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On the Transfer of Power in India

by Suniti Kumar Ghosh

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The transfer of power in India in 1947 brought a sense of “fulfillment” to the three parties to the settlement—the British raj, the Congress and the Muslim League. British Prime Minister Clement Attlee declared that it was “not the abdication but the fulfillment of Britain’s mission in India, a sign of strength, and the vitality of the British Commonwealth.”¹ Speaking on the Indian Independence Bill in the House of Lords, Lord Samuel, a Liberal leader, said, “This was not an hour of defeat but of fulfillment.”² The same idea had been expressed a few days earlier in words shorn of rhetoric by Field Marshal Smuts, then Prime Minister of South Africa: “This does not look like quitting . . .”³

The Indian Independence Act, passed by the British Parliament in the middle of July 1947 without a division, pleased its authors—Attlee, Bevin and their Labour Party colleagues—as well as the Tory leaders including Churchill, whom President Roosevelt had called “an unreconstructed Tory,” “the last of the Victorians.”⁴

After the Mountbatten plan, proposing partition of India on religious lines and transfer of power on the basis of dominion status, had been agreed to by Congress and Muslim League, Alec Joyce of the India Office wired on 3 June 1947 to Mountbatten’s press attache, Alan Campbell-Johnson:

A packed House of Commons listened with intense interest to

Prime Minister’s announcement this afternoon. Proposals and first reaction from India undoubtedly created profound gratification among all Parties. Sense of unity and recognition of tremendous issues and possibilities involved were comparable only with most historic moments during war. . . . This has been a great day for us all.⁵

Campbell-Johnson recorded that “the American reaction has been especially enthusiastic.”⁶

On their part the Indian leaders of both Congress and the Muslim League exuded happiness and gratitude. Rajendra Prasad, President of the Indian Constituent Assembly, described the transfer of power as “the consummation and fulfillment of the historic tradition and democratic ideals of the British race.”⁷

Later, on 16 May 1949, moving his resolution in the Indian Constituent Assembly for the ratification of the Commonwealth Prime Ministers’ decision to accept the “sovereign, independent republic” of India as a member of the Commonwealth of Nations of which the British King or Queen was the head, Jawaharlal Nehru, the lover of roses and rose-tinted phrases, said that from the “prickly thorn of frustration and despair, we have been able to pick the rose of fulfillment.”⁸

How was it that all the three parties supposed to be engaged in a grim struggle with one another retired from it as winners, victors!

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The protagonists in the drama of the transfer of power are

1. Cited in Michael Edwards, *The Last Years of British India*, (London, 1963) p. 181.

2. Alan Campbell-Johnson, *Mission with Mountbatten*, (London, 1951) p. 134.

3. N. Mansergh (Editor-in-Chief), *Constitutional Relations Between Britain and India: The Transfer of Power 1942–7* (Hereafter cited as *T.O.P.*), in 12 volumes (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1971–1983), X, p. 988.

4. Roosevelt and Churchill: *Their Secret Wartime Correspondence* (hereafter *Roosevelt and Churchill*), ed. by F.L. Loewenheim, H.D. Langley and M. Jonas, (London, 1975) p. 11.

5. Campbell-Johnson, *op cit*, p. 110.

6. *Ibid*, p. 114.

7. *Ibid*, p. 159; V.P. Menon, *The Transfer of Power in India*, (Bombay, 1957) p. 415.

8. Jawaharlal Nehru, *Independence and After*, (Delhi, 1949) p. 275.

supposed to have been two: British imperialism (and its domestic feudal allies) and the Indian people including the entire bourgeoisie. The following are held almost as axiomatic truths: first, the contradictions of British imperialism with the entire Indian bourgeoisie were of an antagonistic nature; second, the Congress, “an all-class movement” led by the bourgeoisie, spearheaded the struggle for freedom to establish a bourgeois nation state; and third, the transfer of power meant genuine political independence.

In fact, the combination and clash of forces that led to the transfer of power and partition of the Indian subcontinent on religious lines were far more complex than are generally supposed. My contentions are:

First, though the chief protagonists were two (British imperialism and the Indian people) and though their relative strength and weakness were the main factors in bringing about the transfer of power and in determining its character, there were also other forces—especially U.S. imperialism and the forces of Socialism and national liberation struggle, as then represented by the Soviet Union and the revolutions sweeping China, Vietnam, and Indonesia—which influenced the British raj’s decision to liquidate its direct rule in India.

Second, the dominant section of the Congress leadership represented the Indian big bourgeoisie, which was comprador in character.⁹ It could place itself at the head of mass

movements because the working class and its leadership were ideologically and politically weak. By making a fetish of “non-violence” and the “change of heart” of the imperialists, the Congress leaders saw to it that a genuine anti-imperialist movement did not develop. Further, from 1945 when World War II was drawing to an end, the Congress leaders systematically helped the raj to suppress the anti-imperialist struggles of the people.

For British imperialism it was both a retreat and an advance. It was a retreat because Britain had to terminate its direct rule. In another sense it was an advance, for freed of the immediate worries of direct confrontation with the Indian people, it would carry on and even intensify its exploitation of India.

Third, faced with contradictions at home and abroad, British imperialism found it prudent to stage a withdrawal through the front door and hand over the direct reins of administration to its Indian compradors. The purpose was to ensure preservation of its economic, political and strategic interests. The end of the direct rule meant the end of Britain’s monopoly possession of India; but the formal empire changed

9. Whether the Indian bourgeoisie comprised (and comprises) two sections—national bourgeoisie and comprador bourgeoisie—is a thorny question. It was the subject of my article “The Indian Bourgeoisie and Imperialism” (BCAS, Vol. 15, No. 3), though no exhaustive treatment was possible. Here we shall refer briefly to a few facts.

Bengal Chemical and Pharmaceutical Works, set up in 1892 by P.C. Ray, a scientist, manufactured various products including many vital drugs from basic stages, mainly with indigenous raw materials and without any foreign help. It pursued the policy of learning and innovating while doing. It not only developed basic drugs and new processes but designed most of the machinery for the purpose. Its objective was not merely to make profits but to harness science and technology for productive purposes and to attain self-reliance. (See Sudip Chaudhuri, *Bengal Chemical: 1892–1977* [mimeographed], Indian Institute of Management, [Calcutta, n.d.]) It was not the only firm of this kind, but its character was altogether different from that of the Petits, Tatas, Goenkas, and Birlas to whom reference has been made in my article. The former may be called an enterprise of the national bourgeoisie and the latter compradors.

There were conflicts, both economic and political, between the two sections. Economically, in the thirties and forties, the national bourgeoisie—represented by men like Manu Subedar (a small industrialist), K.T. Shah (Secretary of the National Planning Committee) and their friends (who threw out tycoons like Sir Purshotamdas Thakurdas, Sir Homi Mody and Sir Phiroze Sethna from the leadership of the Indian Merchants’ Chamber, Bombay, in the early thirties)—was hostile to foreign capital, demanded immediate scrapping of the managing-agency system (then the bastion of expatriate foreign capital and Indian big capital), and condemned collaboration agreements between them as “illegitimate marriage.” See Indian Central Banking Enquiry Committee 1931, Vol. I, Part II—*Minority Report* (of Manu Subedar), (Calcutta, 1931); L. Natarajan, *American Shadow Over India*, (Bombay, 1952) pp. 52, 266 (note 1); N.N. Mitra, ed., *Indian Annual Register*, Calcutta, I, 1945, p. 62, *Modern Review* (Calcutta), Sept. 1945, pp. 128–29; and K.T. Shah, “Introduction” to *Industrial Finance* (a National Planning Committee publication, ed. by K.T. Shah), (Bombay, 1948). On the other hand, the comprador bourgeoisie allied itself with foreign capital and found merit in the managing agency system.

Politically, the national bourgeoisie sought to achieve complete independence through armed struggle while the compradors wanted greater power and privileges but within the framework of basic dependence on the imperialists. Its “non-cooperation was only a step towards cooperation.” See G.D. Birla, *Bapu: A Unique Association*, III (Bombay, 1977) p. 76; B. Pattabhi

Sitaramayya, *History of the Indian National Congress*, I, (Bombay, 1946) reprint, p. 358. The method of the national bourgeoisie was non-violence in thought and deed. Gandhi, who played the “dual role of saint for the masses and champion of big business” (to quote Edgar Snow cited in Birla, p. 269), told Guy Wint, a British journalist, in 1939: “We cannot become an utterly independent nation. . . . And so if we could become partners on equal terms I want the Indo-British partnership to be permanent.” Gandhi also wrote that “if dominion status was offered, I would take it . . .” (*Harijan*, 16 December 1939).

The Congress included within it national bourgeois elements which forced the dominant section of the leadership (Gandhi, Sardar Patel and Gandhi’s other lieutenants) to formally accept complete independence as the Congress goal in 1929 and sometimes to make radical pronouncements. In early 1939, national bourgeois elements and communists rallied around Subhas Bose, challenged and defeated the Gandhian leadership, then grew panicky and surrendered.

Outside the Congress, the national bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeoisie had initiated revolutionary struggles long before mass movements were launched by the Congress. The revolutionary struggles in Bengal after 1905, the Ghadar movement, the activities of the Hindustan Republic Association, the Chittagong uprising, the R.I.N. revolt of February 1946, to mention only a few, reflected the aspirations of the national bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeoisie to liberate India through armed struggle. Men like G.D. Birla, who were very close to the Gandhian leadership, appealed again and again to the alien rulers to combine with it and crush the “left wing.” (Birla, II, pp. 12–14, 44–45, 85).

The Indian national bourgeoisie was economically weak and politically flabby and vacillating. Here it is worth quoting Mao Tsetung’s words: “Why did forty years of revolution under Sun Yat-sen end in failure? Because in the epoch of imperialism the petty bourgeoisie and the national bourgeoisie cannot lead any genuine revolution to victory.” (Mao Tsetung, *Selected Works*, II, [Peking, 1969] p. 422).



The front page of the British-owned Evening News of India of Feb. 21, 1947

into an imperial empire shared with other imperialist powers like the U.S.A.

Fourth, the Indian subcontinent, the home of several nations and nationalities, was partitioned on religious lines into two states because the Indian comprador bourgeoisie was split into two hostile sections—one predominantly Hindu (with which Parsi big capital was allied) and the other Muslim. There was unequal development among them, and the Muslim compradors were much weaker than their Hindu counterparts. Out of the fear of being swept away by much more powerful Marwari and Gujarati compradors in an India where the political representatives of the latter would be in direct control of the state machinery, Muslim compradors backed by Muslim feudal elements sought to carve out of India a state of their own—Pakistan.

Lastly, while the roses of fulfillment were plucked by the imperialists and their compradors, the people felt the thorns. While the transfer of power and the birth of the two new states marked the victory of imperialism as well as of the two sections of the comprador big bourgeoisie, it meant defeat of the Indian people and was a setback to revolutionary struggles in South Asia and elsewhere. The people lost because, in the absence of a revolutionary leadership, they rallied behind sections of the bourgeoisie which were in the camp of imperialism and to which World War II had opened up new vistas of rapid expansion as underlings of foreign imperialist capital.

The British raj emerged victorious out of World War II but far weaker economically, politically and militarily than the U.S. and the Soviet Union. Its economic decline which had started after World War I was hastened by World War II. Much of its industry was shattered and its capital investments in Canada and the U.S.A. had been taken over by the latter. For its postwar reconstruction it was dependent on American loan-capital. Instead of being a creditor country as in the past, it had become a debtor.

World War II was the "best of wars" for U.S. monopoly capital. When the war started, it began to cherish dreams of building a world-wide informal empire and of fulfilling its "Manifest Destiny." As James Burnham put it in a 1947 *Life* article, what was wanted was "an American Empire which will be, if not literally world-wide in formal boundaries, capable of exercising decisive world control."

During the war years there was significant increase in the U.S. share in India's foreign trade. The imports from the U.S.A., apart from lend-lease aid, surpassed those from Britain. But what was more significant is that Indian big capital had begun to forge close ties with American monopoly capital. Tatas and Walchands had led the way and Birlas, Kasturbhais and others were looking forward to that happy consummation, without, of course, neglecting the British connection.

Throughout the war the U.S. rulers put unrelenting pressure on the British raj to loosen its hold on the empire, especially India. To bring about the end of India's colonial status, they did whatever was possible for them to do without breaking the Anglo-American alliance which they deemed essential to winning the war. The objective of the U.S. ruling classes was to liquidate the old imperialist powers' monopoly possession of the colonies, remove all barriers, such as the "imperial preference" and "empire dollar pool" that impeded the free movement of U.S. capital and trade, and bring the colonies into their own informal empire. No wonder that the British raj very much resented all U.S. attempts at intervention and found it "intolerable."¹⁰ Under the Anglo-U.S. Financial Agreement of December 1945 the U.S.A. extended a loan to Britain to assist in her postwar reconstruction on condition that Britain would end by mid-1947 the empire dollar pool and eventually the system of imperial preferences.¹¹ During the postwar years the American demand for liquidation of Britain's direct rule in India was insistent. At the same time, the U.S.A. urged Britain "not to abandon essential strategic positions in India" and wanted "to participate in the use and upkeep of some of these positions."¹²

The specter of Communism was haunting the raj. The emergence of the Soviet Union with its power and political influence greatly enhanced, the collapse of different reactionary regimes in Eastern Europe, the advance of the People's Liberation Army and the expansion of Red bases in China, and

10. *T.O.P.*, I, pp. 7-8; II, pp. 969-70; III, pp. 30, 554-56, 690, 699, 792; *Roosevelt and Churchill*, p. 74, n. 1.

11. Gary R. Hess, *America Encounters India, 1941-1947*, (Baltimore and London, 1974), pp. 160, 165, 166, 174.

12. *T.O.P.*, VI, p. 644; VII, p. 931.

the armed national liberation struggles in Indo-China and Indonesia were contributing to the revolutionary ferment in India and accelerating the change in its political climate. The national liberation wars in Indo-China and Indonesia, where the raj rushed troops, including Indian soldiers, to halt the march of national liberation forces, and the prospect of such wars in Burma and Malay threatened the foundations of the British empire. There was great resentment among the Indian people against the use of Indian troops in Indonesia and a powerful demand for their withdrawal.

Another contradiction that beset the raj was with its own people. By the end of the war British youth had become sick of fighting and felt no inclination to serve in distant lands and to shed their blood for the sake of the profits of their bourgeoisie. That is why the British ruling classes were often heard to bewail the shortage of manpower to preserve the empire. Even those who joined the armed forces during the war demanded speedy demobilization and mutinied in some places to realize their demand.¹³

But of all the contradictions with which British imperialism was faced in the immediate postwar years, the contradiction with the Indian people was, no doubt, the principal one. While the years of the war were the best of times for the bourgeoisie, they were the worst of times for the people. Already impoverished, they became victims of indescribable want and misery as a result of the policies of the government and the profiteering of traders and industrialists.

The popular anger found its expression almost immediately after the war. There was an unprecedented upsurge of anti-imperialist struggles, in which workers, peasants and the urban petty bourgeoisie, even sections of the Indian navy, army and air force, police and lower rungs of the bureaucracy took part, and armed confrontations were frequent. Describing the mood of the people in Calcutta in November 1945, Governor Casey wrote: "Both in North and South Calcutta a feature of the disturbances comparatively new to Bengal was that the crowds when fired on largely stood their ground or at most only receded a little, to return again to the attack."¹⁴

Waves of anti-imperialist struggle rose one after another in different parts of the subcontinent. The most spectacular and most significant among them was the uprising in Bombay. The ratings of the Royal Indian Navy (R.I.N.) rose in revolt first in Bombay and then in Karachi, Calcutta and Madras. By 22 February 1946 the rebel sailors, were in control of about 22 vessels in Bombay harbor, including the flagship of the British Vice-Admiral. A total of 78 ships, 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 in a sympathy strike. When ordered, Indian soldiers refused to fire on the R.I.N. ratings. Bombay's workers and youth, irrespective of the community to which they belonged, stood by the navy men, carried food to them, erected barricades and fought with armed policemen and with several British battalions equipped with tanks and armored cars.

On 22 February, Bombay observed a general strike in the teeth of the bitter opposition from the top Congress and Muslim League leaders like Sardar Patel, Jinnah, Chundrigar and S.K.

Patil, who made common cause with the raj and placed "volunteers" at its service. The entire working class came out at the call of the Communist Party, and for two days there were pitched battles on Bombay's streets, in which, according to official estimates, there were about 1500 casualties, including more than two hundred dead. The men of the navy refused to be cowed—even by the threat of Admiral Godfrey (who had flown in bombers) to sink the navy. The glorious struggle ended in defeat when the "non-violent" might of Congress and League leaders was added to the armed might of the British imperialists to crush it.¹⁵ 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. Significant also was the role the Congress leaders played. More of that later.

While the transfer of power and the birth of the two new states marked the victory of imperialism as well as of the two sections of the comprador big bourgeoisie, it meant defeat of the Indian people and was a setback to revolutionary struggles in South Asia and elsewhere. The people lost because, in the absence of a revolutionary leadership, they rallied behind sections of the bourgeoisie which were in the camp of imperialism and to which World War II had opened up new vistas of rapid expansion as underlings of foreign imperialist capital.

Workers rose up everywhere despite the opposition of Congress and League leaders, factory workers, railwaymen, posts and telegraph workers, bank employees, even policemen in various places. In his diary under the date 19 February 1946, Wavell noted:

A day of alarms but not excursions. I saw Porter [Secretary, Government of India, Home Department], all for capitulation to the I.N.A.; Bewoor [Secretary, Posts and Air Dept.] about a postal strike; Carr [A.O.C.-in-C.] about R.I.A.F. mutiny; Griffin [Chief Commissioner of Railways] and Conran-Smith [Secretary, War Transport Department] about a railway strike; and finally the C-in-C., most gloomy of all, about the R.I.N. mutiny at Bombay and the I.N.A. trials. What a cheerful day—prospect or reality of three mutinies and two strikes!¹⁶

The anti-imperialist struggle was not confined to cities and

15. *Ibid*, pp. 1048, 1055-56, 1076, 1080-84. According to a leading participant in the struggle, the total number of ratings involved in the struggle in different places was about 50,000 and the entire navy was affected. See also B. C. Dutt, *The Mutiny of the Innocents*, (Bombay, 1971).

16. Wavell: *The Viceroy's Journal*, ed. by Penderel Moon, (Delhi, 1977) p. 215.

13. *T.O.P.*, VI, p. 1055, fn.

14. *Ibid*, p. 725.

towns; it spread to remote rural areas. In Telangana in the Hyderabad State a peasant struggle started in 1946 which turned into a liberation struggle and out of which emerged a peasant army and liberated areas. (Its fight against Nehru's army after the transfer of power and its withdrawal in 1951 is a story into which we shall not enter here.) All these struggles showed that, so far as the oppressed people were concerned, Congress and Muslim League were on the same side of the barricade as the raj.

When the Cabinet Mission came in March 1946 and met the Viceroy's Executive Council, Sir Edward Benthall, a member of the Council, said 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."¹⁷

Replying to Wavell, Pethick-Lawrence, the Secretary of State for India, wrote on 25 November 1946:

anything in the nature of reconquest and retention of India by force [would not be] practicable from a political, military or economic point of view. Politically our party would not support such a policy nor do we believe that it would be practicable from an international point of view. From a military point of view we have not the forces sufficient to embark upon the holding down of India as a whole . . . Nor from an economic point of view can we contemplate the great expenditure that would be entailed . . ."¹⁸

The postwar situation in India was, indeed, revolutionary. The rulers could not rule in the old way and the mass of the people understood "the impossibility of living in the old way." But no revolutionary leadership, ideologically and politically mature, had emerged. In the absence of such a leadership the domestic class forces hostile to the people were far from isolated. On the contrary, the people cherished illusions about the goals of the political representatives of those very classes—the Congress and League leaders—who were out to strike a bargain with imperialism.

In his letter to King George VI, dated 22 March 1946, Wavell, referring to the happenings 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. . . ."¹⁹ But the new order did not emerge. What emerged was a mockery of it.

4

The British imperialists regarded India as "the essential linchpin in the structure of the Commonwealth." Their main aim was to transfer power to "friendly hands"—that is, to the classes that had a symbiotic relationship with British capital and could be trusted to preserve and further its economic, political and strategic interests—and to enmesh the new state or states in a net of Commonwealth ties,²⁰ in short, to convert the colony into a neo-colony or semi-colony. The British Chiefs of Staff and the G.H.Q. (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 Chiefs of Staff Committee repeatedly emphasized this point.

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. If in these endeavours we were successful, a formal Treaty would probably be unnecessary, and our strategic requirements could be met by Staff conversations and liaison arrangements similar to those in force with the other Dominions.²¹

The Dominion statesmen agreed that India's continuance in the Commonwealth was extremely important to the interests of Britain and the dominions.²² The British imperialists also hoped that in the event of India deciding to remain in the Commonwealth, its example would influence other colonies to do so when they were "eligible for independence."²³

To forge a new kind of relationship with India under which their economic, political and strategic interests would remain secure, the raj followed a strategy which was twofold: first, to keep the Indian leaders engaged in negotiations about the future and sow illusions among the people, while defusing the revolutionary situation and crushing all future struggles; and second, to divert the anti-imperialist struggles along the channels of communalism.

As early as September 1943, Viceroy-designate Wavell and most of the members of the India-Burma Committee of the War cabinet, including Deputy Prime Minister Attlee, realized the efficacy of negotiations and of a negotiated settlement with the Indian leaders, for "our main aim must be to keep India within the Commonwealth."²⁴ The move fell through because of Churchill's opposition. Anticipating unrest among the Indian people in postwar days and stressing the need for opening negotiations with Indian leaders to forestall mass struggles, Wavell wrote to Churchill on 24 October 1944: "If we can secure India as a friendly partner in the British Commonwealth our predominant influence in these countries [such as Burma and Malaya] 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 bag-men."²⁵

With the end of the war in Europe, negotiations opened at Simla in June-July 1945 with the object of reconstituting the Viceroy's Executive Council as a step "towards a settlement." Earlier, in November 1944, the proposal made by Bulabhai Desai (leader of the Congress Party in the Central Legislative Assembly) to the Viceroy with the approval of Liaquat Ali Khan (Jinnah's deputy and General Secretary, All India Muslim League) for the reconstitution of the Viceroy's Executive Council had suggested parity between Congress and Muslim League. The raj changed this to parity between Caste Hindus and Muslims, a cunning maneuver which brought the communal question to the center of the political stage. The

17. *T.O.P.*, VII, p. 7.

18. *Ibid*, IX, p. 174. The terms of this reply were agreed at a meeting between Prime Minister Attlee, Pethick-Lawrence, Stafford Cripps and officials of the India Office. See also *ibid*, p. 68 for Attlee's Notes.

19. *Ibid*, VI, p. 1233.

20. *Ibid*, VI, pp. 561, 659-60, 666; VII, p. 591; VIII, p. 224; IX, pp. 307, 940, 972; X, pp. 329, 965, 974-5.

21. *Ibid*, VIII, pp. 53-7, 348-50, 547, 646, 659; IX, p. 975.

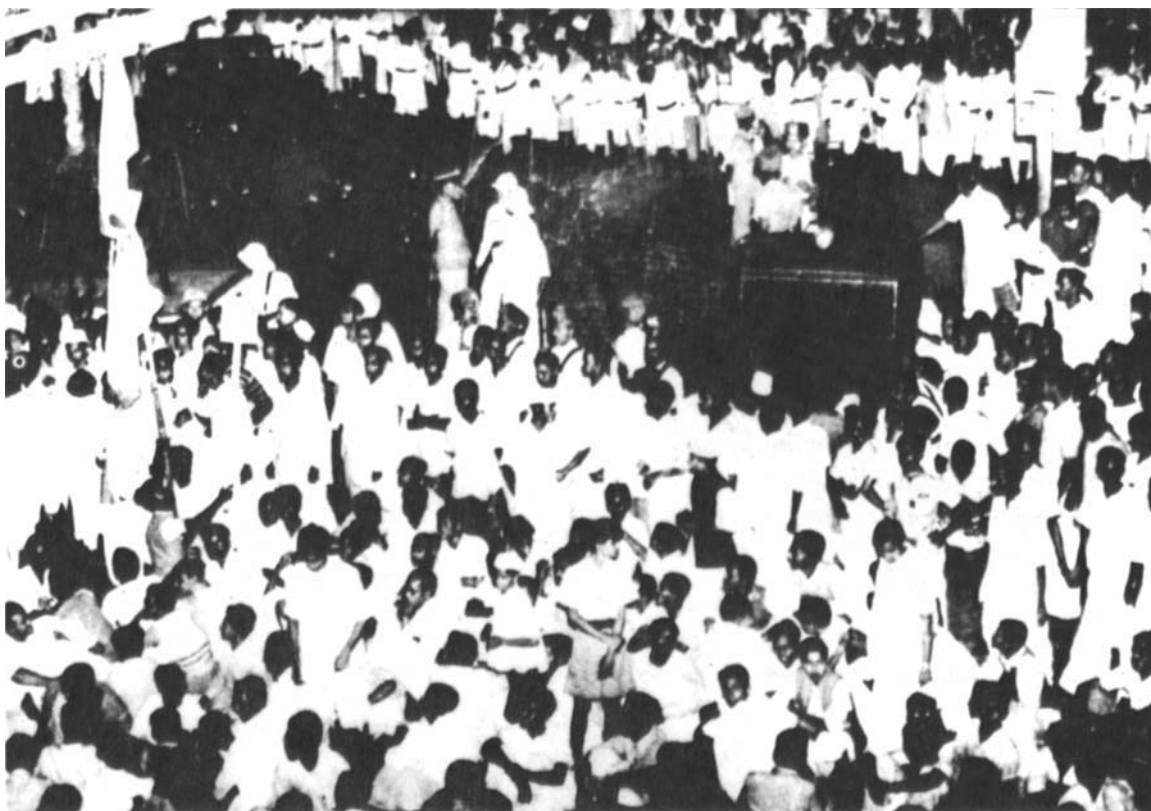
22. *Ibid*, X, pp. 829, 949, 988, 989, 997.

23. *Ibid*, p. 974; also p. 965.

24. *Ibid*, IV, pp. 333-38, 340-44, 365-69.

25. *Ibid*, V, p. 127.

Photo from Ananda Bazar Patrika, Calcutta



all photos courtesy of Suniti Kumar Ghosh

Anti-imperialist demonstration of Feb. 11, 1946 in Calcutta. The next day a general strike began

Simla conference subsequently foundered on the rock of the Muslim League's claim to nominate all the Muslim members of the Council; and E. Jenkins, then Private Secretary to the Viceroy, strongly suspected "that there has been official support for Jinnah's obstinacy."²⁶

From the standpoint of the British imperialists, the Simla Conference was far from a failure. As we shall see, it successfully pulled the top Congress leaders into an informal alliance with the raj to extinguish the flames of anti-imperialist struggle. Second, it gave fresh ammunition to the Hindu and Muslim communalists who, wittingly or not, helped the raj by diverting anti-imperialist hatred into the communal channel. Summing up the views of the Governors expressed at their conference held on 1 and 2 August 1945, Wavell said, "We should endeavour to retain the initiative and divert political energy into legitimate channels."²⁷

Soon after the victory of the Labour Party in the British general elections, which was hailed enthusiastically by the Congress and described by *Hindustan Times* as "the downfall of India's oppressors,"²⁸ elections were announced in New Delhi for the central and provincial legislative assemblies on the basis of the old franchise (less than one percent of the population for the former and about ten percent for the latter).

There followed a veritable deluge of "interesting negotia-

tions about the future." A British parliamentary delegation toured India in January 1946. Close on its heels came the Cabinet Mission which had hectic rounds of negotiations for more than three months. On 16 May it produced a plan which proposed the creation of three semi-independent sub-federations—one comprising predominantly Hindu provinces and the other two comprising Muslim-majority provinces in the northwest and northeast of India—within a loose all-India federation with a weak center. Interestingly, Assam with Muslims forming about 33 or 34 percent of the population was tagged to Muslim-majority Bengal. If it was intended by the Mission to stoke the communal fire, the purpose was well served. It was the fight over the interpretation of a sub-clause in the plan concerning the grouping of provinces that led to the Muslim League's call for "direct action"—and virtual communal war—to force the Congress to concede the Pakistan demand.

"Amidst these 'summit talks,' " wrote Michael Brecher, "the poison of communalism penetrated deeper into the body politic of India."²⁹ It was the systematic policy of imperialism to drive a wedge between Congress and League (both its own "creations," as Gandhi said in a letter to Stafford Cripps)³⁰ and to stir up and exploit communal tension.

Wavell stated on 30 May 1946: "We must at all costs

26. *Ibid.*, XII, p. 797; see also V.P. Menon, *op cit.*, p. 214.

27. *T.O.P.*, VI, p. 19.

28. *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

29. Michael Brecher, *Nehru: A Political Biography*, (London, 1959) pp. 318-19.

30. Sudhir Ghosh, *Gandhi's Emissary*, (London, 1967) p. 159.

avoid becoming embroiled with both Hindu and Muslim at once.”³¹ The Secretary of State for India was of the same view: “We cannot allow ourselves to get into position in which Muslim League and Congress are both in opposition.”³²

In the conditions created by World War II the prospect of dominating the Indian Ocean region economically and politically, under the umbrella of imperialist powers like the U.K. and the U.S.A., became quite alluring to the Indian big bourgeoisie. It is the vision of becoming a zonal power as underlings of the imperialists that impelled the Congress leaders to reject an undivided India with a weak center. And they must share the responsibility for the tragedy.

On 24 January 1947 the Director of the Intelligence Bureau, Government of India, noted:

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. The latter may produce an inordinately dangerous situation and leads us nowhere. The former is a natural, if ghastly process tending in its own way to the solution of the Indian problem.³³

The “ghastly process” was hardly a natural one. It was, on the contrary, as the earlier portion of the note gleefully claims, part of the imperialist “game” which the raj and its collaborators “played.” And far from solving any problem, it plagues the people of the subcontinent even today.

The fact is, there was a revolutionary unity among the people in 1945 and 1946, even in 1947 after communal holocausts had been engineered. On 27 November 1945, Wavell informed Pethick-Lawrence: “Casey [Bengal Governor] was impressed by the very strong anti-British feeling behind the whole demonstration [in Calcutta and Howrah in November 1945] and considers the whole situation still very explosive and dangerous.”³⁴

The revolutionary unity of the people displayed in Bombay in February 1946 alarmed the imperialists and the Hindu and Muslim compradors. Gandhi denounced it as “unholy combination” between Hindus and Muslims and preferred to die rather

than see India delivered over to “the rabble.”³⁵ Within less than a year a qualitative change in the situation was brought about by the skillful moves of the raj and its collaborators.

Speaking at the Subjects Committee meeting of the Meerut Session of the Congress, held in November 1946, Ashok Mehta said: “A year ago, an Englishman could not show his face in Bombay or Calcutta; today he alone moves freely and even Indians move in English dress.”³⁶ Alan Campbell-Johnson wrote on 1 June 1947 in a mood of exultation: “It should be noted that the fury is internal and fratricidal and that the British are probably more popular with both Hindus and Moslems than at any time in living memory.”³⁷

On 20 February 1947 Attlee announced in Parliament their “definite intention” to transfer “power to responsible Indian hands” by June 1948. The imperialists were afraid that the communal Frankenstein they had raised might cause irreparable damage to their long-term plans for a “friendly and stable India.” But they were also afraid of Communism. When Attlee asked 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.”³⁸ 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.”³⁹

In about a month and a half after assuming office as Viceroy on 23 March 1947, Mountbatten devised a plan the outline of which had been prepared by Reforms Commissioner V.P. Menon and Congress boss Patel in late December 1946 or early January 1947.⁴⁰ The plan proposed transfer of power to Indian hands on the basis of dominion status and partition of India on communal lines. It was formally accepted by Congress and League on 3 June, when Mountbatten fixed 15 August as the date of the transfer of power. In less than two months and a half this vast subcontinent was partitioned, boundaries demarcated, assets divided and two new dominions brought into existence!

Mountbatten himself had told the Governors’ Conference held in April that the “partition of India would be a most serious potential source of war.”⁴¹ J.D. Tyson, the Secretary to the Bengal Governor, wrote to people in England on 5 July 1947: “Mountbatten is a hustler; ever since he came out he has pursued shock tactics. . . . I believe, now, we shall withdraw in fairly peaceful conditions—whatever may happen after we have gone. . . . I think there will be very unsettled conditions in India for some time to come . . . but the trouble will be primarily between Hindus and Muslims—not anti-European.”⁴² And Penderal Moon, a high British official then serving in India, wrote: “So with a quick unprecedented unanimity all

31. *T.O.P.*, VII, p. 735.

32. *Ibid.*, VIII, p. 162; also p. 177.

33. *Ibid.*, IX, pp. 542-3. Copies of this note were sent to the private secretaries of Attlee, Lord Alexander and Stafford Cripps.

34. *Ibid.*, VI, p. 553.

35. *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 83, (Delhi, 1981) p. 304.

36. *T.O.P.*, IX, p. 133.

37. Alan Campbell-Johnson, *op cit*, p. 98.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

39. John W. Wheeler-Bennett, *King George VI*, pp. 709-10; cited in B.B. Misra, *The Indian Political Parties*, (Delhi, 1976) p. 625.

40. V.P. Menon, *op cit*, pp. 358-59.

41. *T.O.P.*, X, p. 251.

42. *Ibid.*, XI, p. 940.

[the raj, Congress and League—the three parties to the settlement] set forth together on a path leading straight to mass slaughter [and mass migration].”⁴³

At the same time a parallel process was going on. Speaking on 4 July 1947 on the Indian Independence Bill, the Secretary of State for India told journalists that there would be a new partnership between the East and the West which would bring healthy results for the whole world.⁴⁴ Indeed, the old political relationship between imperialism and the Indian comprador bourgeoisie was yielding place to a new kind of political relationship that would be beneficial to the imperialist system as a whole.

5

The imperialist game could be so well played because Congress and Muslim League were willing participants in it. Though there was a savage “war of succession” between them, their policies vis-à-vis the raj were complementary to the British strategy.

Even before the end of the war, G.D. Birla, the “mentor of the Indian capitalist class” (to quote Bipan Chandra) as well as of many top Congress leaders, was anxious to open political negotiations and was assuring the raj of their co-operation.⁴⁵ In his interviews with a correspondent of the *News Chronicle* and subsequent press statements after his release from detention in the Aga Khan Palace, Gandhi declared that his object was “to help and not hinder the Allied war effort.” He abjured any “intention of offering Civil Disobedience,” condemned sabotage and underground activities and instructed underground political workers to give themselves up to the raj’s police.⁴⁶

The Congress’s appraisal of the postwar situation was similar to that of the British. Bhulabhai Desai, leader of the Congress party in the Central Legislative Assembly, pleaded with Wavell early in January 1945 that “the continuation of the present situation was more likely than not to lead to an upheaval.”⁴⁷ Together with the raj, Congress leaders wanted to build beforehand a dam against the tide of postwar mass upheaval they anticipated. So, in mid-November 1944, with Gandhi’s blessings and Liaquat Ali Khan’s approval, Bhulabhai made his proposal (known as Desai–Liaquat pact) for the reconstitution of the Viceroy’s Executive Council “under the existing constitution from members of the existing legislature” to be ultimately selected by the Viceroy.⁴⁸ On 30 January 1945 Wavell informed the Secretary of State for India that “Desai’s proposals fit in with those I submitted months ago. . . .”⁴⁹

During these negotiations, G.D. Birla saw the Viceroy’s Private Secretary and, as Wavell wired to Amery, Birla “was probably sent by Gandhi” and “Birla obviously thought

Coalition Government at centre under present constitution 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.”⁵⁰

When Wavell convened the Simla Conference after the war in Europe had ended, the Congress, as V.P. Menon wrote, came in for cooperation without any conditions.⁵¹ They accepted the Viceroy’s right to select members of the reconstituted Executive Council and his right to overrule any decision of the Council. Before agreeing to cooperate, Gandhi and the Congress Working Committee did not even demand the release of Congress prisoners or removal of the ban on the Congress and allied organizations. On the other hand, they were prepared to join the Viceroy’s Executive Council “on the basis that they would whole-heartedly co-operate in supporting and carrying through the war against Japan to its victorious conclusion.” (That would not militate against the creed of non-violence devoutly cherished by Gandhi and the Congress.)

Though the Simla Conference failed, “the contacts established between the Congress and the Government,” wrote Congress President Azad to Wavell, “had largely allayed past bitterness, and marked the beginning of a new chapter of confidence and goodwill.”⁵²

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 cooperate.” He wanted that the Congress leaders “should see to it that a peaceful atmosphere is preserved in the country.”⁵³

To refurbish the image of the Congress, which had been somewhat tarnished by Gandhi’s repudiation of all responsibility for the “Quit India” movement, his condemnation of sabotage and underground activities associated with it, and his instruction to underground workers to surrender,⁵⁴ Nehru, Patel and a few others, especially Nehru, did some saber-rattling during the election campaign towards the end of 1945. This perturbed Wavell and some high British officials though the Secretary of State for India considered it as part of electioneering.⁵⁵ G.D. Birla, who served as a valuable contact between the raj and top Congress leaders like Gandhi and Patel, hastened to assure the Secretary of State for India 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.”⁵⁶

Immediately after the upheaval in Calcutta in November 1945, Gandhi and other Congress leaders visited the city. Gandhi had a series of eight interviews with Bengal Governor Casey, who gave interviews also to Nehru and Patel. And the

43. Penderal Moon, *Divide and Quit*, (London, 1961) p. 70.

44. V.P. Menon, *op cit*, p. 391.

45. *T.O.P.*, IV, p. 779; V, pp. 236, 476; Wavell: *The Viceroy’s Journal*, p. 132.

46. B. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *The History of the Indian National Congress*, Vol. II, (Bombay, 1947) pp. 617, 620-22; *T.O.P.*, IV, pp. 1032, 1086, 1102, 1136, 1209.

47. *Ibid*, V, p. 424.

48. Wavell: *The Viceroy’s Journal*, p. 101; *T.O.P.*, V, pp. 230-31, 400-1, 424, 476-77, 787, 1126.

49. *Ibid*, p. 481.

50. *Ibid*, p. 236.

51. *Ibid*, XII, pp. 790-91.

52. *Ibid*, VI, p. 455.

53. Argus, “A Delhi Diary,” *Eastern Economist [EE]*, 10 May 1946, p. 786; *Indian Annual Register* (ed. by N.N. Mitra), 1945, II, p. 147.

54. B. B. Misra, *op cit*, pp. 501-2.

55. *T.O.P.*, VI, p. 482.

56. *T.O.P.*, VI, 615.

Congress Working Committee met in Calcutta and proclaimed once again its faith in non-violence. On 27 December 1945 Wavell noted that "Indian business magnates . . . are anxious for a solution without conflict and disorder."⁵⁷

In many of his speeches Nehru pointed out to the rulers the need for an early, peaceful settlement.⁵⁸ While assuring the raj that "every attempt will be made to arrive at some suitable compromise," Nehru decried the "sporadic violence" of the people and told them that "British rule in India is a thing of the past."⁵⁹ According to Nehru, any delay on the part of British imperialism to arrive at a compromise with the Congress would be disastrous, both for imperialism and for the class Nehru represented. After the R.I.N. revolt, Nehru and Patel condemned at a mass meeting held in Bombay on 26 February 1946 "the mass violence in Bombay during the past four days." Next day, at an interview to the press, 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."⁶⁰

Birla's *Eastern Economist* stated:

In fact, whenever they [Congress leaders] spoke, it was to denounce rebellion, mutiny, indiscipline. It was Sardar Patel's intervention that brought R.I.N. mutiny to an end. Ghandhiji'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."⁶¹

The Birla organ's tender concern for the international foundations of the British empire is worth noting.

Despite the shootings and other repressive measures, despite the communal tension that was steadily being built up and the other efforts of the Congress and League, new struggles, especially police and military revolts and workers' strikes which often turned political, continued to break out in different parts of India.

Towards the end of March 1946, Turnbull, Secretary to the Cabinet Mission to India, wrote to the Permanent Under-Secretary of State for India: "The only hope is that the big boys of Congress and the League are said to be much alarmed lest their followers break loose and of Russia."⁶² At the end of July 1946 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."⁶³ Wavell agreed and wired to Pethick-Lawrence: "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 Communists and try to curb their own left wing."⁶⁴

The Congress leaders were 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.⁶⁵ 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."⁶⁶ Next day Wavell again wired to Pethick-Lawrence: "I think it is quite likely that Congress [if it joins the government at the center] would decide to take steps fairly soon against the communists as otherwise the labour situation will get even worse."⁶⁷ So, Congress leaders were taken into the Viceroy's Executive Council (termed the Interim Government) to serve as imperialism's shield and to protect its interests from the popular anger.

The expectations of the raj were fulfilled. On 21 January 1947 Wavell informed Pethick-Lawrence that searches, still then incomplete, had been conducted and that the Congress governments of Madras and Bombay were taking strong action against the Communists.⁶⁸

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. . . ."⁶⁹ 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"—not the British imperialists."⁷⁰

At its twenty-second session held in Calcutta in February 1947, the All-India Trade Union Congress expressed its concern at the "indiscriminate firing by the police on workers" in Coimbatore, Golden Rock, Kolar Gold Fields, Ratlam, Amalner and Kanpur (all of which were located in 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 labor meetings, arrests and internment of trade union workers, and destruction of union properties, 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."⁷¹

The AITUC also protested against "the recent amendments to the Bombay District Police Act and the enactment of

57. *Ibid.*, p. 687; see also p. 2.

58. Jawaharlal Nehru, *Selected Works* (hereafter *SW*), XIV, [New Delhi, 1981] pp. 141, 265, 459.

59. *Ibid.*, XIV, pp. 135, 254, 493, 496, 497; *T.O.P.*, VI, 1118.

60. Nehru, *SW*, XV, pp. 4, 13; *T.O.P.*, VI, p. 1083.

61. Argus, "A Delhi Diary," *EE*, 10 May 1946, p. 786.

62. *T.O.P.*, VII, p. 72.

63. *Ibid.*, VIII, p. 150.

64. *Ibid.*, p. 155.

65. Note on Labor by J. B. Kripalani, A.I.C.C. G26/1946; cited in Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India 1885-1947*, (Delhi, 1983) p. 429.

66. *T.O.P.*, VIII, pp. 190-91.

67. *Ibid.*, p. 194.

68. *Ibid.*, IX, pp. 524-25; see also p. 575.

69. *Ibid.*, p. 822.

70. *Ibid.*, X, p. 87.

71. All-India Trade Union Congress, *Report: Twenty-Second Session*, (Calcutta, 1947) p. 77.

ordinance in the provinces of Punjab, Madras, Bengal, United Provinces and Central Provinces under which persons can be arrested, externed or detained without trial." It also condemned the Congress governments of Madras, Bombay and the Central Provinces for detaining trade unionists in jail without trial and for internment of some of them.⁷²

As part of their onslaught, the Congress launched a vicious political campaign against the Communists in order to isolate them politically. When the Congress leaders were themselves playing the imperialist game, they accused the Communists of having co-operated with the government during the war after the Nazi attack upon the Soviet Union!⁷³

The tragic fact is that when India stood at the crossroads of history, the Communist Party would give only hesitant and feeble leadership to the people. It failed miserably to fulfill the task that history had given it. Instead of clarifying the minds of workers and peasants about the true character of the Congress and League leaders, it only befogged them; instead of freeing the masses from the influence of the comprador bourgeoisie, it only strengthened it.

6

The aims of Congress and Muslim League, despite the fierce fight between themselves, fit in perfectly with the aim of British imperialism. They, too, were keen on retaining close ties with it in the form of dominion status or membership of the Commonwealth,⁷⁴ which Nehru himself had described in the thirties as "an Indianised edition (with British control behind the scenes) of the present order."⁷⁵

On 8 May 1947 Mountbatten communicated to the British cabinet that Patel and Nehru had indicated "a desire for a form of early Dominion Status (but under a more suitable name)" and added: "This is the greatest opportunity ever offered to the Empire. . . ."⁷⁶ At a meeting with the Viceroy and his staff on 10 May, Nehru said that he "himself was most anxious, apart from sentimental reasons, to have the closest possible 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."⁷⁷

In the record of his interview with Krishna Menon (Nehru's emissary) on 23 May, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for India and Burma, Henderson, noted: "I gained the impression that those for whom he speaks are desperately anxious to maintain the closest possible nexus with the United Kingdom. He rather plaintively stated that they would be hard pressed by their own followers as having sold out to the British. . . ."⁷⁸

The Muslim league was no match for the Congress in the art of double talk—saying one thing in private and the opposite thing in public. Because of the weakness of the class it represented, it wanted the raj to stay longer.⁷⁹ When transfer of power in the immediate future became a certainty, Jinnah appealed to Wavell that the British should "give them their own bit of country, let it be as small as we [the British] liked, but it must be their own, and they would live on one meal a day, etc."⁸⁰

The tragic fact is that when India stood at the crossroads of history, the Communist Party would give only hesitant and feeble leadership to the people. It failed miserably to fulfill the task that history had given it. Instead of clarifying the minds of workers and peasants about the true character of the Congress and League leaders, it only befogged them; instead of freeing the masses from the influence of the comprador bourgeoisie it only strengthened it.

Jinnah and Liaquat Ali Khan proposed again and again that after its establishment Pakistan should be allowed to join the British Commonwealth.⁸¹ On 26 April 1947 Jinnah told Mountbatten that it was not a question of asking to be admitted, it was a question of not being kicked out. He referred to Churchill's assurance to him and said that "it was quite clear to him that the raj could not kick them out."⁸²

On 23 May Attlee wired to the Dominion Prime Ministers:

They [the Congress leaders] said that though, in order to secure assent of their party, they would have publicly to stress fact that it is inherent in Dominion status that Dominion can secede from Commonwealth whenever it wishes, in their view Hindustan would not ultimately leave the Commonwealth, once Dominion status had been accepted.

This most unexpected development opens up new possibility of whole of India, although divided into two or possibly three independent states, remaining in the Commonwealth after the effective transfer of power has taken place. . . . 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.⁸³

72. *Ibid.*, p. 78.

73. B. B. Misra, *op cit.*, p. 537.

74. *T.O.P.*, p. 236; Wavell: *The Viceroy's Journal*, p. 219 (G.D. Birla and Devdas Gandhi, especially Birla, often acted as Gandhi's unofficial emissary); V.P. Menon, *op cit.*, pp. 358-59; *T.O.P.*, IX, p. 890; X, pp. 13, 312, 320.

75. Jawaharlal Nehru, *An Autobiography*, (New Delhi, 1982) (first published in 1936), p. 137.

76. *T.O.P.*, X, p. 699.

77. *Ibid.*, p. 735; see also pp. 829, 897-98.

78. *Ibid.*, p. 962.

79. *Ibid.*, VI, p. 862; VII, pp. 285, 684; IX, 54, 95.

80. *Ibid.*, IX, p. 109; see also X, pp. 102, 300.

81. *Ibid.*, VI, pp. 798-99; IX, pp. 261, 797; X, pp. 201, 300, 357.

82. *Ibid.*, X, 453.

83. *Ibid.*, X, 974-75; see also p. 965.

Churchill, "the unreconstructed Tory," was quite happy. He promised Mountbatten that if he "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."⁸⁴

Gandhi, too, was happy. He told Mountbatten that "even during the war he had expressed himself as not being against it [dominion status]" and sent him a cutting from *Harijan* as a proof.⁸⁵

The Congress and League leaders had reasons to be "desperately anxious to maintain the closest possible nexus with the United Kingdom," for without the assistance of the imperialists the Indian comprador bourgeoisie could neither thrive nor even survive. Quite rightly did Nehru say in May 1949 on his return after attending the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference in London that "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."⁸⁶

7

A political settlement would have been easier and quicker if there were two parties to it. Instead of two, there were three—the raj, Congress and Muslim League. Encouraged by the raj and reacting against the communalism of the Hindu elite, the Muslim elite had earlier demanded and obtained separate electorates, reservation of seats in legislatures, and so forth. It should be noted that both Hindu and Muslim communalism and casteism thrived and still thrive in conditions of semi-feudalism prevailing in India. Egged on by the British imperialists and exasperated by the dictatorial powers of Gandhi, Patel and their closest confidants in the Congress—especially of Gandhi—the League raised the demand for partition of India on communal lines in March 1940, when the end of the direct British rule was in sight. And the demand snowballed, at first with the help of the raj.⁸⁷

The demand for Pakistan was neither raised by the Muslim masses nor was it a demand for their emancipation, as suggested by some people who usually lump together Muslims belonging to different classes and nations of India. The fate of the Muslim "hewers of wood and drawers of water" was no different from that of their Hindu counterparts, who could derive little comfort from the fact that there were more Hindu landlords, usurers and merchants to fleece them than their Muslim counterparts. The raj, which at first encouraged the idea of Pakistan, could hardly be accused either of having any desire to liberate the Muslim masses.

Pakistan was the demand of the big Muslim compradors (Ispahani, Habib, Sir Rafiuddin Adamji, Sir Abdulla Haroon) who wanted a separate state where they could thrive by using

the state machinery, untrammelled by competition with the more powerful Gujarati and Marwari compradors.⁸⁸ Seeking their own "emancipation," they invented the "two nation theory" and raised the slogan of "Islam in danger" to rally Muslims behind their demand. In semi-feudal conditions and in the absence of revolutionary mass organizations, they could sway the Muslims as Hindu and Sikh chauvinists did the Hindus and Sikhs. After the emergence of Pakistan the Muslim masses have continued to be in poverty and misery, while the Pakistan state machinery has minted big Muslim industrialists, whom Gustav Papanek calls "robber barons," out of those who were mainly traders in undivided India.⁸⁹ The result has been, in the words of M.A.H. Ispahani, that: "Today one finds an array of industrialists—big and small—in our country. The performance of some of the big Pakistani industrialists compares favourably with that of the well-known giants of India such as Tata, Birla, Dalmia and Mafatlal."⁹⁰

Gandhi and the Congress wanted an undivided India if they could possibly have it through negotiations with the raj, and they resorted till the end to maneuvers to fulfill that object. But almost from the time the Muslim League raised the demand for partition on religious lines, Gandhi and the Congress accepted it in principle and went on declaring that they would not coerce any unwilling part (meaning a Muslim—majority area) to remain within India.⁹¹

Interestingly enough, it was G. O. Birla (who was very close to Gandhi, Patel, and Rajendra Prasad) who proposed partition of India on religious lines at least as early as 11 January 1938, more than two years before the League raised the demand. He wrote to Gandhi's secretary:

"The chief difficulty [preventing an agreement with the raj] still seems to be the Hindu-Muslim question. . . . I wonder why it should not be possible to have two federations, one of Muslims and another of Hindus. . . . I fear if anything is going to check our progress, it is the Hindu-Muslim question—not the Englishman, but our own internal quarrels."⁹²

Clearly, neither the Hindu nor the Muslim big bourgeois considered the raj as an impediment to his progress.

The Congress-League "war of succession" was not over the question of Pakistan or the principle of partition on communal lines but over the content of the proposed Pakistan. In his reply, dated 16 July 1942, to G. D. Birla's letter advocating such partition, Gandhi's secretary Mahadev Desai wrote: "Bapu [Gandhi] has given it [Birla's letter of 14 July] careful attention. . . . The question is not of Pakistan or

84. *Ibid.*, X, p. 945.

85. *Ibid.*, XI, p. 132.

86. Nehru, *Independence and After*, p. 275.

87. Choudhry Khaliqzaman, *Pathway to Pakistan*, (Lahore, 1961) pp. 204-11; also pp. 233, 257, 266-70; Uma Kaura (Muslims and Indian Nationalism, (New Delhi, 1977) pp. 147-49, 170. The British Cabinet's offer of March-April 1942 contained, according to Secretary of State for India Amery, "the Pakistan cuckoo's egg." *T.O.P.*, I, p. 396; see also pp. 468, 474, 477; M.A.H. Ispahani, "Factors leading to the Partition of British India" in C.H. Philips and M.D. Wainwright, eds, *The Partition of India*, (London, 1970) p. 345 (for Cripps' assurance to Jinnah).

88. M.A.H. Ispahani, *ibid.*, pp. 356-69; *T.O.P.*, VI, pp. 392, 732; VIII, 199; X, 479.

89. Gustav Papanek, *Pakistan's Development*, (Cambridge, Mass.) 1967, pp. 32-68.

90. M.A.H. Ispahani, *op cit.*, p. 359.

91. Gandhi, "A Baffling Situation," April 1940; cited in D.G. Tendulkar, *Mahatma* (in 8 vols.), Vol. V, (Bombay, 1952) pp. 333-34; J. Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, (London, 1956 ed.) pp. 468-69; *SW*, XIII, p. 324; XIV, pp. 50-51, 65, 142, 162, 418; Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *op cit.*, II, pp. 631-34; B.B. Misra, *op cit.*, pp. 506-11; Abul Kalam Azad, *India Wins Freedom*, (Bombay, 1959) p. 62 (for Congress Working Committee Resolution of 11 April 1942); V.P. Menon, *op cit.*, p. 222 and *Indian Review*, September 1945, p. 555 (for Congress Working Committee Resolution of 12 Sept. 1945). See also V.P. Menon, *op cit.*, pp. 162-63; *T.O.P.*, VI, pp. 796, 1022.

92. G.D. Birla, *Bapu: A Unique Association*, III, p. 144.

separation as such, but of the real content of these conception [sic]."⁹³

Wavell put it correctly when he wired to Pethick-Lawrence on 11 March 1946 that "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."⁹⁴

To obtain the maximum they could through tripartite negotiations, Gandhi and the Congress on the one hand and the League on the other resorted to stratagems which cost the people dearly. Watching Jinnah during the Cabinet Mission's interview with him, Lord Alexander, a member of the mission, noted that Jinnah avoided "as far as possible direct answers" and was "playing this game, which is one of life and death for millions of people."⁹⁵ "This game" was being played by all the three parties; the stakes were the lives of millions of people and the welfare of unborn generations—quite cheap and expendable!

The Cabinet Mission's plan of 16 May 1946 offered the prospect of a united India as a loose federation with a weak center. The plan which was at first accepted by Congress and League was later torpedoed by the Congress. Michael Brecher, a great admirer of Nehru, writes that the consensus among the people whom he saw, including Nehru, was that "a united India was within the realm of possibility as late as 1946." He adds that "one must assume that it [the partition of India on religious lines] was a voluntary choice by Nehru, Patel and their colleagues."⁹⁶

8

Why was such voluntary choice made?

While the Congress leaders tried to have an undivided India, they were prepared to settle for an India minus certain parts in the northwest and east. But they would not compromise on one issue, a strong center, whatever the cost to be paid by the people of India. They preferred a divided India with a strong center to an undivided India with a weak center. They opted for partition on religious lines when they found that their dream could not be realized through negotiations.

Moving his resolution at the All India Congress Committee meeting held on 14 June 1947 for acceptance of the 3 June plan, G.B. Pant argued that it would assure an Indian Union with a strong center which could ensure progress. He contended that this plan was better than the Cabinet Mission plan with its groupings and sections and its weak center.⁹⁷

The Congress leaders wanted nothing more passionately than a strong center. It is true that the Congress declared more than once that the future constitution of India "should be a federal one, with the largest measure of autonomy for the federating units, and with the residuary powers vesting in these units."⁹⁸ But when the Indian Constitution was framed, the Congress leaders divested the units of all autonomy and residuary powers and reduced them to glorified municipalities.

They sought even to suppress the demand of the different Indian nationalities to form homogeneous units within India until popular upheavals coerced them to accept it in the main. As B.B. Misra observed, the Congress "would not have anything short of a strong central government, with even residuary powers vested in it."⁹⁹ It should be noted that to oppose the Muslim League's obscurantist demand for the right of self-determination of the many different nations of India, such as the Telegus, Tamils, Bengalis, Punjabis, and Gujaratis, each of which has a common territory, history, language, and economic life. 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 center as they could make it and that there would now be no Provinces with residuary powers.¹⁰⁰

The Marwari, Gujarati and Parsi big capitalists wanted a strong center, for only that could enable them to realize their ambitions. First, they wanted to prevent by using the state machinery the emergence of competitors from different national regions. Second, they aspired to become a zonal power in the Indian Ocean region. At that time Japan lay prostrate, the old colonial powers like France and the Netherlands were maimed, and China was in civil war. Southeast Asia as well as West Asia beckoned our big capitalists. While detained in the Ahmednagar Fort Prison, Nehru dreamt that it was India's "manifest destiny" to become the center of a super-national state stretching from the Middle East to Southeast Asia and to exercise "an important influence" in the Pacific region. He was categorical that the small national state "can have no independent existence."¹⁰¹ The burden of many of his speeches and writings in 1945 and after was that "India is likely to dominate politically and economically the Indian Ocean region."¹⁰² On 27 October 1948 he wrote to Patel from Paris: "Definitely India is considered as a potential great Power and specially a dominant Power in Asia. . . . In Asia, everyone knows that China cannot play an effective part for a long time. The only other country in Asia is India capable of playing this part."¹⁰³ When he visited the U.S.A. in 1949, he spoke at many places in the same vein.¹⁰⁴ Patel, too, sang the same tune: "Let India be strong and be able to assume the leadership of Asia, which is its right."¹⁰⁵

How could India "dominate politically and economically the Indian Ocean region" when it was one of the poorest countries, woefully lacking in economic and military strength? It was because of this disparity between aspiration and ability that the Indian big bourgeoisie was at the same time, enamored of the virtues of the British Commonwealth and yet longed to

99. B.B. Misra, *op cit*, p. 431.

100. E.W.R. Lumby, *The Transfer of Power in India 1945-7*, (London, 1954) p. 179.

101. J. Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, pp. 545, 549, 550.

102. J. Nehru, *SW*, XIV, p. 325; *Independence and After*, pp. 219, 360.

103. Durga Das (ed), *Sardar Patel's Correspondence 1945-50*, Vol. VII, (Ahmedabad, 1973) p. 668.

104. J. Nehru, *Inside America* (a collection of his speeches in the U.S.A. in 1949), (New Delhi, n.d.) pp. 54, 63, 83.

105. P.D. Saggi (Editor-in-Chief), *Life and Work of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel*, (Bombay, n.d.) p. 86.

93. *Ibid*, IV, p. 319.

94. *T.O.P.*, VI, pp. 1134-45.

95. Alexander Papers, *Diary*, p. 17; cited in B. B. Misra, *op cit*, p. 564.

96. Michael Brecher, *op cit*, pp. 374-75.

97. V.P. Menon, *op cit*, pp. 384-85.

98. See B. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *op cit*, I, p. 481; Azad, *op cit*, p. 240.



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CALCUTTA, THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 1946.

MOB VIOLENCE CONTINUES TO HOLD SWAY IN CALCUTTA CHURCH & POST OFFICE SET ON FIRE: TRAINS HELD UP



A British military patrol in an armored car and a lorry (rear) stand by the orders on Chowmahatta Road, Calcutta.

REDUCTION IN FRENCH MILITARY BUDGET

DEMOLITION OF ARMED FORCES

PARIS, Feb. 11.—The French National Defence Council decided tonight to reduce the military budget by 60,000,000,000 francs, bringing it down to 140,000,000,000 francs.

The budget will be made up as follows: At 10,000,000,000 francs; armaments, 18,000,000,000 francs; and colonies, 24,000,000,000 francs.

French troops aged 21 will be demobilized before the end of May.

France's armed forces will be reduced to 1,000,000 men.

10 Dead Yesterday: Police and Troops Open Fire 20 Times

GOVERNMENT BAN PROCESSIONS AND ASSEMBLIES

Outrages committed during yesterday's continued disturbances in Calcutta despite the presence of military patrols in the streets included an attack on the 67-year-old

U.N.O.
No

Front page of the British-owned Statesman of Feb. 14, 1946

hitch its wagon to America's more resplendent star, as Nehru told Colonel Louis Johnson, President Roosevelt's Personal Representative, in April 1942.¹⁰⁶ It hoped to play an intermediate role between the imperialist metropolises and the countries less developed than India, that is, assume the role of a sub-exploiter.

K.M. Panikkar, then Prime Minister of the native state of Bikaner and later India's ambassador to China and other countries, pleaded for the formation of what he called "a maritime State System" with the great land area of India organized to a high pitch of industrial efficiency at one end, and Great Britain at the head of a Western bloc at another. He said that in the organization of this maritime State system "India will be one of the pivotal areas. It will be in the interests of all her associates that she is strong, well-organized, industrially advanced—in fact, a nation in a position to play her role in the world."¹⁰⁷

The following extract from the evidence of the Engineering Association of India (on which big business was represented) before the Fiscal Commission 1949–50 is also illuminating:

... industrially-advanced countries like USA and UK should undertake the obligation of making India industrially great. The exigencies of the situation in South-East Asia require it and comparative inability of the Western powers to be of effective help in South-East Asia demands 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."¹⁰⁸

This role of a sub-exploiter in an imperialist system of exploitation was not a new one for our bourgeoisie. During the era of direct colonial rule they went to Ceylon, Malaya, Burma, Uganda and Tanganyika as the British opened up those colonies. As S.B.D. de Silva has put it, "Like the remora which travels long distances by attaching itself through its dorsal sucker to the body of the shark, Indian capital went along with Britain's overseas expansion."¹⁰⁹

For instance, in Burma, Indian businessmen controlled about two-fifths of the value of Burma's imports and about three-fifths of the value of exports.¹¹⁰ Besides other Indian capitalists, the Nattukottai Chettiars groups alone, based in Tamil Nadu, invested about Rs.75 crore (1 crore = 10 million rupees, but to have an idea of the amount of this investment at today's prices one has to multiply it by more than fifty) in usury and trade in Burma.¹¹¹

In the conditions created by World War II the prospect

108. Government of India, *Report of the Fiscal Commission 1949–50*, Vol. III, Written Evidence, (Delhi, 1950) p. 80.

109. S.B.D. de Silva, *The Political Economy of Underdevelopment*, (London, Boston and Henley, 1982) p. 153.

110. *Ibid*, p. 153.

111. The Indian Central Banking Enquiry Committee 1981, Vol. I, Part I—*Majority Report*, Calcutta, 1931, p. 95; Shoji Ito, "A Note on the 'Business Combine' in India—with Special Reference to the Nattukottai Chettiars" *The Developing Economies* (Tokyo), Sept. 1966, p. 370; see also Raman Mahadevan, "Pattern of Enterprise of Immigrant Entrepreneurs: A Study of Chettiars in Malaya, 1880–1930," *Economic and Political Weekly*, Jan. 28-Feb. 4, 1978, pp. 146–152.

106. *T.O.P.*, I, p. 665; J. Nehru, *SW*, XII, pp. 194–95.

107. K.M. Panikkar, *The Basis of an Indo-British Treaty*, "Introduction"; cited in *Modern Review* (Calcutta), Dec. 1946, p. 489.

of dominating the Indian Ocean region economically and politically, under the umbrella of imperialist powers like the U.K. and the U.S.A., became quite alluring to the Indian big bourgeoisie. It is the vision of becoming a zonal power as underlings of the imperialists that impelled the Congress leaders to reject an undivided India with a weak center. And they must share the responsibility for the tragedy.

9

The transfer of power was the political counterpart of the new economic and financial relationship that was developing between imperialist capital and Indian big capital. During the later phases of the war, British monopolists were planning to set up manufacturing units in India in partnership with Indian companies and to expand the market in India for their capital goods and sophisticated consumer goods.¹¹² Both Secretary of State for India Amery and Viceroy Wavell were eager to help in making "co-operative arrangements" between British and Indian firms "for joint co-operative development of Indian industries."¹¹³ On 25 January 1945 Amery informed Wavell that U.K. business interests "were anxious to assist India's industrial expansion which they believe will, if properly organized, carry the hope of considerable profits to themselves as well as to Indians by expanding the market in India for United Kingdom goods."¹¹⁴

A confidential memorandum, prepared jointly by the board of Trade and Amery's Office, and enclosed with Amery's message, stated that "Our future prospects lie in meeting, and indeed promoting (1) the steady growth in the demand for machinery, equipment, stores, accessories and semi-manufactured materials needed by an expanding and diversified Indian industrial system, and (2) the rapidly developing sophistication of a growing section of Indian consumers. . . ."

The memorandum strongly hoped that through co-operation with Indian capitalists and by setting up manufacturing units in India, British monopolies would be capable of "guiding domestic production" and "strengthening our position in the Indian market."¹¹⁵

During the inter-war years, the traditional British industries, such as cotton textiles, coal and ship-building declined. On the other hand, technologically new and mass production industries like engineering, electrical goods, chemicals and automobiles grew rapidly. As a result of increasing concentration in the private sector giant corporations like Imperial Chemical Industries, Unilever, and Guest Keen and Nettlefold emerged. Consequently, the character of British investments in foreign countries began to change after World War II.

During the inter-war years and even earlier, some large international companies like Royal Dutch Shell, ICI, Guest Keen, and Unilever had set up subsidiaries in India, but the typical foreign investment was smaller, directed by expatriates through managing agency firms which were unable to dispense with the patronage of the colonial state. But gradually "the sun of the old-fashioned rentier," as Hobsbawm puts it, "was

setting," and the sun of the giant international corporation was rising.¹¹⁶ Besides setting up branches and subsidiaries, the multinationals began towards the end of the war to make "cooperative arrangements" with big Indian capitalists to start joint ventures. They would provide the technology, capital goods, components, and spare parts, and design, set up and run, at least for some time, the plants, while local capitalist groups would raise finances for making payments to them and for other construction work and working capital. There was a merger of interests of foreign and Indian capital. As technology and capital goods (in which technology is embodied) are the key to power, and as they are in the hands of the multinational, it generally controls a joint venture, whatever may be its equity holding.

Indian big capital was eager to participate. Flush with war profits, it began to have visions of rapid expansion in postwar days by relying on two props, foreign imperialist capital and state capitalism. In 1944 appeared *A Brief Memorandum Outlining a Plan of Economic Development for India*, popularly known as the Bombay Plan, the authors of which were the foremost representatives of Indian commerce and industry—Sir Purshotamdas Thakurdas, Sir J.R.D. Tata, G.D. Birla, and others. For finances, it depended partly on fresh influx of foreign loan-capital, and for capital goods and technology it relied on imperialist capital. It declared that India in the initial years of planning would "be dependent almost entirely on foreign countries for the machinery and technical skill necessary for the establishment of both basic and other industries."¹¹⁷

Then in the spring and summer of 1945, a delegation of some of India's top business magnates (including Sir J.R.D. Tata, G.D. Birla, Sir Padampat Singhanian, Kasturbhai Lalbhai, M.A.H. Ispahani) went to the U.K. and the U.S.A. in search of capital and collaboration.

Tie-ups between ICI and Tata and between Nuffield and Birla for starting joint ventures in India, which Manu Subedar denounced in the Central Legislative Assembly as illegitimate marriages, were formed in 1945 and more negotiations for such tie-ups were in progress. The Indian big bourgeoisie's plan of depending on imperialist capital for fulfilling its dream of expansion fitted perfectly into British and U.S. capital's strategies of using India chiefly as an outlet for export of capital. Direct colonial rule was not deemed essential for the purposes of multinationals like the ICI. It could obtain much of what it sought by using the levers of capital goods, technology and loans. Under the new kind of arrangement, the Indian economy would remain, as before, dovetailed with the economy of the metropolis, despite formal political independence. And when the economic basis of the relationship would be of a satellitic character, political and other relations could be shaped accordingly.

For British imperialism it was both a retreat and an advance. It was a retreat because Britain had to terminate its direct rule. In another sense it was an advance, for freed of the immediate worries of direct confrontation with the Indian

112. *T.O.P.*, III, p. 752; IV, 935.

113. *Ibid*, IV, p. 676, 741, 812, 851-2.

114. *Ibid*, V, p. 466.

115. *Ibid*, V, pp. 469-70.

116. E. Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire*, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1976 reprint) p. 259.

117. P. Thakurdas et al, *A Brief Memorandum Outlining a Plan of Economic Development for India* (in 2 Parts), (Bombay, 1944) Part I, p. 44.

people, it would carry on and even intensify its exploitation of India.

10

It was not conflict with the raj but the bitter struggle between Congress and League that delayed the political settlement. The Congress stand *vis-à-vis* British imperialism was no different from the League stand *vis-à-vis* the raj: and amounted to "sweet reasonableness" and servility.

The task of carving up the provinces of the Punjab and Bengal and the district of Sylhet in less than five weeks, regardless of the interests of the 100 million people living there, and attaching the parts to the two new states was given to a British lawyer, Sir Cyril Radcliffe, a stranger to the country. The casual manner in which the government and top Congress and League leaders handled the problem and the callous indifference with which Mountbatten published the Radcliffe award contributed greatly to the horrors of the communal conflagration.

Campbell-Johnson wrote of the 3 June 1947 plan: "The third main feature was Dominion Status. This was a masterstroke on many grounds, but in particular because it made possible the administrative and constitutional continuity, on the basis of the great India Act of 1935."¹¹⁸ It was this Act that Nehru had described in 1936 as "a charter of slavery."

Interestingly, before Mountbatten left London to assume the office of Viceroy, Attlee and members of the Cabinet Mission had told him that he "was, in fact, to regard himself less as the last British Viceroy than as the first head of the new Indian State."¹¹⁹ (One marvels at the remarkable confidence of the British imperialists in their compradors). The last British Viceroy actually became at the invitation of the Congress the first head of the new Indian state. Nehru and Patel "wanted him to stay on [in that capacity] as long as he would. . . ."¹²⁰

At the invitation of the Congress two British governors and two other governors of the period of direct colonial rule remained governors of four out of nine provinces of the Indian Union, the former two as governors of the largest two provinces. In Pakistan the governors of all the provinces except Sind were British after the transfer of power. The bureaucratic "steel frame" continued as before, but many British civilians chose to leave after accepting compensation.

British military officers became heads of the three defence services of India as well as of Pakistan. The former Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army, Sir Claude Auchinleck, became for some time Supreme Commander of the armed forces of the two new States. An appeal was issued to all the British officers and other British personnel in the Indian armed forces to continue, and forty-nine percent of the officers and ninety-four percent of the other ranks decided to stay on.¹²¹

But the naval ratings who had been victimized for their role in the R.I.N. revolt of 1946 and other such men were denied jobs. Mountbatten appreciated Nehru's attitude and noted that "it was evidence of Nehru's fairness of mind that he said that he would look for someone other than his previous

nominee to be 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."¹²²

Both Nehru and Jinnah "wholeheartedly welcomed" the British Government's proposal to negotiate "overall Commonwealth defence arrangements." It was decided that, on behalf of India and Pakistan, the Joint Defence Council would conduct negotiations with the high-powered British delegation. It is worth noting that the Joint Defence Council was composed of Mountbatten as Chairman, Claude Auchinleck (Supreme Commander), Liaquat Ali Khan (representing Pakistan) and Baldev Singh (representing India) as members. In his Personal Report to members of the British cabinet and the king, dated 8 August 1947, Mountbatten wrote: "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 [between the Council and the British delegation] and trust that the desired objects will be achieved."¹²³

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." The only Indian present at the talks was Nehru. The note on this interview 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."¹²⁴

Replying to Montgomery's letter of appreciation, Nehru wrote: "As I told you, we have approached this question with every desire to meet the wishes of the British Government."¹²⁵ Several Gurkha regiments and battalions "which now form part of the Indian Army" and "their Regional Centres" were "allotted for service under His Majesty's Government,"¹²⁶ obviously, to deal with the rebellious people of Southeast Asia.

Mountbatten designed flags for the new states with the Union Jack in the upper canton. Gandhi, Patel and others, as Nehru told Mountbatten, were willing to accept it, but they later found it prudent not to do so as there was a "general feeling among Congress extremists . . . that Indian leaders were pandering far too much to the British." They agreed to fly the Union Jack on certain days of the year; the flags of the Governor-General and governors and of the Navy and the Air Force were suitably designed, and it was decided not to publicize these matters.¹²⁷

In India, freedom was ushered in with the playing of "God Save the King" followed by "Jana Gana Mana" (the Indian national anthem), with Nehru toasting the health of the British

118. Campbell-Johnson, *op cit*, p. 355.

119. *T.O.P.*, X, p. 243.

120. *Ibid*, XII, p. 36.

121. *Ibid*, p. 765.

122. *Ibid*, IX, p. 13.

123. *Ibid*, p. 599.

124. *Ibid*, XI, pp. 724-25.

125. *Ibid*, pp. 609-10.

126. *Ibid*, XII, p. 569.

127. *Ibid*, pp. 164, 230-31, 596.

King and Mountbatten toasting the Dominion Government,¹²⁸ and with the Union Jack flying proudly and looking on while the Indian national flag was unfurled. On 15 August 1947 the "programme had originally included a ceremonial lowering of the Union Jack" but it was changed and the Union Jack was not hauled down, because it might offend "British susceptibilities."¹²⁹

To crown all, on 15 August, Rajendra Prasad, President of the Indian 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."¹³⁰



128. Campbell-Johnson, *op cit*, pp. 158, 161.

129. *T.O.P.*, XII, p. 772.

130. *Ibid*, p. 777.

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