige of the old imperialist powers like France and the Netherlands and the prospect of a bitter civil war in China. This whetted the appetite of the Indian big bourgeoisie. While Patel was their most trusted man, Nehru gave voice to their aspirations. While detained in the Ahmednagar Fort, Nehru was emphatic that the small nation state "can have no independent existence", that "The days of small nations are over". In August 1945 he affirmed:

"I stand for a south Asia federation of India, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan and Burma.... In the world of today there are two big powers, Russia and America. In the world of tomorrow there will be two more, India and China - there will be no fifth."

In January 1946, he asserted that "*India is likely to dominate politically and economically the Indian Ocean region*". Addressing army officers in October 1946, he said:

"India is today [when India was still a British colony] among the four great powers of the world, other three being America, Russia and China. But in point of resources India has a greater potential than China."

It became the theme of his many speeches and statements in 1945 and after that *India was "bound to emerge as one of the greatest powers of the world"*. According to him, "Some form of a common organization [for countries from the Middle East to South-East Asia] dealing with defence, trade and possibly other subjects seems to be an inevitable development." He held that

"in the modern world it is inevitable for India to be the centre of things in Asia. (In that term, I would include Australia and New Zealand too, being in the Indian Ocean region. East Africa comes into it also)....

India is going to be the centre of a very big federation."¹⁷⁴

As regards Pakistan, the Congress leaders were sure that Pakistan would not prove viable and come back to them.¹⁷⁵ Nehru considered Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) to be "really part of India" and wanted her to be included within the Indian federation. Nepal too, according to Nehru, was "certainly a part of India", though an independent country and, as Chester Bowles, Nehru's friend and US ambassador to India for two terms, said: "So India has done on a small scale in Nepal what we have done on a far broader scale on two continents."¹⁷⁶

Patel shared Nehru's hopes and aspirations and said: "Let India be strong and be able to assume the leadership of Asia, *which is its right*." And it was Gandhi's fond wish that Hindustani might "become the language of the whole of Asia".¹⁷⁷

George Laithwaite, then Deputy Under-Secretary of State for Burma, referred in a note to "the somewhat 'imperialistic' attitude which it will not be surprising to see India take in the field of foreign policy, at any rate so long as Nehru is head of the Government. Her whole inclination will be to endeavour to establish her hegemony in the Indian Ocean area..."¹⁷⁸

What India under Nehru hoped to play was not an imperialist role but the role of a sub-exploiter – an intermediate role between the imperialist metropolises and countries in Asia weaker and less developed than India. The Indian big bourgeoisie had been accustomed to playing the role of a sub-exploiter in the British colonies of Burma, Malaya, Sri Lanka and in East Africa. The end of World War II made them see visions of greener pastures in the whole of Asia except China and Japan.

How could India "dominate politically and economically the Indian Ocean region" when she was one of the most impoverished countries, woefully lacking in economic and military strength? The Indian big bourgeoisie sought to play worthily the role of a zonal power under the umbrella of the Anglo-American powers. Earlier, in January 1942, Nehru declared:

"Either *under* America or Europe a world order would be established which would include Britain, Russia, China and a free India. This would be a proper order."

Again, he wrote echoing American imperialists:

"The next hundred years, it has been said, are going to be the century of America. America is undoubtedly going to play a very important role in the years and generations to come."

Early in April 1942, as noted before, Nehru told Colonel Louis Johnson, then President Roosevelt's Personal Representative in India, that India wanted to hitch her wagon to America's star, not Britain's.

Later, Nehru modified his view and asserted:

"We shall seek to build anew our relations with England on a friendly and co-operative basis, forgetting the past".¹⁷⁹

The Indian big bourgeoisie and their political frontmen expected Britain and the U.S.A. to equip them economically and arm them militarily so that they could become a zonal power under the aegis of the Anglo-American powers. K.M. Munshi wrote:

"Russia is within a striking distance of India. South-East Asia is in a ferment. Turkey, Iraq and Iran are menaced by Russia.... A vital bond...links us to England.... Before the next trouble starts a National Government in India, fully equipped and assisted by Britain, must emerge as a self-controlled unit of international strength."

In a lengthy note dated 13 March 1947 addressed to Viceroy-designate Mountbatten, Krishna Menon, Nehru's confidant, who was then serving as an unofficial intermediary between Nehru and the British rulers, proposed as "the basis of Indo-British relations":

- "(a) Reciprocity of citizenship.
- (b) Agreements with regard to mutually suitable arrangements...
- (c) Long-term treaty of alliance..."

During the first interview on 24 March 1947 between Viceroy Mountbatten and Nehru, the latter "said, they did not want to break any threads, and he suggested 'some form of common nationality'".¹⁸⁰

Interestingly, a book entitled *The Basis of an Indo-British Treaty*, written by K.M. Panikkar, who was then Prime Minister of the native state of Bikaner and later India's ambassador to China and other countries, was published in June 1946 jointly by the Indian Council of World Affairs (the same body which invited an Asian Relations Conference in Delhi in March 1946) and the Oxford University Press. It pleaded for the conclusion of an Indo-British treaty and the formation of a "maritime State System" extending from Britain to Indonesia. It held that as India would be "one of the pivotal areas", it was Britain's interest to see that India was "strong, well-organized, industrially advanced". One of "the finest fruits of the alliance" would be "an Indo-British Monroe Doctrine for the Indian

Ocean Region". *"The future organization of relationship between England and India"*, wrote Panikkar, *"will be the first and important step towards the creation of a new Commonwealth, the fourth British Empire..."*

Nehru also wanted to invoke an Asian Monroe doctrine.

Later, on 6 May 1949, G.D. Birla wrote to Sardar Patel, then India's Deputy Prime Minister:

*"I talked to him [Anthony Eden] about the need of building up a strong India militarily as well as industrially and to that end the U.K. should co-operate with us. He said he would talk to (Lord) Alexander about military equipment, and about industries to City men. Now that India was in the Commonwealth, he said that they would all co-operate."*¹⁸¹

The following from the written evidence of the Engineering Association of India before the Fiscal Commission 1949-50 is also illuminating:

"...industrially-advanced countries like U.S.A. and U.K. should undertake the obligation of making India industrially great. The exigencies of the situation in South-East Asia require it" and demand "that India should be made strong in order that she may act as a bulwark against the rising tide of Communism in this part of the globe."

On his return to India after attending the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference in May 1949, where India's membership of the British Commonwealth was formally accepted, Nehru declared:

*"We join the Commonwealth obviously because we think it is beneficial to us and to certain causes in the world that we wish to advance."*¹⁸²

What socialist causes did Nehru seek to advance together with Britain, Canada, Australia and South Africa?

So the Indian big bourgeoisie and the Nehrus became enamoured of the virtues of the British Commonwealth and at the same time longed to hitch their wagon to the star of U.S. monopoly capital.

One may note that the 'socialist' Nehru was greatly upset when, immediately on his release from prison in September 1945 Sarat Chandra Bose at interviews to press correspondents including a correspondent of *Blitz* (Bombay) and at public meetings lashed out at Chiang Kai-shek as "Arch-Fascist tyrant of China", who "exterminated millions of his countrymen" with the financial and other help of foreign powers and who, but for Mao Tsetung, "would never have fought the Japs". He also acclaimed Mao Tsetung and the Chinese Communists for coercing Chiang

to fight Japan and regretted that "our internationalists" lionized Chiang and never mentioned one word about Mao "the great man and his band of workers".^{182a} Nehru, while extolling Chiang and his wife and paying his homage to them, issued statements to the press condemning Bose for his "extraordinarily unfair and unwise and totally uncalled for" statements. He continued to pay his tribute to Chiang, "the illustrious leader of China", and did not think "that even in the midst of civil war there is any person who challenges the right of the Generalissimo to be the leader of China" – "the only possible leader in the present circumstances who can lead China out of chaos".^{182b}

Not without reason *New York Times* wrote in October 1949 after the flight of Chiang to Taiwan and after the U.S. loss of China:

"Washington's hopes for a democratic rallying point in Asia have been pinned on India, the second biggest Asiatic nation, and on the man who determines India's policy – Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru" – the hoped for "counterweight to Mao Tsetung".^{182c}

While the Indian big bourgeoisie sought internally to suppress the different nations and nationalities of India, externally they aspired to extend their sway as a junior partner of Anglo-American imperialist powers over neighbouring countries, especially in South and South-East Asia. And a strong centre was deemed indispensable for fulfilling their aspirations.

The partition of India on communal lines was due to several causes. But it was the 'great power' syndrome, which demanded a strong, unitary government and which was bent on curbing the forces of genuine nationalism, that was the main cause of this unnatural division of India.

Change and Continuity

India became a British dominion under the Indian Independence Act, 1947, which was passed by British Parliament in July at record speed and without division. Churchill, whom Roosevelt had called "an unreconstructed Tory", "the last of the Victorians", kept the promise he had given Mountbatten in May that if Mountbatten "could achieve Dominion status for both Hindustan and Pakistan, the whole country would be behind them" and "the Conservative Party would help to rush the legislation through".¹⁸³ While it was hailed by Congress and League leaders, Attlee declared during the passage of the bill that it was "not the abdication but the fulfilment of Britain's mission in India, a sign of strength, and the vitality of the British Commonwealth". Field Marshal Smuts, then Prime Minister of South Africa, said: "*This does not look like quitting.*" The

American reaction to the acceptance of the Mountbatten Plan had been "especially enthusiastic". Expressing the feelings of the Congress leaders, Gandhi described the British withdrawal as "the noblest act of the British nation".¹⁸⁴

Campbell-Johnson correctly pointed out that *dominion status* "made possible the maximum administrative and constitutional continuity, on the basis of the great India Act of 1935". And as he said, some two hundred and fifty of the clauses of this 'great' Act became part of the constitution of post-colonial India.¹⁸⁵

As the social order remained almost the same as before, so did the administrative structure. The bureaucracy, the police and the army, the judiciary, etc., of the colonial era continued with minor changes. The same laws too prevailed; only the repressive laws were given more teeth and the coercive apparatus has been strengthened with the passing of years as para-military forces have proliferated. British capital received ample assurances that it would be encouraged to thrive in India.

At the invitation of the Congress leaders, Mountbatten, the last British Viceroy, became the head of the new Indian state. Nehru and Patel "wanted him to stay on as long as he would". Hodson writes:

"By a strange paradox Lord Mountbatten as constitutional governor-general of independent India exercised more direct executive authority in certain spheres than he had enjoyed as autocratic viceroy."

Nehru and his colleagues sought Mountbatten's advice about the composition of the cabinet for post-colonial India, "tore up the list of the Cabinet" they had prepared and changed four members of the old list.¹⁸⁶

Invited by the Congress, two British governors for the largest two provinces – Bombay and Madras – and two other governors of the period of direct British rule remained. In Pakistan the governors of all the provinces except Sind were British after the transfer of power. As in Pakistan so in India, British military officers became heads of three defence services. The former Commander-in-Chief of the Indian army, Claude Auchinleck, became for some time the Supreme Commander of the armed forces of the two new states. All the British officers and other British personnel in India's armed forces were appealed to to continue with a 50 per cent increase in India Allowance for other ranks. Forty-nine per cent of the British army officers and ninety-four per cent of the other ranks were retained in the army of 'free' India.¹⁸⁷ *But the INA soldiers and the naval ratings who had been victimized for their role in the R.I.N. revolt of 1946 were denied jobs.*

Both Nehru and Jinnah "wholeheartedly welcomed" the British

Government's proposal to negotiate "overall Commonwealth defence arrangements". The Joint Defence Council which was composed of Mountbatten (as chairman), Auchinleck, Liaquat Ali and Baldev Singh was empowered to conduct negotiations on behalf of India and Pakistan. Mountbatten informed London:

"As I shall continue to be Chairman of the Joint Defence Council after 15th August, I shall hope to be able to regulate these discussions [with the British delegation] and trust that the desired objects will be achieved."

Field Marshal Lord Montgomery, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, descended on Delhi and had talks with Nehru on 23 and 24 June 1947 "concerning the grant of facilities for the employment of Gurkha troops in the British Army". Besides Nehru, there was no Indian present during the talks. The note of these interviews prepared by Nehru himself stated that Montgomery

"pointed out the grave man-power difficulty of the United Kingdom leading to the necessity of their retaining Gurkha troops in South-East Asia for emergencies, notably war".

On behalf of India Nehru agreed in principle to grant the facilities the British Government was seeking. Montgomery hoped that the subsequent discussions for working out details would be "carried out *quietly without much fuss....* Therefore, it is better to do it as soon as possible *in a quiet way without any fuss.*"

Several Gurkha regiments and battalions which were part of the Indian army, were allotted for service under the British government and recruitment of Gurkha soldiers on Indian soil by the British continued, obviously to suppress the peoples in South-East Asia who were fighting arms in hand to overthrow the imperialist yoke. Earlier, in April, the Indian government had decided that the Indian soldiers who had joined the Indonesians in their struggle against the Dutch "would be struck off the rolls of the Army from the date of their desertion" from the British Indian army. Nehru decided not to appoint "his previous nominee" as Trade Agent in Malaya, "since Lord Wavell had objected to him on the ground that he took part in an anti-British movement during the war".¹⁸⁸

Mountbatten took great interest in designing flags for the new states and wanted the Congress and League leaders "to have the Union Jack in the upper canton of their flags". Gandhi told a prayer meeting that there was nothing "wrong with having the Union Jack in a corner of our flag".

Nehru apologetically told Mountbatten that Gandhi, Patel and others were willing to accept the design but they became afraid of "the general feeling among Congress extremists...that Indian leaders were pandering far too much to the British" and thought it "inadvisable to press the design on them". Both Nehru and Jinnah agreed to fly the Union Jack on twelve days in the year but wanted that *this should not be publicized*. "In fact", Mountbatten wrote, *"they are worried about their extremists agitating against over-stressing the British connection, although they are quite willing to retain it themselves."* The list of days supplied by Mountbatten included "Empire Day" (24 May), which was considered "an unfortunate expression so far as India is concerned", and it was changed to "Commonwealth Day".¹⁸⁹ Other flags, too, like the Indian Navy and Air Force flags, were suitably designed by Mountbatten and accepted.

India's freedom was ushered in on 15 August with the playing of "God Save the King" followed by "Jana Gana Mana", with Nehru toasting the health of the British King and Mountbatten toasting the Dominion Government, and with the Union Jack flying proudly while the Indian national flag was unfurled. The "programme had originally included a ceremonial lowering of the Union Jack", but it was changed and the Union Jack was not hauled down, as it might offend "British susceptibilities".

To crown it all, on 15 August, Rajendra Prasad as President of the Constituent Assembly requested Mountbatten, the head of the new State, to convey "a message of loyal greetings from this House" to the British King. It said:

"That message [the King's message to the new dominion] will serve as an inspiration in the great work on which we launch today.... I hope and trust that the interest and sympathy and the kindness which have always inspired His Majesty will continue in favour of India and we shall be worthy of them."

"Thus came to an end", wrote Attlee later, "the *direct* rule of the British in India..." "The transfer of power", Alan Campbell-Johnson has rightly observed, "was an unique response essentially to a revolutionary situation".¹⁹⁰

As Harry Magdoff has rightly observed:

*"Even though it [the British Labour Party] eventually presided over the dissolution of the formal British Empire – not by choice, but by necessity – it realistically managed the dissolution so that there would be as smooth a transition as possible to an informal empire that would serve the same imperialist policies."*¹⁹¹

The transition became smooth in India – from imperialism's point of

view, not from that of the people – because the working class here was politically and organizationally weak and the long colonial rule had fostered and moulded the native big bourgeoisie into a class the interests of which were closely linked with those of the imperialists and which depended on the latter for survival and expansion.

But an important change occurred. Britain's formal empire was transformed into an informal empire shared by several imperialist powers, of which the U.S.A. emerged as the leader.

P-C-P Strategy

Bipan Chandra has theorized that pressure (or struggle) by the Congress led to compromise with the British raj, which again was followed by more pressure. This process culminated in a compromise settlement which marked the end of British rule and assured India's national independence and formation of a bourgeois nation state in India. Chandra holds that the Indian bourgeoisie adopted what he calls the P-C-P (pressure-compromise-pressure) strategy and advanced step by step towards its goal of a bourgeois nation-state and independent economic development. "The political aim", he writes, "was to be achieved not through the sudden expulsion of imperialism or the seizure of power but through a negotiated settlement." He calls this "a non-revolutionary pattern of anti-imperialist struggle".¹⁹²

This raises several questions.

First, compromise between two or more parties implies surrender by each of some of its claims. Real independence or complete freedom from external control can hardly be the outcome of a compromise between a colony and its masters.

Second, as we have seen, the Indian big bourgeoisie as well as the top leadership of the Congress aspired not to real national independence but to self-government within the framework of basic dependence on imperialism. Gandhi, who is supposed to be the architect of India's 'freedom', wrote a few weeks before his assassination:

*"Let me tell you, I derived no little strength from my implicit loyalty to the British Empire in thought, word and deed."*¹⁹³

Third, the 'P-C-P' strategy appears to have ideally fitted into the British strategy. It was the imperial strategy to contain anti-imperialist struggles of the people by associating more and more friendly and reliable Indian elements with the administration of the country at different levels, by making devolution of power by stages to those who could be depended

upon to safeguard the vital interests of British imperialism – strategic, political and economic. This policy was announced as early as 20 August 1917 by the Secretary of State for India,¹⁹⁴ anticipating post-war unrest. Gandhi's 'P-C-P' strategy, instead of being a challenge to the British strategy of devolution of power by stages, disrupted anti-imperialist struggles of the people and was complementary to it. The stages and degrees of devolution of power were decided upon by the imperialist rulers as their main contradiction with the people developed and as the need to derail and thwart the people's struggles arose. The Gandhian strategy fulfilled the needs of the imperial strategy: it helped in diverting the people from the revolutionary path by propagating the theory of non-violence and change of heart philosophy and by placing before the people the so-called constructive programme to counter anti-imperialist programmes. It is this strategy of devolution of power by stages that embittered communal relations and led to the unnatural partition of India.

Fourth, no Congress movement forced the British government to arrive at a compromise and make fresh devolution of power. The Rowlatt Satyagraha, the Non-co-operation movement and the Civil Disobedience movements ended in withdrawal, without the raj making the least concession. The individual Civil Disobedience movement fizzled out: the raj did not yield to Gandhi's threat of a 'Quit India' movement. Throughout the entire period from 1919 to 1947, the initiative lay with the British imperialists, not with the Congress.

In 1956, Attlee came and stayed in the Raj Bhavan in Calcutta, when P.B. Chakravarti, then Chief Justice of the Calcutta High Court, was acting as governor of West Bengal. During a conversation between them, Attlee cited several reasons why the British withdrew from India in 1947, of which the most important, according to him, was the weakening of "the very foundation of the attachment of the Indian land and naval forces to the British Government" under the impact of Subhas Bose's activities. When asked by Justice Chakravarti "about the extent to which the British decision to quit India was influenced by Gandhi's activities...Attlee's lips widened in a smile of disdain and he uttered slowly, putting emphasis on each single letter, – 'mi-ni-mal'".¹⁹⁵

Dominion Status, Membership of the Commonwealth and Independence

Dominion status was often equated with independence. Under the Statute of Westminster, 1931, dominion status came to embody complete constitutional freedom: a dominion could even decide for itself whether it was to be at war or peace and enjoyed the right to secede from the

Commonwealth. A member of the British Commonwealth or the Commonwealth of Nations has the right to walk out of it, if it so chooses. So it is argued that there is little difference between dominion status, membership of the Commonwealth and independence.

But what is apparent is not real. A state that emerges as a dominion or member of the Commonwealth invariably becomes a weak client state. As Harry Magdoff points out,

“What really makes the difference in the Third World is that these countries, under the sway of a long history of colonialism and semi-colonialism, have evolved a mode of production, a class structure, and a social, psychological and cultural milieu that are subservient to the metropolitan centres.... their economic structure, the nature of their international trade, and their wage-and-price relations are also geared to reproduce, through the ordinary processes of the market place, the subordinate condition of these societies.”

Continued integration into the capitalist-imperialist system perpetuates dependence. Dominion status or membership of the Commonwealth is the outward symbol of this continued integration and consequent dependence. If the economy of a post-colonial state is integrated into the capitalist-imperialist system, it cannot escape dependence, even though it may not flaunt the outward label – dominion status or membership of the Commonwealth. Even if a post-colonial state secedes from the Commonwealth, it cannot move out of the orbit of imperialism, unless the age-old links of dependence with the metropolitan country are snapped. During colonial rule, the economy of a colony becomes a dependent, lopsided economy. There is a forced complementarity between the economy of the colony and that of the metropolitan country. Barratt Brown was right when he said:

“Most of the mechanisms of neo-colonialism, like earlier forms of imperialism, work automatically. They do not require to be positively set in motion by the colonial power for the day after the grant of independence, but they would have to be positively stopped by the successor government if the ties of economic as well as political dependence were to be loosened. Hence the importance attached by the colonial powers to the succession.”¹⁹⁶

During the colonial rule, British imperialism fostered certain classes – the Indian big bourgeoisie and the feudals – which became the dominant classes in Indian society. When, in the changed international and Indian context, British imperialism found it impossible to continue its direct rule, it handed over power to these indigenous elites that had thriven by serving

it, that had been long tested and found that they could be trusted to preserve imperialism's vital interests. The attainment of dominion status or membership of the Commonwealth through negotiation and compromise precluded any social revolution which could smash this nexus between imperialism and these classes and the complementarity between the economy of the metropolitan countries and the economy of post-colonial India. The old order continued with some cosmetic changes.

Presiding over the Lucknow Congress in April 1936, Nehru said:

"Between Indian nationalism, Indian freedom, and British imperialism there can be no common ground, and if we remain within the imperialist fold, whatever our name or status, whatever outward semblance of political power we might have, we remain cribbed and confined and allied to and dominated by the reactionary forces and the great financial interests of the capitalist world. The exploitation of our masses will still continue and all the vital social problems that face us will remain unsolved. Even real political freedom will be out of our reach, much more so radical social changes."

Such words that cast a spell over the youth of India can hardly be reconciled with Nehru's life-long practice.

Addressing the Associated Chambers of Commerce of India, dominated by British expatriate capitalists, in December 1946, Nehru declared:

"during 150 years of British rule, all manner of visible and invisible contacts have grown up with her [England]. These contacts cannot be cut off suddenly.

"Well, so far as our relationship with England is concerned, unless the break comes in such a way as to poison the future this relationship will continue in hundreds of ways that flourish culturally and linguistically."

He assured the British capitalists that they would continue to have their "place in industry and commerce in India".¹⁹⁷

Campbell-Johnson described the relationship which was forged between post-colonial India and imperialist Britain as "one of the greatest reconciliations of history". He said:

"Perhaps Lord Mountbatten's greatest achievement lay in producing a solution which had about it sufficient substance and support to survive storm of immediate revolutionary crisis and to *maintain in spite of Partition the vital links between the past and the future.*"¹⁹⁸

As the vital links between imperial Britain and India were preserved,

real political freedom, as Nehru had said, remained out of our reach. To quote John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson,

“...mercantile techniques of formal empire were being employed to develop India in the mid-Victorian age at the same time as informal techniques of free trade were being used in Latin America for the same purpose.... *formal and informal empire are essentially interconnected and to some extent interchangeable*.... Within the last two hundred years, for example, India has passed from informal to formal association with the United Kingdom and since World War II, back to an informal connection.”

National independence can never be won without a social revolution: without the overthrow of the classes which serve as the props of colonial rule, imperialism is hardly overthrown. India could not liberate herself from the imperialist yoke until a political and social revolution swept clean the legacy of the colonial past. Only by breaking the fetters that enchain her to the capitalist-imperialist system and by overthrowing the classes which are national only in the geographical sense, could India be really free.

Writing in the early sixties, Dr Thomas Balogh, the Oxford economist who served as economic adviser to the British cabinet, observed:

“...neo-imperialism does not depend on open political domination. The economic relations of the US to South America are not essentially different from those of Britain to her African colonies. The International Monetary Fund fulfils the role of the colonial administration of enforcing the rules of the game.”¹⁹⁹

The transfer of power marked the end of imperialism's direct rule and the beginning of its indirect rule. And India's dependence on Britain alone yielded to dependence on several imperialist powers including Britain. Her formal empire changed into an informal empire shared by them.

References and Notes

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2. *Ibid*, 424.
3. *Ibid*, 481; for the pact, see CWG, LXXX, 444-5.
4. See H.M. Seervai, *Partition of India*, 32 and fn.15.
5. TOP, V, 236 – emphasis added.
6. *Ibid*, XII, 790-1; SWN, XIV, 47.
7. *Ibid*, 27; also 37.
8. Argus, "A Delhi Diary", *EE*, 10 May 1946, 786; *IAR*, 1945, II, 147; TOP, VI, 455 – emphasis added; SWN, XIV, 58,61.
9. TOP, VI, 1-2,19,68.
10. SWN, XIV, 360,326,558-61,562,584,587-8; TOP, VI, 326,360,595.
11. Moore, *Endgames of Empire*, 5,7.
12. Cited in Palme Dutt, *The Crisis of Britain*, 128,129 – emphasis added.
13. Gary R. Hess, *America Encounters India, 1941-47*, 158,160,165,166,174.
14. TOP, VI, 102.
15. Hess, *op cit.*, 168,174; *Wavell the Viceroy's Journal* (ed. by Penderel Moon), 121.
16. Misra, *op cit.*, 501-2.
17. TOP, VI, 482 – emphasis added; *Ibid*, 615.
18. See Shankardass, *Vallabhbhai Patel*, 264.
- 18a. Abul Hashim, *In Retrospection*, 108 – emphasis added.
19. Shankardass, *Vallabhbhai Patel*, 264.
20. TOP, VI, 713.
21. *Ibid*, 553,713.
22. *Ibid*, 589,599,633,679; CWG, LXXXII, 452.
23. TOP, VI, 597.
24. *Ibid*, 572.
25. *Ibid*, 574,595,674-5,713.
26. SWN, XIV, 195,207,229,231,241,252,254,491,493, *passim* – emphasis added; Moore, *Escape from Empire*, 76.
27. TOP, VI, 687.
28. B.C. Dutt, *Mutiny of the Innocents*, 61; *Hindusthan Standard*, 21 Jan. 1947.
29. See Colville's report to Wavell, 27 Feb. 1946, TOP, VI, 1079-84.
30. Cited in R. Palme Dutt, *Freedom for India*, 9-10.
31. B.C. Dutt, *op cit.*, 185.
32. *Ibid*, 185-6.
33. SWN, XV, 4,13; TOP, VI, 1083. Emphasis added.
34. CWG, LXXXIII, 171,183,184,241-2,243,304,360,403,441; TOP, VII, 261-2.
35. SWN, XV, 11-2.
36. Secretary, GOI, Home Department.
37. Secretary, GOI, Posts and Air Department.
38. A.O.C-in-C.
39. Chief Commissioner of Railways.
40. Secretary, GOI, War Transport Department.
41. *Wavell the Viceroy's Journal*, 215.
42. TOP, VI, 1233.
43. Argus, "A Delhi Diary", *EE*, 10 May 1946, 786.
44. TOP, VII, 72.
45. Palme Dutt, *Freedom for India*, 8; see also Stephen P. Cohen, *The Indian Army*, 147.
46. TOP, VI, 305.

47. *Ibid.*, 387,546; *Wavell the Viceroy's Journal*, 188 – emphasis added.
48. *TOP*, VIII, 229,535.
49. See *SWN*, XV, 56-68,70-4,77,80.
50. *Ibid.*, 88,90-2,96-7 – emphasis added. See also *ibid.*, Second Series, I, 353,357-8,360,361.
51. *Ibid.*, 357 and fns.2,3 and 5; 358,360-3; *Ibid.*, II, 344-5. Emphasis added.
52. Misra, *op cit.*, 549-50.
53. *SWN*, XIV, 210,218,219,246; *Ibid.*, Second Series, I, 23; *Wavell the Viceroy's Journal*, 181; *TOP*, VIII, 420; *CWG*, LXXXV, 53-4; Durga Das (ed.), *Sardar Patel's Correspondence*, V, 325.
- 53a. *TOP*, III, 922.
54. M.A.H. Ispahani, "Factors leading to the Partition of British India", in Philips and Wainwright (eds.), *op cit.*, 356-9; *TOP*, VI, 392,732; VIII, 199; X, 479; see also Ayesha Jalal, *op cit.*, 182 and fn.21,210.
55. Khaliqzaman, *op cit.*, 204-11,233,257,266-70; *TOP*, I, 468,474,477; Ispahani, *op cit.*, 345 for Cripps' assurance to Jinnah.
56. *Ibid.*, 359; Gustav Papanek, *Pakistan's Development*, Cambridge, Mass., 1967, pp. 32-68.
57. *TOP*, IV, 392; see also *Wavell the Viceroy's Journal*, 149.
58. *TOP*, VI, 732; VIII, 199; see also *ibid.* X, 479 and E.W.R. Lumby, *The Transfer of Power in India 1945-7*, 92-3.
59. Ispahani, *op cit.*, 356,359.
60. M.A.H. Ispahani, *Qaid-E-Azam Jinnah as I knew Him*, 73-87, 130 ff.; Z.H. Zaidi, "Aspects of the Development of Muslim League Policy, 1937-47", in Philips and Wainwright (eds.), *op cit.*, 270.
61. Birla, *In the Shadow*, 286.
62. D.R. Mankekar, *Homi Mody: A Many Splendoured Life*, 200-1.
63. See Rajendra Prasad, *At the Feet of Mahatma Gandhi*, (Bombay, 1961), 303; Rajendra Prasad, 'Introduction' to Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi: The Last Phase*, I, pp. xii,xiii; Pyarelal, *ibid.*, II, 253; Leonard Mosley, *The Last Days of the British Raj*, 107-10,112-4; Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India 1885-1947*, 436.
64. Birla, *Bapu*, IV, 316,319.
- 64a. *TOP*, I, 528,530.
65. *SWN*, XIV, 142; see also 187,222,300,314; XV, 35; *TOP*, VI, 796,1022.
66. *SWN*, XIV, 141-2,146,147.
67. Cited in Palme Dutt, *Freedom for India*, front cover page.
68. *TOP*, VII, 7 – emphasis added.
69. *Ibid.*, VI, 561,659-60,666; VII, 122,591; VIII, 224; IX, 307,940,972; X, 329,945,974-5.
70. *Ibid.*, VIII, 659; also 547,646; IX, 975.
71. *Ibid.*, VIII, 50-2,659 – emphasis added.
72. Jalal, *op cit.*, 243.
73. Cited in Wolpert, *op cit.*, 228; *TOP*, V, 279-80; see Misra, *op cit.*, 624. Emphasis added.
74. *TOP*, VIII, 51; IX, 972-3 -- emphasis added.
75. *TOP*, VII, 117; VI, 1208; see also VII, 402.
76. *Ibid.*, 111-2,285 fn.3.
77. *Ibid.*, VI, 1134-5.
78. *Ibid.*, VII, 476-7; also 509; *SWN*, XV, 36; also 111-2,114,119.
79. *TOP*, VII, 437,512.
80. *Wavell the Viceroy's Journal*, 260 – emphasis added.
81. *Ibid.*, 261; *TOP*, VII, 490 – emphasis added.
82. See Menon, *op cit.*, 466-75.
83. Sudhir Ghosh, *op cit.*, 80-1 – emphasis added; see also 154.
84. *TOP*, VII, 262 – emphasis added; *CWG*, LXXXIV, 174.
85. *Ibid.*, 478-80; also 169-72,172-4,209-11; *passim*.
86. *Ibid.*, 476-7,477,481; see also Menon, *op cit.*, 271.

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88. TOP, VII, 855 – emphasis added.
89. CWG, LXXXIV, 481; Menon, *op cit.*, 271; *ibid*, 282; TOP, VIII, 313.
90. See TOP, X, 44.
91. SWN, XV, 122.
- 91a. TOP, X, 44.
92. *Ibid*, 237,242-5; see also 249. Emphasis added.
93. Jalal, *op cit.*, 210.
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98. TOP, IX, 542 – emphasis added. Copies of this note were sent to Attlee, Alexander and Cripps.
99. *Ibid*, VIII, 522; *ibid*, 311; also 324.
100. *Ibid*, VII, 262; VIII, 313; X, 69; CWG, LXXXV, 17; *Wavell the Viceroy's Journal*, 260,341 and the editor's note; Alan Campbell-Johnson, *Mission with Mountbatten*, 52.
101. CWG, LXXXIV, 174,324,328-9,330. Emphasis added.
102. Quoted in Misra, *op cit.*, 567; see also TOP, VIII, 323,482,595.
103. CWG, LXXXIV, 491-2.
104. *Wavell the Viceroy's Journal*, Epilogue, 462.
105. CWG, LXXXIV, 368 and fn.3.
106. TOP, VII, 539,1004-5.
107. *Ibid*, VIII, 150,154,155. Emphasis added.
108. *Ibid*, 161; Home Poll (1) 12/7/1946, cited in Sumit Sarkar, *op cit.*, 431.
109. Note on Labour by J.B. Kripalani, AICC Papers, File G26/1946, cited in *ibid*, 429.
110. TOP, VIII, 190-1,194.
111. *Ibid*, 169.
112. SWN, Second Series, I, 177 and fn.5.
113. TOP, IX, 524-5 – emphasis added.
114. SWN, Second Series, I, 616 and fn.2, 617 fn.2,618.
115. TOP, IX, 575,822; X, 87 – emphasis added.
116. AITUC, *Report: Twenty-Second Session*, 77.78.
117. SWN, XV, 5.
118. CWG, LXXXIV, 8,102-3,336,344; LXXXV, 35,49,82,103,116-7, *passim*; SWN, XV, 630.
119. *Ibid*, 636.
120. *Ibid*, 116.
121. Misra, *op cit.*, 537.
122. SWN, Second Series, I, 128 – emphasis added.
123. CWG, LXXXVI, 456; LXXXVII, 22-3,466.
124. For the statement, see TOP, IX, 295-6; CWG, LXXXVI, 486-8.
125. SWN, Second Series, I, 40,fn.7; see CWG, LXXXVI, 490-5 for Nehru's draft of CWC's statement of 22 Dec. 1946 and the AICC resolution.
126. *Ibid*, 227-30, 242.
127. TOP, VII, 676 – emphasis added.
128. For the statement, see Menon, *op cit.*, 506-9.
129. Campbell-Johnson, *op cit.*, 17.
130. John W. Wheeler-Bennett, *King George VI*, 709-10; cited in Misra, *op cit.*, 625.
131. TOP, IX, 705,729,733.
132. Azad, *op cit.*, 194.

- 132a. TOP, IX, 785-6.
133. For the resolution, see CWG, LXXXVII, 538; *Ibid*, 124; TOP, IX, 785; *Ibid*, 899 – emphasis added.
134. *Ibid*; E.W.R. Lumby, *op cit.*, 150; *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 25 Apr. 1947, cited in Amalendu De, *Swadhin Bangabhumii Gathaner Parikalpana*, 6; TOP, X, 519,555.
135. See Munshi, *op cit.*, 118-9; A.G. Noorani, "The Cabinet Mission and its Aftermath", in Philips and Wainwright (eds.), *op cit.*, 111-2; Jalal, *op cit.*, 261.
136. TOP, X, 497-99,551-2.
137. *Ibid*, 154,533; SWN, Second Series, II, 84.
138. TOP, X, 716-7,740,762; see also 780.
139. Menon to Patel, 10 May 1947, Durga Das (ed.), *op cit.*, V, 113-7; Menon, *op cit.*, 358-9 – emphasis added.
140. TOP, X, 699,735 – emphasis added; see also 179,312,320,829,897-8,962.
141. *Ibid*, 453 – emphasis added; see also 201,300,357.
142. *Ibid*, 974-5 – emphasis added; see also 897-8.
143. Moore, *Endgames of Empire*, 167; TOP, X, 834; IX, 842; X, 876-8.
144. *Ibid*, 452,472,479,512,554-5,625,657,926. Emphasis added.
145. *Ibid*, XI, 2,158,163; see also X, 850,1040; Durga Das (ed.), *op cit.*, IV, 39-46,58.
- 145a. V.P. Menon, *op cit.*, 435.
- 145b. Sarat Bose to Gandhi, 14 June 1947, in Pyarelal, *op cit.*, II, 188; *Hindusthan Standard*, 28 Feb. and 25 March 1947; H. Ghosh, General Secretary, Bengal Prov. Forward Bloc to the President, INC, 30 May 1947, AICC Papers, File CL-8/1946; Joint Statement of P.C. Joshi, Secretary, CPI and Bhowani Sen, Secretary, Bengal Prov. Committee, CPI, in Bhowani Sen, *Bangavanga O Pakistan*, Appendix; Amalendu De, *Swadhin Bangabhumii Gathaner Parikalpana*, 127-9; also 138-41; Shila Sen, *op cit.*, 242-3.
146. Durga Das (ed.), *op cit.*, 55-6.
147. Brecher, *op cit.* 375,377 – emphasis added; also 374; SWN, Second Series, I, 27-8 and fn.2; 38, fn.2.
148. Munshi, *op cit.*, 127-8 – emphasis added; Menon, *op cit.*, 384-5.
149. Campbell-Johnson, *op cit.*, 52; TOP, X, 103; Azad, *op cit.*, 186-7; TOP, X, 517-9; CWG, LXXXVII, 416,425,435; LXXXVIII, 13,42-3,45; also 39.
150. TOP, XI, 4; Menon, *op cit.*, 371; Campbell-Johnson, *op cit.*, 160.
151. Azad, *op cit.*, 192-3,196-8; CWG, LXXXVIII, 76,84-5,97-9.
152. Of the 562 states, "only 52 were considered big enough to deserve separate representation in the federal legislature" as envisaged in the GOI Act of 1935, 91 "were grouped together for the purpose" and "the rest were not really states but estates" (SWN, XV, 343 fn.5).
153. SWN, XV, 341-2,353,356 – emphasis added; see also 360,422-3,426,431,446,450, *passim*; Vol. I of this book, 98-100.
154. SWN, XV, 367 and fn.6; also 366 fn.3.
155. *Ibid*, 366-9,378-81,389,398,400,402,403,406,415-16.
156. Quoted in E.W.R. Lumby, "British Policy towards the Indian States, 1940-7", in Philips and Wainwright (eds.), *op cit.*, 103 – emphasis added; see also SWN, Second Series, II, 247.
157. *Ibid*, 243; Barbara N. Ramusack, *op cit.*, 394; IAR, 1947, I, 214-6.
158. Nehru, *Inside America*, 169.
159. TOP, X, 12-3,35.
160. SWN, Second Series, II, 74; TOP, X, 615,922; Hodson, *op cit.*, 310.
161. TOP, XI, 105-6; X, 814.
162. Nehru's speech at the Subjects Committee meeting of the Meerut Congress, 21 Nov. 1946, SWN, Second Series, I, 19; II, 153.
163. TOP, XI, 656,682-3; Menon, *op cit.*, 518 – for the Indian Independence Act, see *ibid*,

- 516-32; Leonard Mosley, *The Last Days of the British Raj*, 221-2, 225; Philips, 'Introduction', Philips and Wainwright (eds.), *op cit.*, 21 – emphasis added.
164. *TOP*, XII, 120-1, 191.
165. *Ibid*, VI, 72; VII, 23, 400-1; *Wavell the Viceroy's Journal*, 263; *TOP*, VIII, 372; XII, 279.
166. *Ibid*, 291, 305; for Jenkins' request, see *ibid*, 279, 290-1, 305, 557, 579 and fn.1, 580.
167. *Ibid*, 667, 703, 705, 736.
168. *Ibid*, 611 – emphasis added; Hodson, *op cit.*, 351; Christie was joint private secretary to the Viceroy; *TOP*, XII, 611 and fn.3, 760, 761, 733; also 744, 749, 754.
169. *Ibid*, 760, 777.
170. Moon, *Divide and Quit*, 268.
171. Menon, *op cit.*, 433; Moon, *op cit.*, 95; *TOP*, X, 251.
172. *Ibid*, XII, 512; also 527.
173. W.H. Morris-Jones, "The Transfer of Power, 1947", *Modern Asian Studies*, 16, 1 (1982).
174. Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, 545, 549, 550; *SWN*, XII, 134, 174; XIV, 160, 187, 325, 440, 441-2; XV, 123, 566; *ibid*, Second Series, I, 19, 311, 439; Second Series, II, 89, 474, 581-2 – *passim*. Emphasis ours.
175. Azad, *op cit.*, 207; Brecher, *op cit.*, 377-8; also Durga Das (ed.), *op cit.*, V, 113.
176. *SWN*, XV, 458; *ibid*, Second Series, II, 470; Nehru to Macmanage, 1 Nov. 1945, JN Papers, cited in B.N. Pandey, *op cit.*, 250; Chester Bowles, *Ambassador's Report*, 280.
177. P.D. Saggi (editor-in-chief), *Life and Works of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel*, Bombay, n.d., 86 – emphasis added; *CWG*, LXXXVII, 216. See also Patel's letter to Nehru, 7 Nov. 1950, Durga Das (ed.), *op cit.*, X, 337-40.
178. *TOP*, VIII, 689.
179. *SWN*, XII, 105, 169, 194-5; *TOP*, I, 665; *SWN*, Second Series, III, 100.
180. Munshi's words quoted from *Modern Review* (Calcutta), Feb. 1946, p.144; *TOP*, IX, 951; X, 13. Emphasis ours.
181. K.M. Panikkar, *The Basis of an Indo-British Treaty*; see esp. pp.4, 5, 7, 12, 26, 52; Birla, *In the Shadow*, 298. Emphasis added.
182. Report of the Fiscal Commission 1949-50, III, Written Evidence, Delhi, 1950, p.80; Nehru, *Independence and After*, 275. Emphasis added.
- 182a. See Sarat Chandra Bose: *Commemoration Volume*, 46-8, 388.
- 182b. *SWN*, XIV, 446 and fn.2, 447, 451, 466.
- 182c. Quoted in R. Palme Dutt, *India Today and Tomorrow*, 275.
183. *TOP*, X, 945.
184. Attlee quoted in C.H. Philips, (ed.), *The Evolution of India and Pakistan: Select Documents*, 406; *TOP*, X, 988; Campbell-Johnson, *op cit.*, 114; Pyarelal, *op cit.*, II, 300. See also *CWG*, LXXXIX, 254, 289.
185. Campbell-Johnson, *op cit.*, 355, 319 – emphasis added.
186. *TOP*, XII, 36; H.V. Hodson, "The Role of Mountbatten", in Philips and Wainwright (eds.), *op cit.*, 123.
187. *TOP*, 94, 765.
188. *Ibid*, 599; XI, 724-5, 809-10; XII, 569; Palme Dutt, *The Crisis of Britain and the British Empire*, 205; *SWN*, Second Series, II, 547-8 and fn.4; *TOP*, X, 13. Emphasis added.
189. *Ibid*, XII, 164, 230-1, 596; *CWG*, LXXXVIII, 375. Emphasis added.
190. Campbell-Johnson, *op cit.*, 158, 161, 361; *TOP*, XII, 772, 777; C.R. Attlee, *As It Happened*.
186. Emphasis added.
191. Harry Magdoff, *The Age of Imperialism*, 25.
192. Bipan Chandra, "The Indian Capitalist Class and British Imperialism", in R.S. Sharma (ed.), *Indian Society: Historical Probings*, New Delhi, 1974, p.391.
193. *CWG*, XC, 45 – emphasis ours.
194. See Vol.I of this book, 106.

195. See R.C. Majumdar, *op cit.*, III, 609-10.
196. Harry Magdoff, *Imperialism*, 188-9; M. Barratt Brown, *The Economics of Imperialism*, 256.
197. *SWN*, VII, 174; *ibid*, Second Series, I, 426,428.
198. Campbell-Johnson, *op cit.*, 361,362-3 – emphasis added.
199. John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, "The Imperialism of Free Trade", *The Economic History Review*, Second Series, Vol.VI, No.1, Aug. 1953, pp.6-7 – emphasis added; Thomas Balogh, *The Economics of Poverty* (1st edn., 1966), 29.

CHAPTER TEN

THE ROLE OF THE CPI: FROM OUTBREAK OF WAR TO TRANSFER OF POWER

The Imperialist War Phase

When the war broke out, the CPI, like all communists elsewhere, described it as an imperialist war – a war between rival imperialisms for a redivision of the world. It led a one-day political strike of 90,000 workers in Bombay against the war on 2 October 1939. It held that the imperialist war would give rise to revolution in capitalist countries as well as in colonies and semi-colonies.

But the CPI was least prepared for organizing or leading any revolutionary struggle. During the years from 1936 to 1939, it had sought to rally the workers, peasants and the petty bourgeoisie behind the Congress leadership. Instead of clarifying the issues before the people and breaking their illusions about the Congress leadership, it strengthened their illusions. As Joshi, the CPI General Secretary, lamented early in 1940,

“The bourgeoisie dominated the national movement and it would not launch a struggle; the proletariat, the only truly revolutionary class, was too weak to initiate one on its own.”¹

The source of this weakness was the CPI itself, supposed to be the vanguard of the proletariat.

Speaking of Gandhi’s strategy after outbreak of the war, Adhikari said:

“Firstly it [Gandhi’s strategy] will mean that the revolutionary vanguard is decimated in isolation through imperialist repression.... Shorn of its moral embellishment, it [Gandhism] is the line of the cowardly and compromising bourgeoisie.... It is seeking to use its position to overtake and imprison the rapidly growing forces of revolution, to isolate and eliminate them. It is paving the way for the most ignoble compromise and defeat at a time when all the factors [except a revolutionary party] are favourable for decisive victory over Imperialism.”²

Yet the CPI leadership showed little inclination to climb out of the

morass of opportunism where it had been wallowing. A few weeks before the war started, it had formulated the policy of rallying communists, socialists, peasants, students and workers into a united front of leftists, powerful enough to direct "*Congress policy by pressure from below instead of control from above* when the crisis broke..."³ After the outbreak of the war, the CPI leadership, despite the realization that the Gandhian leadership wanted to shackle all struggles and worked for "the most ignoble compromise and defeat", affirmed that "*a national struggle today was a practical possibility only through the Congress. The Congress had to be led into action.*" The CPI strategy was to create the necessary pressure from below to compel the leadership of the Congress to issue the call for an anti-imperialist struggle.⁴ According to Joshi, national unity was "embodied in the Congress". He condemned Subhas and the Forward Bloc for proposing to launch a struggle without the sanction of the Congress leadership and accused him of disrupting "the very organ of struggle", which was the Congress, though experience showed that the Congress, instead of being the organ of struggle, was opposed to it. The signals that were coming from afar were not particularly helpful. Even in the months after the war had begun, Soviet spokesmen described the Congress as "the organization of the anti-imperialist front, which embodies the leadership of the anti-imperialist struggle".⁵

The CPI raised the slogan - '*na ek pai, na ek bhai*', neither any monetary contribution nor any participation in the war as a recruit. On the occasion of the Congress session at Ramgarh in March 1940, it brought out a pamphlet entitled "The Proletarian Path". The "immediate task", according to it, was "conquest of power by the Indian people".⁶ To fulfil this task, the "first steps" would be "political general strike in the major industries together with country-wide no-rent and no-tax action". The next step would be a "nation-wide armed insurrection", which would overthrow colonial rule. The CPI's programme included the establishment of a "Democratic Republic of the People", a "People's Army", etc. Its "proletarian path" was modelled on the Russian revolution and destined to remain a grandiose plan on paper. The CPI did very little theoretical work on the complex problems of the Indian revolution as it always looked up to foreign mentors for guidance. The CPI leadership ignored the uneven social, economic and political development in this vast country and failed to understand that no nation-wide insurrection was possible. The CPI leadership actually paid lip-service to revolution instead of seriously meaning it. If it was really serious, it would have done some theoretical work and, while organizing the working class and other revolutionary classes, would have given priority to arousing and organizing the peasants, particularly in those areas which were the enemy's weakest links in the chain of

political domination, develop and expand the struggle and carry on a protracted war for seizure of country-wide power. Most lamentably, the CPI leadership never took the work among the peasantry, the main force of the Indian revolution, seriously.

Interestingly, while "The Proletarian Path" decried Gandhism as "the most disruptive, most demoralizing, most anti-struggle force within the National Congress", it hoped "to build up the Congress as the organ of people's movement"!

In March 1940, there was a general strike of textile workers in Bombay, which was led by the CPI. Arrests of communists started. By early 1941 the CPI was crippled by the arrests. Its illusion about Nehru faded away for the time being. In October 1940, while accusing the Gandhian leadership of sabotaging the national struggle, it criticized Nehru, too. Nehru's role, it said, was "to bark at the Communists and to hang revolutionary drapings round the Working Committee's resolutions".⁷

At its Nagpur session in December 1940, the All India Students Federation split over the question whether to accept Gandhi's recommendation that students should shun politics. The AISF, led by the communists, meeting separately, questioned the Congress claim to speak for the whole of India, condemned the Muslim League's 'Pakistan' demand as well as the Hindu Mahasabha's 'Hindustan' slogan as reactionary and disruptive, and stood for a "*voluntary federation of regional states* based on mutual confidence" instead of a unitary India.⁸

"People's War"

The Nazi blitzkrieg against the Soviet Union marked a new phase of World War II. Though an alliance was formed between imperialist Britain and the Soviet Union, which was soon joined by the U.S.A., the question was whether the character of the war had changed from an imperialist to a people's war, when the people of the whole world were threatened by the menace of slavery to the fascists.

At first the CPI did not recognize any change in the character of the war. Its Polit Bureau issued a pamphlet in July, which held that the war continued to be an imperialist war and stated that the Indian people could "help in the just war which the Soviet Union is waging...by fighting all the more vigorously for their own emancipation from the imperialist yoke" and that they "can render fully effective aid to the Soviet Union only as a free people".⁹ For some time the CPI policy remained unchanged.

In a statement made in July 1941 on the colonies and the war, the CPGB said that the colonial people "will understand the need for immediate

building of a great united front for the defeat of Hitler” and that opposition to the war was “detrimental to the true interests of the Indian people”.¹⁰

In *Labour Monthly* of September 1941, Palme Dutt wrote:

“The interest of the people of India and Ireland and of all the colonial peoples, as of all the peoples of the world, is bound up with the victory of the peoples against Fascism; that interest is absolute and unconditional, and does not depend on any measures their rulers may promise or concede.”¹¹

According to Overstreet and Windmiller, an article by I. Lemin, entitled “The Role of the British Empire in the Current War”, appeared in the September 1941 issue of *Bolshevik*, the organ of the CPSU(B). It assigned to the British empire “the highest place side by side with the U.S.S.R.” in the “great coalition of democratic peoples” fighting fascism. Pointing out that India had not yet mobilized its forces for the war effort, it stated: “The further the mobilization of these forces for struggle against Hitlerite fascism proceeds, the better.”¹²

Then in the course of his speech on 6 November 1941, Stalin said that “all honest people must support the armies of the U.S.S.R., Great Britain and other Allies, as armies of liberation”.¹³

By November 1941, rethinking started within the underground CPI. It was in mid-December that the Polit Bureau recognized in a resolution that with the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union the war had been transformed from an imperialist to a people’s war, and undertook to organize a People’s War movement.¹⁴

In a Party letter, dated December 1941, the CPI leadership acknowledged that British comrades had corrected them. They circulated among their members along with the Party letter “two important documents which the British Communist Party published in the very first month after Hitler’s attack upon the Soviet Union” and which had just reached them.¹⁵

A lengthy note from imprisoned Communist leaders, known as the jail document or Deoli thesis, was smuggled out. It also emphasized the change in the character of the war and strongly urged a change in the Party line.¹⁶

Though the new line met with some opposition from the party ranks,¹⁷ the CPI leadership tried to implement it on different fronts. At its session in Patna in December 1941, the All India Students Federation adopted the new line. The communists also pushed it through the All India Kisan Sabha executive. But Nehru’s opposition at the Kanpur session of the AITUC did not allow the communists to get it adopted by that body.

When Stafford Cripps came, the CPI greeted the British constitutional proposals “as a suitable basis for a settlement, inadequate though they

are" and appealed to the Congress and the League to set up a 'national government' to rally the people for defence.

To help those friends who were negotiating with the government for the release of communist prisoners, the party drafted a "Memorandum on Communist Policy and Plan of Work"¹⁸ for the consideration of the authorities. Among other things, it gave the government the assurance that all communists – those who were underground and those who were in prisons or detention camps, if released – would help "existing war-efforts" in every way possible.

In May an Intelligence official and Home Member Maxwell interviewed Joshi separately. Joshi gave them all assurances of help and co-operation.¹⁹ While seeking release of his comrades, he told the Intelligence official that the release might depend on their signing the "Memorandum", that is, on giving an undertaking to help "existing war-efforts".²⁰ Joshi told Maxwell that when Russia became involved in the war, "it became apparent that the object of the allied nations was to fight a war on behalf of world liberation and freedom..." When Maxwell suggested that after the defeat of the fascist powers the Allied governments like that of Britain might pursue their old policies, Joshi dismissed such a suggestion and asserted: "*World freedom would in fact be established by an Allied victory*".²¹ Both of them noted that Joshi was not much interested in Kisans and their grievances.²²

In July 1942 the ban on the CPI was lifted by the government and the release of communist prisoners started.

At the AICC meeting in Bombay on 7 and 8 August, which passed the 'Quit India' resolution, communist members moved amendments which were rejected. One such amendment urged the Congress to take the initiative in building a united national front of parties and sections of people who wanted to secure India's immediate freedom and who were prepared to participate in or support the formation of a 'National Government' which would undertake the organization of armed as well as non-violent defence against Fascist aggressors in close co-operation with the United Nations and their armies.²³

The communist leaders held that it was the bounden duty of India's working class to defend the Soviet Union, the land where Socialism had emerged and which was fighting a grim war against fascism. In *Forward to Freedom* by Joshi, which appeared in February 1942 under the pen-name Hansraj, Joshi characterized the war as "the war of world liberation". He affirmed that the united Indian people's participation in the world-wide anti-fascist war led by the Soviet Union and its victory would *automatically* liberate India and the world from the imperialist yoke.²⁴ He also theorized that *the Anglo-American imperialists had been "passing more and more*

into the grip of people's unity" (the words quoted are all in capital letters in the original) and that the people "are now in a position to seize the government by the scruff and make it do their bidding..."²⁵ The strength of the imperialist rulers", affirmed Joshi, "is the same in all the colonies: Nil."²⁶ There was also glowing praise of Chiang Kai-shek.²⁷ There was some fulsome eulogy of the Congress, too. About the League, Joshi wrote that it "is to the Muslim masses what the Congress is to the Indian people as a whole". He further asserted that the Congress "remains the main army of the national movement", "the organized embodiment of India's will to freedom".²⁸

The underestimation of world imperialism and the refusal to analyse the class character of the leaders of the Congress and the League were products of the same vice – the CPI leaders' deep-seated opportunism. As we shall see, throughout this period until 1947, they made statements and put forward arguments which smacked of infantile disorder, in order to evade the responsibility of organizing and leading a revolutionary struggle.

The CPI envisaged that there would be no need for revolutionary struggle to achieve India's freedom. According to it, the key to national independence was national unity, the basis of which was Congress-League unity. Once the Congress and the League united and, together with others, formed a 'national government' (under the British aegis), and rallied all forces for national defence in co-operation with the Allied forces against Japan, the 'national government' would be able "to take our war out of imperialist hands" and achieve "our liberation by leading India into the world war of liberation".²⁹ The CPI leadership was ecstatic over the 'National Government' which, if formed, would necessarily be a product of compromise with British imperialism. In order to build national unity, the CPI campaigned to persuade the Congress to accept the 'essence' of the Pakistan demand.

In September 1942, when an insurrectionary situation had developed in large parts of the country in response to the 'Quit India' slogan; an enlarged plenum of the CPI Central Committee adopted a political resolution which blamed imperialist repression and "mad patriots" for the 'Quit India' movement, for sabotage and disruption. It held that "the fifth column elements and fascist agents" were taking advantage of the situation and the plenum resolved to fight them on different fronts. It undertook to "organize a countrywide campaign for national unity", based on Congress-League unity. It would explain "what is just in this Pakistan demand" and stress "the urgency of the Congress conceding the right of self-determination of the *Muslim nationalities*", including the right of separation.³⁰ In another resolution the plenum stated that while seeking satisfaction of the partial demands of the workers, the Party's task would be "to mobilize the entire

working class through the trade unions for our patriotic policy on production..."³¹

Earlier, in the "Memorandum on Communist Policy and Plan of Work" of April 1942, the CPI leaders had assured the raj that if the Government released imprisoned communists and recognized trade unions, "*it will have no need to fear strikes as far as we Communists can help it*". They had undertaken also to "work out schemes for speeding up production and launch mass drives calling upon the workers to speed up production..."³²

In an article on the decisions of a plenary session of the Central Committee, which met in February 1943, P.C. Joshi wrote that the 'Quit India' "struggle failed, as it was bound to fail, because it was not national struggle but nation-wide sabotage". As it became usual with the CPI, Joshi condemned the C.S.P. and Forward Bloc workers as 'fifth columnists' deluding "mad patriots". The way out of the crisis was to get Gandhi released. Gandhi had already decried underground activities and violence and was expected by the CPI to break the stalemate by opening negotiations with the Government and the Muslim League. It shifted the responsibility for the 'Quit India' struggle to the shoulders of the 'saboteurs' and 'fifth-columnists' and trailed behind the big bourgeois leadership of the Congress as well as behind British imperialism.

To shield the government from the anger of the people, prevent food riots, etc., when food scarcity was getting acute and food prices were shooting up, for which Government policies and the insatiable greed of hoarders were responsible, the CPI Central Committee decided to launch a 'Food Campaign' and a 'Grow More Food Campaign'. Besides, they decided to launch a 'Production Campaign' for more production in factories and for prevention of strikes as far as possible when workers were being ruthlessly exploited.

The CPI leaders wanted the party to serve "as the crusader for national unity which acts as the bridge between the premier political organizations of our people, the Congress and the League", and which "*seeks nothing for itself except to be acclaimed as a young brother party*..."³³ This kind of stuff was being poured out by the CPI leaders. In the name of coming to the aid of the Soviet Union, they had abandoned Marxism.

The CPI leaders acclaimed not only the Congress but also the League as an anti-imperialist, freedom-loving organization. Their adulation of the Congress and Congress leaders, mainly Gandhi and Nehru, as well as of the League and Jinnah was sickening.

The first Congress of the CPI was held in Bombay from 23 May to 1 June 1943. To quote from the *Indian Annual Register*,

"On either side of the dais...were hung two big portraits of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Mr M.A. Jinnah against the background of the Congress and Muslim League flags respectively."³⁴

This was symbolic of the rank opportunism of the CPI leaders and their desertion of Marxism-Leninism. It is significant that in a reprint of Stalin's Report to the Sixteenth Congress of the CPSU(B), Adhikari deleted Stalin's references to Gandhi "as a liberal compromiser in the service of the imperialist bourgeoisie against the colonial national-revolutionary movement".³⁵ This reflected not only the political attitude but also the political dishonesty of the CPI leadership.

The CPI Congress adopted a political resolution and a new Party Constitution. The political resolution "Forward to Unity in Action" said: "Our people must unite to defend the Motherland, shoulder to shoulder with the peoples of the United Nations. That *alone* leads to freedom." It stated:

"The basic slogan of today is national unity for national defence to win National Government of national defence. To implement this slogan, to win National Government the urgent need today is to build unity in action for defence, food and production. That *alone* would lead to freedom and victory."³⁶

The resolution blamed the Congress leadership for the 'Quit India' resolution, which had been 'exploited' by the CSP and the Forward Bloc – the 'fifth column'. They were held responsible not only for causing widespread sabotage and anarchy but also for accentuating the food crisis as well as the crisis on the production front. The CPI congratulated itself on its "heroic fight against the Fifth Column".

As Home Secretary Tottenham noted in his circular to all provincial governments, the CPI leaders had become bolder and more self-confident and chided both the Congress and the League for their "negative policy" which did not allow them to unite. The CPI also criticized its own "left nationalist deviations": it had concentrated on "wordy abuse" of the bureaucracy while failing to expose the "negative and defeatist policy" of the national leadership; overemphasized the repression theme; and in its food campaign wrongly aimed at exposing bureaucratic inefficiency. As official documents including Tottenham's circular noted, this criticism of the government had been intended "to catch the public ear", "to retain a national and popular appeal".³⁷ Interestingly, the Home Department's "Communist Survey, April-June 1943" observed:

*“People’s War [the CPI organ] may in future be more critical of Congress, but it is evident that it will at the same time aim at reducing the risk of reprisals by blending such criticism with a sickly adulation of the ‘great’ Congress and its leaders.”*³⁸

The Party Congress decided “to popularize the Allied armies in India as the defenders of the country and organize ‘anti-fascist cultural patriotic squads’ to raise the morale of the troops”.³⁹

Significantly, the new Party constitution dispensed with an illegal apparatus and formed the basis of a purely *legal* communist party. It appears that the Party felt no need for going underground again in future, for combining legal with illegal activities.

Ranadive presented a long report “Working Class and National Defence” at the Party Congress. The substance of that report was that the workers, though driven to “hellish” and “intolerable” conditions by their employers who were reaping super-profits as well as by the government, must not go on strikes to improve their conditions, for that would mean stabbing the country “for the misdeeds of selfish employers”; instead, they should organize themselves and co-operate with the employers and the government to produce more. The task of the communists was to prevent strikes – and break them, if they occurred in spite of the communists – and get the workers to maximize production and avoid waste.⁴⁰

To meet the acute food crisis, when prices of food had soared and were soaring still higher, the political resolution urged the formation of representative food committees to have control over stocks, etc., and co-operate in official schemes. Popular anger was sought to be diverted against hoarders alone and not against the policies of the raj and landlordism, main causes of the crisis. In his “Report on Reformist Deviation” of 1948, Randive wrote that in a party letter dated 4 October 1943, praise was showered on even big landlords and moneylenders.⁴¹ The peasants were advised to grow more food for national defence and freedom. The demands of the poor and landless peasants for land reform, fair wages, etc., were ignored.

The political resolution claimed that the Party membership had leapt up from 4,464 in July 1942 to 15,563 on 1 May 1943 – a spectacular achievement. A Party letter subsequently expected the membership to rise to 56,000 by the end of the year. A Central Committee of 22 members was elected. Joshi, Adhikari and Ranadive formed the Political Bureau of the Central Committee and Joshi continued to be the secretary.

In “Congress and Communists”, which appeared in November 1944, Joshi was confident that the achievement of national unity would be followed by a political settlement with Britain. It would be in the interests

of Britain to arrive at such a settlement, for without it the war would be more prolonged and demand more sacrifices from her people. Moreover, to quote Joshi, "a prosperous postwar Britain can be built only in alliance with a free India with its expanding market..."⁴² In another lengthy article "Victory – Whose?" which was first published in *People's War* of 20 May 1945, after the Allied victory over Germany, Joshi made many interesting formulations. He said:

"Europe after the last war was the cockpit of imperialist powers, but Europe after this war has slipped out of imperialist hands into the hands of its own people".⁴³

About the U.S.A., he stated that "Reactionary forces in the U.S. suffered a decisive defeat in the Presidential election;..." and that "The American ruling-class are not out to build a colonial empire; they want markets".⁴⁴

Joshi expected the British Labour Party to win in the next general election, to "build a People's Britain", and liberate India and the colonies. "Independent India", he wrote, "will be prosperous India and a good market. Thus if the British people fight for their bread, they will have to agree to our freedom too!... British bread and Indian freedom go together."⁴⁵ This General Secretary of the CPI preached that no revolutionary struggle would be necessary to achieve India's freedom, that there would be peaceful transition from colonial slavery to independence.

Joshi asserted that a united national movement in India would lead to the formation of a provisional 'National Government', which would not only build a wonderful India but "rush increased aid to China", reconcile the Kuomintang with the Communist Party of China and help her to shorten her agonies under Japan and escape U.S. domination after the war! What was needed was Congress-League unity.

The CPI leadership betrayed a woeful lack of understanding of the nature of imperialism and chose to remain blind to the class character of the Congress and League leaders. The enormous literature they produced in a verbose, self-righteous and boastful style was imbued with deep opportunism – a besetting vice of theirs with which they were afflicted in 1936 and of which they never got cured. Instead of arousing and organizing the people for political, revolutionary tasks, they pursued a non-class, anti-struggle (except against militant political workers and "traitor Bose") line and did whatever they could to fill the people's minds with complacency. It is no wonder that, when in the post-war days the struggles of the people broke out, the CPI failed miserably.

What Went Wrong with People's War

It appears that the characterization of the war after the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union as people's war was not wrong. Nothing could be a greater calamity for the people of the world than the victory of the Axis Powers – Germany, Japan and Italy. World War II passed through several phases. In the beginning it was an imperialist war. The situation changed when the Soviet Union was attacked, and when, soon after, Japan entered the war and overran the countries of South-East Asia. At this phase the contradiction between India and British imperialism, then an ally of the Soviet Union, became secondary and the contradictions between the Soviet Union (and China) and the Axis powers and then the contradiction between the Indian people and Japanese militarism became primary. The situation again changed in late 1942 or early 1943 when the victory of the Soviet Union and other Allied Powers over the Axis Powers was assured. The alliance between the Soviet Union and the imperialist powers was only temporary and the contradictions between them became more and more manifest as the victorious end of the war came nearer. The CPI leadership overlooked this aspect. If it did not, it would have to assume the responsibility of organizing the people for the national democratic revolution at the appropriate time, which it was reluctant to do. It seems it was haunted by the fear of revolution throughout this period.

The optimism that all the Allied Powers were fighting for world liberation and that their victory would *automatically* lead to India's freedom was indeed a product of infantile reformist disorder. Even such nonsense was preached that the British and U.S. imperialists had become prisoners in the hands of the people. Such optimism was not dispelled even by Churchill's declaration in September 1941 that the Atlantic Charter did not apply to India and other British colonies or the later declaration on 10 November 1942 that he had "not become the King's First Minister in order to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire".

It is worth noting that on 12 October 1942 Mao Tsetung hailed the Soviet victory achieved on 9 October in the protracted, bitter battle of Stalingrad as a turning point in the world war. To quote him, "In short, after October 9 there is only one road open to Hitler, the road to extinction." He also noted the contradictions within the Allied camp. He referred to Britain's and the U.S.A.'s delaying to open the second front. He said: "On the western front, even if Britain and the United States continue their policy of looking on and stalling, the second front will eventually be opened, when the time comes to belabour the slain tiger."⁴⁶

The CPI leaders failed to realize that the contradiction between the Indian people and British imperialism would become primary in the phase

that was opening. They did not change the direction of their policies in time to prepare for the post-war upsurge of the people's struggles. As seen before, both the British and the Congress leaders anticipated and prepared for the post-war upheaval, but not the CPI.

Instead, the CPI as led by the Joshis trailed behind the British raj as well as behind the leaders of the Congress and the League. While slandering many patriots as "fifth columnists" it indulged in sickening adulation of the Congress leaders who had been waiting before the 'Quit India' struggle to make terms with the Japanese.

Dissociating itself from Gandhi's gamble in 1942 does not appear to have been wrong. But the alternative to opposition to Gandhi's manoeuvre was not surrender to imperialism and co-operation with it as its underling. Mao Tsetung had been putting in practice his theory of revolution in colonies and semi-colonies since 1928. His writings in which his theory was elaborated – the strategy, the tactics, the military line, etc. – had already come out. By 1942 the Communist Party of China, fighting single-handed against the Japanese fascists and other very heavy odds, had established extensive liberated areas by acting according to Mao Tsetung's theory. But the CPI leadership did not think it worthwhile to learn from China's experience. As noted before, the most lamentable fact was that the CPI leadership hardly ever gave the importance to the peasant question in India, which it deserved. The alternative to surrender to the raj and to what the CPI called "national leadership" was learning from China's experience and arousing and organizing the peasantry, without neglecting the working class and other revolutionary sections of the people, for the liberation war when the conditions for it would mature.

In a brief message to the Central Committee of the CPI dated Yenai, 5 April 1943, Mao Tsetung on behalf of the Central Committee, CPC, reminded the former that the victory in the anti-fascist war was near, and said:

"We believe that under the concerted efforts of the Communist Party of India and the Indian people, a way will certainly be found out of the present difficult situation so that both the objects – to vanquish fascism and strive for Indian independence – will be attained."⁴⁷

The CPI leaders did not think any striving on their part for Indian independence was necessary. They were sure that the defeat of fascism plus Congress-League unity, which appeared to them as a magic wand, would automatically open the gate to India's independence.

The CPI and the Pakistan Demand

In *Forward to Freedom* Joshi spoke of the "red herrings of Pakistan and Akhand Hindustan".⁴⁸ The enlarged plenum of the CPI Central Committee, held in September 1942, stated in a resolution "On Pakistan and National Unity" that each one of the various nationalities of India should enjoy "the right to exist as an autonomous state within the free Indian union or federation and will have the right to secede from it if it may so desire". This guaranteeing "the right of autonomous state existence and of secession" to "nationalities having Muslim faith" should "form the basis for unity between the National Congress and the League". The resolution added: "In the case of the Bengali Muslims of the Eastern and Northern districts of Bengal where they form an overwhelming majority, they may form themselves into an autonomous region in the state of Bengal or may form a separate state." *The resolution recognized "Western Punjabis (dominantly Muslims)" and Sikhs, besides the Muslims of East and North Bengal, as separate nationalities.* In his report entitled "Pakistan and National Unity" to the enlarged plenum, Adhikari said:

"The demand for Pakistan, if we look at its progressive essence, is in reality the demand for the self-determination and separation of the areas of *Muslim nationalities* of the Punjab, N.W. Frontier, Sind, Baluchistan and of the eastern districts of Bengal."⁴⁹

To the CPI religion became at this time an important criterion of nationality.

*In People's War of 12 November 1944, Adhikari described the Pakistan demand as "the freedom demand of the Muslim League".*⁵⁰

Not to see the classes and their interests behind the policies of the Congress and of the League was not communism. Both these parties dominated by the rival sections of the big bourgeoisie of the Hindu (and Parsi) and Muslim communities were enemies of the principle of self-determination of nationalities. While the Congress leadership was striving to become the sole heir to the British raj in an *akhand* Bharat, the League leadership wanted to carve out several provinces which the Muslim big bourgeoisie could dominate. Both relied on British imperialism to give them what they wanted; both wanted to remain within the framework of dependence on British imperialism; and both were enemies of the toiling people.

The task was not to appeal to the Congress and League leaders and whine day in and day out for Congress-League unity, which actually meant the unity of the rival sections of the big bourgeoisie, dependent on

imperialism, but to expose them and their policies, to fight them for independent mobilization of the people of all communities, especially the major communities, under the leadership of the Communist Party.

Instead of exposing the game of the Muslim League and asking progressive Muslims to fight it, the CPI leadership urged them to join the League.

A prominent CPI leader Sajjad Zaheer wrote :

“It is a good and fine thing, a happy augury, for Indian Muslims and for India as a whole that the Muslim League continues to grow and gather around it millions of our liberty-loving people.... In the increasing strength and capacity of the League to move the Muslim masses on the path of progress and democracy lies the salvation of millions of our Muslim countrymen and the possibility of Congress-League unity.”⁵¹

The CPI leadership lent support to Rajagopalachari's formula for the partition of India on religious lines. In a pamphlet *“They Must Meet Again”*, which Joshi wrote after the failure of the negotiations between Gandhi and Jinnah in September 1944, the CPI General Secretary unequivocally supported the Pakistan demand of the Muslim League and boasted that the CPI had made it popular among the supporters of the Congress.⁵² Joshi insisted that the Muslims should have the right to form their state comprising all the Muslim-majority areas and that there should be no plebiscite before its establishment.⁵³

In “Congress and Communists” Joshi wrote :

“...just as in one simple slogan, ‘Swaraj’, Gandhiji gave expression to our freedom urge, so Mr Jinnah through the slogan of Pakistan has given expression to the freedom urge of the Muslims, for absolute independence in their own homelands.”⁵⁴

The CPI was not content only with propagating that the League was a freedom-loving, anti-imperialist organization. In Bengal it tried its best to defend the policies of the League ministry, dominated by big compradors like the Ispahanis and by big landlords like Nazimuddin who headed the ministry, and dependent for survival on British expatriate capitalists. It was a corrupt ministry whose policies were accentuating the famine conditions in Bengal in 1943. The CPI did not hesitate to defend this ministry and slandered all those who opposed its policies.⁵⁵

There was a shift in the CPI's stand on the Pakistan issue towards the end of 1945 when it drafted its election manifesto. In this manifesto there is no mention of “Muslim nationalities” or of Pakistan. Instead, it proposed that there should be “17 sovereign National Constituent Assemblies based

on the natural homelands of various Indian peoples'' – Pathanland, Western Punjab, Central Punjab, Hindustan, Andhra, Bengal and so on. *These 17 constituent assemblies should elect delegates to the All India Constituent Assembly* and should "enjoy the unfettered right to negotiate, formulate and finally to decide their mutual relations within an Independent India, on the basis of complete equality". The Muslims of the eastern districts of Bengal were no longer regarded as a separate nation. Instead, the manifesto said:

"The Communist Party stands for a United and Free Bengal in a free India. Bengal as the common homeland of the Bengali Muslims and Hindus should be free to exercise its right of self-determination through a Sovereign Constituent Assembly based on adult franchise and to define its relation with the rest of India."

The CPI was then in favour of "a voluntary Union of sovereign national States".⁵⁶

Within a few months there was again a shift when the CPI drafted a memorandum and submitted it to the British Cabinet Mission in mid-April 1946. The memorandum proposed that *the All India Constituent Assembly should be directly elected* – not by the delegates of 17 constituent assemblies – on the basis of adult franchise, that "linguistically and culturally homogeneous national units" should be constituted after redemarcation of the boundaries of the provinces and the dissolution of the native states. The people of each of these eighteen national units, including Kashmir, "should have the unfettered right of self-determination, i.e., the right to decide freely whether they will join the Indian Union or form a separate sovereign state or another Indian Union". The CPI stood "for a free, voluntary democratic Indian Union of sovereign units".⁵⁷

In the meantime Palme Dutt's article "India and Pakistan" had appeared in *Labour Monthly*. Palme Dutt criticized the Muslim League as a communal organization and its Pakistan demand as undemocratic.⁵⁸ He expressed himself in favour of one "democratically elected Constituent Assembly". He came to India when the Cabinet Mission arrived in late March 1946.

The political resolution entitled "For the Final Assault", adopted by the CPI Central Committee in August 1946, condemned the Pakistan demand as undemocratic and reactionary and accused the Muslim League of hoping to "gain its demands from imperialism by obstructing the building of a joint front for freedom".⁵⁹ In "Resurgent India at the Crossroads", written in early 1947, Adhikari criticized the Pakistan demand as undemocratic and blamed the League for diverting "the anti-imperialist and freedom urge of its following against the Congress and the Hindus, instead of directing it against imperialism".⁶⁰

It was because of its opportunism that the CPI position on the Pakistan issue went through several twists and turns. It changed from qualified to unqualified support for Pakistan and then to one of condemnation of it. In June 1947, after the Mountbatten award, when the emergence of Pakistan was no longer in dispute, the Central Committee of the CPI sharply criticized the vested interests – the would-be ruling classes of Pakistan – and hoped that an “era of *voluntary Indian unity*, full democracy and new life” would open in Pakistan.⁶¹

The Eve of the Allied Victory and After

On Gandhi's release from the Aga Khan Palace, *People's War* in an editorial welcomed him back as “the beloved leader of the greatest patriotic organization of our people, the mighty National Congress”. It wrote:

“Every son and daughter of India, every patriotic organization of our land, is looking to the greatest son of our nation to take it out of the bog...”⁶²

In “Congress and Communists”, Joshi stated: “*To us the Congress is our parent organization, its leaders our political fathers...*” He described his own party men as “*Communist Congressmen*”.⁶³

Despite the CPI leaders' filial devotion, the Congress Working Committee, after the release of its members from prison, formed a sub-committee with Nehru, Patel and Pant to investigate the activities of the communist members of the Congress. On the recommendation of the sub-committee a charge-sheet was presented to the communist members of the AICC, accusing them of following an anti-national and anti-Congress policy during the war. The Working Committee removed the communists from the AICC and banned communists from holding elective offices in the Congress. The CPI had in the meantime directed its members to quit the Congress.

Joshi wrote a voluminous reply to the Congress Working Committee's charges, which appeared in two parts in December 1945 under the title *Communist Reply to Congress Working Committee's Charges*. Earlier, in May 1944, immediately on Gandhi's release, Joshi had started a correspondence with Gandhi, which lasted for more than a year, to convince Gandhi of the party's political and moral integrity. Though Joshi greeted Gandhi as “the most loved leader of the greatest patriotic organization of our people” and as “*the nation's father*”,⁶⁴ Joshi failed to rid “the nation's father” of his “prejudices” about the CPI. In *Communist Reply*, Joshi,

while defending the CPI, criticized the Working Committee for the 'Quit India' slogan and for refusal to settle with the League. He dilated on the CPI's favourite theme that a Congress-League settlement and formation of a national government would have wrested control over defence and other matters from the imperialist bureaucracy and laid the basis of India's freedom. He accused the Congress leadership of refusing to recognize in principle the demand for "Pakistan as the right for sovereign freedom of Muslims in their own homeland". He also chided the League leadership for including Assam within their proposed Pakistan though it was not a Muslim-majority area, and stood for the partition of Punjab and Bengal, which were not entirely Muslim homelands. At this time the CPI was virtually in favour of the partition of India on a religious basis.⁶⁵ In *Communist Reply* Joshi blamed the Congress leaders for wasting "opportunity after opportunity" to liberate the country during "the six most revolutionary years in world history".⁶⁶ Joshi refused to comment on the role of his own party – the party which claimed to be the vanguard of the working class and whose task was to lead the national democratic revolution to victory. He did not even realize that the task of the Congress leadership was not only *not* to utilize the opportunities but to oppose any revolutionary party, if it attempted to do so. Though critical, Joshi acclaimed the Congress leaders as "the oldest political leadership of our greatest political organization of which we have been very proud to be members". He said: "The more you slander our Party, the more shall our Party glorify the Congress." He declared his party's resolve to wage "the battle for 'Congress-League-Communist' unity".⁶⁷

By hanging onto the coat-tails of the Congress leadership since 1936 and then of both the Congress and the League, the CPI leadership helped to defuse a revolutionary situation when it arose, particularly in the post-war days.

When anti-imperialist mass struggles had broken out and a revolutionary situation was fast developing soon after the end of the war, the CPI was putting up candidates for election to provincial assemblies. It contested in 108 constituencies in the whole of India out of 1,585 and won 8 seats. In the general (that is, Hindu) constituencies where they had no candidates, they supported the Congress and in the Muslim constituencies the Muslim League.

In a booklet with the pretentious title *For the Final Bid for Power!*, which appeared on the eve of elections, Joshi explained:

"The crux of our freedom plan is to make the Indian demand against British rule not only a morally unanswerable case but a practically irresistible freedom movement, and for this we must apply the same principle of self-determination among ourselves."

He further said: "The strategy for the freedom struggle that our Party puts forward is the strategy of building up a brotherhood of all freedom-loving Indians", which would include the Congress, the League, the CPI and others.

But how that "brotherhood" would wage the "practically irresistible freedom movement" was left unsaid. The CPI's "final bid for power" seemed to take the form of the battle for the ballot-box. Its election manifesto declared that its "only call" was: "Indian must not fight Indian but all Indians together must fight the British enslavers!" Though the manifesto did not clarify how the fight would be conducted, it seemed to suggest that the victory of the Congress and the League in the elections would convert India into a People's State. It would be the task of the CPI to put pressure on "the Popular Ministries", which would then pass "People's Ordinances", and the goal would be attained.

It is worth noting that the CPI has participated in every general election held since 1937 – whether in colonial or post-colonial India. The CPI leadership has never deviated from the 'parliamentary' path.

The CPI leaders never inquired why the Congress stood for a unitary state and whose interests it would serve. They did not also ask why the Muslim League demanded the partition of India on religious lines and whose interests would Pakistan serve. These demands were, no doubt, 'stamped with the brand of a class', but a class analysis could hardly be expected from the CPI leaders. They undertook the task of mobilizing the workers, the peasants and other revolutionary sections of the people behind the Congress and the League, that is, behind the two sections of the Indian big bourgeoisie and big landlords. It is also significant that in the enormous CPI literature, one never comes across any reference to the Marxist truth "Violence is the midwife of an old society pregnant with a new one".

It was this non-Marxist, non-revolutionary Communist leadership which submitted a memorandum before the British Cabinet Mission in mid-April 1946. In this memorandum the CPI asked British imperialism to furnish proof of its "sincerity" by making a declaration recognizing India's independence and sovereignty and by withdrawing British troops within six months. It urged the British government to proceed "along the lines laid down in this Memorandum..." One may remember that it was after the upheavals in Calcutta, after the naval revolt in Bombay which shook the whole of India, after unrest had spread even among the armed forces, and after Viceroy Wavell had reported to his King that "India is in the birth-pangs of a new order", that the CPI leadership was presenting its memorandum – its blueprint of a future independent India – for the consideration of the British imperialists, and for their implementation of

it, while it itself did little to make that blueprint a reality.

The CPI and the Post-War Upsurge of Struggle

The wave of struggles in the post-war days, which swept the sub-continent to the great alarm of the imperialists and native reactionaries, found the CPI leadership, as Madhu Limaye wrote, "confused and bewildered". To quote Limaye, it "reluctantly followed in the wake of these demonstrations, appealing for the creation of a united front".⁶⁸ The CPI leadership not only failed to anticipate the post-war upheaval but also failed to realize its revolutionary potentialities: it did not deviate during this period – 1945 to 1947 – when India was on "the edge of a volcano", from its consistent class-collaborationist line. At the root of its disease was its fear of mass revolutionary struggle. "In the early postwar period, then", observed Overstreet and Windmiller, "the CPI was seeking not revolution but respectability in the Indian body politic."⁶⁹ As noted before, it set up candidates for election to provincial assemblies and, when the Cabinet Mission came, submitted its blueprint for India's independence for the British imperialists to consider.

When the storm of struggle broke, first in Calcutta in November 1945, pro-CPI students and its cadres took at first a leading part in it. But the CPI leadership was unable to grasp the revolutionary significance of the struggle or understand the people's mood. While CPI cadres had instinctively reacted to the great INA demonstration and other happenings in Calcutta – which sent "shivers down the imperialist spine" and which brought the whole lot of Congress leaders to that city, besides Viceroy Wavell, and prompted them to have long confabulations with Governor Casey – "the central committee which held its meeting in December", Ranadive, who was a Polit Bureau member at the time, wrote later, "in its resolution did not even mention the INA demonstration or the great upsurge that was already working itself through strikes, meetings and anti-imperialist conflicts".⁷⁰ When Abdul Rashid of the INA was sentenced to rigorous imprisonment for 7 years and Calcutta erupted again,⁷¹ CPI leaders joined Congress and League leaders in appealing to the people to remain calm. On 13 February *Swadhinata*, the Bengali organ of the CPI, issued a call for struggle against indiscipline and disorder as Congress president Azad did. Joint peace brigades composed of Congress-League-Communist volunteers moved about in Calcutta and neighbouring industrial areas to maintain peace. Though many CPI cadres instinctively stood by the people and displayed great courage, it became the task of the CPI leadership to extinguish the revolutionary flame and to continue to trail behind the

Congress and League leaders.

In his report Ranadive wrote:

“There is no call for struggle, there is only a programme of mass amelioration. It will be seen that neither the working class strikes that were developing one after another, nor the huge demonstrations and strikes of the armed forces was [were] making any meaning on the members of the central committee.”⁷²

When the naval revolt supported by the working class of Bombay sent a thrill throughout India, the CPI leadership's stand was revealing. In its memorandum to the Royal Indian Navy Enquiry Commission, an official body, it tried to represent that the rebels had waged their heroic fight *merely* to improve their service conditions.⁷³ It ignored the fact that the rebels' demands included the demands for the release of all Indian political prisoners, including the INA personnel, withdrawal of Indian troops from Indonesia, and 'Quit India'.⁷⁴ (The CPI publication "Towards a People's Navy" acknowledges that the first two of the above demands were raised by the rebels but mentions the demand for "impartial judicial enquiry into the police shootings that have taken place all over India" in place of 'Quit India'). B.C. Dutt, who lit the spark that kindled the revolt, wrote that on the Navy Day, 1 December 1945, "Political slogans in foot-high letters were staring from every wall [of the Talwar, a shore establishment]: 'Quit India', 'Down with the Imperialists', 'Revolt Now', 'Kill the British'".⁷⁵ And on the night before 2 February, when the Commander-in-Chief was to visit the Talwar, Dutt, despite very strict security measures, painted 'Jai Hind' and 'Quit India' on the wooden platform from which the Commander-in-Chief was to take the salute.⁷⁶

Dutt wrote that not one of the political parties of the left "was in our midst. Neither did they try to contact us directly even though we were still accessible to anyone who cared to reach us." To quote him again,

"On February 22 when the workers were challenging the might of the British Empire with bare hands on the streets of Bombay and the ratings were still behind the guns, the Communist Party of India was appealing to the Congress Party [which was placing 'volunteers' at the disposal of the Bombay Governor to fight workers and the ratings] to see that 'justice' was done to the ratings."⁷⁷

A somewhat redeeming feature was that the CPI leadership issued an appeal to the people to observe a complete *hartal* in Bombay on 23 February – "as a mark of their *disapproval* of Government repression and to demand immediate cessation of repression, the opening of negotiations,

and the satisfaction of the just demands of the strikers".⁷⁸ The CPI did not want the revolt but negotiations and a settlement and was in favour of non-violence, not violence. When on 22 February, the British military units indiscriminately fired on the people in the streets and killed many, none of them who came out into the streets, according to a British officer, "was armed, not even with sticks or stones" on the advice of the Communist Party.⁷⁹

But, during this period many of the CPI cadres remained with the workers in their innumerable struggles. Big strikes like the one in Calcutta on 29 July to express solidarity with striking postal employees were led by communists. Communist cadres, courageous and self-sacrificing, built up peasant struggles in some pockets – the movement of the Warli tribals in some taluks of the Thana district in Maharashtra, the Tebhaga movement in several districts of Bengal, particularly in North Bengal, the Tanka movement in North Mymensingh in which mainly a tribe of Hajong peasants and some Muslims participated, the Bakasht struggle by the peasants in Bihar, etc. Besides, the CPI cadres and local leaders built up the most remarkable peasant struggle – the struggle in Telangana in the native state of Hyderabad – and the peasant-worker struggle in Punnapra and Vayalar in the Alleppey district of the Travancore state. These struggles were not planned by the central leadership nor were they encouraged by it. Though militant, the struggles in British India were all struggles to realize partial demands – *not for land and power*. When peasants asked for arms in some areas, for instance in Dinajpur, to fight back the armed attacks of the police on them during the Tebhaga movement, the leadership preferred suppression of the movement to armed confrontation. Only in the Telangana region, the peasant struggle developed into a struggle for land and power. (It may be noted that at a later stage, for the first time in India, the local communist leadership stood for the implementation of the Maoist strategy of revolution in colonies and semi-colonies, which was opposed by the then central leadership including General Secretary of the Party Ranadive and PB member P. Sundarayya.) But, as Ranadive wrote in 1948, the central leadership headed by P.C. Joshi was panicky in 1946-7. To quote him,

"...Joshi wanted the words like 'agrarian revolt' to be banned and all revolutionary significance of partial struggles to be forgotten. His advice is 'agrarian revolt must be denounced as mythical to cover the suppression of the peasant movement invented by the bureaucracy'."⁸⁰

In August 1946 the CPI Central Committee adopted a resolution entitled "For the Final Assault". It criticized the Congress and League leaders for setting their followers against each other, leading often to

communal riots, while they pursued a policy of compromise with imperialism. Yet it held that *pressure from below* would suffice to make these "patriotic parties" join a united front of different organizations including the CPI to accomplish the democratic revolution. It decried the leaders of the CSP and the Forward Bloc and opposed the formation of a bloc of 'Left parties' within the Congress as it wanted to rally *the "entire Congress"* to build the joint front. It is curious that while criticizing the Congress and the League for following a policy of compromise with imperialism, the CPI leaders called them "patriotic parties" and held that the "entire Congress" and the League would, under pressure from below, join a united front for carrying out an anti-imperialist democratic revolution.

The resolution said:

"The central slogan of rallying the entire people for the joint front must be the Constituent Assembly..."⁸¹

The resolution claimed that the membership of the party had risen to 50,000.⁸² In "*Communist Reply*" (December 1945), Joshi had claimed that the party had a membership of more than 30,000 and that 3 lac workers organized in the AITUC and 8 lac-strong All India Kisan Sabha were under the Party's influence.⁸³

When CPI cadres were being ruthlessly persecuted by Congress as well as League ministries and by the Interim Government at the centre, of which Patel was Home Member, the CPI leadership drew a distinction between "popular ministries" and the bureaucracy. Instead of blaming and exposing the "popular ministries" for the raids, numerous arrests without trial, shootings and so on, they concentrated their fire on the bureaucracy. In the political-organizational letter of February 1947, Joshi wrote:

"How do we destroy the strength of imperialism? By driving a wedge between the imperialist bureaucracy and the bourgeois leadership by rousing the common people, its [the bourgeois leadership's] own followers to intervene..."⁸⁴

The CPI leadership also distinguished between the "popular ministries" and "the vested interests"⁸⁵ and expected the former to curb the attacks of the latter on the toiling people. Even when communist cadres, workers and peasants were facing the brunt of repression unleashed by the "popular ministries" and the Interim Government, the CPI refused to get off the bandwagon of the Congress. Different provincial committees of the CPI issued statements in the form of memoranda to the Congress high command, appealing to them to intervene so that the provincial governments would

not sanction police repression or allow free rein to "the greedy interests".⁸⁶ Significantly, the Andhra Committee's *Zamindar-Police Terror in Andhra*, to quote Overstreet and Windmiller, "did not even mention the peasant revolts in Telangana, and took pains to show that the Communist campaign in Andhra was, with one minor exception, completely non-violent".⁸⁷

When the imperialist plan named after Mountbatten was formally adopted by the Congress and the League on 3 June, when the deal was struck between British imperialism and the representatives of the big compradors and big landlords, the Central Committee of the CPI stated in a political resolution in June 1947, entitled "Mountbatten Award and After", that the award was "the culmination of a double-faced imperial policy which, *while making concessions to the national demand to transfer power*, sets in motion disruptive and reactionary forces to disrupt the popular upsurge, obstruct the realization of real independence, throttle the growth of democracy and destroy the unity and integrity of India". Yet those who colluded with British imperialism to carry through this imperial policy were acclaimed as "the national leadership" of the "national movement". According to the CPI, *British imperialism was "forced...to make important concessions to the urgent demands of the national liberation movement..."* So, instead of exposing the sordid deal, the CPI was "of the opinion that new opportunities for national advance have been won. *The two popular Governments and Constituent Assemblies are the strategic weapons in the hands of the national leadership.*" (All the words quoted above are in bold type). They were strategic weapons, no doubt, but weapons against the people.

"The Communist Party", said the resolution, "shall mobilize popular and *Ministerial support* behind" the democratic struggles of the workers and peasants and "compel the capitalists and landlords to meet their demands." The CPI's own bitter experience of the "Ministerial support" was not enough to convince its Central Committee that the ministers were not above classes, nor friends of the proletariat.

The resolution also stated:

"The Communist Party realizes that the new situation demands *the broadest Joint Front based on the principle of fullest co-operation between the popular Governments and all popular organizations* for the noble task of national liberation and reconstruction and final unification."⁸⁸

On the eve of the transfer of power, the CPI declared its ardent loyalty to the new government.⁸⁹ Declaring full support to both the Indian and Pakistani governments, Joshi said:

"It is the duty of us all to rally wholeheartedly and enthusiastically behind them and pledge them all our support."⁹⁰

The CPI's "final bid for power" culminated in the election battle. Its "final assault" took the form of the "fullest co-operation between the popular governments and all popular organizations". Even after the bitter offensive by the "popular" Interim Government and "popular ministries" against the CPI and against militant workers and peasants and after the *artificial* division of India and change from direct to indirect rule by the British, the CPI leadership continued to trail behind the leaders of the Congress and the League.

In "India and Pakistan" (March 1946) Palme Dutt urged that "every effort within the national movement should be directed towards the establishment of a united national front" including the Congress and the League, "the two principal political organizations standing for the aim of Indian independence". He held that the Indian big capitalists had an anti-imperialist role to play in the post-war phase and that they hoped "to break the stranglehold of British monopoly, win the leading position and enter on a course of profitable large-scale industrial development under a National Government". The powerful influence of the biggest of them was "reflected in an increasingly dominant position of the right wing sections of the leadership (Patel, Prasad, Kripalani, etc.) and a right wing anti-communist offensive". (The bitterest anti-communist offensive was launched by Nehru, regarded by Palme Dutt as the leader of the 'left wing'.) Yet he wished that "this breach [between the Congress and the CPI] may be overcome at the earliest possible moment, in view of national unity in the coming period.... It is of the greatest importance that effective co-operation in *the coming national struggle* should be established between the National Congress and the rising force of the political working-class movement and of the peasants' movement, as well as of younger radical opinion represented by the Communist Party".⁹¹

To heal the rift Palme Dutt met Gandhi, Patel, Nehru and S.K. Patil. Though the eminent 'Marxist' theoretician believed that the biggest Indian capitalists who had hugely profited from war contracts, shortage, high prices, inflation and black-marketing at the cost of immense suffering, starvation and deaths of millions, were powerfully influencing the Congress, he had no hesitation to try to make the CPI and the organizations of the toiling people line up behind the Congress leadership, that is, behind the Indian big capitalists, corrupt and anti-national.

Palme Dutt was of the view that the Mountbatten award marked an "enforced retreat of imperialism" and permitted a "*signal advance*" and would "open the way" to future democratic progress. *He wanted*

collaboration between the CPI and the Congress, implied that the Nehru government was progressive and envisaged the "combined leadership of the Soviet Union, India and the progressive democratic countries" in world affairs.⁹²

In the meantime an important event occurred. On 15 May 1943 the presidium of the Executive Committee of the Communist International recommended the dissolution of the International. Its resolution said among other things that, though the Communist International had served some purpose at the first stages of the working class movement, it became "a drag on the further strengthening of the national working class parties".⁹³

By a statement of the presidium of the ECCI, the Communist International was dissolved with effect from 10 June 1943.

The world is vast and conditions differ from country to country, from region to region. No party, group or individual, however great or wise, can have a correct understanding of the specific conditions in various countries other than their own – conditions rich in complexity and many of them unique in character. With Marxism-Leninism and Mao Tsetung Thought as the guide and learning from the experiences of other countries, every communist party should be free to formulate its own policies, even to make mistakes. Learning from his bitter experience, Mao Tsetung, while welcoming mutual consultations and help, opposed in principle the interference of one Party, however big, in the affairs of another Party.

Mao Tsetung said that the works of Marx and Lenin are "necessary reading. That comes first. But communists of any country and the proletarian philosophical circles of any country must create new theory, write new works, produce their own theoreticians to serve the political tasks facing them".⁹⁴ Instead of realizing the importance of producing theoreticians of their own, the CPI depended on foreign mentors whose understanding of the complexities of the Indian situation was rather poor. The CPI also refused to learn from the experiences of other colonial and semi-colonial countries like China and Vietnam.

Mao Tsetung said: "Without a people's army the people have nothing".⁹⁵ Summing up revolutionary China's experience, he stated:

"A well-disciplined Party armed with the theory of Marxism-Leninism, using the method of self-criticism and linked with the masses of the people; an army under the leadership of such a Party; a united front of all revolutionary classes and all revolutionary groups under the leadership of such a Party – these are the three main weapons with which we have defeated the enemy".⁹⁶

Without these three weapons the people of a colony can hardly break the chains of colonial or semi-colonial slavery. But the CPI leadership was

badly equipped with Marxism-Leninism and had weak links with the masses; it had a wrong conception of the anti-imperialist united front the leadership of which it offered to the representatives of the pro-imperialist classes; and it never thought of building an army under its leadership.

At a crucial period of history – 1936 to 1947 – the CPI failed in spite of the dedication, courage and sacrifices of thousands of cadres and supporters. If it had not failed, a different India would have emerged influencing the whole world. It was because of its failure that the plans of the British imperialists, the Birlas and the Ispahanis, the Nehrus and the Jinnahs, could succeed and that the sub-continent was artificially divided into satellite states – both orbiting imperialist powers. The cost was inconceivable suffering of hundreds of millions for generations.

The primary responsibility for the failure was that of the CPI leaders, their ideological and political weakness and immaturity. But the frequent interference by foreign mentors who imposed a class-collaborationist line on the CPI in 1936 also played its role.

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APPENDIX

Gandhi and His Charisma: A Brief Note

Some reviewers of the first volume of this book have criticized it on the ground that it draws a portrait of Gandhi (based, of course, on his words and deeds) which can hardly be reconciled with his charismatic influence on the people. In their view a leader who followed policies opposed to the interests of the people could hardly enjoy the charisma that Gandhi did. It may be noted that the critics have neither refuted my arguments and the facts cited by me nor pointed out any inaccuracy in my quotes from Gandhi and their interpretations.

Gandhi was indeed a charismatic leader, for he could attract, influence, and inspire devotion among people. But charisma, the ability to influence and inspire people, does not presuppose that the policies of a leader possessed of it necessarily serve the interests of the people. Hitler enjoyed charisma among the Germans for some time; so did Jinnah among the Muslims. Few would agree that their policies were right. There may be a complex of factors contributing to a leader's charisma.

Before we discuss what went into the making of Gandhi's charisma, we would note the limits within which it worked.

First, Gandhi's charisma, as we have seen, failed to work on the Muslims. Second, a large section of the scheduled castes and tribes remained untouched by his charismatic influence. Third, his ability to influence and inspire the politically-inclined youth of India was very much limited. Fourth, towards the end of his life, his charisma ceased to work on his close associates who had cherished implicit faith in him before.

A few words about the period which saw Gandhi's advent in Indian politics. World War I intensified the crisis of British imperialism. During the war itself the British imperialists realized that it would be necessary to make devolution of power by stages to Indian collaborators, which, instead of weakening their rule, would strengthen it, and the Secretary of State Montagu made the appropriate declaration in August 1917. The appointment of the Indian Industrial Commission 1916-18, the Montagu-Chelmsford Report of 1918, and the Government of India Act 1919 were so many carrots dangled before the comprador bourgeoisie and other upper classes and their leaders in order to associate them with the administration. It is worth remembering that World War I had contributed greatly to the

development, expansion and strengthening of the Indian big bourgeoisie who had emerged as agents of British capital.

On the other hand, unrest swept through this sub-continent towards the end of the war. By 1916, as Viceroy Chelmsford said, India had been "bled absolutely white".¹ In Punjab press-gang methods were widely used to recruit soldiers, and people were forced to make contributions to the War Fund. The raj's measures to bleed the people white were compounded by the reckless profiteering and swindling by the Indian big bourgeoisie. Both in India and the world outside, the popular forces were growing and presenting an immediate as well as potential threat to imperialism and its agents. The great Russian Revolution was awakening the masses, and the right of self-determination of the colonial peoples was placed by history on the agenda. Early in 1918 the British government observed:

"The Revolution in Russia in its beginning was regarded in India as a triumph over despotism; and... it has given impetus to Indian political aspirations."²

In the immediate post-war days the struggles of workers were breaking out in Bombay and other places. Discontent was simmering among the peasantry whom the landlords, the usurers, British and comprador merchant capital had reduced to a state of pauperization. During the war itself a section of the youth took to the path of violence to overthrow British rule.

It was at such a crossroads of history that Gandhi appeared on India's political stage. Early in April 1915 Gandhi, who had offered in London his active help to British war-efforts, returned to India at the request of the British Under-Secretary of State for India. While in Africa for twenty-two years, he was full of eulogy for the British colonialists and "vied with Englishmen in loyalty to the throne": it was his "love of truth [that] was at the root of this loyalty".³

It was in South Africa that Gandhi devised the form of struggle – satyagraha – an ideal weapon with which to emasculate the anti-imperialist spirit of the people. Gandhi himself declared that his satyagraha technique was intended to combat revolutionary violence. It may be borne in mind that this prophet of non-violence, though violently opposed to the use of violence by the people in the struggle against British imperialism, actively supported, whether in South Africa, London or India, the most violent wars launched by the British masters and, towards the close of his life, was in favour of war between India and Pakistan and approved of or suggested the march of troops into Junagadh, Kashmir and Hyderabad.⁴

Gandhi's activities in South Africa were watched keenly by the Indian big bourgeoisie like Sir Ratan Tata, Sir Purshotamdas and others, besides some of the princes, who overwhelmed him with large funds to help him

to carry on his work. They had found in him the man they were seeking, the man who would be a powerful bulwark against all revolutionary struggles. He was welcomed back home both by the raj which bestowed signal honours on him for the services rendered by him in South Africa as well as by the Indian big bourgeoisie. On the eve of his departure from London, General Smuts, the South African minister responsible for the savage repression on Indian workers in South Africa during Gandhi's stay there, told the press that Gandhi would prove to be "an enormous asset to Britain".⁵ And Gandhi did not belie Smuts's expectations. On his arrival in India Gandhi pledged his loyalty to the British and declared war on the revolutionaries, and the raj used him for furthering the cause of the war and recruiting Indian soldiers.

There were three main factors which contributed to the making of Gandhi's charisma.

A Superb Cocktail of Religion and Politics

Gandhi's charisma among the Hindus owed much to his capacity to make a superb cocktail of religion and politics. His continual references to God, to 'the inner voice' and to the religious scriptures and epics, his claims that his steps were guided by God (that for instance his fasts were undertaken at the call of God), his *ashrams* and his ascetic's robe swayed the Hindu masses powerfully in this land where godmen flourish even today. His harking back to a mythical past, the Ram Rajya, had an immense appeal to the backward-looking Hindus, especially the peasantry enmeshed in feudal ties. He never hesitated to make unabashed exploitation of the religious credulity of the peasant masses and of other toiling people who shared the peasant outlook. When Rabindranath Tagore met Romain Rolland and his two friends in June 1926, Rabindranath dwelt on Gandhi's "variations and contradictions, the compromises he has accepted and that sort of secret bad faith which makes him prove to himself by sophistries that the decisions he takes are those demanded by virtue and the divine law even when the contrary is true *and he must be aware of the fact*".⁶

Besides his *ashrams* and the ascetic's garb, the prayer-meetings Gandhi held every day, where he blended prayers and politics, were a powerful weapon of his with which he swayed the mass mind. Kanji Dwarkadas said that Gandhi "was exploiting for political purposes these public prayers to keep and continue his hold on ignorant and superstitious people".⁷

Subhas observed that in this land where the "spiritual man has always wielded the largest influence", Gandhi "came to be looked upon by the mass of the people as a Mahatma before he became the undisputed political

leader of India''. Subhas said that at the Nagpur Congress in December 1920, Jinnah, who had addressed Gandhi as 'Mr Gandhi', was "shouted down by thousands of people who insisted that he should address him as 'Mahatma Gandhi'". Subhas added:

"Consciously or unconsciously, the Mahatma fully exploited the mass psychology of the people.... He was exploiting many of the weak traits in the character of his countrymen [like inordinate belief in fate and in the supernatural, indifference to modern scientific development, etc.], which had accounted for India's downfall to a large extent.... In some parts of the country the Mahatma began to be worshipped as an Avatar [incarnation of God]."⁸

The appeal of Gandhi as a leader to the masses, as David Petrie, Director of the Intelligence Bureau, Government of India, from 1924 to 1931 rightly said, "was semi-divine" and his "influence was far more religious than political".⁹

Gandhi did his best to turn the gaze of the people backward, to revive the obscurantist ideas and faiths of the past and to blunt the power of reason. When it suited him he talked of the "sinfulness" of foreign cloth or of the Bihar earthquake in 1934 as having been caused by the caste Hindus' sin of untouchability. His "moral" outpourings on modern civilization, industry, medicine, etc., had their appeal to the masses of the people in a colonial and semi-feudal society, who groaning under the impact of a bastard civilization felt yearnings for the supposed pristine glory of a vanished age. Gandhi knew how credulous the masses were. "If one makes a fuss of eating and drinking and wears a *langoti*", said Gandhi, "one can easily acquire the title of Mahatma in this country." Again he said: "in our country, a Mahatma enjoys the right to do anything. He may commit murder, indulge in acts of debauchery or whatever else he chooses; he is always pardoned. Who is there to question him?"¹⁰

Ravinder Kumar was right when he observed:

"More significantly, the religious idiom of Gandhi's politics widened the gulf between the two major communities of the sub-continent, and was probably one of the reasons behind its division into the two states of India and Pakistan in 1947."¹¹

Deification of Gandhi

Systematic efforts were made by interested classes and persons to deify Gandhi – not without his knowledge. During the Bardoli satyagraha of 1928,¹² which opposed the government's enhancement of land revenue

“affecting a small but dominant landed class”, Vallabhbhai Patel and others including Gandhi “deliberately used a religious idiom in their speeches and writings”. Those reluctant to join the satyagraha were warned that “it would be difficult...for them to face God after death on account of their unholy actions”. Support of the various social groups was sought “on caste and religious grounds”. The tribal people who constituted almost one half of the Bardoli taluk’s population, many of whom were serfs of their landowners, were told that their gods Siliya and Simaliya, who had grown old, had sent Gandhi, “*their new ‘god’*”, to look after them. They were enjoined “to follow their dharma” and obey the command of their new god who wore a *langoti* like them.¹³

The following was one of the verses of a Gujarati song:

“Oh Englishman, the God Gandhiji came in the end and your days have been numbered.”¹⁴

This deification of Gandhi was not confined to Gujarat. Shahid Amin writes that “legends about his ‘divinity’ circulated at the time of his visit to Gorakhpur [on 8 February 1921]”. To quote Amin, “Even in the eyes of some local Congressmen this ‘deification’ – ‘unofficial canonization’ as the *Pioneer* put it – assumed dangerously distended proportions.... Most of the rumours about the Mahatma’s *pratap* (power/glory) were reported in the local press between February and May 1921.” Amin says that numerous stories of Gandhi’s miracle-making powers – many times more numerous than Christ’s – were spread by ‘nationalist’ journals and by word of mouth. Stories of supernatural beings appearing and asking the people to do *pūja* to [worship] Gandhi were also circulated. According to Amin, the fact of the reporting of these rumours in the local nationalist weekly *Swadesh* indicates that “these were actively spread by interested parties”.¹⁵

Similar stories about Gandhi’s miraculous powers were spread in Bihar and he was deified.¹⁶ P.C. Bamford, a high-ranking intelligence official, noted:

“unscrupulous agitators were circulating to the credulous masses stories of divine attributes and miraculous powers [possessed by Gandhi]. Gandhi’s influence was strengthened by a spurious divinity.”¹⁷

As noted before, Pandit R.S. Shukla, then Prime Minister of the Central Provinces and Berar, made it obligatory by an order issued in September 1938 to use the word ‘Mahatma’ before Gandhi’s name in all official papers. ‘Gandhi-worship’ was also prevalent in some places of that province.¹⁸

In present-day Koraput in Orissa, rumours were spread early in July

1938 'that Mr Gandhi will visit the area soon and those who do not produce Congress tickets will suffer from ailments!' An official publication stated:

"The Congress had built up an organization and acquired a hold over these backward tribes [in Koraput] by making attractive promises...; they also played on their superstition, and in some places Mr Gandhi was deified and temple ritual took place at the Congress office."¹⁹

And, soon after 8 August 1942, a circular was issued in the name of the Congress reproducing Gandhi's message to the people on the eve of his arrest. It was entitled *Six Commandments of Gandhi Baba*.²⁰

Exercises in Gandhi's Image Building

Myths about Gandhi which have no semblance of truth were consciously built up and propagated by his colleagues. Two illustrative ones may be cited, which will perhaps suffice. Nehru wrote:

"Crushed in the dark misery of the present, she [India] had tried to find relief in helpless muttering and in vague dreams of the past and the future, but he [Gandhi] came and gave hope to her mind and strength to her much-battered body, and the future became an alluring vision".²¹

Nehru here deliberately falsified the history of the anti-colonial struggles of the Indian people before Gandhi's advent – struggles which were not diversionary ones like those in which Nehru participated under the leadership of Gandhi. Speaking of 1917 and 1918, Percival Spear correctly pointed out that "the political classes were occupied by the government's political moves. But the masses were getting steadily more restive. The precipitation of these feelings into an anti-government movement came about, as so often, by the government's attempt to prevent it."²² It was Gandhi's mission to shackle all anti-government and anti-feudal struggles, not to organize or lead them. The future that Gandhi was striving for – self-government within the British empire and the preservation of the social status quo – was indeed 'an alluring vision' to the Nehrus and the Birlas.

Rajendra Prasad wrote:

Gandhi "went to Noakhali [in 1946]. The result was that the Hindus recovered their courage and morale. The Muslims who, to begin with, suspected his *bona fides*, began slowly to be affected by his presence and his speeches, and saw the error of their ways. That was one of the marvels of non-violence in action..."²³

No doubt, this is a marvel of untruth. The Muslims, who at first flocked to Gandhi's meetings, soon boycotted them and put every conceivable pressure on him to leave Noakhali. And how could the apostle of non-violence restore a sense of security to the minds of the Hindus when he himself moved about under the best possible armed protection provided by the Bengal government?²⁴ It should be noted that the ordinary Muslims were not responsible for the communal riots, and the section which was involved in them was led by a gangster – Mian Ghulam Sarwar – who had unsuccessfully contested the 1946 Assembly election helped with Congress funds.²⁵ It may also be borne in mind that the Muslims of the neighbouring district of Tripura (Comilla) organized themselves – not under the influence of Gandhi – and successfully prevented the gangsters from spreading the riots in that district.

We refrain from citing more samples of image-building so essential for the success of Congress policies. In the absence of a revolutionary party to call the bluff, the Congress leaders were apt to make breathtaking claims. After reading, according to his biographer and disciple Tendulkar, the first volume of Marx's *Capital* in the Aga Khan Palace at the age of seventy-four, Gandhi commented: "I would have written it better as assuming, of course, I had the leisure for study Marx has put in." In this context what Frances Gunther wrote to Nehru may be found interesting: "Essentially ignorant – his ideas on science, food, sex, education, back to the village, etc. are crack potted and assigned by another man would arouse nothing but a yawn."²⁶

Gandhi's charisma amounted to something like adoration for a holy person who was venerated but whose teachings were seldom followed. In the eyes of the Hindu masses who came under the spell of his charisma, he was a saint, an avatar, whose *darshan* was coveted, but whose sermons on non-violence or injunctions to carry out the 'constructive programme' or to abolish untouchability fell mostly on deaf ears. It may be noted that his 'constructive' workers were usually paid. When, in January 1947, Gandhi was asked "How did your *Ahimsa* work in Bihar?", he replied: "It did not work at all. It failed miserably."²⁷

Gandhi of the popular imagination was not as he really was. He became in the imagination of the oppressed and exploited, the simple and unsophisticated masses a symbol of anti-imperialist, anti-feudal struggle – the very opposite of what he was. They created him in the image of an ideal hero of their conception. During the Rowlatt Satyagraha, a small band of Muslim workers and peasants, which called itself 'Danda Fauj', paraded the streets of Lahore in April 1919 and plastered its walls with posters which appealed to Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs to enlist in the 'Danda Fauj' and fight against the "English monkeys", for this was "the command of

Mahatma Gandhi''. The workers of the European-owned tea plantations in the Surma valley in Assam left them and began their long trek back home during the non-co-operation days, thinking this had been the call of Gandhi. The peasants of Chauri-Chaura violently resisted and retaliated against the murderous attacks on them by the police with Gandhi's name on their lips.²⁸

Besides Gandhi's extraordinary astuteness, his unabashed exploitation of the religious credulity of the Hindu masses, two other factors contributed to the making of his charisma.

British Imperialism Confirms Gandhi as the National Leader

One was that, appreciating his worth, British imperialism recognized him as the national leader. Like General Smuts, many Viceroys including Willingdon regarded him as an asset. In combating the militant forces of anti-colonial and anti-feudal struggle, the British ruling classes counted on his help and he never failed them. As Judith Brown wrote, "Gandhi was impelled into or at least confirmed in a national leadership role by the Government's attitude, its needs and fears, as much as those of his followers or the compulsions of his own personality.... They [the British officials] angled for his help in the struggle against violence and terrorism."²⁹

From his days in South Africa, Gandhi "regularly maintained personal contact with the highest levels of Government, even when no specific issue was at hand".³⁰ Jacques Pouchepadass has referred to 'fantastic rumours' that circulated about Gandhi in Champaran in 1917 – rumours that Gandhi had been sent to Champaran by the Viceroy, or even the King, to redress the grievances of the peasants; that the administration of Champaran was going to be handed over to the Indians and so on. According to Pouchepadass, "many of these rumours were very consciously spread by the local leaders".³¹ The Indian elite, the rich peasants and others looked upon him as their guide and placed implicit faith in him, for his easy accessibility to the highest representatives of the raj fed their opportunist hopes. Men like Prasad, Patel and many others gathered around him thinking that while risks were small, gains would be enormous.

Big Bourgeois Support

The other prop – a more important one – on which Gandhi's charisma rested was the lavish support extended to him by the Indian big bourgeoisie. With his home-coming, besides the Tatas and Thakurdases, the Sarabhais,

Birlas and others rallied to his support. The Indian business elite hailed him: his message of non-violence, his satyagraha, his faith in the raj, his political aspirations, his abhorrence of class struggle, his 'change of heart' and 'trusteeship' theories, his determination to preserve the social status quo, his 'constructive programme' intended to thwart revolutionary action – all these and more convinced them that in the troubled times ahead he was their best friend. His outlook on industrialization never frightened them. Rather, they expected that Gandhi's 'moral' outpourings on industry and modern civilization would weave a spell on the masses, victims of cruel exploitation who were yearning to escape from it. His *ashram*, all other organizations of his, and all his political, social and moral campaigns were financed by them. Modifying somewhat Sarojini Naidu's quip, one might say that it cost the big bourgeoisie, the Birlas in particular, quite a big amount to keep him in poverty. And he too attended to their interests to the very end of his life. During the war when the "prices of cloth reached levels more than five times the pre-war level", the government intervened, cloth prices were put under control and fixed at levels which "industrialists themselves were not reluctant to accept". The profits of the cotton mill industry, in which capital to the tune of Rs 50 crore was "primarily invested", soared from Rs 7 crore in 1940 to Rs 109 crore in 1943. But the declared profits were only 'peanuts' compared to the actual profits made when hoarding and blackmarketing were the rule.³² G.D. Birla's biographer, Ram Niwas Jaju, writes that "the boom in the speculation market and then the war gave a boost to their activities, and they [the Birlas] acquired twenty-two big factories" in addition to what they had before. On 24 March 1947 G.D. Birla "wrote a seven-page letter" to Rajagopalachari, a member of the Interim Government, asking for removal of control on cloth.³³ Gandhi started inveighing against rationing and control on prices of food and cloth. He pitied the millionaires. "We do have millionaires in our country", he said, "and they make millions too, but even they are left with little money because of heavy taxation." He condemned 'control' "as a vicious thing" and "continuing the controls as criminal".³⁴ And control on cloth was lifted and cloth prices shot up immediately to the satisfaction of the poor millionaires and to the immense distress of the common people.

Edgar Snow was not wrong when he said: "Nobody else in India could play this *dual role of saint for the masses and champion of big business, which was the secret of Gandhi's power*"³⁵ – the secret of Gandhi's charisma. A negative factor that sustained Gandhi's charisma was the weakness of the working class and the Communist Party of India.

The End of the Gandhian Era

Gandhi's political decline started when it was realized by his close associates as well as by his big bourgeois supporters that his calculations about the 'Quit India' movement had gone awry. The British imperialists no longer trusted him, though in 1945-47 they handled him carefully in order not to antagonize him because of his influence on the Hindu masses. Nor did his associates, his former 'yes-men', and big bourgeois patrons repose in him the faith that they had before.

Nehru noted in his prison diary on 7 April 1943 that Patel, Kripalani, Prafulla Ghosh and Shankar Rao Deo "have been hit in their great faith in Bapu's instinct for right action at the right time.... it is obvious that they visualize an end of the so-called Gandhian era in Indian politics and this prospect leads to unhappiness, for the future is uncertain and dark."³⁶

The Birlas too were disillusioned about his 'infallibility' after 'Quit India'. On 14 April 1934, Birla wrote to Gandhi:

"Somehow or other, I always agree with you and therefore please don't think that I am lacking in reasoning powers. After all what am I to say if you are ever correct?"³⁷

The same Birla told Wavell in March 1944 that "political leaders had missed a great opportunity during the war".³⁸ Until 1941 Gandhi was their master-strategist and they wanted him to be the sole plenipotentiary of the Congress. Gandhi's policies, aided by Nehru's rhetoric, were superb in handling mass discontent, thwarting anti-imperialist, anti-feudal struggles and in safeguarding and promoting the interests of the colonial masters, the big compradors, the princes and the landlords. They had found in him a leader without an equal, gave him whatever help they could and venerated him. But their faith was shaken after Gandhi's 'Quit India' gamble. Birla distanced himself from Gandhi and his place was taken by Patel. Nehru too proved his usefulness to them: his work on the Planning Committee, his enthusiastic reaction to the Bombay Plan and his role during the post-war upsurge established his *bona fides*.

In mid-1944 G.D. Birla, J.R.D. Tata, Thakurdas and Ardeshir Dalal saw Gandhi and sought his opinion about Dalal's appointment as the member of the Viceroy's Executive Council for Planning and Reconstruction. But they refused to abide by his advice.³⁹ Early in March 1944, Birla proposed to Wavell the visit of an industrial delegation to the U.K. and expressed his willingness to go. And the delegation led by Birla and J.R.D. Tata actually left India for the U.K. in May next year. It is somewhat significant that Birla, who would earlier keep Gandhi informed of the

minutest details of much of his work, withheld this important information from Gandhi for more than a year. When Gandhi came to know of it on the eve of the delegation's departure, he issued a press statement accusing "big merchants, capitalists, industrialists and others" of doing the will of the government and profiting in the process, and suggesting that the delegation might enter into "a shameful deal" with the government. When Birla protested and Tata fumed, Gandhi blessed the delegation.⁴⁰

Differences between Gandhi and his colleagues began to crop up and during the talks with the Cabinet Mission they became serious. Pyarelal wrote:

"In that hour of decision they had no use for Bapu. They decided to drop the pilot.... At noon [on 25 June] the Cabinet Mission invited the members of the Working Committee to meet them. Bapu not being a member was not sent for and did not go. On their return nobody told Bapu a word about what had happened at the meeting! The final phase of negotiations with the Cabinet Mission marked the beginning of the cleavage between Gandhiji and some of his closest colleagues which in the final phase of the transfer of power left them facing different ways."⁴¹

In a note to G.D. Birla in 1946, Gandhi wrote:

"My voice carries no weight in the Working Committee. If I leave the scene, the soreness will go, I do not like the shape that things are taking and, I cannot speak out.... Today I feel like Trishanku. Is it really time for me to retire to the Himalayas? Many people have started suggesting this."⁴²

Gandhi felt that he was not wanted in Delhi and thought of going to Noakhali in Bengal. On 25 October 1946 he wrote to his disciple D.B. Kalelkar: "I have been reduced to the position of Trishanku. I am hanging in mid-air. I do not know whether I shall go to Bengal or continue here or go to Sevagram." The first person he consulted was Nehru. "Without a moment's hesitation he [Nehru] replied: 'Yes, your place is there [Noakhali]...', I asked him, 'when?' 'As soon as you feel like it', he replied."⁴³ It seems it was good riddance for Nehru and Patel. All momentous decisions – to dismember Punjab and Bengal and partition India artificially – were adopted without any reference to him. He was allowed to plough his lonely furrow. He came to Delhi at the end of March 1947 at the invitation not of his colleagues but of the new Viceroy Mountbatten. Nehru sarcastically told Mountbatten that "Gandhi was going round with ointment trying to heal one sore spot after another on the body of India, instead of diagnosing the cause of this eruption of sores and participating in the treatment of the body as a whole".⁴⁴

Gandhi's complaint to Nirmal Kumar Bose, his secretary in Noakhali,

seemed an acknowledgement of his tragic defeat. Gandhi said:

“Mountbatten had the cheek to tell me ‘Mr Gandhi, today the Congress is with me and not with you’.”⁴⁵

On 15 August 1947, when Abul Hashim saw Gandhi at Sodepur (near Calcutta), Gandhi complained:

“The world knows Sardar Patel is my ‘yes-man’ but these days he says ‘no’ to everything I say; Babu Rajendra Prasad goes out with me in my morning walk but when I come back to my *Ashram* I feel as though we shall never meet again...”⁴⁶

The winter of the mahatma's life was a winter of despair. His charisma did no longer work on those he had groomed so long. When Pyarelal rejoined Gandhi in the middle of December 1947, he found him “the saddest man that one could picture... spiritually isolated from his surroundings and from almost every one of his colleagues, who now held positions of power and prestige in the Government”.⁴⁷ His hold on “the pillars of various constructive work organizations” was also slipping away. He had to loyally abide by the decisions made by them who had previously abided loyally by his decisions. Those who had joined his bandwagon in the past and whom he had placed in positions of power now ignored him. When Gandhi undertook a fast to save Muslims in Delhi from massacre, Patel did not hesitate to insult him. Even Patel's secretary refused to see Gandhi when requested by Gandhi's secretary to do so in connection with some grievances of refugees.⁴⁸ Gandhi went on lamenting: “today I have become a sort of burden. There was a time when my word was law. But it is no longer so.” He said at a prayer meeting on 5 November 1947: “Today I have become bankrupt. I have no say with my people today.”⁴⁹ In one of his letters written probably in January 1948, Gandhi wrote: “I still do not know what the next step is going to be.... I am groping for light.” In another letter he said: “Regard me as bankrupt”. Nearly ninety-five per cent of the post received by Gandhi in the months before 15 August 1947 was full of abuse.⁵⁰

Who conspired to kill him is shrouded in mystery. It seems that the centre of the “terrible and widespread conspiracy”, as Gandhi called it days before his assassination, was not Pune or some other distant place but quite close to him, and he had apprehensions about it.⁵¹

To quote Khaliquzzaman,

“From a statement of Mr K.M. Munshi, it is borne out that months before his assassination such talk had been taking place amongst big Hindu leaders, which encouraged Mr Munshi to tell Gandhiji that if he

suffered violence at anybody's hands it would be a Muslim, to which Gandhiji replied, 'No, it would be a Hindu'.⁵²

Significantly, early in the morning of the day he was assassinated, Gandhi "had said to Biswan, his personal attendant: 'Bring me all my important letters. I must reply to them today, for tomorrow I may never be'.⁵³

Information about the conspiracy, some of the conspirators, and some details were conveyed to Bombay's chief minister B.G. Kher by one professor personally after the bomb explosion at Birla House on 20 January 1948, and the information was passed on to Union Home Minister Patel and to Gandhi. Pyarelal writes:

"What, however, surprises one is that in spite of the definite and concrete information of which the authorities were in possession, they should have failed to trace and arrest the conspirators and frustrate their plan....⁵⁴

There is a contradiction between what G.D. Birla broadcast immediately after Gandhi's assassination and Patel's statement in Parliament on 6 February 1948 on the one hand and what Gandhi actually said on the other. On the morning of 21 January Gandhi did say to Birla that he was prepared to allow police guards to be posted for his protection, which is contrary to the story spread by Birla and Patel.⁵⁵

Gandhi's funeral procession was organized as a military operation by the British Commander-in-Chief of 'free' India's army. His body went on its last journey in an army vehicle after the last five months' stay in the Birla House. As Pethick-Lawrence wrote, "The funeral carriage was drawn by units of India's army, navy and air force.... Dakotas of the Royal Indian Air Force, dipping in salute, showered flowers on the bier." This seemed incongruous to a Gandhian who observed: "perhaps it was the height of tragedy when his erstwhile companions so arranged that his mortal remains should be carried in a gun-carriage over which military bombers hovered and dipped low in ostentatious salute."⁵⁶ This was indeed a somewhat ironic tribute to the prophet of non-violence from his erstwhile disciples. Perhaps the mahatma, whose love of non-violence manifested itself in his refusal, even when approached, to comment on the USA's dropping of atom bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945,⁵⁷ apart from his other actions and pronouncements, deserved this tribute.

Gandhi had served his purpose. His big bourgeois patrons, his Congress colleagues and British imperialism had no more any use for him. In his seventy-ninth year he passed away as a martyr with a halo around him and with all criticism of both his political and personal life⁵⁸ hushed.

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4. *CWG*, LXXXIX, 237,246,433,434; Pyarelal, *op cit.*, I, 476,488; N.K. Bose, *My Days with Gandhi*, 251; *Jawaharlal's Speeches 1949-1953*, 357-8; Nehru, *Independence and After*, 236; K.M. Munshi, *The End of an Era: Hyderabad Memories*, 6. See also Vol.I of this book, 132-3.
5. See *ibid*, 161-3.
6. Romain Rolland's Diary, 29 June 1926, in *Romain Rolland and Gandhi Correspondence* - emphasis added.
7. Dwarkadas, *India's Fight for Freedom*, 470; also Subhas Bose, *The Indian Struggle*, 207.
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9. David Petrie, *Communism in India 1924-1927*, 289.
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24. Pyarelal, *op cit.*, I, 371,383,439,453,464,498,499,520,559,561, *passim*; *Wavell the Viceroy's Journal*, 428; Nirmal Kumar Bose, *My Days with Gandhi*, 149-50,152. Nirmal Bose was Gandhi's secretary in Noakhali.
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50. Pyarelal, *op cit.*, II, 321, 698, 699.
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52. Khaliqzaman, *op cit.*, 409.
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56. Pethick-Lawrence, *op cit.*, 302; N.K. Bose, *Studies in Gandhism*, 303.
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58. We have refrained from discussing aspects of Gandhi's personal life. One aspect invited severe criticism, even condemnation, from his former 'yes-men' and others. One who is interested in knowing it and knowing Gandhi the man better may refer to CWG, LXVII, 61, 69, 104-5, 117, 166, 416; LXX, 81-2, 95, 312-5; LXXIX, 212-3, 215-6, 238; LXXXI, 82-3; LXXXVI, 452-3, 465-6; LXXXVII, 89-92, 108, *passim*; also Nirmal Kumar Bose, *My Days with Gandhi*, 133-4, 154, 158, 174, 179, 184; and Ved Mehta, *Mahatma Gandhi and His Apostles*, Penguin Books, 1977 for Sushila Nayar's statement.

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